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DURHAM REGIONAL POLICE SERVICE STATISTICS AND THE BATTLE TO MAINTAIN LAW & ORDER

THE BEST ANY COMMUNITY CAN HOPE FOR is to somehow keep the level of crime against its peaceful population from boiling over, particularly in a society where violence has all too often become the new normal.

This is particularly true with regard to an increasing number among today's youth. Recently, four boys and a young man were charged after having used hammers and a pickaxe to steal jewelry from a store in the Oshawa Centre. A brazen act that took place in broad daylight as shoppers looked on. To make matters worse, three of the suspects arrested were out on release orders from previous incidents. Of those three, two are so-called young offenders. Added to this is the unsettling reality that, as of the writing of this column, Durham Regional Police have recorded 31 firearm discharges in the Region. A very unsettling statistic, and one that many old-timers in the community will surely find hard to reconcile in a city that has, for generations, been a relatively safe place to live.

Overall, crime within the various municipalities that make up Durham Region has lately been driven by increases in property and what the police refer to as lower-severity offences. In fact, data from 2024 showed a significant year-over-year increase in calls for service that were fueled by incidents such as assault, harassment, and threats. This can hardly be surprising in a world that has become so angry on so many levels.

As to the major trends that have made the news in recent years, they include the theft of high-end vehicles, rising shoplifting incidents, and organized retail thefts like the one referenced at the top of this column.

There was a temporary drop in crime during the Covid pandemic, but that has given way to an upward trend that resumed after 2021. Despite the rise, Durham Region maintained one of the lowest overall violent crime rates among comparable jurisdictions. It moved to the third-lowest overall crime rate and second-lowest violent crime rate among similar communities. Those are a few statistics I thought readers of this column may find interesting.

We often hear of special investigations, and to that end, the police service announced the results of "Project Burden" in 2024. This initiative included a six-month investigation that focused on illegal firearms, drugs, and fraud. It was a 'multi-jurisdictional' effort that led to 32 individuals being taken into custody on a total of 184 charges. Police confiscated 16 firearms, one kilogram of both cocaine and fentanyl, and approximately \$80,000 in cash. What is undoubtedly frustrating is the fact these 'busts' as they're so often called, are but a drop in an otherwise ocean of crime. Still, what they do illustrate is the effectiveness of a coordinated campaign among the 'soldiers' who have been trained to defeat the enemy. Like a platoon in a modern-day military regiment, the men and women in the police force undoubtedly need an occasional success on such a large scale if they are to maintain a rewarding sense of purpose. So, while Oshawa is generally considered safe, especially in the suburban areas that make up what I like to call 'old Oshawa' which extends northward to Conlin Road only, it has faced growing challenges - particularly in the downtown core. The primary crime issues there may be linked to a public health crisis involving increasing rates of addiction, homelessness, and related social problems.

In May 2025, Mayor Dan Carter declared a public health crisis, citing rising violence and illegal behavior linked to the most vulnerable members of society. The number of people whom we have become accustomed to identifying as 'homeless' in the community has definitely grown - from around 45 individuals in April 2020 to more than 500 by May of this year. This has led Oshawa city councillors to pass a recent motion on the issue of open drug use – one that seeks to remind higher levels of government that the possession of certain substances is a criminal offence, and that the open use of such substances has become flagrant in parts of the city.

As written and presented, the motion was filled with all the right intentions, given the ongoing crisis in mental health and addictions our entire country is facing. Nevertheless, at least one locally elected official took it upon himself to stand on the very margins of critical thought - in almost complete opposition to the initiative being proposed. That person was Ward 4 councillor Derek Giberson. This should come as no surprise to anyone in the community who has taken at least five minutes to listen to anything the councillor from downtown Oshawa has had to say during this term of Council.

