

# Life getting better in Jane-Finch

New report finds improvements in crime-ridden area

But many locals still feel unsafe walking after dark

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Ann-Marie Rusk believes her kids have a brighter future than she did growing up in the Jane-Finch area, a neighbourhood that for a long time carried the stigma of being Canada's most notorious for crime. "I don't think their eyes will see as much crime as mine have," the 27-year-old mother of five children aged 11 and under said yesterday.

Rusk's optimism is reflected in a new report that suggests there have been "significant improvements" in the quality of life for people in the densely populated San Romanoway community.

"The youth and children now have a playground, tennis court, swimming pool and ... programs, so they have a place where they belong to keep them busy so they're out of trouble," she said.

The author of the report, Carleton University criminologist George Rigakos, studied demographics, domestic violence, property and violent crime, drug availability, policing and security, and community improvements and programming,



DAVID THOMAS/TORONTO STAR

Ann-Marie Rusk, 27, with four of her five children — Xavier, 2, Joseph, 11, Isabel, 6, and Vanessa, 9 — believes they will have better lives in the San Romanoway neighbourhood than she had growing up.

and compared them to the results of research he conducted in 2002.

He found an overall decrease of 22.8 per cent in violent crimes from 2002 to 2004, with declines of about one-third in the number of assaults by strangers, robberies and sexual assaults.

Property crime decreased by 23.7 per cent from 2002 to 2004, and break-and-enters declined by 21.1 per cent over the two-year period, the study found.

Those statistics are consistent

with data collected by police, said 31 Division Supt. Glenn Decaire, in charge of the station in the city's northwest end responsible for policing the area.

Rigakos also pointed to some troubling trends.

More than 20 per cent of women in the San Romanoway community reported being physically victimized by their partners in 2004. And while fear of crime had decreased in 2004 from 2002, 45 per cent of respondents in the San Romanoway community reported feeling

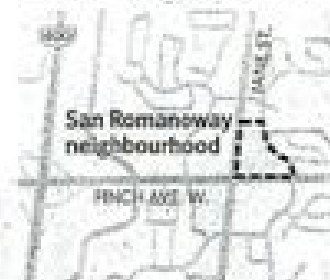
unsafe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark compared to 11 per cent of all Canadians.

There was also a 76.2 per cent increase in assaults by persons known to the victim.

"With all of this progressive change, however, it is important to note that there is still much room for improvement. While crime victimization rates have gone down considerably, they are still well above the average," wrote the author.

Rigakos concluded the estab-

## Good signs for Jane-Finch



About 4,400 people live in the San Romanoway neighbourhood at the northeast corner of Jane St. and Finch Ave. W.

lishment of the San Romanoway Revitalization Association, a non-profit organization serving 4,400 people, has played a big role in lowering crime rates.

Established in October 2000 by building owners, management, residents, law enforcement, local businesses and other interested individuals, the association took an aggressive approach to community safety.

Rusk, who volunteers with the association, agrees the association has made a huge difference.

Her children attend breakfast and after-school programs, as well as March break and summer camps. There are also excursions and Raptors and Blue Jays tickets, and donated clothes and food from the association for low-income people.

"There was nothing like this around when we were growing up. We didn't even have a swimming pool," said Rusk, who has lived in the Jane-Finch commu-

Highlights of change in crime rates and attitudes of residents between 2002 and 2004.

Shows improvement...

- Violent crime down 22.8%
- Property crime down 23.7%

Needs work...

- 45 per cent of residents feel somewhat unsafe or very unsafe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark.
- More than one in five women report being physically victimized by their partner.

nity her whole life, the last decade in one of two San Romanoway highrises.

Stephanie Payne, executive director of the San Romanoway Revitalization Association and a school board trustee, said while Jane and Finch has been "studied to death," this report and its predecessor are different.

That first "quality of neighbourhood life survey" prompted changes that have had a positive impact measured in the follow-up report just released, she explained.

For instance, residents in 2002 said they wanted to see both the crime and the garbage cleaned up.

"We had cameras installed all over; over by the recreation centre where the youth used to hang out and smoke dope, there's heavy lighting out there; there's been a lot of work done to the grounds; both lobbies were done," Payne said.