



## **Detroit Coalition Against Police Brutality**

### **“Peace Zones for Life”**

Detroit is under attack. Much of the violence is the result of the increased police presence inside and outside our city. The latest victim of these attacks was 7 year old Aiyana Jones who was shot to death in the early morning hours on May 17, 2010 while asleep on her grandmother’s couch. In the two weeks before this tragedy, a teenage boy had been gunned down for the way he looked at another young man, a police officer was killed responding to a 911 call and, as people gathered at Aiyana’s funeral, another man was shot to death fleeing police after a high speed chase. In response to this escalating violence, the Mayor said he had no idea how to respond.

Violence is not limited to the police. Violence happens among us every day. The day after the death resulting from the high speed chase, a 12 year old boy was shot by accident in the midst of a domestic argument. Such deaths are common in a city where our relationships are often strained, bruising and brittle.

We know that in an atmosphere of casual and deadly violence we have to find ways to transform ourselves and the institutions that surround us. That is why we are calling for transforming war zones to peace zones for life where we take charge of our own safety, security and relationships. Only by acknowledging the violence within our community can we move toward creating real peace.

For the past year we have been working to create this kind of healing space in response to an earlier tragedy. On Good Friday of 2009, 15-year-old Detroiters Robert “Tazzy” Mitchell was tased and killed by Warren, Michigan police officers during a routine stop. This case is not an isolated incident. In fact, Robert Mitchell had been afraid to venture into Warren—literally across the street from his northeast Detroit neighborhood—because he and others in the area had personally witnessed Warren police chasing Detroit young people back across the border.

Working with Robert’s mother Cora Mitchell and many community partners we held a march between Detroit and Warren, believing we had to go beyond mere public protest to:

- provide the facts around Mitchell’s death in the face of Warren police officials’ efforts to criminalize him
- reflect family/community rage and pain
- demand justice
- de-escalate conflict between Warren and Detroit citizens/governments
- promote a joint plan to build peace across segregated and separated communities.

We believe that the march, and our organizing activities made significant inroads in moving the communities forward. The Warren City Council members, and members of the city’s Crime Commission, and even some Warren police officers talked about the need to evaluate some of the long-standing grievances of Detroit youth vis-à-vis the Warren Police Department.

This openness to look at ourselves, to reflect on who we are and what we have been doing is the kind of transformation we are seeking. During the people chanted the familiar call, “No justice no peace”; but as time went on, people began to chant “Peace zones for life.” As the group crossed over into Warren, many of the marchers asked Warren residents to join in a combined fight for justice and to promote unification of the two communities...even in the face of some austere Warren police officers, who seemed to cringe as the marchers passed by.

The energy and sense of community built from this march has energized youth in the neighborhoods. Many of them no longer see themselves as victims, but instead as capable of fighting to humanize an otherwise inhuman situation. This is the kind of

holistic approach that restores relationships and our humanity. It is the source of real security.

“Peace Zones for Life” are critical to our efforts to address community violence and to address the root causes of police violence. We know that fights inside the walls of our home often become the basis for death outside of them at the hands of police. As we rebuild ties in our neighborhoods and struggle to turn our pain into programs of transformation we are concerned with:

- The de-escalation of hostility between residents in a community, community members and public/private institutions; and the de-escalation of randomized violence in communities.
- The development of independent self-sustaining economic/social institutions that will serve to define geographical areas and undergird the re-creation of community.

### **Creating peace step by step**

*Creation of conflict resolution centers*—These will be community places where people can come to resolve their differences in the presence of trained conflict mediators. The Coalition has already begun this work informally with two volunteer centers. One is in a church in the Puritan/Livernois area, and the other in a vacant field at Montgomery and Holmur in Detroit.

*Creation of a “Detroit Peace Officials Association” (DPOA)*—The Coalition is working with young people to keep peace in their communities by setting up neighborhood watches and participating in the conflict resolution centers.

*Artistic efforts that both portray neighborhood challenges and celebrate all those who have worked tirelessly to create a better community*—Telling our stories to one another through visual and performing arts, music, rap, plays, dance, posters, paintings, and sculpture moves us through pain to a deeper understanding of ourselves, our responsibilities to one another and our visions for the future.

The Coalition is working toward a holistic neighborhood effort that encompasses economic, religious, government and citizen institutions.

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