

“The Heartbreak Of Our Community”

by MARKESHIA RICKS | Apr 10, 2015 9:05 am

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MARKESHIA RICKS PHOTO

Violence is not just a problem for the people who experience it directly. Like a rock thrown in a lake, violence has a ripple effect that touches an entire community. And it will take the efforts of all of New Haven to challenge a culture that promotes violence, particularly among young people.

That’s the message that more than a hundred people who packed out the Long Wharf Theatre got Thursday night at a community discussion on violence put on by The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven. The event was held in partnership with Long Wharf Theatre, coinciding with the production of *brownsville song (b-side for tray)*, which runs through April 19.



“The violent loss of young lives is the heartbreak of our community,” said foundation President and CEO Will Ginsberg (pictured), who set the tone for the night by pointing out that the community could take “pride, but not solace” in its efforts to drive down homicides through a combination of policy, community policing and the work of the city’s numerous non-profits.

“Today we gather as one to understand why violence happens in our midst, to learn what violence means to our fellow citizens and hopefully feel a greater empathy for those affected by it,” he said.

Those affected by violence, particularly gun violence, are names you’d likely recognize from news stories. One of those young New Haveners is [Henry Green](#), who was shot in 2009, and lived to tell the tale. He told his community via video Thursday that fixing violence in New Haven is as simple as “believing that we can. We are only a lost cause if we believe we are a lost cause.”

People got to further experience the ripple effect through a series of video-recorded stories of people such as the immediate family members of [Jacob Craggett](#), a Hillhouse High School student gunned down while leaving his grandmother’s house in 2014. They also heard from Joan Malerba-Foran, teacher of Common Ground High School student [Javier Martinez](#). Martinez was killed in late 2013.



DIANA LI PHOTO

From Erik Clemons (pictured in this file photo), attendees also learned how those ripples can wash over and impact a life throughout time. Clemons is the president and CEO of ConnCAT (Connecticut Center for Arts and Technology) and he lost his younger brother to gun violence back in 1988. In a video testimonial he recalled watching helplessly as his brother started to change and exhibit negative behavior after their parents broke up, and their father was no longer around. He also recalled the night that he, his younger brother, and a cousin were in the parking lot of a Norwalk housing project when shots rang out.

“I dropped to the ground and got under the car,” he said. Instead of dropping to the ground, his brother had chosen to run and was shot. Clemons, along with his then seven months-pregnant sister, transported their bleeding brother to the hospital in Clemons’ car. After the trauma of that experience, Clemons said his relationship with his mother, his sister and even his estranged father was never the same.

“We never really talked about it,” he said. “We still don’t talk about it.” Clemons said for a long time he blamed his parents and even himself for the path his brother went down. For a time, he even blamed his brother for choosing the wrong path. But he grew to understand that there are larger issues at play for young people trying to navigate poverty and broken homes, including the absence of a basic human need—the need for love.

Youth Violence: Preventable Public Health Problem



Dr. Deborah Prothrow-Stith, a leading health expert on violence and keynote speaker for the evening (pictured), challenged the audience to not only tackle the obvious root causes of violence such as poverty and income inequality, and access to guns, but to also address the prevalent culture of violence. She said the culture of violence in the United States plays a role in why the country has more homicides than any other industrialized nation.

“It matters what we say to our children, what we do to them and what we expect them to do,” she said. “The culture right now is one that encourages violence, one that expects violence, promotes and markets violence to children. In some ways I’m surprised that there isn’t more violence.”

Prothrow-Stith said that violence is preventable, but it takes sustained effort to address the root causes of violence. She said spending on these issues is more effective on the front end for prevention rather on the back end for punishment. By acknowledging violence as a public health issue, a community can approach it with preventative and treatment strategies, she said.

“When it comes to crime prevention, we are almost always spending money after the fact,” she said, pointing to the massive amounts of money spent on prosecuting and incarcerating people compared to what is spent on education and preventative services.

Everybody Has A Part To Play



Mayor Toni Harp said peace in New Haven looks like a place where all the city's children first and foremost get a chance to grow up and do so in a safe and supportive environment.

"We are a city that educates people from around the world," she said. "And violence can be like water. It can seep into anything, including college campuses. When people are afraid to come downtown it impacts our economy. Whether you live in East Rock or Newhallville, if we are to be a peaceful city ... we all have to be involved ensuring that this kind of violence ends."

