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## East bay mothers of slain children work to end violence

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ANTIOCH -- Ask Lucinda Jackson about her son and her weary eyes light up.

The Antioch woman is quick to share how the gregarious young man reluctantly became a dedicated father; his successes working as a mechanic; the yellow 1971 Pontiac Firebird he restored; and his affectionate nature.

"He used to try to smush on me and love on me," Jackson said. She would shoo him away from kissing her face because of his stubble.

Suddenly, her eyes become distant, the sides welling up with tears.

"I wish I would have let him," Jackson said.

Jackson's son, LeMar Green, was gunned down outside his Pittsburg home last year. But instead of retreating into grief, she has found solace joining other bereaved mothers who are attempting to stop the violence that turned their worlds upside down.

These women lead support groups, speak at peace rallies and mentor incarcerated youths.

For Jackson, working to help others honors her son, who turned around his life after serving three years in prison for carjacking. Police say he was shot by a former girlfriend, the mother of his son.

"LeMar died because of domestic violence and trying to be a good father and protect his son," she said. "It's the least I can do, to make sure that doesn't happen to someone else."

In the winter, Jackson, who is setting up a support

group for male victims of domestic abuse, marched with other mothers of slain East Contra Costa men through the

crime-ridden Sycamore Drive neighborhood in Antioch to plead for peace.

Marching alongside her was Tammy Scott, a mother who was unable to find grief counseling near her Antioch home. She is establishing an organization that will counsel parents of both slain children and children convicted of murder or manslaughter.

"I don't feel happiness anymore. I'm just "... living," Scott said. "They say you're supposed to get over it in due time. It's a process."

Scott's 19-year-old son, Deante Fuller, was killed in a drunken-driving accident in November.

"Mothers don't raise their children to kill," Scott said. "I believe that those kids make their own choices. (Mothers) need to know it's not their fault."

Though violent crime often makes headlines, there is less public awareness of how bereaved families struggle.

Typically, for each killing, 10 people are stricken by serious grief, according to the National Organization of Parents of Murdered Children, which means that hundreds of people in the East Bay have joined the ranks of the bereaved this year alone.

Evelyn McGann's 21-year-old son, Richard, was on

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dating a woman whose ex-boyfriend and an accomplice stabbed him 53 times and left him in a ditch.

The San Pablo woman was left in a position no parent wants to imagine: struggling to accept the loss of her child at the hands of another person.

She was one of the first members of the East Bay chapter of Parents of Murdered Children and now leads the group, providing a variety of services to grieving families, from taking tear-filled midnight phone calls to accompanying parents to court.

McGann also regularly takes parents to talk to troubled teenagers at the Orin Allen Youth Rehabilitation Facility, a minimum-security detention facility for young offenders in Byron.

Murder is a fact of life for D.K., a West Contra Costa 17-year-old serving time for a drug charge. One of his brothers was killed when he was 16, and another is serving life in prison for murder.

Jackson also visits these boys. When she and another mother of a slain child spoke to him last month, their raw emotions hit home.

"I see my mom every day, but I never see the hurt," said D.K., who is being identified by his initials to protect his privacy. "But when you see it in someone else, it's like, wow, that was their baby. I really got to change before I put my mama through something like that."

Probation manager Dave Ellis said the talks are invaluable for the teens in his care, who are statistically more likely to turn to violence.

"Let me tell you who's going to commit the murders. I don't know who, but they're over there," he said, gesturing toward the dorm room with rows of teens clad in blue uniforms perched on cots.

The facility also brings in successful role models to talk to the youths, but for D.K., the mothers' message of empathy and rebuke holds more resonance.

"A lot of people come, and you can't relate," he said. "People with jobs come and say, 'Go get a job.' But when somebody comes with murder, you can relate and feel the same pain. Around here, you can really

Bereaved mothers say that it can be hard to share their experiences -- McGann tries to imagine she is telling a story that happened to someone else -- but say that community outreach helps them feel less helpless in the face of the brutal, senseless death of a loved one.

"I can't do anything for Richard now," McGann said, "but if I can turn one head around, I've accomplished my goal for the week."

When she spoke to them last month, Jackson told the boys they could call or write her if they needed help or someone to talk to. But she and other mothers are trying to change a culture, and it isn't easy.

"I asked them how many of them were raised by single mothers, and almost every hand went up," Jackson said.

Almost all the boys also had siblings who were either killed or incarcerated and mothers who abused drugs or alcohol, she said.

"Basically, the streets are raising them. They have no support," she said.

Just days after the mothers' visit, D.K.'s cousin was slain.

Women began coming together to form anti-violence networks in the 1980s, according to UC Santa Barbara sociology professor Nikki Jones, who

mothers are especially well positioned to touch young lives and affect policy.

"We all have mothers," she said. "We can all imagine that relationship, and that's a way we can connect across difference."

Some of these mothers have a chance to directly stop violence because they are raising the children their sons left behind. Jackson recently won custody of her 4-year-old grandson, Sabion.

"I made (LeMar) a promise that I would finish what he started," said Jackson, turning to give her grandson a hug and a kiss.