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Sikh leadership honored for action plans to prevent youth violence and gang involvement

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SACCAYV members and gurdwara presidents with Assistant Commissioner Dan Malo (far right) and Sgt. Lindsey Houghton (far right, back row)

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WHEN the youth get on a wrong track of life, it becomes a concern for the entire community. As such, taking corrective steps to prevent youth from wandering into the dark alleys of the criminal gang world calls for collective efforts by all concerned. In this regard, the South Asian community has demonstrated remarkable resourcefulness and willingness to walk side by side with a common goal of youth gang and violence prevention.

A community event, “Youth Violence and Family Relationships,” hosted by the South Asian Community Coalition Against Youth Violence (SACCAYV) on October 9 in Surrey, was to some extent a celebration of this community collaboration, especially the partnership between the Sikh leadership,

Gira Bhatt

police, academic researchers and service agencies. The larger goal was to affirm the commitment to continue collaborative efforts to prevent youth violence and gang involvement. The event was sponsored in part by the Acting Together – Community University Research Alliance (AT-CURA) of Kwantlen Polytechnic University and MOSAIC-BC.



The significance of this event cannot be underestimated. Following the loss of over a hundred youth in a decade to gang violence, in 2004, the community came together as the Sikh Societies of the Lower Mainland under the leadership of Balwant Sanghera, a retired school psychologist and a tireless social activist. By 2014, the group evolved as the South Asian Community Against Youth Violence (SACCAYV) and has become the model of collaboration with a fine record of the ability, willingness and action to work collaboratively with various agencies including the academics, police, educators, law makers, and importantly, the community at large.

It was no surprise that when the police needed community help to develop a collaborative gang-prevention action plan, it determined to work with the South Asian community for its pilot project. Recognizing the strengths of the local gurdwaras as the hub of the community, a historic two-day residential summit was held at the RCMP training center in Chilliwack in June 2013. The Sikh leadership along with youth members met with police officers, including RCMP Assistant Commissioner Norm Lipinski, Lower Mainland District Commander Chief Superintendent Dan Malo, Staff-Sgt. Baltej Dhillon, and Sgt. Lindsey Houghton who leads the End Gang Life campaign for BC's integrated anti-gang police agency (CFSEU-BC), several police chiefs, and AT-CURA members. A commitment was made by police and the Sikh leadership to create and follow a concrete collaborative gang-prevention action plan.

This action plan is no ordinary plan. It is a long-term plan including various steps along the way. It is collaborative, it is evidence-based, it is local and relevant to our community and our youth. The first step was to compile a systematic inventory of current youth programs implemented by the police and the gurdwaras. The AT-CURA team coordinated a systematic compilation of these programs. A police officer and a student assistant from KPU visited each



Assistant Commissioner Dan Malo, SACCAYV Chair Balwant Sanghera and Sgt. Lindsey Houghton.

All photos submitted

of the 16 gurdwaras in the Lower Mainland which welcomed them with warm hospitality and provided details of their youth programs. These inventories are systematically categorized to develop comprehensive gang-prevention strategies.

Another important step was to integrate information from the police on how gangs recruit youth, and from the academic researchers and psychologists on what parents can do to prevent youth from being lured into criminal gangs. The result was the parent resource booklet, "Understanding Youth and

Gangs,” which is a joint publication by the SACCAYV, CFSEU-BC, and the AT-CURA. Close to 100,000 copies in English are being printed for province-wide distribution.

The English version of this booklet is now being published in several languages, the first being Punjabi. The Sikh gurdwaras and several individual community members have provided part sponsorship to the AT-CURA project to publish the booklet in Punjabi.

A high point of the October 9 event was the preview of the Punjabi version of the booklet and presentation of the Certificate of Appreciation to the gurdwara presidents for their sponsorship of it. Sanghera, Chair of the SACCAYV, presented these certificates with an acknowledgement from the AT-CURA project team. The CFSEU-BC will make the printed copies available for general distribution in November.

The event keynote speaker, Assistant Commissioner Dan Malo, spoke highly of the work undertaken by SACCAYV and the Sikh leadership while asking that we continue with our collective efforts supporting the police and the community to prevent youth violence and gang recruitment. The event, attended by 65 invited guests, concluded with a forum facilitated by Ninu Kang (MOSAIC-BC) with a discussion on youth violence, family relationships, and recommendations to help strengthen families.

The Sikh leadership along with SACCAYV, AT-CURA, and MOSAIC-BC continues its collaboration with the police, academic researchers and service agencies.

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