

Youth Voices on Gun Violence

**ROTARY CLUBS AND INTERACT WORKING
TOGETHER FOR CHANGE**

Wake Up! Interact

Columbia, MO

May 2021

Introduction

This slide deck illustrates how an Interact and a Rotary club worked together to build peace in their community by promoting dialogue on gun violence.

Following these introductory slides are segments that provide an overview of the clubs, how they worked together, and quotes from the dialogues that occurred.

Why Youth Voices?

- We often see adults on TV giving the news or making big political decisions that deal with topics involving youth but adults and youth rarely get to HEAR what the youth has to say about it.
- Youth can offer a new set of eyes and incorporate new technology or programs. They can bring new ideas and information.
- As a high school club, Interact can reach out to a wide variety of students and hear their take on today's common topics.
- With this year's topic of gun violence: young kids and teens are being affected by it and so are an important voice to engage when it comes to finding a solution.

Why Gun Violence?

- The Wake Up! Officers wanted to find a topic that was personal to people in our community.
- In recent years gun violence in the Columbia area has gone up; this has shocked the community.
- Missouri was number 7 in deaths per capita due to gun violence in 2019 (at 20.6 per 100,000). *
- This is a prevalent problem as 43,551 Americans died by gun violence in 2020. *
- Many youth are exposed or involved in gun violence whether adults realize it or not. We practice shooter drills, we hear about it in the news, we see it on their streets, and we attend the funerals of loved ones
- * Statistics from <https://www.rd.com/article/gun-violence-statistics/>

OVERVIEW OF CLUBS

Wake Up! Interact

History

Wake Up! Interact was started after the murder of Micheal Brown in Ferguson, MO, so we have always tried to base ourselves around finding ways to heal a community through conversations not debate.

- + Last year we focused on creating a TEDx event called Fueling Your Fire which ultimately got canceled due to Covid
- + We also helped the school district hold their own community dialogues on equity, diversity, and inclusion; and have facilitated additional dialogues with other groups.

2021

This year our big focus was on the rising gun violence in our community in Columbia, MO. We wanted to bring youth and adults together to have a productive discussion around possible solutions

We also had other side projects like

- + Podcasts on students choice of topics
- + Social media

The Rotary Club of Columbia- Metro, Missouri (District 6080)

- Peacebuilder Club
- Wake Up! Sponsor
- 65+ members
- Founded in 1993
- See more at:

<https://columbiametrorotary.org/>

Club Mission: To be a transformative influence in our community and in the world through our work with youth, education, and the environment.

Club Vision: Our club remains a fun, stable, and energetic community for fellowship committed to the work and values of Rotary. Our members are deeply committed to “service above self” and active throughout the community as well as in club projects. Our programs and projects are relevant, sustainable and help to create a strong, resilient, peaceful, and productive community.

WHAT WE DID

MetroRotary and Wake Up! Interact Working Together

MetroRotary:

- Provided dialogue and facilitation training to students
- Secured grant to fund Voicethread platform and prizes to incent participation
- Helped plan community dialogue
- Participated in community dialogues

Wake Up!

- Recruited youth
- Picked topic for and designed community dialogue
- Found a way to reach a the community through multiple different mediums
- Moderated community dialogues
- Researched potential solutions and existing resources
- Prepared dialogue guide

SUMMARY QUOTES FROM GUN VIOLENCE PROJECTS

The following slides organize quotes from youth participating in our dialogues on gun violence. The quotes are aligned with questions the youth explored during the dialogues. These were:

- What has been your experience with gun violence?
- Why is it happening?
- (How) Can we change?

What We Experience

What

“One of my friends I
had known for years
was killed due to gun
violence.”



What

“I think about the fear I have going to school because I don't know if someone will decide to shoot it up.”



What

“All my years in school we’ve practiced what to do if there is a shooter. It’s become kind of a weird norm to know there might be a mass shooting. It shouldn’t be a norm.”



What

“I hear the gun shots in my community but I don't find out who the victim or suspect is until my mom or guardian tells me. Because the news is depressing to watch when it's someone dying to gun violence everyday.”



