

Overbrook pilot project to respond to violent crime going city-wide

Part of Ottawa's gang strategy officially launches April 8

By Andrew Foote, [CBC News](#) Posted: Mar 15, 2016 2:57 PM ET Last Updated: Mar 15, 2016 5:02 PM ET

When Mohamed Ali Hassan [was stabbed to death in Ottawa's Lawson Park last month](#), police responded by combing the area for evidence and interviewing witnesses to help their investigation.

But police were also part of a different response not long afterward to help nearby residents cope and the community start to recover.

The Feb. 22 homicide was the second and most recent time community organizations in Overbrook responded to a violent or traumatic incident with a new "post-incident protocol," a [pilot project that's part of Ottawa's gang strategy](#).

- [Police arrest one man after Overbrook shooting injures another](#)
- [Michael Leblanc charged with murder in stabbing death of Mohamed Ali Hassan](#)
- [Ottawa police chief responds to spate of drug-related 'extreme violence'](#)

Instead of different agencies and associations responding on their own, they get on a conference call as soon as four hours after emergency crews are dispatched to start working on a longer-term, collective response.

"We reached out to the community, we did some door-to-door (visits), we delivered some flyers about resources that exist for community members if they need any support," said Méhdi Louzouaz with the Rideau-Rockcliffe Community Resource Centre.

"But we're also listening and we're making a decision collectively about what's the next step and what can we do, as simple as should we host an information session that day to meet the neighbours? Should we do something else?"

Collaboration praised

The pilot project was led by the Rideau-Rockcliffe resource centre, Ottawa Community Housing, and Ottawa police.

Besides the door-to-door presence immediately after the homicide, Louzouaz said agencies kept checking back in while working on some of the longer-term issues they were hearing about.

"[The action] that we are working on following that incident is conducting an audit in the park to make sure the park is safe, the second thing is the use of the park; the park is not used properly right now so we want to make sure there are some fun and positive events happening in the park this summer," he said.

During their first test of the protocol, a follow-up to [a shooting on Lilas Private on July 14](#), Louzouaz said they organized a barbecue for people on the street six weeks later so neighbours could meet community groups in a friendly setting.

The president of the Overbrook Community Association said it's an excellent plan that was overdue.

"The city never really had a mechanism where everybody in the community and all the different agencies that would be responding to an incident would be able to talk with one another," said Rawlson King.

"This is very important, especially for neighbours because neighbours want to know what's going on in their own community."

"If we don't coordinate the response, what can happen is we could have five or six different agencies knocking on the same door offering almost the same support," Louzouaz said.

"If someone was not scared (but) you have five people knocking on your door in the last hour, even if you're not scared you start wondering if you should be scared."

Stronger communities

The pilot project is part of the 2013 Ottawa Gang Strategy, a partnership between several community groups.

Insp. Chris Renwick of the Ottawa police guns and gangs unit said the plan that was tested in Overbrook helps tackle gang violence by creating more resilient communities.

'It's about joining together community associations, the city-run facilities, schools, just bringing them all together and giving them more power.'

- *Insp. Chris Renwick*

"Stronger neighbourhoods are better to resist criminal activity and those few in the community who are causing such angst and concern within that community," he said.

"That's what this is about, it's about joining together community associations, the city-run facilities, schools, just bringing them all together and giving them more power."

After working on the program for a year, Louzouaz said they're getting ready to share what they've learned and launch the plan for community organizations across the city April 8 at Ottawa City Hall.

They won't be telling other communities how they should respond, he said, but rather sharing a template of what's worked for them and being available to help make plans specific to their areas.

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