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## Brown: Why not try fighting violence with jobs?

By Mark Brown

Quiwana Bell, who runs a social service agency in the Austin neighborhood, caught the news about the Belgium terrorist attacks before heading downtown Tuesday to testify at a hearing into the need for more summer jobs for young people.

At that point, the death toll in Brussels was at 26, and the awful reality of the violent deaths tugged at Bell as it did at most of us.

But there was another feeling edging in there that couldn't be denied as she watched the wall-to-wall television coverage on CNN.

And when Bell got her turn at the microphone, she chose to put it out there.

"That's tragic," she said of those who died in Brussels at the terrorists' hands, "But when you talk about a 7-year-old who just got shot it's kind of normal, and we just kind of [say] 'Oh, wow, that's awful,' and we keep on going, you know. We're better than that. And there's something to be done."

She said it in a soft voice that shook ever so slightly with emotion that comes from working first hand with the effects of the violence on Chicago's West Side — and with the young men who are both its perpetrators and primary victims.

I'm sure there were many other Chicagoans who thought something similar as Bell: that for some reason homicide one-at-a-time is regarded as less serious a national crisis than these mass terrorist killings.

"It's bewildering to us, because we see our people dying on the streets every day, and the care and concern doesn't seem to be there," Bell told me later.

Perhaps the reason is that too many of us imagine ourselves immune from the one and vulnerable to the other, or maybe it's because we think we can get the upper hand on the terrorists but have no answer for the killings committed by our own.

I don't pretend to have the answers.



Quiwana Bell, chief operating officer of Westside Health Authority, and Jessie Dunkin, a product of the agency's employment training program, after testifying Tuesday about the need for more funding for summer youth jobs. | Mark Brown/Sun-Times

But the people testifying Tuesday before the Cook County Board of Commissioners believe expanding summer jobs programs would be a big help.

"Nothing stops a bullet like a job," was the theme of Commissioner Bridget Gainer's hearing.

As my colleague Mary Mitchell wrote recently, you're not going to get much argument from anybody about the importance of work experience for young people as a way of opening up opportunities and giving them purpose in life.

Where you get an argument is over the proper role of government in creating those jobs.

The federal government is pretty much out of the summer jobs business, and the state of Illinois has cut back drastically. That leaves just the city's One Summer Chicago program, and it's not enough to meet the need, or any solution at all for the suburbs.

Sure, a private sector solution would be better.

But the private sector jobs of my youth are gone, or even sadder, taken by adults.

"The jobs that we had their parents have," said Bell, chief operating officer of Westside Health Authority. "It's an epidemic. It's not just black youth either."

An earlier speaker, Father Dave Kelly of Precious Blood Ministries in Back of the Yards, said the question he hears most often is: "Hey, Father. Can you help me get a job?"

Bell agreed.

"I hear that at least 40 times a day," she said. "It's just unbelievable."

Bell fears what the future holds for her Austin neighborhood as the unemployed 20-somethings of today become the 30-somethings of tomorrow.

"If you don't have a job at 21, where the hell you going to be at 30?" she said. "We have to get them at this age and get them set up for something, because right now they're set up for nothing."

If you could reduce terrorism with something as simple as a jobs program, wouldn't you do it?