

Poor services leave kids easy prey to gangs

July 19, 2008

SANDRO CONTENTA
BETSY POWELL
JIM RANKIN
STAFF REPORTERS

As a teenager, Graham D'Souza was an East Side Bloods gang member, carrying a gun, selling crack, getting arrested for robbery. He spent time in custody and got shot – in the heart.

His destiny was clear: to join the scores mostly young men from tough neighbourhoods who cycle in and out of jail, often returning to the very place where their trouble began.

"If not (in) jail, pretty much a waste to society," D'Souza says of his dim prospects.

Now 25, he shows the scars of his misspent youth – most visibly a faded zipper scar that runs down his chest. Two years ago, outside a downtown nightclub, he got in a fight with a stranger who pulled a gun and shot him in the back. One bullet entered a vein and went to his heart. Another lodged near his spine.

After weeks recovering from heart surgery in hospital a friend told him about Youth Employment Local Leadership (YELL), a program offered at the East Scarborough Boys and Girls Club in the heart of Kingston-Galloway.

"That kind of changed my life around," says D'Souza, recently hired by the club as a youth worker. Now, he's better known as hip hop artist Camoflaugé, a.k.a. Gangis Khan.

"I do a lot of people proud now."

It cost \$250,000 to \$300,000 to put D'Souza and 36 other YELL participants through the 10-month program. All but two "graduated" last fall and most have found jobs,



JIM RANKIN/TORONTO STAR

Graham D'Souza once belonged to a street gang and now counsels youth through the East Scarborough Boys and Girls Club. D'Souza was shot in the back, and had the bullet lodge in his heart.

STATISTICS

13,200: offenders in Canada's 58 penitentiaries
\$200 billion: annual cost of law enforcement and prisons for all levels of government in the U.S.
\$234 billion: Canada's entire federal budget in 2007-08
800: number of offenders noted as escaped from prison or unlawfully at large in Canada
336,000: number of victims of violent crime in Canada in 2006
25 years: mandatory

apprenticeships or gone back to school.

Compared to the costs of incarcerating offenders from the neighbourhood, YELL is a bargain.

There were 11 people from the M1E postal area, which includes Kingston-Galloway, serving sentences in provincial jails last year, according to a Star analysis of a one-day snapshot of prisoner data obtained in a freedom of information request.

With an average sentence of 242 days, these 11 inmates will cost taxpayers a total of \$285,000 by the time two-thirds of their sentences are served, which is when most are released, based on Ontario's average daily incarceration cost of \$160 per inmate.

This makes M1E the fifth-most costly of the City of Toronto's 102 postal areas. The costs for the area soar – to \$17.6 million – when the estimated number neighbourhood residents serving much longer sentences in federal prisons is calculated, based on an extrapolation of the provincial data.

"The concept is really pay now or pay later," says Ron Rock, executive director of the East Scarborough Boys and Girls Club. "If you invest and engage young people now then in 15 to 20 years you'll definitely see the positive results."

In other words, if YELL managed to keep just one participant, like D'Souza, from going to jail, the program paid for itself.

But YELL is no more. The sign above its plaza storefront office space on Kingston Rd. is still there. Inside, the furniture is gone. A potted tree, leaning to one side, is brown.

Funding for YELL, like the tree, has dried up.

The unstable support that forced its closure represents the best and the worst of how governments help troubled neighbourhoods. There is funding, but it's often short-term. Successful programs end abruptly. Participants reach for the hand up, only to find it yanked away.

"So many things are flash in the pan," says Anne Gloger, manager of Storefront, which provides office space, computers and administrative help for social support groups and services in the neighbourhood.

Short-lived programs that recently died in Kingston-Galloway include one that provided alternatives to jail for Aboriginal youth in trouble with the law, and YELL.

YELL paid "at risk and underserved" youth a salary and placed them in a simulated work environment where attendance was mandatory. Funding vanished after just one year. Progress, and a promise, was made and then broken. The youth felt abandoned.

