

Here and Now

Produced by

Headlines Theatre

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Recommendations to Social Service Agencies in the Lower Mainland

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Here and Now

The Idea

In 2004, staff at Headlines Theatre were having discussions about what they had been reading in the local newspaper. The headlines were filled with sensational stories of Indo-Canadian gang violence. As the discussions evolved, the staff began to be curious about the usefulness of labeling one community as the problem. Many other minority groups have been targeted in a similar way in the past. The Vietnamese, Chinese and Russian communities have all been identified by their ethnicity and their involvement in gangs. The staff wondered why the issue of violence, (gang or otherwise) was not seen as an issue which the entire community needs to address rather than just blaming and labeling the Indo-Canadian community.

As a result of these discussions, Headlines Theatre began to be curious about the possibility of creating a project that addressed the underlying issues of gang violence, a project that would help to create community based solutions. They knew that they had been successful in addressing social issues through the use of theatre before, and had created opportunities for solutions to be discovered by the community. A proposal for the project was created.

Staff at Headlines Theatre knew the importance of having the input and support of the Indo-Canadian community. Various community members and organizations were approached with the idea, and the project received a very positive response. This group became the pre-production advisory committee for the project.

Twenty-two members of the South Asian community participated in a week long intensive workshop which explored the issues which exist in all their lives. Their experience of violence was direct and indirect. Some participants were parents and family members that had been touched by issues of gang violence while others had been involved in the gang lifestyle and had managed to leave. They all came together to explore the issues of violence, and to share their experiences. The participants used theatre games

and exercises to create trust and share personal experiences. These experiences created ideas in which the play could be developed. An audience interactive theatre project was created. The play is not about any one participant's personal experience, rather the themes and ideas that emerged from the workshop.

Prior to the workshop starting, seven participants were identified as cast members through an extensive interview process. This was required so that the workshop did not become a week long audition. The workshop participants could focus on the experience, rather than being concerned about being cast for a part in the play.

It is very important to recognize that it is a very small number of Indo-Canadians that have become involved in the gangs. The majority of families are law-abiding and hard working individuals that are not involved in criminal behavior. Unfortunately, that small percentage is tarnishing the reputation which the community had worked so hard to earn. This is also another reason why some families do not get involved in finding solutions, because they can not identify with the values and behaviors of those involved in criminal activity. They decide to look away until it affects someone they know, but as was apparent at the performances, the issue of violence has touched just about everyone.

Forum Theatre

Forum theatre is a unique and powerful method to ask audience members to help in finding solutions to a problem. The twenty-five minute play is shown once in its entirety, then it is performed again with the audience members having the opportunity to yell "stop" at any time and come onto the stage.

The play has many layers which the audience quickly recognizes. There are patterns of behavior in the family and within the relationship of the gang members that are deep rooted. The dysfunction in the relationships created a challenge for audience members to create safety for the world that is present in the play. This is called an intervention.

The play, “Here and Now” was presented for two weeks at the Ross Street Temple in Vancouver and two weeks at the Surrey Art Centre. The show ran from November 17 to December 11, 2005, and was directed by David Diamond. There were twenty-one performances including two matinees for high school students in grades eight to eleven. There were a total of 177 interventions from audience members of all ages. Each of the audience members was participating to try to create safety for their character, or other characters in the play. Some of the interventions were successful, while others that were less successful in achieving safety still had opportunities for the audience to learn from. As in life, sometimes the decisions we make could be different if we knew what other circumstances would intervene, but most of the time, life happens and we have to go with what life presents.

The audience members were not aware of the complexities of the issue. The play itself does not offer any solutions; it builds to a climax and ends. The ideas and interventions of the audience were documented by the community scribe which were later reviewed and analyzed, and which is woven into the recommendation portion of this report.

At some performances, the audience did not participate in the interventions as readily as they did at others. Diamond asked the audience to take a chance and try an idea. One idea could lead to another and another and another. He probed, challenged and questioned the audience. He sometimes identified the quietness of the audience and reminded them that “the silence in the theatre is the same as the silence out there in the community.” Heads nodded in agreement, to validate his statement that no one wants to take a chance at addressing the issue.

