

Moms march for justice

MOMS Move for Justice (MMJ), a group that advocates for an end to gang violence in Cape Town, will march to Parliament today to demand the government listen to their complaints. MMJ was started in 2015 by Avril Andrews as a resource for mothers grieving over the loss of children to gang violence.

Andrews says she sought women who could understand her own experience of losing a son to gang violence. She says the grief of loss is usually compounded by a feeling that nothing was being done about the murders.

Murder is a growing problem in the Western Cape, especially in the Cape Flats where Andrews is from. There were 46 reported murders in the province this past weekend. SAPS was also working with a deficit of detectives, leaving a backlog of cases.

Andrews attributes the degree of violent crime to generational anger. She sees violence escalate as children are exposed to their fathers' frustrations and problems. Often young men who find themselves in gangs are looking for a sense of belonging or safety.

The experience of coping with these murders can be extremely lonely, according to Andrews. After her son's death, she expected the community to come together to support her, as they would any neighbour who lost a family member. Instead she was met with fearful eyes as she walked down the street. Other members of the community were afraid to be associated with her lest they upset the perpetrators of her son's murder.

But creating a support group with other mothers who faced similar circumstances was extremely healing for Andrews. The moms would get together to voice their frustrations and even engage in dance therapy as a form of cathartic healing. Since 2015, other support groups have been established in Nyanga, Mitchells Plain and Atlantis. The groups provide a safe space for the women to heal.

Today's march begins at the Castle of Good Hope and ends at Parliament. MMJ hopes the march will encourage lawmakers to take a stronger stance against gang violence. They've asked that ministers who don't understand the level of violence occurring due to gangs be removed and replaced. Additionally, they want to see firearms confiscated from illegal owners.

The organisation has previously met with SAPS to work on improving police presence in the community. The mothers demand that police take their cases seriously and engage more with the families of victims to keep them abreast of investigations. Andrews says that while changes are not always obvious, there is progress being made. She hopes the group will bring awareness to the issue and will wake people up from complacency.

"This is not normal. Children should not be dying," she says.