Conversely, one need only look to the efforts being made by Ward 5 councillors Brian Nicholson and John Gray on the issue of crime and public safety in and around the Simcoe and Mill Sts neighbourhood. Residents there have had to cope with more than their share of drug-related issues and associated criminal activity. The efforts of these councillors were prompted by their constituents' concerns that so much drug-related activity has practically undermined their safety on a day-to-day basis. Thank goodness these two elected officials are not opposed to measures that will surely help to improve the lives of their residents, unlike their colleague from Ward 4. Obviously, not all residents who have lived in Oshawa will have seen or even reported actual crimes – unless recent property tax hikes may be considered as such. As with any major urban centre, crime tends to be concentrated in specific areas, and while day-to-day living feels safe for most, there are certainly more serious incidents that should concern everyone.

In July 2025, Durham Regional Police began investigating a violent swarming attack on a Muslim woman in a restaurant in the city's south end, and residents of the Windfields neighborhood in what many of us call New Oshawa, have reported witnessing police drug busts.

Mayor Carter has previously emphasized his view that the police lack the resources to effectively address much of what is going on, and he has advocated for more support from the Province. To his credit, he has repeatedly called on the Ford government to initiate strategic investments for resources in addictions and mental health support. The possibility exists that a new urgent care department will be established at Lakeridge Health in Oshawa to handle specific emergencies and to enable the release the police within a 20 minute period. That's good news on all fronts.

The topic of policing in the community certainly warrants further discussion. There are concerns as to the never-ending request for more money and greater staffing for police divisions across the Region, and the service has not been without controversy.

For now, let us stand united in thanking the men and women of the Durham Regional Police for their service. To walk a mile in someone else's shoes, as they say, can be an invaluable exercise. Most among us can only imagine the daily uncertainty in a profession so volatile.



Lisa Robinson

PICKERING CITY COUNCILLOR

The Real Threat to Democracy Isn't Dissent It's Silence

By Councillor Lisa Robinson

Across Canada and around the world, the last few years have tested the boundaries between public health authority and personal liberty. Governments claimed extraordinary powers in the name of safety,

but history teaches us that emergency powers, once granted, are rarely surrendered easily. When citizens questioned mandates, digital tracking, or censorship of opposing views, they were often labelled as dangerous, divisive, or “anti-science.”

But speaking out against government excess is not extremism — it's the heartbeat of democracy. Democracies depend on dissent. The people who marched, wrote, protested, or simply refused to be silenced did not endanger society; they reminded it that free nations are built on consent, not compliance.

Every major human-rights advance began with individuals who stood against the prevailing narrative — from labour organizers to civil-rights activists, from suffragettes to whistle-blowers. During the pandemic, ordinary citizens took up that same tradition, asking the questions too many leaders were afraid to confront. They demanded transparency in data, accountability in decision-making, and respect for bodily autonomy. They were not a threat to public order — they were a threat to unchecked power.

I know this because I lived it. Since the very beginning of COVID-19, I have stood up against these heavy-handed measures — even inside City Hall, where the people's voice has been reduced to five-minute time slots and pre-approved topics. I have been punished punitively for speaking the truth. Sanctioned. Slandered. Stripped of pay. Accused of things I never said, based on lies crafted to silence me. But every attempt to silence me only proved the point: dissent is not the disease — tyranny is.

The real danger to democracy comes when governments learn they can rule by decree and silence opposition through fear or ridicule. When truth becomes whatever officials say it is, the people no longer govern; they are managed. And once citizens accept that, the path from democracy to technocracy is short and steep.

History will judge those who stood up — and those who stayed silent. The lesson is simple: freedom doesn't disappear overnight; it erodes when questioning authority becomes a punishable act. Those who refused to bow to coercion did not weaken our country; they kept its democratic spine intact.

Because in the end, the true enemy of dictatorship is not rebellion — it's courage. "Strength Does Not Lie In The Absence Of Fear, But In The Courage To Face It Head-On And Rise Above It"



The Strength in Solitude - How Toxic Relationships Destroy the Peace of Being Alone

By Camryn Bland
Youth Columnist

In our everyday lives, we interact with dozens of people, each serving a different role in our lives. Some relationships may be professional, such as those with peers or colleagues, while others may be specially selected, like close friendships. No matter the environment, humans are social creatures who often seek connections and events. We constantly surround ourselves with others, and so we begin to lose sight of what it means to be alone. We have become so accustomed to interaction that necessary solitude feels foreign and frightening.

