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Newark group seeks options for no-hope youth inmates

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Ron Salahuddin sees them in the juvenile jails, scores of 14- and 15-year-old repeat offenders who have no caring adults in their lives.

Salahuddin, Newark's deputy mayor for public safety and youth empowerment, sees them eventually leave jail with no support network at all, no skills, no job possibilities, winding up in gangs.

"Our job is to make sure we give them alternatives," he said at Newark's Symphony Hall at a meeting of the newly formed Newark Interfaith Coalition for Hope and Peace yesterday. "We've got to teach Johnny and Tariq! We've got to give Johnny and Tariq some alternatives!"

The coalition, a group of Christian, Muslim and Jewish leaders from the Newark area, "hopes to make and witness a commitment to this city to reduce violence and offer hope in these times," said Newark Episcopal Bishop Mark Beckwith, one of the group's organizers.

The effort stems from the horror of last summer's triple homicide behind Mount Vernon School in the city's Ivy Hill section.

"That galvanized us," Beckwith said.

"Our bright stars are dying every day," said the Rev. Jeffrey Brown of Union Baptist Church in Cambridge, Mass., who headed a similar effort in Massachusetts and knows Beckwith from the latter's time living in that state. "We cannot allow another generation of young people to go through the era of violence we have gone through."

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