



## **Working Together to Help Each Other**

August 2, 2012

For over 30 years, Tropicana has been active in the community providing services to improve the lives of individuals and families living in communities considered to be "at risk". These services include youth employment and youth development programs, individual and family counselling, tutoring and childcare services. "Tropicana Community Services expresses its regret and concerns about the recent gun violence experienced in a number of neighbourhoods across Toronto", said Sharon Shelton, Executive Director. Every year Tropicana assists more than 20,000 individuals. This past year, with the assistance of 25 volunteers, Tropicana has tutored 60 students to improve their performance in the school curriculum. Currently, Tropicana has 1,620 young persons in job placements for the summer providing them with life skills and the tangible benefits of a real wage. The current economic situation places greater stress on communities that are already disadvantaged.

Many of the youth who participate in Tropicana Community Services' programs live in the communities affected by gun violence. These youth and their families are traumatized and we are providing counselling services to them and their families. The trauma will be longstanding so long-term assistance and sustainable programs are needed to support the families and communities.

We need to remember that the families and youth living in the communities affected by the recent gun violence are productive members of society. They grieve with our society as a whole. The actions of a few persons are stigmatizing entire communities by the poor choices that they make when they use violence as a means of resolving their disputes. The recent events clearly point to a need for us to develop new efforts to assist youth in non-violent conflict resolution strategies. We need also to focus more efforts on programming youth for success.

It is understandable that there will be many opinions regarding what needs to be done. Everyone needs to bring his/her efforts together to focus on solutions aimed at creating healthy communities for all citizens of Toronto. We cannot work in silos to resolve societal problems. Until the recent escalation of gun violence, there was some progress in the reduction of crime and violence, yet, clearly, these events suggest that efforts to build vibrant and healthy communities cannot stop. Consistent and long-term commitment on the part of all stakeholders, including parents, community organizations, schools, colleges and universities, police and all levels of government is required.

These are challenging times yet communities are standing strong and Tropicana Community Services will continue to work with them in support of their aspirations for better opportunities tomorrow.

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