The Play

Here and Now is a play about relationships and the struggles of the characters. Jay is a nineteen year old living at home with his mother Rupa and his dad Jeevan. His Daadi (grandmother) also lives in the home as does his twenty one year old sister Sonya. Jay witnesses his parents argue and fight with one another, and he sees his grandmother being involved in the situations as well. Both his parents work outside of the home, and his Daadi has been his main caregiver since he was young. Jay’s sister Sonya has

friends and acquaintances that she knows are involved with gangs. After one particular argument with her father, and witnessing him hit her mother and push Jay, Sonya invites Jay to come and hang out with her and her friends. She is unaware that this decision will lead to Jay being recruited by Kam (gang member), and the predicament he will be in several months later.

Kam and Sunny are childhood friends. They have been involved in a gang for almost ten years. They have a long history together, and are like brothers. Sunny has decided that he does not want to continue living the gang lifestyle, and wants to get out. Kam does not want Sunny to leave, and struggles with how he will resolve this dilemma. The climax of the play is when Jay finds himself being instructed by Kam to shoot Sunny. Jay tries to convince himself that this is his only option. The final words spoken by Jay are “You gotta do, what you gotta do, you gotta do what the fuck you gotta do,” as Sunny begs for his life.

Every night, artistic director David Diamond asked the audience to stand after the first showing of the play. He asked, “If the issues in this play do not affect your life, or the lives of people dear to you, please sit...it’s OK to sit.” At each of the twenty-one shows at least 95% or more of audience members remained standing indicating that they were impacted by the issues identified in the play. On at least four occasions, the entire audience remained standing. The audience members were very diverse, so it became clear that the issues in the play were in fact the issues in our larger community. Many of the issues of parental conflict, intergenerational issues, domestic violence, relationships and feeling stuck in a circumstance were not cultural moments, but rather life moments that everyone has experienced.

If 95% of audience members in over twenty-one performances were affected or could relate to the issues, then where would they go if they needed to access resources or help? This question arose every evening of the play. If we have identified that a problem exists, then we must also be able to identify the resources needed to assist in resolving the problem. Do the resources exist? Is there help available for the numerous issues identified in the production?

The play raises many complex issues which members of all ethnicities can identify with. Each of the interventions which took place on the stage was an idea that the audience member had that they believed would create safety for their own character as well as for the other characters on the stage. The audience members all had good intentions as to the positive outcomes they were trying to create. They were able to identify the dysfunction in the family and the dysfunction in the lives of the gang members.

The Family

Both Rupa and Jeevan need to improve their relationship and how they communicate with one another. They were disrespectful towards one another and Jeevan resorted to using violence to manage conflict. He did not listen to his wife's ideas and Rupa did not understand Jeevan's struggle to try to hang on to his beliefs of how children should behave. The example they were setting for their children did not allow for their children to feel safe in coming to them when they had a problem. The parents had not created a strong attachment with their children. They had not gained the children's respect, and did not have the skills in recognizing the challenges that the children of immigrant parents experience growing up in the western world. They also had poor communication skills with their children as they were too busy working and trying to earn a living. Jeevan works eighteen hours a day driving a taxi, and being financially responsible for his family. The fast paced life in the family did not create positive family dynamics. Audience members recognized the struggle that the parents were facing. Many interventions displayed Rupa and Jeevan's ability to communicate better and have respect for one another. Rupa spoke to Jeevan in a positive tone, and understood his desire to question Sonya's behavior. If the parents could be in agreement with the rules and expectations of their children, the children would recognize that their parents will work as a team, and that their expectations of them will be consistent.

Rupa and her mother in law were also setting a bad example for the children. The grandmother felt that she was disrespected by her daughter in law. She felt she had a big responsibility in raising the grandchildren and running the household. She did not feel appreciated or heard by her daughter in law. She also felt the need to "mother" the family and take care of everyone. She too

was trying desperately to hang onto her traditional values and beliefs. A few interventions recognized the importance of Daadi's role in the family. Although she is a woman of great power in the family, (the matriarch) she also has much influence which could work to the benefit of the entire family. Many grandparents are able to take on the role of leadership, and assist both the children and parents to understand one another's struggle.