"The next time someone announces project funding, you're less likely to engage with that kid because he's been hung out to dry," says Jaime Elliot-Ngugi, youth facilitator at Storefront.

minimum sentence given to a California man in 2003 for stealing three golf clubs from a store because it was his third offence

Graphics

Please drag your mouse on top of the graphic listed below to view larger version. To view all the graphics associated with our Crime & Punishment project, click [here](#).



GTA's most expensive

neighbourhoods

The cost of imprisoning people from certain areas of the city reaches eight figures when provincial costs are extrapolated to reflect more expensive federal sentences.

Provincial jail costs by neighbourhood in the GTA

[Download PDF.](#)

The money doesn't vanish. Instead, it is diverted to new programs in a cycle of starts and stops that frustrate those who need long-term help.

"Everybody wants to look good," says Elliot-Ngugi, explaining the preference for short-term programs. "New governments want to be the ones that say, 'Hey, I've got the projects and I'm going to help kids.'"

What neighbourhoods like Kingston-Galloway need is "core" funding that sustains staff and programs, she says.

"But who's going to get the glory for that? Nobody. But you announce four new programs and you're a star."

THERE IS only one TTC route to ferry the residents of Kingston-Galloway to and from one of the highest concentrations of public housing in Canada.

Bus 54A Lawrence East topped the list of complaints aired at a community meeting last year. Local crime – gangs, drugs and prostitution – came second. Other issues: Not enough places for teenagers to hang out. No post office. No seniors-only building. Not enough playgrounds.

The neighbourhood is isolated, cut off on the west from downtown by the bridge passing over the train tracks. On the other side of the tracks is Guildwood Village, a postwar enclave of single-family homes with manicured lawns and mature trees. Kingston-Galloway is literally on the wrong side of the tracks.

Lining Kingston Road are small plazas with cheque-cashing outlets, gas stations and motels once used by motorists when old Highway 2 got them in and out of Toronto. They now house refugees. There is little for recreation except the boys and girls club. The de facto community centre, Morningside Mall, was torn down last year.

Common to the neighbourhood and others where the Star analysis of jail data shows high incarceration costs are factors that go hand-in-hand with poverty: higher levels of unemployment, more families headed by single moms, fewer university degrees, above average numbers of public housing units, lower incomes.

Kingston-Galloway is one of the city's 13 "priority" neighbourhoods, areas lacking social services like libraries, food banks and community centres. Four of the five costliest incarceration areas in the city include priority neighbourhoods.

"The challenges for these 13 neighbourhoods isn't a failure of the residents in the communities themselves but a failure in the systems to invest in them to create the same level of infrastructures that other neighbourhoods benefit from," says Denise Campbell, Toronto's manager of community development.

For Frances Lankin, president and CEO of the United Way, it's no surprise these communities send a disproportionate number of people to jail.

"We've failed ...the people who live in these neighbourhoods."

More than a decade of funding cuts to programs and supports created growing numbers of young people "slipping through the cracks and dropping out of school and then their options for the future are limited," says Lankin. "They end up looking, at the ages of 12, 13, 14 at a world of quick money from the drug trade ... because we're not giving them alternatives."

SEATED BEHIND fold-up tables in a wood-paneled room lined with sculptures and paintings of Canadian landscapes are 26 people deciding how money will be distributed in Kingston-Galloway. Most at this meeting in Cedar Ridge Creative Centre, a city-owned historic mansion, work for the city and most live outside the neighbourhood.

This is the Kingston-Galloway/Orton Park Neighbourhood Action Partnership. Absent are youth, the group these people are there to help. In fact, the word does not come up until almost an hour into the meeting.

"Don't hear youth, enough," Wayne Robinson, the city's priority neighbourhood team leader for Kingston-Galloway, reminds those gathered. "Sometimes we forget about the youth, particularly the marginalized youth."

Forgetting happens a lot.

