

## **LIFE ON THE STREET KHALID SAMAD ROAMS EAST SIDE AT NIGHT TO STOP DRUG DEALS, GANG WARS AMONG YOUTHS**

*[FINAL / ALL Edition]*

**The Plain Dealer - Cleveland, Ohio**

Author: CHRISTOPHER QUINN PLAIN DEALER REPORTER

Date: Sep 8, 1996

Start Page: 1.A

Section: NATIONAL

Text Word Count: 1125

**Khalid Samad** has walked the city's streets under the dim glare of street lamps, confronting gun-toting drug dealers and asking why they spread poison through their community.

He has rubbed elbows with hundreds of gang members, gained their confidence and negotiated truces between them.

And he has organized more than one summit to stop the violence in the city's East Side.

But as he enters his third decade of activism, Samad looks around the city and wonders about the permanence of his efforts. The peace he helped build is withering. Teenagers are warring again, killing each other as neighborhood fights neighborhood to gain control of crack sales, he says.

Samad, discouraged but not despairing, carries on.

He doesn't want a complete generation of young black men lost to prisons and cemeteries. His plan now is to appeal to teenagers on a spiritual level, to show them they have in their heritage the character they need to succeed.

For Samad, 43, the labor of peace is never-ending.

"If I stop," he starts to say, then pauses. "How could I do that?"

Community leaders are counting on him to continue.

"I think his work is vitally important," said City Council President Jay Westbrook. "I think that he is as responsible for saving lives of young people in this community as cardiologists are at the Cleveland Clinic. ... It's a deeply rooted commitment that he has."

"He's one of the rare ones," said fellow activist Harllel Jones, director of the Denise McNair New Life Center, a community center on the East Side. "I think he's one of the best gang prevention guys in the city of Cleveland. ... He carries a lot of influence in the inner city."

**Samad's daytime job is gang intervention for the Cleveland School District's security force.** The soft-spoken, 6-foot-4 Samad goes through schools forcing children to shed the gang symbols they wear. He teaches parents the signs that children are in gangs.

"He's a determined kind of person," said school board member Gerald Henley, who helped create the schools' gang program in 1990. **"Khalid has a very good relationship with young people."**

He establishes that relationship after dark, when he is unpaid. Alone or with members of Peace in the Hood, a group he co-founded three years ago, he hits the streets to talk with teenagers and scare drug dealers away.

"A lot of people do eight hours and go home and turn on the TV," Jones said. "Not Khalid."

Samad walks unarmed into the worst crime areas to talk with teenagers in street language. He learns which groups are feuding, why someone was shot a week ago, which streets have had the big drug sales lately.

"The youth understand him," Jones said. "He articulates very well."

Shuge Trump knows. Trump, now 18, said he had been in several gang brawls. While with friends on the corner of E. 130th St. and Griffing Ave. one night last week, Trump explained how Samad brokered peace at John Hay High School last year.

"He had all the students sit down," Trump said. "He said, 'Why you all be fighting?'"

And the brawling stopped.

Negotiating truces is perhaps Samad's greatest triumph. His secret: Being who he is. Youngsters on the street say Samad is well-known and well-respected. If he can get teens to talk, he can get them to respect each other.

And teens say they listen to him because he is one of them.

Three years ago he and other leaders gathered the city's gangs, brought in such speakers as comedian and activist Dick Gregory and produced an unprecedented pact. Warring gangs agreed to stop shooting. Teens who once feared walking onto the turf of rival gangs suddenly were free to wander.

The truce remains. Gang members say they cannot count how many lives have been saved. Neil, nicknamed "Homicide," often stands at E. 123rd St. and Imperial Ave. He said last week that some of his friends would most likely be dead if not for the truce.

"It saved a lot of people," he said.

Although the truce has reduced gang warfare, Samad is seeing a new kind of violence. Teens aligned by neighborhoods are fighting over drug territories.

Samad said Cleveland must provide more opportunities for young men. That belief has been forming since he was in junior high school, growing up near Harvard Ave. and Kinsman Rd. and reading black newspapers in his grandmother's newsstand at E. 76th St. and Central Ave.

"That's what helped to shape and form my thinking," he says.

His name was John Farley then, and he was a basketball player, on a Glenville playground and for John F. Kennedy High School. He later played for three colleges, including Cuyahoga Community College.

While attending an Alabama college, Samad embraced Islam. When he toured inner-city Birmingham, the squalor sparked his life's work.

"That's when I decided I needed to put something back," he said.

In the mid-1970s he oversaw a youth basketball league at the community college, working and talking with youths. He married in 1978 and had four children. Samad became close to the late activist Omar Ali-Bey, and in 1990 he went to work for the school system.

In the early 1990s, Ali-Bey and Samad formed Peace in the Hood and began walking the streets at night, challenging drug dealers. "Some of them would just run," he said. Others stood their ground. "They would say, 'We're just surviving.'"

The work was tense at first, but Samad befriended youths by playing basketball with them. They began to trust him. Some even joined Peace in the Hood. Samad thought he was making a difference.

In 1994, however, Ali-Bey died of AIDS, and Samad lost some of his enthusiasm. He said Ali-Bey was a powerful force and had left a vacuum.

Samad also was angered that the 1993 peace summit brought no "peace dividend" in the form of job training for young men.

The city's industry has never embraced the young men from the East Side, Samad said. Today the young men who dropped their weapons as part of the peace are fighting for drug turf.

"This has been the most violent summer since the early 1990s," Samad said. "We are on the verge of losing our victory."

Still, he works. One of his latest ideas is starting a security firm to employ young men he has befriended.

Meanwhile, Samad will continue making rounds in the night, fearlessly walking into Cleveland's more dangerous quarters.

"He's a persistent person," school board member Henley said.