

LAW AND ORDER

# Police raids unnerve Jamestown moms

Kids believed to be enlisted by gangs to transport and stash guns – with the result that bedrooms are getting torn apart

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On a tiny street in northwest-ern Toronto, a telltale mark is appearing on more and more doors: two dented semicircles, left by the impact of a battering ram.

Police are using SWAT-style raids in an attempt to rid the public-housing complex of the guns that have increasingly become a fact of life there. The weapons frequently turn up in strange places, from cubbyholes to backpacks casually abandoned in backyards, sometimes surprising even residents who have been unwittingly harbouring them.

These guns – often shared communally, sometimes used for gang initiation – pose an investigative challenge to police, who have been coming to the homes of some of the street’s den mothers to search for weapons.

“You’re in your bed, and you hear your door fly,” Janet Delisser, a mother of three whose home was raided by police in the spring, said. “All I could see was guns pointing on you, lights shining.”

Gun crime in Toronto is up this year, with an increase of 57 per cent in shootings causing injury or death over last year, police say.

The danger became all too clear two weeks ago when 14-year-old Lecent Ross was shot and killed while she was visiting neighbouring children on Jamestown Crescent in northern Etobicoke, the second shooting death on the street in four months. There were no parents in the room at the time. Police have no update on the case, and investigators continue to treat Lecent’s death as suspicious, although they have not ruled out the possibility it was an accident.

Early last Saturday morning, officers raided at least three houses on Jamestown Crescent. Police wouldn’t confirm whether Lecent’s death and the raids were linked.

Lately, the search warrants bring them to some of the children’s and teens’ favourite spots, reflecting what appears to be ever-younger recruitment into gangs.

“Some of our issues are that young people have access to guns,” Superintendent Ron Taverner, unit commander of Toronto Police 23 Division, said. “It’s sort of an evolution of gangs – they bring people up through the ranks, if you will.”

Jamestown comprises three- to five-bedroom houses, typically occupied by families, and that fact defines the character of the street: Kids are a fixture, riding bikes and scooters down the street before abandoning them on the front lawns of friends’ small brick townhouses as they run in unannounced. These same children are sometimes targeted to hold or transport illegal weapons.

Keaton Austin, a pastor at Abundant Life Assembly on Dixon Road, said it’s older, adult men bringing guns into the community. “If the police catch an adult, they know it’s hard-core [penitentiary]. ... And he knows the kid isn’t going to the penitentiary,” he said. “It’s a slap on the wrist and the kid’s gone.”

One woman whose house on Jamestown Crescent was raided last Saturday offers neighbourhood children meals, and sometimes even a safe place to stay. She said she was shocked to see her children’s rooms turned upside down.

“I’ve seen the raids happen around here forever, and I’ve stood back and watched thinking: ‘Oh my god, they must feel horrible,’” said the woman, who asked that her name not be used because she feared she would be searched again for speaking publicly about police actions in the neighbourhood. “Never in my



Janet Delisser is one of the growing number of residents who have had SWAT-style visits from Toronto police, looking for guns and other contraband. She later found a pellet gun stashed in storage space next to her front door. She had no idea how it got there, she said. J.P. MOCZULSKI FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL

wildest dreams, never did I believe that would ever be me.”

She said police were looking for something that they said could have been hidden in her house without her knowledge, which she insisted she would never allow. “Because I don’t want to see [the kids] dying on the street, apparently that puts me in a position where people can come in and hide things in my house,” she said. “It’s the most ridiculous thing I ever heard.”

Supt. Taverner said he is aware of guns being passed around and hidden. Sometimes, he said, they are stashed in common areas or buried, and police work with Toronto Community Housing to patrol for weapons. Residents also sometimes call to report them.

Ms. Delisser said that, when her house was raided, the police physically searched everyone before they could leave the house, including her 11-year-old daughter. Police turned up nothing, but her house was “demolished,” she says, her children’s belongings tossed out of their drawers and the contents of her kitchen cupboards emptied onto the counter.