"The funders need to listen to what the people in the neighbourhoods are saying," says Elliot-Ngugi, from Storefront.

Kingston-Galloway needs counsellors, especially those who can intervene when kids feel the pull of gangs. Agencies and governments prefer to fund workers who "outreach," which Elliot-Ngugi calls the latest "buzz word" in funding circles. But when outreach workers make contact with troubled youths, there is no counsellor to provide specialized and long-term help.

"No one wants to fund counsellors. They're expensive," she says.

Sabri Essa, a community support worker for the Toronto District School Board, says programs end up being run by out-of-touch agencies that don't act until going to committees and subcommittees. "So when young people want to do it, they say, 'No. We've been doing it for 25 years, telling you how to live your life, let's do it the same way.'"

The key, Essa says, is to train residents to access funds and run their own programs.

"If you don't empower young people, there will be 'the summer of the gun' every summer."

ON A SUN-DRENCHED afternoon, children toss a bright green tennis ball on a paved mound behind public housing in Orton Park. D'Souza stands outside a mobile recreation trailer run by the boys and girls club.

D'Souza grew up not far from Kingston-Galloway after his parents and twin brother moved to Toronto from Kuwait in the mid-90s. With his parents busy trying to find work or tired from working, he fell in with the East Side Bloods. The bullet that remains near his spine is a reminder of those days.

Now he is hoping for money to run his own club "branch" in Orton Park. The area is only a few blocks from the club's Galloway Rd. site, but "OP" youth don't often stray far from their home turf.

With YELL gone, he would like to see apprentice programs that pay "people to do something constructive, like a plumbing course or carpentry, or even computers, and make it effective, like finish the program and we'll find you work."

Young men returning from jail, in particular, need to be diverted from what put them there in the first place.

"You can't have someone come out of prison and say, 'Okay, now go about your way.' Not only do they only know what they know, but you learn more in prison," he says. "It's school for criminals."

This is the second part of the 1-2 punch that flattens troubled neighbourhoods. First there's yo-yo funding and meagre services, then comes the incarceration cycle in which crime begets crime.

And that leads to another factor, cited by people who live here when asked about the high number of residents who end up in jail: Heavy policing.

"The police figure they arrest you, they'll get lucky" and find drugs or a gun, says D'Souza.

"It's kind of the neighbourhood, the housing, they know the people got to sell (drugs) to make money."

Toronto police Chief Bill Blair acknowledges "policing heavily" in areas like Kingston-Galloway. But he says officers focus only on "a relatively small number of people that are victimizing a whole community, who represent a real danger to the people living in that area."

Blair says "consistent patterns" of violence are happening in parts of the city "that show up on maps where we see poverty, high unemployment, early dropout rates, lack of opportunity, marginalization, quite often in racialized communities."

Police targeted Kingston-Galloway in 2004 after several shootings and homicides were linked to a gang war between the Galloway Boys and the Malvern Crew from northeast Scarborough. In October 2004, police arrested or issued warrants for 16 people with ties to the Kingston-Galloway neighbourhood. They were charged with offences, including multiple counts of murder, which are still before the courts.

THE BUZZ of powerful floor fans fills the hallways and rooms of the East Scarborough Boys and Girls Club. Heavy rains have caused drains to back up. With computers and other equipment damaged by the water, Ron Rock, the executive director, is pondering where he will find the money to make things right.

Same old struggle. The answer is uncertain.

There is reason for optimism. The city is working with the club toward expansion, with funding coming from a \$13 million fund promised by Mayor David Miller – to be distributed evenly in Toronto's 13 priority neighbourhoods – to fund infrastructure improvements. Pending council approval this fall, the boys and girls club will get \$1 million.

On this evening, a group of young people gather in a room and close the door to the hum outside, and sing.

A newly created choir is rehearsing. Boys and girls clap and sway, crack jokes and raise their voices, with the dream of being something big some day.

They call themselves *Unknown Blessings*.