What

“I think about the fear that black people face daily by gun violence performed by the people that are supposed to serve and protect us. I think about all the pain these kids feel because their dad/mother/brother/sister etc was murdered.”



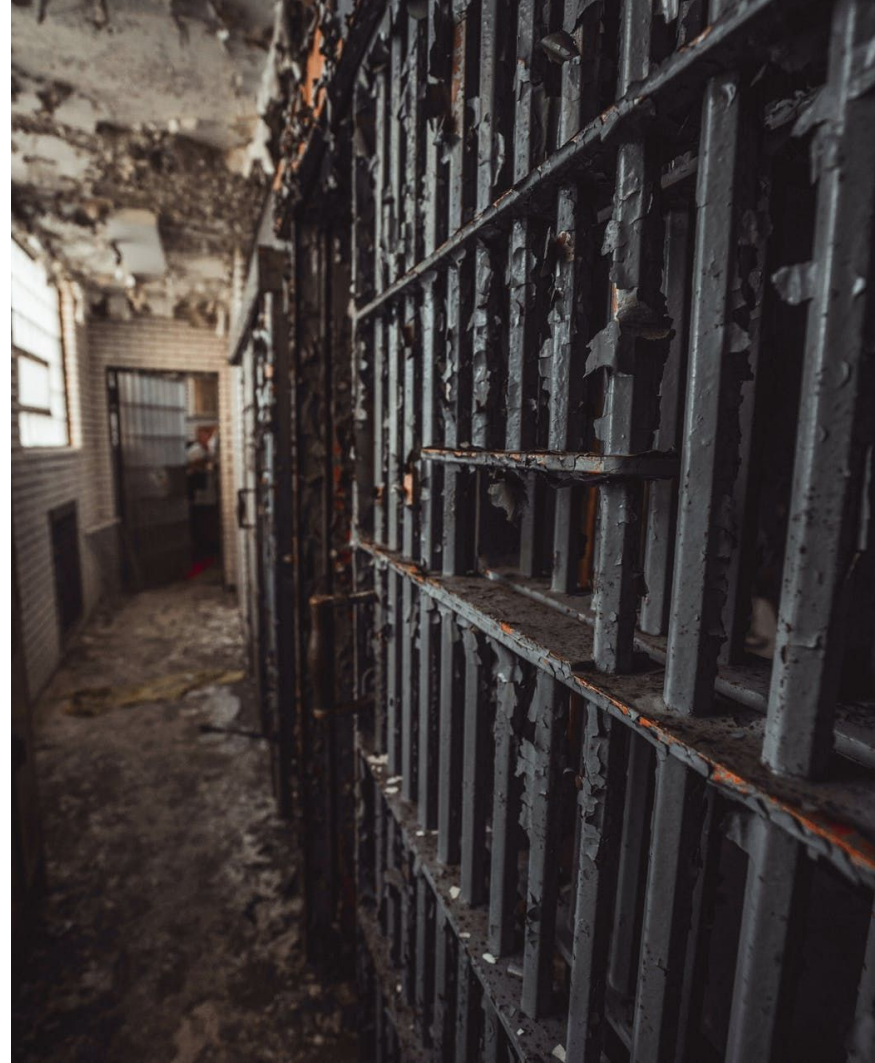
What

“I think of those I know--
those I knew that were
lost to gun violence. I think
of the fun times I've
shared with those people
and I'm enraged when I
remember there won't be
any new ones.”



What

“Seeing typically young black men my age be painted as ‘only’ a murderer, ‘only’ a criminal, ‘only’ a delinquent, ‘only’ a convict, - anything sub-human - while those with a fairer skin who commit acts of terrorism are still considered ‘children’ or ‘21-year-old kids’ makes me question *what narrative are we actually promoting here?*”



What

“... so it's sad seeing people just throw their life away, especially the ones who had a bright future ahead of them. it also breaks my heart seeing people die because of someone else's stupidity, - seeing people lose their moms, siblings, cousins , aunts, uncles, is so sad.



What

“I've personally seen families broken apart due to gun violence.