The adults in the family need to lead by example. The mother, father and grandmother need to model healthy relationships and create safety in the home for the children. This will in turn teach the children to be respectful, learn to negotiate, and understand the importance of boundaries. If the parents are respectful of the children, the children are more likely to understand why their parents have particular beliefs and values. Often adults just expect children to understand why they have particular ideas or beliefs without explaining. If the relationship is strong, the children are more likely to understand. Daadi told Sonya that she represented the honor and respect of the family, but she did not tell her why. Sonya was tired of hearing that she had to behave in a certain way for her family. She could not recognize the link between her actions of going to a restaurant and what that had to do with her family's reputation. Instead of using the same phrases repeatedly with youth, they need to be made aware of where the beliefs come from. These conversations are more difficult for children to understand when they are used in the middle of a difficult time. These conversations need to happen when everyone is calm and willing to listen, and can expect to be heard.

Many interventions recognized the gender imbalance between Sonya and Jay. Although Sonya is two years older than Jay, she was questioned more about her actions than Jay was. Female audience members said that they could relate to Sonya's struggle. They noticed that their brothers are not held accountable for their actions whereas they are. The males have more freedom to come and go as they please, but the females are not given the same leverage. As a result of such experiences, many youth are living dual lives. They play the role of the Indian child at home, and take on the western role when they are outside of the home. This can cause many youth to have trouble being comfortable in either role as she has not learned to weave the two experiences together, and feel comfortable with herself.

Parents need to be honest and open with their children from a young age. If a parent has a concern, they should name it and be able to talk to their children. Many issues which children need to be aware of are often not talked about in the home. Parents and caregivers need to be vigilant and honest about the dangers and realities of gang involvement. If parents are unable to start the discussions and give accurate information, the children will be less likely to go to them when they need to discuss other important issues.

The audience recognized that although the grandmother had suspicions about Jay's actions when she found the three thousand dollars in his room and saw the leather jacket, she did not ask him outright what he was doing. She had an instinctive feeling that something was wrong, but she did not name it. Some interventions that replaced the grandmother also did not ask Jay directly what was going on. They did admit that they knew that they felt a sense of urgency, but did not know what to do. Some said that they could not stop Jay from leaving the house. Others realized that they could have done more. It was disclosed in the community workshop that one mother found a stash of automatic weapons in her teenage sons' bedroom. She had no idea that he was involved in gang activity. There is a difference between having no idea and having strong suspicions. It was not helpful for Daadi to be trapped in denial, because she was not able to create an opportunity for Jay to share his fear with her. She could have created the space for Jay to tell her then or later.

In another intervention an audience member took the role of Daadi and told Jay about her own experiences in India. She said she was familiar with violence and conflict. She had seen people get killed and it was not an experience she wanted to remember. Hearing his grandmother talk about her experience with violence caused Jay to reflect on the possibility that perhaps she might understand his struggle. Elders in the South Asian community have many life experiences that they could and should share with the younger generations. Often youth believe that the parents and grandparents will not understand their experience, but they may be surprised by the knowledge and life experiences they have had.

One intervention replacing Daadi was humorous, yet very endearing. An audience member told Jay how much he was loved and that Daadi would always be there for him. The man taking the role of Daadi held Jay close to him and hugged him lovingly. Afterwards he said that he noticed that no one

in the family showed any affection, or told each other how much they were cared for. Children need to be told that they are loved and cared for. The parents are working hard for their children, but they are not spending time, or telling them what they need to hear. Jay revealed that this particular intervention was unique for him because this was the closest he had come to telling Daadi that he was in trouble.

The issues which Jay was struggling with were all kept secret in the play. The violence he witnessed at home and his experience in working for Kam were both things that he felt that he could not talk to anyone about. The children had been taught from an early age that what happens in the home stays in the home. Jay was aware of this because he rejected interventions that suggested that he speak with a counselor, a social worker or even other family members. He felt he did not have a voice that would be heard or understood. He did not want anyone to have a different perception of his family, make any judgments or talk about their problems. He based this belief on his previous experience with his parents. He thought nothing would change. A new approach for offering such services to Jay was required. It should not be up to children to find solutions to their family problems. The adults should be leading the way.

