

Our View: Our community moving toward healing, together

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In five short days, we will reach the one-year mark of the mass shooting in Lewiston that left 18 people dead, 13 people shot and wounded, dozens of others injured and needing medical attention, and an untold number more who carry trauma from that horrifying day.

The day must be confronted, and it will be formally observed through a commemoration event at The Colisee on Friday night, but for too many people the greater preference would be that the day is best skipped. The memories are just too painful. The loss still much too raw.

Lewiston is supposed to be strong. It's supposed to be working toward resiliency. And, for some people those things are true. But, for many, many more, they're not and the road ahead remains long.

As the calendar marches toward Oct. 25 we have seen deeply personal and shared community anxiety climb, in differing measures, but equally profound.

Two weeks ago, when a group of parents and young soccer players at Drouin Field heard gunfire, the fear was instant as was the decision to dash off the field and return to the safety of their homes. It turns out the sounds came from the River Road shooting range some three miles away, but some of those children still aren't sure they can return to practice.

That's what community trauma feels like and looks like. Invisible — until it isn't.

It is precisely the specter of community trauma that prompted the Maine Community Foundation to set up a specific fund to help community nonprofits navigate the hurt and help the community heal. The people donating to the fund understood that, and the steering committee that made decisions about how \$1.9 million in donations would be distributed is made up of local leaders who understand better than most what the greater Lewiston-Auburn community needs.

Last weekend, a group called the Uvalde Foundation for Kids called into question the distribution of those funds to these nonprofits.

One of the nonprofits is the Trinity Jubilee Center, which serves Lewiston's neediest populations with meals, a warming center, refugee assistance and outreach programs. Why did the steering committee decide to provide relief funding to this group?

Because, as few people know, the center and its staff quietly offered services to Maine's homeless population during the 48-hour lockdown when other more fortunate people were safely tucked behind closed doors at home.

According to Erin Reed, executive director at Trinity Jubilee, the center — which never closes during snowstorms and never closed during COVID — never closed during the lockdown. Instead, staff and volunteers worked extra shifts to care for homeless guests who Reed said were scared and exhausted and grateful they had somewhere safe to go. Being able to call loved ones, and having access to food, water and restrooms in a locked building created a safe space for them.

Trinity Jubilee also provided multiple meals for children who weren't getting fed at locked-down schools.

These were essential services for people in great need, which costs money. Since the shooting, Reed has noticed an increase in guests struggling with mental health needs, so staff has arranged for service providers to come to the shelter to work directly with people where they are, which costs more.

The people seeking these services were not at Just-in-Time or Schemengees, but the fear and loss of safety — even from a distance — is real.

It's not even close to the same plane as victims and their family members, or anywhere close to the trauma sustained by first responders, including police, and health care providers who jumped in to treat the injured, but loss and fear are not things we can define in certain measure for each person. These emotions are highly individualized and some people are more resilient than others, which is why such a wide array of nonprofits were called forward to serve the community. First to work toward healing those most directly impacted, while also being mindful of the necessary work to be done for the entire community.

The week ahead will be tough. The dread is real. The grief is real. The fear is real. There are real regrets and real questions of accountability that must be answered.

What is also real is the good work that's been done, is being done and will be done by community organizations – perhaps most especially by the Maine Resiliency Center – to help people move forward.

Many people who have sought community services are not terribly interested in looking back. They know what that looks like.

They're much more interested in looking forward because, as is undeniably true, that's the direction time takes us all.

Forward.

Let's help each other get there together.

After Lewiston shootings, embrace life. Every one. Every minute. Every day.

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