

Grief, silence mark Sammy Yatim's birthday



Sad gathering

Sammy Yatim's mother, Sahar Bahadi, and his sister Sarah, were joined by about a dozen friends and family members as they marked what would have been Yatim's 19th birthday. Yatim was shot by Toronto Police during a confrontation on an empty streetcar on July 27.

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TORONTO — Sammy Yatim would have turned 19 tomorrow.

Yesterday afternoon, his mother and sister marked the birthday he'll never celebrate by taping pictures and flowers to a telephone pole at the corner of Dundas St. and Bellwoods Ave.

That's close to where Yatim was hit by eight bullets and then Tasered in a confrontation with Toronto police. He was alone on a streetcar, holding a knife, when officers surrounded the vehicle shortly after midnight on July 27. Yatim died in hospital.

The death, captured by bystanders using cellphone cameras, ignited public outrage and intense debate over police and the use of force.

Yatim's mother, Sahar Bahadi, and his sister, Sarah, were joined by about a dozen friends and family members. They remembered the young man in silence. They made no formal remarks and declined to speak to reporters.

Sarah wrote on the metal pole in black marker: "To my hero. Happy 19th birthday. Have a great one up there. I love you. Gone but never forgotten. Sarah <3."

She taped a bouquet of flowers to the pole and then pulled out one red rose. A young woman put up a sheet with pictures of Yatim wearing a Toronto baseball cap that said: "Happy Birthday Sammy. Rest in Peace."

Bahadi wrote at the bottom: "I give my life to see you again — Mom."

Toronto Police Const. James Forcillo has been charged with second-degree murder in Yatim's death. The case is still before the court.

Frank Iacobucci, a retired Supreme Court justice, is leading an internal police probe of the shooting, and the review is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

A coroner's inquest is currently examining the fatal police shootings of three other people, each of whom struggled with mental illness.

The Yatim family has said that Sammy had no history of mental illness or violence.