

MADD seeing some movement on impaired sentences

By Mark Pavilons

In many ways, Marco Muzzo's 10-year prison sentence is precedent-setting. And that comes as a good sign that lawmakers are getting more serious about drinking and driving.

Muzzo was sentenced March 29 after he pleaded guilty in the collision that killed three children and their grandfather, last September in Vaughan. The accident claimed the lives of Daniel Neville-Lake, 9, Harrison Neville-Lake, 5, Milly Neville-Lake, 2, and their grandfather Gary Neville, 65. The children's grandmother and great-grandmother were also seriously injured in the crash. Muzzo also received a 12-year driving ban, which takes effect after his release.

MADD?Canada sees this decision as one of the toughest in recent years for a first-time offender. They were ?relieved??the judge in this case ??Superior Court Justice Michelle Fuerst ??went with the Crown's recommendation.

Carolyn Swinson, MADD?Canada spokesperson, said the Supreme Court, late last year, opened the door for judges to levy sentences on a case-by-case basis, and not rely on precedence.

The York Chapter of MADD?Canada has been in touch with the Neville-Lake family throughout their ordeal.

The penalties, and sentences don't seem to be a deterrent, Swinson pointed out. What's needed is stricter immediate measures, such as more vehicle impoundment and licence suspensions. MADD?is calling for mandatory breath screening by police. Research has shown this method, used in several countries including Australia, has seen results in reducing impaired driving. MADD?would also like to see mandatory breathalyzers following every fatal collision or one that involves serious injuries.

Swinson knows how the Neville-Lake family feels. She lost a son to a drunk driver and that case was thrown out on a technicality. She has been to many court cases, supporting victims in Toronto through MADD.

Decisions such as the one in the Muzzo case, are sending a clear message. Swinson noted that only 20 years ago, common punishments included house arrest and two years less a day, for such crimes.