

## Minneapolis forum's message: Gun violence is a public health crisis

The epidemic of gun crime among youth is as much a health issue as smoking or drinking, advocates said at the North Side forum.

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More than 100 people gathered Thursday night in north Minneapolis to decry the toll gun violence has taken among young people in their community and to talk about a fresh approach to stopping the bloodshed.

The campaign, called "Don't Shoot ... I Want to Live," is the brainchild of a coalition of North Side leaders who believe that the epidemic of gun violence plaguing their community should be treated as a public health problem similar to such issues as smoking, drinking and seat-belt use.

"Leading ain't easy," shouted Sha Cage, a local spoken-word artist who opened the two-hour forum.

Community residents and leaders who packed the Peace Foundation headquarters at 1119 W. Broadway listened solemnly as family members of homicide victims offered emotional words of advice about how to prevent the kinds of tragedies they have faced.

"No one person knows the answer to curb the violence, because if they did we'd be much further down the road," said Guy Jones, the father of shooting victim Charez Jones, 14.

"But parents need to take control of the household again," he said. "Spend more time with your kids."

According to numbers from the city of Minneapolis, homicide is the leading cause of death for city residents between the ages of 15 and 24, and the problem is even more intense on the North Side.

Doris Young choked up as she talked about her 17-year-old son Sterling Horton, whose 2006 shooting death remains unsolved. "Every time I talk about this, it's like it just happened," she said.

Young's voice quavered as she spoke of not cooking her son's favorite foods anymore. But she proclaimed loudly that she won't be held hostage in her own neighborhood.

Her message was especially striking to several young people who are growing up in the community.

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