

■ PAGE TWO ■

# Book 'an invaluable tool' in fight against street gangs

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The Suburban

It's a scenario that's becoming increasingly common at high schools — and an ever growing number of elementary schools — across the city: street gang members preying on students in the hopes of recruiting them to participate in illegal activities such as prostitution or drug trafficking.

Fighting street gangs requires a multi-pronged approach that includes repressive measures from law enforcement officials, education and prevention.

It's for this reason that on Monday a 32-page book, titled *Youth and Street Gangs*, was launched at Laurier Macdonald High School in St. Leonard. The book, aimed at youth between the ages of eight and 17, uses graphics and simple text to explain everything from how street gangs operate and recruit to how to help friends that may want to leave a gang.

The intent of the publication was to educate kids and parents so they make the right choices when confronted with difficult situations, said Ricaardoe Di Done, president of the Organization for the Protection of Children's Rights, whose company, TheoDone, published the book.

"I have five kids of my own and I'm



Ricaardoe Di Done's company, TheoDone, published a book on street gangs as a preventative tool for kids aged eight to 17 and their parents.

very concerned for the best interests of my children and I realized how serious the problem of street gangs has been getting in municipalities all over and how little we were investing in education and prevention," he said. "We thought that the best way to resolve the problem was to sensitize our youth, parents and teachers about this serious matter."

"Education is the key to prevention and prevention is the goal," said Laurier Macdonald principal Eileen Kelly.

The book's simplicity is its most attractive trait, said Harry Delva of St. Michel community centre Maison D'Haiti.

"What I really like [about the book] is the simple way in which the street gang

phenomenon is presented, with the right words, and I think that they found a good way to open youngsters' eyes," he said.

Delva said that the book could also be an invaluable tool for parents who are often too busy to notice signs that their child has joined, or is being actively recruited by street gangs.

"Parents don't really know what's going on; parents don't understand at all what we call the street gang phenomenon because they often have the impression that what their children are going through is a normal part of their adolescence," he said.

With street gangs sometimes targeting kids as young as eight or nine years old,

it's important to reach out to these children before they fall through the cracks and become easy prey for gang members, explained Luciano Bentenuto, a criminal gang expert with the Correctional Service of Canada.

"I said before that the research shows that the individuals that are between six and 17 are definitely the ones we have to reach out to, if we're going to talk about prevention," he said.

"And what I saw in this book, and not only what I saw but I've lent it to children and watched them react to it, and the way it's done... makes it something that the kids are actually going to use."