

## Ward 20 candidates discuss youth and policing

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If you want to keep your children from mischief, get them to spend a lot of time at the community centre and they'll be fine.

That's the message incumbent city councillor Adam Vaughan and challenger Dean Maher delivered to the mostly teenage audience during the Ward 20 youth and policing all-candidates meeting July 29 at Scadding Court Community Centre.

With third candidate Mike Yen a no-show, Vaughan and Maher offered a see-saw of responses to 10 questions formulated by young people from the community which ranged from "How will you work with the local police to decrease the amount of gun violence among the youth within Toronto and especially Alexandra Park?" to "What are some of the other ways in which you can ensure that police and youth can engage with each other on a more positive level?"

Maher believes putting adolescents on the right track starts at home and simply keeping them busy will steer them from trouble.

"We need to try to figure out what got them to that point, try to find some way to intervene, speak to the families. Stop the violence before it escalates, because the police can't do it all alone," he said. "We need to get younger people working. There's nothing like an eight-hour shift to just suck the life right out of you so you don't have the motivation to do something. It also teaches kids about responsibility."

Vaughan spent most of the meeting rhyiming off initiatives he's created to engage the community over his first term as councillor, like Friday night dinners where he sat down with families and police from 14, 51 and 52 divisions.

"It was through those conversations that we uncovered a pattern that was developing in the community where teenagers 13 to 15 were suddenly being targeted for involvement in activities that would put them in a very dangerous situation," he said. "So we immediately worked with Scadding Court, Dixon Hall with Alexandra Park Community Centre to put together summer programs that would hire young people and provide leadership training for them."

But what's critical about gun violence he said is people need to understand gun possession is never safe.

"When there's a gun in the house, the entire family is at risk," Vaughan said. "It doesn't provide protection for you. What it brings is danger and we have to start talking to young people that way."

Getting the community's youth to be on their best behaviour is only part of making the ward safer for Maher, who thinks police also need to mind their manners.

"The moment you encounter cops your heart starts to race and a wall goes up. Police need to find a way to communicate in a friendly way," he said. "It's like a customer service thing. Police have to step back and explain upfront why they're there."



**Ward 20 candidates discuss youth and policing.** Trinity-Spadina councillor Adam Vaughan, right, with Dean Maher - running to unseat Vaughan in the October 25 municipal election - attend a Ward 20 youth and policing all-candidates meeting at the Scadding Court Community Centre (July 29, 2010) Photo/ANDREW RAMPERSAUD

Vaughan, who sits on the Toronto Police Services Board, was more sympathetic, playing up the angle that since police are just like everyone else, all people need to do is be polite to them. The former journalist then took a moment for some small talk with officers Jesse Riley and Bernie Gill from 14 Division who were at the meeting to prove his point.

"It just comes down to manners and respect," he said. "Young people need to realize that it's okay to talk to an officer instead of worrying they'll be called a snitch."

Dustin Hill, a former gang member who now works with Toronto youth to help better their lives, asked the pair of candidates what they would do to help young people with a criminal record, out on bail and otherwise known to police.

Vaughan said anyone can get involved in the programs at their community centre because there's an understanding that teenagers can get caught in a downward cycle and shouldn't suffer for mistakes they wouldn't make now. Maher said mentorship programs with police would counter the stigma of having a record.

Hill was unimpressed with their responses.

"I asked because I wanted to know if they'd be able to answer the question and they didn't," he said. "They were so caught up in their images that I knew they weren't going to say anything that might come off as risqué."

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