

PERSPECTIVES

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Preventing youth violence

By BARBARA NOTESTEIN

The alarming events of the July 4 weekend in Riverwest highlight the need for far greater positive engagement of youths.

For over 10 years, Safe & Sound has focused our collaborative crime-reduction strategies on 21 of Milwaukee's highest crime neighborhoods, including Riverwest. We mobilize residents, youths, youth-serving agencies, churches and businesses, law enforcement and other city services to partner in effective strategies to prevent crime.

We support after-school Safe Places for youths, and our Community Partner organizers work daily with youths to increase their engagement in the community. Because of our deep involvement with the residents and youths of Riverwest, we know that the recent incidents are not representative of the youths in this community.

It would be unfair if all youths were painted with the same brush. Only those involved in this incident are responsible.

That is why Safe & Sound joins the community in commending and thanking the parents who came forward to turn in their sons and daughters and, in doing so, communicating the message that the youths need to be held accountable for their actions.

But we also know that there is much positive work occurring in Riverwest. Two youth-serving agencies, COA-Riverwest and the Holton Youth and Family

Center Collaborative, are part of Safe & Sound's crime strategy initiative. Youths already have created and led projects to reduce crime and build leadership skills, proving that young people can have a powerful, positive impact in their neighborhoods.

Many youths in Riverwest, and indeed throughout Milwaukee, feel voiceless — that their concerns and views are not heard. Youths must be involved in the dialogue and be engaged in any solution addressing the recent events.

When youths are engaged and active in their community, residents no longer fear them and the fabric of the community is strengthened. Youths not only need the opportunity to express their feelings and be heard but also need to be recognized for their positive actions already taking place in the community.

Safe & Sound is planning a youth-led town hall meeting for late July, to create a forum for youths to discuss their concerns and fears. We want to let them tell us how we can support them in making additional positive contributions to the neighborhood — how they can make a difference in Milwaukee. And they will discuss strategies and plans enabling them to make positive contributions to their neighborhoods.

We all must recognize that positive youth development and engagement are the best solutions to reducing crime and strengthening neighborhoods.

Barbara Notestein is executive director of Safe & Sound.

On jobs, we can't or we won't?

If you were shocked by Friday's job report, if you thought we were doing well and were taken aback by the bad news, you haven't been paying attention. The fact is, the U.S. economy has been stuck in a rut for a year and a half.

Yet a destructive passivity has overtaken our discourse. Turn on your TV, and you'll see some self-satisfied pundit declaring that nothing much can be done about the economy's short-run problems (reminder: This "short run" is now in its fourth year), that we should focus on the long run instead.



Paul Krugman

Our failure to create jobs is a choice, not a necessity.

This gets things exactly wrong. The truth is that creating jobs in a depressed economy is something government could and should be doing. Yes, there are huge political obstacles to action — notably, the fact that the House is controlled by a party that benefits from the economy's weakness. But political gridlock should not be conflated with economic reality.

Our failure to create jobs is a choice, not a necessity — a choice rationalized by an ever-shifting set of excuses.

Excuse No. 1: Just around the cor-



days: High unemployment is "structural," they say, and requires long-term solutions (which means, in practice, doing nothing).

Well, if there really was a mismatch between the workers we have and the workers we need, workers who do have the right skills, and are therefore able to find jobs, should be getting big wage increases. They aren't. In fact, average wages actually fell last month.