Harp urged people to get involved as mentors or donate resources in other ways to support agencies such as the New Haven Family Alliance Inc.

"Everybody can do something," she said. Harp urged the community to keep the momentum of the discussion going by documenting and staying committed to successful efforts, so that five years from now the city isn't having the same conversation.

"Far too often, when the administration changes, or when the funding source ends, we stop doing what's working," she said. "We have to stay committed to what's working and continue."

Previous coverage related to "brownsville song (b-side for tray):

[Leading Lady Discovers “B-Side” At Dixwell Gym](#)

[At Stetson, The Gloves Come Off](#)

[Justus’s Mom Brings Leading Lady To Tears](#)

[Eyeing Breakthrough, He Explores City’s “B Side”](#)

[Can “Second-Chance Society” Compete With Big \(Prison\) Business?](#)

[The Organic Truth, From Trayvon To “Tray”](#)

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Comments

posted by: Scribe2k on April 10, 2015 12:24pm

This was by far one of the proudest moments one could have as being a part of the New Haven community. The gathering the dialogue and the testimonials all inspiring and full of hope. The words of the dignitaries all were encouraging. The council from the panelists offered more hope and positivity.

The videos showed the heartbreak for us all as Mr. Ginsberg said. This is so true and on point. These are our stories and our children. We can not have enough reminders like this and thank you Community Foundation for shining the light on this difficult subject. This conversation must continue so that we realize that we are related to all of the people involved. The people involved are not just our neighbors they are our family.

I can't wait to see what the Community Foundation will do next. We need more of this type discussion. This is the type of work and awareness that makes a difference.

Finally, kudos to Mayor Harp. She not only made a statement with her words but also with her presence. She was commended by the keynote speaker in the beginning for staying and did she stay. Wow. Thank you Mayor Harp for making more than a casual appearance.

Thank you Community Foundation, Long Wharf Theater and Mayor Harp for a job well done.

posted by: Threefifths on April 10, 2015 4:24pm

The warriors are in the streets not the ivory towers.

posted by: Threefifths on April 10, 2015 6:26pm

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No one talk about the Elephant in the room which is how do you stop the rise of Police violence of People of color?

posted by: Scribe2k on April 11, 2015 8:01am

One additional note.

Sincere thanks to the folks in the videos. One of the best moments that should be noted about this event is that it allowed for our community to come together and share in the

pain, loss and healing.

Barbara Tinney offered apologies for the losses and that is on behalf of everyone in attendance. That is a heartfelt, sincere sentiment. We share in the loss and must also share in the healing. That event offered healing in a broad community sense. You could hear the shared loss in the soft crying and sobs in the dark as we were viewing the videos. You could see the pain in the tears that were being wiped away. You could see the steps toward healing in the hugs for the families and folks in the videos from others in attendance.

Something is moving and it is good.

posted by: connecticutcontrarian on April 11, 2015 10:32am

Perhaps one day 3/5 you would choose to actually attend some of the events in New Haven that you vociferously criticize. The “warriors in the streets” as you characterize them were there. They were active participants in the convening. They informed the discussion rather than just being the subject of discussion. I can think of no one better suited to discuss these issues than victims and families whose lives have been directly impacted by violence. They were there. Too bad you weren't

posted by: Threefifths on April 11, 2015 3:36pm

posted by: connecticutcontrarian on April 11, 2015 10:32am

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How do you know I was not there. In fact how do you know that I have never attend some of the events in New Haven. How come this was not address.

No one talk about the Elephant in the room which is how do you stop the rise of Police violence of People of color?

posted by: Theodora on April 12, 2015 12:01pm

One “ivory tower” warrior can get more accomplished than 40 “street” warriors, 3/5ths. If you had the solution, one might expect you'd have fixed things by now. You type more than act.

posted by: Threefifths on April 12, 2015 7:19pm

posted by: Theodora on April 12, 2015 12:01pm

One “ivory tower” warrior can get more accomplished than 40 “street” warriors, 3/5ths. If you had the solution, one might expect you’d have fixed things by now. You type more than act.

It’s so much easier to suggest solutions when you don’t know too much about the problem.

My bad. Are you a Armchair revolutionary?