I've had gun violence affect my life through multiple instances that all ended up with me losing someone I loved or knew at the hands of a gun.

I've also seen how much it hurts communities that feel like the only way for them to feel safe where they live is to keep firearms in their home to protect themselves from the firearms outside of their home.”



Why Is It Happening?

Why

“ . . .when someone is part of violence, like they see their parents fighting or other types of violence, that can affect them to do violent things. That is, the only thing they know is violence. They were grown up to it.”



Why

“I believe this cycle can come from many different things, like if parents are addicted to alcohol then they are most likely to receive violence from that parent. Mental illness can as well be hereditary and things like depression are probably crucial to people who want to commit violent acts.”

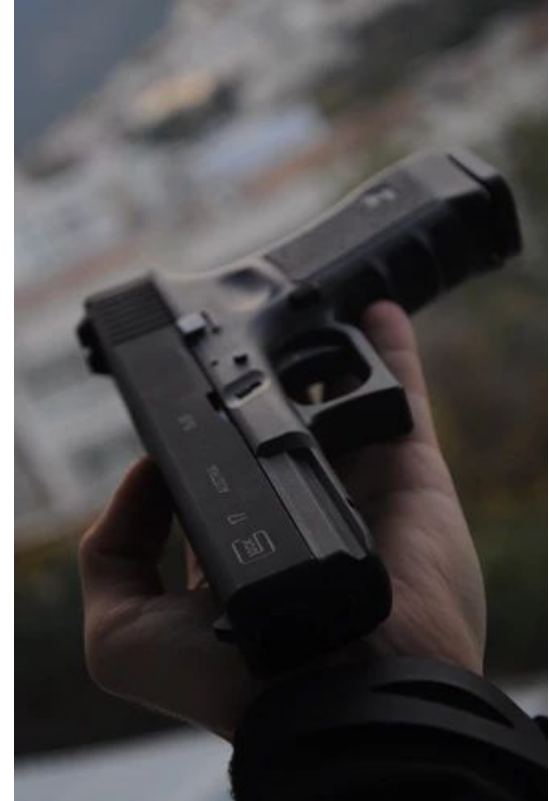


Why

“... all we know is "if someone does something to you do it back." Yes that is a good thing to learn, but it's not a good thing to apply in these kinds of situations. I understand why people think they have to get even but if we still live by this idea that we have to get even then we won't get anywhere.”

Why

“ . . . most of these kids don't have a way out or they don't think they have a way out or they think gangs is the only way to be successful.”



Why

“... you can tell how kids experience gun violence because the violence from outside school is also brought into our schools.”



Why

“Innocent children and other people are dying for no reason because they were shot and killed by people who were able to purchase a gun at Walmart.”

(How) Can We
Change?

Change?

“... there can be a system that if a kid gets out of jail that when they get back to school that they can get all the help they need because they were probably growing up with violence and that is not good for their health. If they can get all the help they need so they might stop doing violent things.”



Change?

“I honestly don't think there's a way to stop this, people have their minds made up. It's up to them to change their way of thinking.”

Change?

“ . . . helping kids learn to express themselves by naming emotions could help - like a community day because not only one person experiences things like this. Also being a good role model for children could help someone alot with the effects of experiencing violence.”



Change?

“I believe the more we pay attention to everyone in our classroom the more we can prevent violent situations.”



Change?

“School never addresses the facts on gun violence and when it happens in the community, they don't do anything, not even talk about it that much. They also don't really tell us how to prevent gun violence, they may tell us facts and tell us it a real thing, but nothing is being done.”



Change?

“Not many dialogues are had at school about what we can do to prevent gun violence within our communities. While I believe that it would be most beneficial to have such dialogue, I don't think it would be comfortable because not everyone knows they're going to threaten to kill someone someday. Those conflicts are entirely personal and to have our school try to invade the privacy of those involved would endanger more people and make the situation messier.”

Where do you hear about
gun violence?

EVERYWHERE

(multiple students)

NEXT STEPS

Where do we go from here?

- Shared with our sponsoring Rotary club
- Sharing at community forums
- Planning additional youth dialogues
- We will continue to seek solutions

