

## Stop the blame and shame

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Perhaps it was predictable. An upcoming holiday; specifically Diwali, many people already fatigued by excessive COVID-19 concerns and Peel Region sitting at just one level below full lockdown. Finger pointing was bound to escalate. The problem with pointing fingers however, is that when enough of us do it ? eventually fingers will point right back at you. Sadly, I'm wondering: was it easier to engage in this behaviour because of cultural differences? Was it easier because it was Diwali recently celebrated and not Christmas? Yes, I'm calling us out on our behaviour. Does riding out a pandemic become any easier if collectively we have someone else to blame for it? Enough with blaming and shaming, it really doesn't resolve anything and it only creates division. We can do better than that.

When it comes to ?blame and shame? here are just a few recent examples of why ?the pandemic is not my fault:?

It's because we opened the schools. While I might, as a non-medical professional, have an opinion that school openings (and in particular the DPCDSB's recent ?come and go as you please? policy) aren't helping the COVID-19 numbers, schools reopening were not really a choice. How else to deal with the multitude of families who have no other option but to send their children to school so they can remain employed and pay their rent? How else do we attempt to keep the economy moving, shipping goods and stocking grocery shelves? It frustrates me immensely that the great majority of folks we previously heralded as front-line heroes doing the unseen work to support our economy are now the exact same folks we are blaming and shaming for spreading the virus when they can't help being exposed to it at their workplace.

It's because of all the kids gathering at the parks and skateboard pads. The youth today are so irresponsible! Sounds like older people looking to blame younger people for trying to cope with a virus none of us really know how to cope with. I won't lie, I sat behind a school bus one day watching it disgorge teenage passengers, many of whom began congregating at the local park and not a single one of them wearing masks. It concerned me. I've also received calls from folks expressing similar concerns from skate parks and basketball courts across the region. Collectively most agree however, that we don't want the kids to stop gathering?mental health is crucial right now?so there should be no blame and shame here, just a request to please keep wearing your mask, even after the school day is over.

It's ?other? families who are gathering. The implication here is that ?my? family isn't gathering but ?your? family is and that's against the rules. Maybe you really are taking every single precaution you can possibly take. Maybe you really haven't seen a single member of your family since this whole nightmare began (240+ days ago) and if you haven't, thank you. We shouldn't assume however, that ?other? people are consistently breaking the rules. If you DO know for sure that your neighbour is regularly hosting parties?report them to by-law enforcement, don't just vent your anger on social media. That kind of blame and shame accomplishes nothing.

Diwali. We have to address the elephant in the room. We all anticipated the complaints that would follow as a result of fireworks that might be lit in celebration of this festival of light. I'm guessing it wasn't too far of a stretch to then blame Diwali celebrants for allegedly gathering unsafely. News reports of one Gurdwara in Brampton that experienced some crowd control issues didn't help. But what of the many, many other faith based facilities that experienced NO overcrowding difficulties? Neighbouring Mayor Patrick Brown shared his frustration recently, advising that he and a number of faith-leaders in Peel had talked over the phone on Friday, November 13th, to discuss safe gathering expectations. His disappointment stems not from the fact these rules were followed across most of Brampton, but from all the media focus placed on just one location where problems arose. For the record, this location had also ?complied with the indoor requirements? but was unfortunately overwhelmed with unexpected pedestrian traffic gathering outdoors. They called the police and the police called by-law officers to help them with crowd control. I wonder again, will this same level of media vigilance be applied at Christmas time outside of Christian places of worship?

Everyone is looking for someone to blame and shame instead of simply taking some personal responsibility. As I may have said at

least once or twice now, this virus knows no borders. It doesn't recognize where Brampton stops and Caledon starts. Heck it doesn't even recognize that England is an island surrounded by water, that it already infected its Prime Minister once before or that Europe is comprised of a number of countries and has multiple borders. It doesn't matter WHERE it originated. It could care less about race, ethnicity, sex or religion. It's indiscriminate and it's about time we stopped discriminating against those we've individually decided are 'at fault' for its spread. The only issue on which I might agree with at least some of the 'finger-pointing people' is when they're pointing at folks who don't wear masks (unless medically prevented from doing so) or at those who wear them improperly. You, I might be willing to blame and shame. You, I might be willing to consider holding responsible for virus spread. Taking your mask off in a store so you can chat on the phone or wearing your mask covering your mouth but not your nose? You, I might be willing to hold accountable and to blame and to shame.

You know why? It's been proven by SCIENCE that masks can help stop (or at least slow) the spread of Covid. That's not a rumour and it's not blaming and shaming any one culture, race, sex, ethnicity or religious group because we're better than that. Aren't we?