The Gang

Loyalty to the gang was a recurring theme in the play. Kam was loyal to his crew and he expected Jay to be loyal to him as well. Kam perceived Sunny's desire to exit from the gang as a disloyal decision. This was one of the reasons he struggled in his decision to let him leave the gang. The friendship, relationship, and hierarchy between the two are important elements to the lifestyle they are living. Kam and Sunny are like brothers and sincerely love one another. They have a long history together. Kam is torn between his business relationship with Sunny and his friendship.

Jay is intrigued about being in a gang. He may have not realized right away the danger he has exposed himself to, but when he receives a gun from Kam, he knows that he has really entered into a criminal lifestyle. Suddenly Jay feels a sense of power, but he is scared to death at the same time. He is looking for something that feels like home, a sense of belonging, and he believes that he has found it in his connection with Kam and his crew. Jay has a car he parks two blocks away from home that his parents do not know

about. He has money, and he has friends. He is beginning to feel that he is doing something with his life, but on the inside, he lives with his inner struggle. He is struggling with his fears and apprehensions.

Many of the interventions for Jay not accepting a weapon after doing drug deals for several months revealed that Jay would receive a very severe beating and be ejected from gang. Depending on how Jay handled the situation, he could also end up being shot. The audience did not realize the severity or the consequences of going against Kam. Some thought that they could just say no to the gun and continue to sell drugs for Kam. They did not recognize that Jay was expected to commit to his crew, and to do what he was told without questioning. Jay was required to continue to be loyal to his gang.

Jay also recognizes that if he does not accept the gun at this time, after receiving a beating, he will have to remember to never speak about what he knows about the gang or his involvement in it. Gangs know that as soon as others have information about them, they become more vulnerable to investigation and arrest. If Jay speaks out, he will be putting himself and his family at risk. Jay knows this and decides to accept the gun.

It becomes evident early on in the play that Sunny wants to get out of the gang. Sunny tries to tell Kam that he has a legitimate means to making money. He is selling cars, and wants to get away from the gang lifestyle. He is tired of living in fear of his enemies. In the interventions for Sunny, audience members were able to get him out of the gang safely by focusing on his relationship with Kam. By reminding Kam about their history together, some interventions convinced Kam to let Sunny leave town. Sunny makes a promise to never talk about the gang or what he knows. He also is aware that he must leave his family behind as added insurance that he will not talk. Kam will let Sunny know when he can come back to town. During one intervention for Sunny, a young man discovered that he would be able to leave the gang with Kam's help. He told Kam, "I'm either going to die in this lifestyle, or I'm going to die outside of this lifestyle. I see more hope outside." This young man's sense of desire and hope allowed him to see that he had to take a chance and get out of the gang and try to start his life over again.

In another intervention replacing Sunny, an audience member is able to convince Kam to let him leave the gang, but still maintain a friendship. He

tells Kam, “Someday you’ll be bleeding, you are going to need a couch, and I want to give you my couch.” Sunny is reminding Kam that it would also benefit Kam to allow him to leave because he will appreciate having a friend living out of town. Sunny is telling Kam that he cares very much for him, and that he will never betray their brotherhood. The key to getting out safely for Sunny is to be respectful of Kam’s wishes and to not minimize the long friendship and experiences they have endured.

The audience could relate with many of the characters in the play. Some they identified as similar to people in their own lives, and others they had to be reminded of. At several performances, Diamond asked the audience if they knew anyone that Jays’ character represented. Jay is a youth on the verge of entering a world that he will probably not be able to get out of safely. He is looking for validation and acceptance, and a place to belong. About 15 to 20 percent of the audience raised their hands. Diamond stated that at least another 20 percent of the audience knew a Jay, but they did not know that they knew him. Diamond was speculating that there are many young people in our lives that could be tempted into gang membership, but we just did not recognize the signs, or see that youth as a potential gang member. There are many young vulnerable youth in all our lives.

Finding Solutions and General Recommendations

One of the major realizations which emerged from the production was that there are no formalized structures for people trying to leave the gang lifestyle. They place themselves at risk whether they stay in the gang or leave. It was recognized in the workshops as well as in the play that many of the over 90 deaths are of Indo-Canadian men that were attempting to get out of gangs. This was a sad realization and a further reason to implement and support programs for prevention as well as assisting those who no longer want to be involved in gangs.