Independence is no longer seen as a strength, but a weakness which resembles loneliness.

Many people feel dependent on company, always relying on someone else to feel secure or validated. Craving constant connection can quietly strip away one's ability to enjoy solitude. We begin to associate being alone with being unloved, when in reality, solitude can be one of the most empowering experiences a person can have.

This fear of loneliness traps individuals in negative social circles due to a fear of isolation, especially in adolescents. In high school, friendships and an exciting social life can feel like top priorities. These four years are filled with parties, events, study sessions, or simple weekend hangouts, which all feel better when shared with friends.

There are countless advantages to genuine friendships at any age. When you find the right people, friendships ensure you always have someone to count on, to cheer for you, and to make irreplaceable memories with. I love my friends, and I know I am so lucky to have them. However, not every friendship is based on this love, but on fear or jealousy. In my past, I have felt stuck in many draining social circles, which felt impossible to escape. Turning away from my friends felt terrifying and dangerous, even if they were damaging to my identity. Teens often feel pressured to be the most popular, and so they fear being disliked by others.

When we become desperate for connection, it is very easy to fall into fake friendships and toxic relationships. Toxic friends may not always look like the exaggerated trio from Mean Girls, however they can be just as harmful. Friendships which seem supportive may be sources of stress, insecurity, and emotional strain. Even if these effects go unnoticed, friendships can shift from major sources of joy to a never-ending supply of drama and distress.

In most social circles, gossip, belittlement, and recurring criticism are normalized. It may seem like playful teasing, comments which weren't meant to hurt your feelings. However, there should never be doubt on if your friends are genuine and kind to you. Friends should encourage growth and authenticity, not try to limit who you are. In many cases, these normalized actions are not playful teasing, but genuine bullying disguised by smiles and party invitations.

It can be difficult to recognize a relationship is unhealthy, however it's even harder to act on this realization. Despite the temptations, ending a relationship should never be impulsive. First, it's important to reflect on your own role and communicate honestly. Ask yourself if you act similarly and brainstorm how to fix your own actions. Communicate with your friend, and see if they are feeling similar to you, as they may also feel unseen in the friendship. It is important to have compassion for others in the situation, not just for yourself.

Eventually, you face a choice to either rebuild the connection on healthier terms, or walk away. If someone dismisses your feelings or continues to make you feel unseen, I believe that's not a friend worth keeping. Those are the relationships where major problems lie, which are not worth your time or energy. In some cases, it's time to let go, wish them the best, and separate yourself from the negative influence. Letting go may hurt at first, but it's a necessary act of courage.

The most challenging aspect of breaking a connection is accepting the solitude which comes afterwards. We often tell ourselves it is better to be with harmful people than be alone. When constantly surrounded by others, being alone sounds terrifying.

Once you are forced into this isolation, it feels unknown and confusing. This mindset is one which we need to break in order to escape negative influences who are weighing us back.

Choosing solitude is not about loneliness, it's about choosing peace over chaos, self-respect over insecurity. The moment you realize that your own company can be enough, you begin to grow.

Ashley Corbo, an American influencer, captures this truth perfectly. On her social media accounts and her podcast, Trying Not To Care, Corbo has said, "It's better to be alone than be surrounded by people who make you feel lonely." Her words remind us that solitude is not isolation, it's freedom from being held back. When you stop wasting your love on others who don't reciprocate, you begin to love yourself. You begin to realize you don't need a friend to get coffee with, or a companion to go to the cinema. There should be no shame in being alone, as long as you are not lonely. Loneliness is a mindset which comes from disappointment in others, not yourself. So, live your life with happiness and fulfillment, whether that be with others, or just your own company. Only with this acceptance can you make room for experiences, and people, that truly bring you joy.