



'Yeah, we heard the shots As slugs keep flying, kids become numb

By Peter Gelzinis | Sunday, August 7, 2011 | <http://www.bostonherald.com> | Columnists

Two people were shot in Dorchester on Thursday afternoon, within minutes of each other and within a few hundred yards of the Bowdoin Street Health Center.

Because neither victim died, because their wounds were not determined to be "life threatening," the two incidents barely made a ripple in the day's news.

Meanwhile, an employee inside the Bowdoin Street Health Center, who realized that one of those victims was her relative, became hysterical and had to be driven to the hospital.

At that point, the woman wasn't sure if her relative was going to live or die.

Phillomin "Philly" Laptiste, who oversees a variety of programs at the health center, tried to comfort her colleague. As she was doing that, her concern also focused on the three teens working summer jobs at the health center.

As the shots rang out in the vicinity of the center's parking lot, Philly realized that at least two of those youngsters were out by the parking lot, setting up for the Thursday afternoon farmers market.

"I ran out there in a panic to see if those kids were OK," Philly Laptiste was saying yesterday. "Did you hear the shots?" I asked them. 'Are you all right?'"

The kids looked at this 34-year-old woman with a kind of strange bemusement. "Yeah, we heard the shots," they said nonchalantly, "but we're used to it. We're fine."

In that moment, what pierced Philly Laptiste's heart was the cold realization: "This is not normal." In the middle of summer, children should not be shrugging off the sounds of gunfire as easily as if it were the chimes of an ice cream truck.

But Thursday afternoon on Bowdoin Street, they did.

"That's the saddest part," Philly said, "the fact that so many of our children have grown numb to this insanity. It's become a part of life for them."

When Philly asked if they wanted to speak with someone, or go home, the kids simply said no. They were fine. The bullets did not find them.

You should understand that Philly Laptiste is no dilettante. She grew up in the Bowdoin-Geneva neighborhood and lives on Norton Street.

A year ago, the 14-year-old boy from across the street, Nicholas Fomby-Davis, was shot and killed. On July Fourth, three people at a cookout next door to Philly were shot.



Photo by Mark Garfinkel

What she struggles against, personally and professionally, is an urban post-traumatic stress syndrome. "We need to encourage the idea — neighbors looking out for one another. We can't become oblivious to this."

Yesterday, her neighbors and their children on Norton Street boarded a bus provided by Catholic Charities and spent a "Getaway Day" at Sunset Point on the South Shore.

It was a chance for families to breathe, for children to play as their parents talked about ways to alter their reality with strategies like an upcoming campaign sponsored by the Citizens For Safety called "Where Did the Gun Come From?"

It is a start, a way to battle against children accepting gunfire as a part of their world. As for that frantic health-center worker who rushed to the hospital to check on a wounded relative, she returned to tell Philly: "I'm more afraid for him than he is for himself."

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