As the various interventions in the play displayed, the three characters involved in the gang do not have many options other than to run away from their communities. They are aware that if they run away with the assistance of their fellow gang members, they must leave behind insurance. This insurance comes in the form of swearing to keep silent about the information that they have about the gang, and by leaving their family behind as collateral. If he talks about his involvement, or releases any information

about the gang, he knows that there will be a heavy price to pay. They know that if they speak, their family will be threatened or hurt. It was revealed in the play that the family could have a brick thrown through their window, shots fired at their home, or their home could be set on fire. This gives a guarantee to the gang that the person leaving the gang will not put his family at risk, and that he will keep quiet about the information he has. People leaving gangs are too afraid to talk, not only for themselves, but for their families as well.

We have come to know from the experience of the workshop participants, that young men have gone into hiding and have had to leave their families and communities behind. We also know this experience to be true because one young woman approached the director after a show and told him that her family was held hostage (emotionally and psychologically) for three years. It was the only way for her brother to get out of the gang. This was the only guarantee that the gang had that he would not talk to anyone about the information he had about the activities he had been involved in. She recognized that the situations in the play were based on the reality of what is really happening in our communities.

When the director posed the question to the audiences about where a young person could go if he wanted to leave the gang lifestyle, the answers he received from the audience were generally the same. They said he could leave the province, leave the country, he could go to the Police, and one young audience member thought that he could commit suicide. Although the suggestion of suicide sounds like an extreme option, the audience member must have recognized that there are few safe options for him to get out of the gang. He must have recognized the fear and desperation which those wanting to leave must be experiencing. Given the high rate of suicide of youth in British Columbia, it is no wonder that this was a perceived solution for this youth. Of the twenty-one performances, only one person identified that a youth gang information hot-line was an available resource.

During the discussion between the interventions, another audience member spoke of her experience. She said, "I taught for eleven years at an elementary school. A youth got shot on our school grounds after a dance at the high school. They have nowhere to go, it breaks my heart." She was referring to the lack of resources and services available for youth to exit gang activity.

What if there was a system in place that would allow people that want to get out safely could access? We discovered in the interventions that the police were not necessarily an option. The Canadian criminal justice system is not designed to assist criminals, trying to get away from criminal behavior. The role of the police is to investigate criminal behavior, identify perpetrators and forward the information to Crown Counsel so that Crown can assess whether there is enough information to lay a charge and proceed with the matter in court where a judge or jury will decide the guilt or innocence of the accused.

When a gang member finally has the courage to leave his gang, he can not safely share any information with the police. He knows that he would be putting himself and his family in danger by giving information to the police. As would be expected of the police, they will try to get any information they can from him. It is their responsibility to get information about criminal activity, but once they receive that information, they lack the resources to keep the individual safe from repercussions. The police do not have a system in place to “protect” him. Nor do the police view the individual as a victim in most cases. They know that the individual has been engaged in criminal activity, and they are not in a position to protect him as a result of his history with the gang.

The police have been stating their desire to assist those wanting to get out, but gang members perceive this as a risk they are not prepared to take. The gang member is caught in a vicious cycle, with no resources to help him. Audience members were also not as able to relate to the struggles of Sunny or Kam. They seemed to be identified by many audience members as the “bad guys.” Fewer than six interventions for Kam took place, presumably because he was not viewed by many as a victim in the play, and his personal struggles were more difficult for the audience to identify and relate to. There were more interventions for Sunny.

Poor police relations and understanding of the criminal justice system are also another reason that the South Asian community does not turn to the police to report crime, or ask for assistance. The community has seen that only a handful of gang related murders are solved, and that when an accused is convicted, the criminal justice system does not impose what they would consider a reasonable punishment. The system is perceived as too lenient on criminals and not helpful for victims. The risk in involving the police does not appear to be a viable source of protection. Also, the police forces

themselves have recognized that they must be more culturally competent and be more ethnically diverse in their hiring practices.

