

# Converting Pain into Purpose

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

The family was welcomed to Portland by several local mothers who are also grieving the loss of their sons to violence on the streets.

One mother, Lucy Mashia, spoke of losing her son, Leonard Irving Jr., in 2011 to gang violence. To this day, Mashia does not know who took her son's life and continues a battle to learn anything about who may have taken his life and why.

"I just want to know why," said Mashia. "The suffering is hard for me, when I still don't have any answers, when I still have to ask when someone out there knows how my son died and who killed him."

Dickerson's father, Bishop Charles Dickerson, a resident of California, also spoke.

"Nothing we do today will bring our son back," he said. "Yet we believe we can avoid this pain for another parent. I am in pain, I cry every day. I believe in God. But we are trying to convert our pain into purpose."

Kate Desmond, the community

justice manager at the Multnomah County Department of Justice, shared her plea, "We strive to talk to young men about education and going to school," she said. "We don't want to see this happen to anyone."

Multnomah county Deputy District Attorney Eric Zimmerman also spoke to the family and vowed to help them, and other families find the answers they so wished they had, offering support for future generations.

"I really do believe in mentorship and positive role models," said Zimmerman. "I would like to turn that 16 or 18 year old looking at a struggle in life and show him he can turn himself around. It takes a village to raise a child, and I'm part of that village, and so are you."

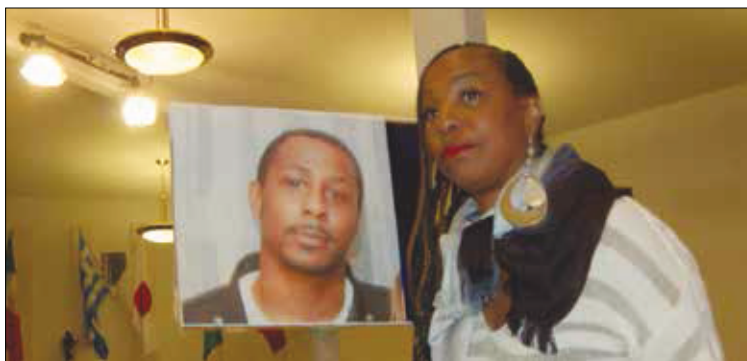
A family friend of Dickerson's mother, Veronica Very, sang and the family came forward to cry and pray. Soon they were joined arm in arm by the other mothers, other community members, and gang prevention officers.

"This isn't the first or the last time," said Very. "I don't want anybody to have to go through



PHOTO BY OLIVIA OLIVIA/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Dr. Pastor Mark Strong of Life Change Church leads the room in prayer as other family members of slain black youth embrace, including Lucy Mashia and Kimberly Dixon, two Portland mothers of murder victims, and Keonna Jackson, the mother D'Andre Dickerson, a man killed in recent shooting near Woodlawn Park.



Lucy Mashia holds up a photo of her only son, Leonard James, "L.J." Irving, who she lost in June 2011. Police still do not know who shot and killed Irving and Mashia continues to look for answers.

this, but we need to come together to find answers, because no one will find them alone. If we come together, I believe we can try and stop this from happening to other families, and expose this culture of violence and replace it with concern and love for one another."

Crime Stoppers is offering a reward up to \$1,000 for information leading to an arrest in Dickerson's death. Tips can be left at [crimestoppersoforegon.com](http://crimestoppersoforegon.com) or by calling 503-823-HELP.

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