

Gangsters kill young mom

'Lovable' 20-year-old slain when Hobbema house sprayed with bullets

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HOBBEEMA - The chatter of 13-year-old Alyssa Soosay and seven friends was silenced around midnight Saturday when she heard a strange rustling outside.

She peered out the second-storey bedroom window of the Hobbema home to see nearly a dozen men standing together, watching the girls in the dark. She gasped.

"Get down! Everybody down!" she shouted. She had seen these men before.

The girls dropped to the floor just as the bullets started flying, she said, seven rounds hitting the house.

She looked up a moment later and saw that Delena Dixon, 20, who lived in the house with her parents and her daughter, was bleeding from her head. They called 911. The young woman was airlifted to Edmonton, where she was pronounced dead.

The day after her friend was murdered, the teenager scratched repeatedly at the armrest of a sofa, digging in her finger. She searched for words to describe how to move on when youth are continually struck with such tragedy at the Samson First Nations reserve, 90 kilometres southeast of Edmonton.

"I always kind of thought we were going to get shot up one of these days," the teenager said. "I don't want these gangs here anymore."

Family members wept on the porch across the street on the Samson townsite, looking at the police tape that surrounds the home that has been tagged with graffiti and bullet holes.

"She was such a lovable person," said her mother, Verna Dee. "She was always



CREDIT: Shaughn Butts, The Journal

THEIR DAUGHTER, HER MOTHER: SHOT DEAD: Darren Applegarth and Verna Dee comfort granddaughter Melena Dixon, 18 months, whose mother Delena Dixon died when a Hobbema house was shot up.

smiling and she liked to tease a lot. She had so many friends." Dixon had an 18-month-old daughter, Melena, and was planning to take cosmetology at NAIT in the fall, she added.

A gun amnesty campaign launched Aug. 1 and a gang task force aimed at curbing the escalating violence hasn't been working, Dee said.

An emergency meeting has been called for today to discuss the rash of violent incidents in Hobbema over the past three weeks, said community leader Roy Louis, who helped launch the gun amnesty program.

"It's unbearable. It's unreal," he said. "We have to put a halt to this."

Some elders are suggesting banishing troublemakers like gang members from the reserve -- an idea that has gained interest among residents, he said, adding that he still has hope they can find long-term solutions to gang activity.

Police have no suspects in Dixon's death at this time, but believe she was not the intended target of the suspected gang shooting, said Cpl. Darrel Bruno of the Hobbema RCMP.

The evening before Dixon was killed, a man was injured at the same residence when a bullet grazed his arm.

Dixon's death follows the high-profile shooting of 23-month-old toddler Asia Saddleback, who was seriously injured in a drive-by shooting in April.

There are 13 active gangs in Hobbema with an estimated 250 members who are suspected of causing hundreds of firearms-related complaints last year alone.

Residents can still hand in unwanted weapons until Nov. 30 as part of the gun amnesty program, but faith in its potential success has been badly shaken. Some residents described their community Sunday as a war zone filled with terrorists.

"It's going to take 25 or 30 years to change things," said Dixon's father, Darren Applegarth. "People are too scared of these gangs. They don't want to be snitches because they're terrified they'll then come after them next."

Even his dog has been shot by gang members, he said, and he spends his nights on edge, waiting for the bullets to strike him too.

RCMP investigators from Edmonton and Calgary spent Sunday interviewing witnesses while forensic officers gathered evidence at the house.

Applegarth said losing a daughter, who was once a rodeo cowgirl and a dancer in the community powwow, has caused deep wounds that won't easily heal.

"It hurts. It really hurts," he said. "The worst part is knowing that I'll never hear her tell me again, 'Daddy, I love you.' "

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