Indo-Canadians have been identified as a community that does not share information openly with social service agencies. There are many reasons for this perception. One reason is that Indo-Canadians do not share their family problems with outsiders because they have historically solved problems without outside intervention in the past. This is understandable given that many families fear losing honor and respect in their community, but also because they do not trust or expect someone else to solve their problems. They believe that what happens in the home, stays in the home, and will be resolved in the home.

Social service agencies need to be aware of the complexities of this issue. They need to look beneath the presenting problems, and explore the greater needs of the youth or family in front of them. If South Asians are not sharing information, perhaps different methods of reaching out to the community and building relationships is required.

Specific Recommendations

Toll free resource number

It has been evident for quite some time that members of various communities do not feel safe accessing resources that are currently offered to families that are dealing with issues of violence and gangs. A toll free telephone number would be helpful for the communities that want to get information about resources, learn about different options, simply be heard, or share information confidentially. They do not have to involve the authorities, but can still give information that would be helpful in solving crimes and keeping communities safe. The toll free resource lines would be available 24 hours of the day, and would be answered by skilled individuals that are fluent in the various languages spoken in the lower mainland. This would be a confidential resource line. The caller would be assisted through referrals and other appropriate interventions. This number would also allow callers to be directed toward safer options, such as safe houses.

Safe Houses

A safe house is a designated residence to which anyone who is trying to find refuge and safety from a gang lifestyle can go. The safe house would be accessed in the same manner as a transition house. The individual would call a pager number, and their call would be returned immediately. A worker with knowledge of the issues that this individual is experiencing would be required to assist the gang member. The worker would ask assessment questions and determine the needs of the individual. The trained worker would meet with the gang member in a neutral location and let him know how the safe house works. The safe houses would be located in various parts of the province and possibly in other provinces as well. At the safe house, the individual would learn new skills and ideas to help him adjust to his new lifestyle. He would realize that he can have a safe and productive life outside of the gang. He would also receive counseling services to help him through the change process. The individual would stay in the safe house for a minimum of six months. He would receive all of the services required to help him begin to create a new life for himself.

Interactive Website

Another useful way in which youth can get information and education about the gang lifestyle may be to create an interactive website which allows youth to see the realities of the choices they make. The website would contain helpful information about what to be aware of so that a youth is not recruited, and to be honest and realistic as to what will happen when people make the decision to join in criminal behavior. The website would not glamorize gang activity in the way the media currently does, rather it would show the dangers and difficulties of the lifestyle. People that have managed to escape the gangs could also share in their real-life experiences of the true dangers and difficulties of being involved in this lifestyle. The website would be informative and fun, with a section for youth as well as parents. It could allow the user to make different selections which will portray the realities of the gang lifestyle. They would also learn the realities of how difficult it is to get out of the gangs and the impact it has on families. The

website would provide real information for youth that are curious, as well as those that may be heavily involved and need to get out. The information on this website would be accessed by many in the privacy of their homes.

Another benefit of such a website would be to provide an updated list of services available to the community, so that it is right there and they do not have to search for it when they are in crisis.

Prevention

Parenting Programs

Family dynamics were an important part of the play. It became evident early in the play that there were poor communication skills in the family. The father did not know how to effectively communicate with his children; the parents did not know how to communicate with each other and the mother was in conflict with her mother in law. There were patterns of poor communication between all members of the family. Many audience members recognized the parents' need to be armed with effective parenting and communication skills in order to better understand the needs of their children. The children in this production were nineteen and twenty one years of age, but it was clear from their interactions with their parents that they had very different values and ideas from their parents. They even stated that they felt that their parents were living in the past. All parents should have access to parenting programs which assist them in learning more about the needs of their children and their experience of growing up in a western culture.

The parenting skills programs should begin when the children are a young age, teaching the parents to bond and nurture with their children and identifying the importance of emotional connectedness as well as the daily needs of the child. The father and mother in the play worked long hours. This is not an unusual situation for many families; however it leaves the responsibility of parenting to the grandmother who is also not aware of the daily challenges that her grandchildren face. Parenting programs should be available to all caregivers including grandparents.

Many parents are benefited by hearing about the experiences and struggles of other parents. They begin to realize that they are not the only ones that are having trouble raising and understanding their children. They realize that others are also struggling and that they do not have to suffer in silence. Parents can learn new skills and ideas from the facilitator as well as from one another. The parents also realize that there is no shame in asking for help.

