

## Showing up can make a world of difference

by BROCK WEIR

The world was shocked late last month when an 18-year-old opened fire at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas. The gunman tragically shot and killed 19 students and two teachers, wounding nearly 20 others in the process.

The world was shocked, yes, but these horrendous incidents are increasing at an ever-alarming rate.

While the immediate aftermath of the murders brought forward the customary ? and more than appropriate --- protests calling for better legislation on gun control, keeping pace were the ?thoughts and prayers? brigade that trotted out hoary old chestnuts along the lines of the best line of defence against bad people with guns is arming more of the good people to take them down.

Their far-from-out-of-the-box ideas were duly trotted out, and the more recent catch-all solution of arming teachers to protect their classrooms, the very people many pockets of the United States don't even trust to teach their own history, was floated once again.

These deeply flawed arguments hit all the right notes with the people they were intended to reach, but there was something different in the air this time, perhaps even a feeling that finally enough was really enough.

Just before I sat down to write this on Sunday, Democrat and Republican Senators announced what is being described as a ?framework? for potential legislation on gun safety. As this is related to gun legislation in the US any number of things could happen to this ?framework? in the short window of time between our going to press and this column arriving online and at your doorsteps. The outline includes a measure of gun control, increased school safety, and a boost to mental health programs.

?Our plan saves lives while also protecting the constitutional rights of law-abiding Americans,? the CBC quoted the bipartisan lawmakers. ?We look forward to earning broad, bipartisan support and passing our common-sense proposal into law.?

While it remains to be seen just how ?common-sense? these proposals can be, after all the majority of our two nations probably have different perspectives on just what ?common sense? means in this context, it's a step in the right direction.

But it is also a tall order.

In the immediate days after the shooting rocked their own state, Texas lawmakers set to work on tackling one of their greatest threats? drag queen story hours?

No, seriously.

In Pride Month, this is the piece of priority legislation that is working its way through the Austin-based capital.

Spurred by videos of kids attending a drag show, the State Senator who put forward the legislation attempting to ban minors from such shows, said, as quoted by NBC News, ?The events of this past weekend were horrifying and show a disturbing trend in which perverted adults are obsessed with sexualizing young children. As a father of two young children, I would never take my children to a drag show and I know [my colleagues] wouldn't either.?

The usual suspects, of course, took this piece of legislation and ran with it in an attempt to make it snowball across the country through the usual channels, but it's yet to be seen whether this legislation against allegedly ?sexualizing young children? will extend to grandparents asking their preschool-age grandsons, ?Do you have a girlfriend yet??., entering their daughters in highly sexualized beauty pageants, or fathers taking their sons out for a bite at Hooters.

Of course, it isn't yet to be seen; we all know that will never happen, but that doesn't fit into the narrative they're trying to create.

We're fortunate to live in communities where organizations are making the effort to teach kids it is indeed okay to express their true selves, even if it doesn't dovetail into what generation upon generation has tried to construct as the accepted norm.

Aurora and New Tecumseth are just two communities that have embraced the idea of drag queen story hours. Whether with Miss Eva Lasting, whose warm and welcoming storytelling ability has been embraced by the Aurora Public Library for the last several years, or through Fay & Fluffy's Storytime, which delighted kids and families virtually last year by the New Tecumseth Public Library, these shows are joyous occasions for kids, parents and caregivers alike.

Kids are able to be themselves in a safe and accepting environment, are encouraged to ask questions, and parents revel in the opportunities to see their kids be authentic with their peers in an environment that is anything but judgemental.

As I've watched these events unfold in person and through virtual channels, I continually marvel at how lucky these kids are to have such opportunities. Many of parents of like-aged kids are my peers and, looking back, had they had the chance to take part, it would have done our whole generation a favour in increasing perspectives.

The sting of watching helplessly from my desk as one of my peers fled the classroom in tears in the middle of a presentation after being mercilessly bullied by another student simply for having two moms still smarts.

How I hope times have changed and, if they have, these kinds of opportunities have played no small part in that.

I am fully aware though that, for one reason or another, we're not all on the same page.

It wasn't all that long ago that one reader re-tweeted some of our previous pre-pandemic Pride coverage, including Drag Queen Storytime, accusing me directly of promoting ?deviant? behaviour through the simple act of event coverage.

That one instance was an eye-opener that no matter how diverse and cosmopolitan our communities are becoming, there's still a lot more work to do in the field of allyship. The good news is if you truly are an ally of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, demonstrating said allyship is easier than ever.

Wherever you might live, there are plenty of Pride-related events being hosted by prominent community-building organizations to suit every taste. Being an ally can include volunteering to make these events happen, looking at ways to maintain the momentum throughout the balance of the year, or it can be as simple as finding your place along the side of the street ahead of a colourful, inclusive and family-friendly Pride parade.

As lucky as we are to live in communities that support each other, regardless of the path they walk in life, there are no shortage of examples around the world, some sadly all too close to home, to illustrate that this support can be a fragile thing.

But, with a collective effort, it can be a strong part of how we define ourselves now and into the future ? as long as we show up.