“Somebody came with information that somebody lives here, or he comes here, and he might have left something here with me knowing or without me knowing,” she said.

Ms. Delisser wasn’t totally surprised after finding a gun stashed in the storage space next to her front door. She had no idea how it got there, she said.

The gun looked real, and after she called police to report it, they later told her it was a powerful pellet gun, the kind that would serve as a realistic threat during a holdup.

Police also sometimes hit the jackpot: A backpack of guns was found hidden in a neighbourhood backyard last year.

Patricia Crooks, a community outreach worker who runs an after-school program for children in the area, said kids might be asked to do “favours” for older criminals without fully understanding the consequences. “Maybe they want to be in the gangs. Maybe they don’t want to be in the gangs. They could be scared into it,” she said.

The process of recruitment is

not clear, but one thing most people seem to agree on is that the children are getting younger and younger. “As young as 13. This is ridiculous. These are babies,” Ms. Crooks said.

Allan Bowen, known to Jamestown residents as “Pastor Al,” is the senior pastor at Abundant Life Assembly. He has worked in the community for years, and said there is “deep sorrow” around the trauma the police searches often leave behind.

However, he has also presided over the funerals of young people shot to death. “When you see it from the idea of getting guns off the street, guns that have put someone in the casket, guns that have taken someone’s life – then you understand the bigger rationale for the raid,” he said.

But as for whether the police approach to the searches is justified, “people around the neighbourhood will tell you no,” Mr. Bowen said.

Maureen Archibald, who lives close to the house where Lecent died two weeks ago, said the violence in her neighbourhood weighs on her, but so does the uncertainty around whose home might be searched next. “It’s stressful. We don’t know what’s going on. ... If they come kick down my door in the night while I’m in a deep sleep, I won’t be able to take it,” she said.

“If I had the money, I would be out of here.”

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Southern Ontario (Windsor to Hamilton)	Decrease of \$6.50
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The Ontario Energy Board (OEB) will hold a public hearing to consider the application filed by Union Gas. We will question Union Gas on the case. We will also hear arguments from individuals and from groups that represent the customers of Union Gas. At the end of this hearing, the OEB will decide whether to pre-approve the costs as requested in this application.

The OEB is an independent and impartial public agency. We make decisions that serve the public interest. Our goal is to promote a financially viable and efficient energy sector that provides you with reliable energy services at a reasonable cost.

### BE INFORMED AND HAVE YOUR SAY

You have the right to information regarding this application and to be involved in the process.

- You can review the application filed by Union Gas on the OEB’s website now.
- You can file a letter with your comments, which will be considered during the hearing.
- You can become an active participant (called an intervenor). Apply by **August 4, 2015** or the hearing will go ahead without you and you will not receive any further notice of the proceeding.
- At the end of the process, you can review the OEB’s decision and its reasons on our website.

### LEARN MORE

Our file number for this case is **EB-2015-0200**. To learn more about this hearing, find instructions on how to file letters or become an intervenor, or to access any document related to this case, please select the file number **EB-2015-0200** from the list on the OEB website: [www.ontarioenergyboard.ca/notice](http://www.ontarioenergyboard.ca/notice). You can also phone our Consumer Relations Centre at 1-877-632-2727 with any questions.

### ORAL VS. WRITTEN HEARINGS

There are two types of OEB hearings – oral and written. The OEB will determine at a later date whether to proceed by way of a written or oral hearing. If you think an oral hearing is needed, you can write to the OEB to explain why by **August 4, 2015**.

### PRIVACY

*If you write a letter of comment, your name and the content of your letter will be put on the public record and the OEB website. However, your personal telephone number, home address and e-mail address will be removed. If you are a business, all your information will remain public. If you apply to become an intervenor, all information will be public.*

*This hearing will be held under section 36 of the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998, S.O. 1998 c.15 (Schedule B).*



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