School curriculum for children and teens

Children spend many years in school, working their way from the elementary to the high school level. In order to educate children about decisions that could have a negative influence on their lives, it is important to have those discussions at an earlier stage in life. By grade six or seven, children are able to understand these more serious issues. Children and teens need to be made aware of how youth can be recruited into gangs, how they need to be aware of the choices they make, and the friends they have. Youth that have knowledge and understanding of issues are less likely to be easily influenced by others. They will be able to make better decisions if they have self esteem and confidence. If a youth has adults in his life that he can go to in any situation, he will access help sooner, rather than waiting until he is in too deep. If a youth recognizes that there is no such thing as easy money, he will be less likely to reach for it. If he is made aware of the dangers and repercussions, he will think twice before heading in that direction. Other themes and ideas that can be explored while discussing the issue of gangs is bullying, conflict resolution, communication and personal responsibility. Children also need encouragement in learning about other difficult issues such as racism and discrimination. If a child feels like he does not have a place to belong or is an outsider, he will find anyone who shows him attention, and that could be someone he will later be used by. Our character Jay was a very quiet young man, but he opened up when Kam started to show him some attention. Jay was looking for a surrogate family to belong in, that attention should be coming from people that want to nurture and assist Jay, not strangers.

Along with the school's involvement in teaching our children, there needs to be extensive outreach and community education. Many parents are unaware of the challenges and difficulties that their children face. As children need to be made aware of the dangers of gang involvement, parents also need to be made aware of the challenges that children face everyday. Many parents assume that children have a very easy life, but do not really know what is going on. If children do not have that secure relationship with their parents, they will not be able to come to them when difficult situations arise.

Looking ahead

Several grass roots organizations have begun to assist youth and families in the Indo-Canadian community. The services provided range from mentoring students, organizing sports activities, offering parenting classes, having role models, and developing a media campaign about gang involvement. Each of the organizations is looking for funding to continue to run their programs, and sometimes competing with one another for the funds. There is little or no collaboration between the organizations, so often the community does not know what is available to them. Often the agencies also do not know what the other is able to offer. A more organized and accessible system must be in place to better support the organizations, and the clients that are in need of the service. The efforts of these organizations are an example of the Indo-Canadian community standing up and stating that they want the violence to stop. They are working to extinguish the problem. It is easy to imagine that this same need for organization exists in other communities as well.

One realization that came through during the performance and interventions was the recognition that as individuals, we all have choices as to how we live our lives, the relationships we have, and the decisions we make. This is important to note because sometimes people feel that what happens to them is not in their control and that some circumstances are inevitable. Diamond challenged the audience on this notion, assisting them to realize that in every situation, no matter how desperate, they have a choice. In every action of our lives, we have many choices. Nothing has to be inevitable, if we begin to broaden our ability to look at situations in a different way. Also, each of our choices is like a web, they are all connected to one another, but sometimes

we have to look harder to notice the connections. The actions of the characters in the play were all linked and connected together. If the community would begin to see that all our actions to resolve this violence are also connected, we could make a difference. It is not inevitable that the violence will continue, or that people will continue to die. If we bring all our efforts together, we will be able to create solutions.

As a young girl left the theatre after a performance, I overheard her say to her mother “the best way to get out of a gang, is to never join a gang.” Youth today often know more about the realities of what is happening in the world than their parents do. This young person’s words were so innocent, yet so true. She had recognized the challenges in trying to leave a gang. She had recognized that once you are in, it is very difficult to exit safely.

It is imperative that all levels of government, municipal, provincial and federal agencies work together to address the issues of violence and implement the ideas suggested as well as continue to work on new solutions. The social impact and pain that all our communities are facing is much too high. As was experienced in the play, people are losing their lives at a time when they are actually trying to change their lives. It is time to stop blaming, labeling, finger pointing and to create long term solutions. The work of this production came from people wanting to make a difference, and to try a new approach to a problem that has been looked at the same way for a number of years. As a community, we need to stop being silent and to start working on solutions to save our youth. The violence will not end overnight, but if different ways of creating safety are implemented, the violence will be addressed, and lives may be saved.