

* OPINION

More engagement by fathers would help fix many of society's ills

BY JEFFERY LEVING

The killings of Jaslyn Adams and Adam Toledo are tragic. Adams is the 7-year-old girl killed at a McDonald's drive-thru earlier this year while with her father on the West Side. Adam Toledo was a 13-year-old boy killed by a Chicago police officer.

These killings were back in the news recently because of some text messages sent by McDonald's CEO Chris Kempczinski to Mayor Lori Lightfoot concerning the parents of those children.

I strongly believe, and have spent my career putting that belief into action, that engagement by fathers is the solution to many societal ills.

As someone who for decades has advocated for fathers, particularly single and divorced fathers, I can tell you tales of heroism by dads whose children were in trouble. The most emotionally draining case that ever came into my law office involved a father whose teenage daughter had disappeared.

Using the courts and determined detective work on the street, we located her — drug-addicted and having been trafficked into prostitution. This father didn't give up hope. We rescued his little girl, and reunited her with her dad.

I represented another father who was a shooting victim, paralyzed from the waist down. Even though he consistently paid child support, his daughter's mother refused to let him see her, and thwarted the girl's efforts to contact her father. But this man never stopped loving his little girl, and thanks to our victorious effort in court, when the girl was 16, she was able to spend Christmas with her father for the first time. This is a true story of perseverance.

Scores of desperate fathers have come to me for help in locating and recovering their children who were illegally taken out of state or out of the country. These are not easy cases, but I am motivated to win them by these men who are unwavering in their desire to not have their children deleted from their lives.

Society lets our children down

Anytime there's a tragedy, we can say in hindsight that if somebody had done something different that day, it would have been averted. But in the McDonald's situation, this was a father out to lunch with his daughter. And despite allegations that he was involved with gangs, when it came to his daughter, he was doing the right thing, not the wrong thing.

Our society lets down children in myriad



Jontae Adams speaks to reporters as dozens gather for a vigil for his 7-year-old daughter, Jaslyn Adams, held days after she was shot on April 18 while she was with him at a McDonald's drive-thru. It's wrong to blame parents when tragedy strikes, lawyer Jeffery Leving writes. ASHLEE REZIN

ways, whether it's mediocre schools, lack of access to nutritious food and preventive health care, failing to keep illegal guns off the streets, or, if and when parents split up, not recognizing the importance of both parents in successfully raising a child.

There are many circumstances where we collectively betray children, and I think it's wrong to blame parents, particularly in an instance where the shooting victim was in the car with her father at the time. This man was being a good dad to his daughter.

We live in a time and place when tragedies such as the ones discussed here are too frequent. Many measures are needed to improve this condition, and I assure you that

father engagement is one of them. Children with a concerned and participating father will be healthier, do better in school, earn more money as working adults, and are less likely to be involved in crime, either as a victim or an offender.

The fathers I know are hard-working regular guys who care dearly about their children. When catastrophe and heartbreak unfortunately occur, I do not blame them.

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