

Plan For 2000

Due to recent school shootings and youth violence, there is a growing opportunity for young people to speak out on the issue of gun violence. Ben Gelt and David Winkler are taking the upcoming year to organize students around the issue of gun violence. We feel that the year 2000 presents a great opportunity for students to have a successful role in electing candidates that will support gun control. As exemplified by SAFE Trip 99, young people can garner positive attention for this issue. Ben and David are uniquely capable of being spokesmen for the student movement. In three months time, we have already established a strong presence for ourselves, from Washington politicians to 60's folk singers to other gun control groups. We can use these connections and the momentum that exists from our activities to plan and carry out a productive year as student activists.

These are our goals in the year 2000:

- 1) To plan several student events, in strategically targeted districts, that would create positive media and begin to establish a presence for students on this issue (i.e. Presidential conventions, Washington DC, Anniversary of Columbine).
- 2) To register young people to vote in the elections of 2000 solely because of the issue of gun violence
- 3) To set up an internet-site that will:
 - a. Educate our voters about their candidates for Nov. 2000
 - b. Easily instruct motivated students to start their own chapters
 - c. Facilitate e-mail alert communication with members
 - d. Educate young people about gun violence
 - e. Sell promotional items (t-shirts, buttons, mugs) for fundraising
 - f. Provide links to local like-minded organizations and individuals



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SAFE STUDENTS

**A NATIONAL YOUTH MOVEMENT FORMED BY STUDENTS
DEDICATED TO REDUCING GUN VIOLENCE**

GUN VIOLENCE IS KILLING TOO MANY AMERICANS

In 1997, 32,436 people were killed by guns in America

By the year 2001, gunfire injury is projected to surpass motor vehicle injury as the leading cause of traumatic death in the United States.

Cherry D et al. Trends in nonfatal and fatal firearm-related injury rates in the US, 1985-1995. *Annals of Emergency Medicine* 1998; 32: 51-59.

In 1996 handguns were used to murder 2 people in New Zealand, 15 in Japan, 30 in Great Britain, 106 in Canada, 213 in Germany and **9,390 in the United States.**

Center to Prevent Handgun Violence

In a ten-year period between 1984 and 1993, the firearm homicide rate for persons between the ages of 15 and 24 increased 158 percent. In contrast, during this same time period the homicide rate for people age 24 and older declined by 19 percent.

Snyder, H. Juvenile Arrests 1997. Bulletin. Washington, DC: OJJDP, 1998.

In 1997, 12 young people under the age of 20 were killed by gunfire every day.

Center for Disease Control and Prevention

Since 1995 there have been 107 school shootings resulting in 116 fatalities.

ABC Nightly News 8/10/99

Gun violence is more than just these facts . . .

November 2, 1999: Honolulu, Hawaii -- A Xerox employee opened fire at work, killing seven.

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August 10, 1999: Los Angeles, CA -- A white supremacist fired over seventy shots and wounded five at a preschool. He later shot and killed a postal worker.

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July 29, 1999: Atlanta, GA -- A disgruntled day-trader shot and killed nine and wounded 13 others.

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April 20, 1999: Littleton, CO -- Two students, ages 17 and 18, killed 12 students and a teacher, while wounding 23. They used an arsenal of guns and bombs.

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May 21, 1998: Springfield, OR -- A 15-year-old student shot and killed two students and wounded 22 when he opened fire at Thurston High School.

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March 24, 1998: Jonesboro, AK -- Two boys, ages 11 and 13, shot and killed a teacher and four girls at Westside Middle School. Nine girls and one other teacher were wounded.

We must do something about this public health problem!

What is the solution to gun violence?

Gun violence is a complicated problem; a simple solution will only make matters worse. Here are four levels of a comprehensive plan to reduce gun violence:

- 1) **Educate the public about the danger of firearms.** We must work to counter-balance the culture that tells our youth that guns are an acceptable solution to their problems. Any gun can kill and we must take them seriously. Public service campaigns should be expanded. We can reduce the violence through simple education.
- 2) **Strictly enforce the laws regarding guns.** Since guns are so lethal, so readily available, and so often used in crimes, it is imperative that we treat them seriously. Police and prosecutors must not tolerate violations of our guns laws. The success of Project Exile definitely shows that enforcement can reduce crime. For example, Project Exile's success was aided by the presence of Virginia's one-gun-a-month law which was enacted after New York and Washington DC found that most of the crime guns in their cities were coming from Virginia.
- 3) **Legislate a comprehensive gun code -- without loopholes.** Our goal should be to add legal accountability to gun ownership. We must close the gun show loophole. We need laws that reduce the ability of gun traffickers to sell guns for profit. No one should be able to obtain a gun without undergoing a background check. Furthermore, we must provide a system of laws that is understandable to the public and enforceable to the police. Just as we seek to reform our complicated tax code, so must we change our gun laws.
- 4) **Regulate the gun industry.** Contrary to popular belief the gun industry is one of the least regulated industries in America. Nearly every product in America (food, cars, toy guns) is regulated by a government agency to ensure that it does not pose an unreasonable risk to the public. Guns are not. Most products are tested to ensure the general safety of Americans who do not have the time or expertise to test products themselves. If a product poses an unreasonable risk, then it is not allowed into the marketplace. In 1967, the Consumer Product Safety Commission was created for this purpose, but was specifically prohibited from regulating two products: guns and tobacco. Even the ATF, which has some oversight, can only halt production of a gun **after** it has been sold in the retail marketplace (e.g. the TEC-9 assault pistol). By regulating the industry, America can adopt safety standards that would save lives. In 1995, the cost of firearm injury was estimated at \$4 billion with taxpayers paying at least 50% of the costs. We must force the companies that profit from gun sales to accept some responsibility for those costs. This can be done through the regulation of an industry that does not want to regulate itself.

These solutions will save lives. Each piece is as important as the next. The majority of Americans supports these common-sense measures, but it is the students of America who are crying out for a solution.

"I am here because I'm tired of waking up and reading the paper -- and not being surprised when six or seven people have been shot somewhere."

---Jaamil Farbes, a student at a recent meeting of SAFE Students

SAFE Students is a national movement formed by students dedicated to reducing gun violence

"Gun violence has invaded our lives and our schools, and now it is up to us to take them back."

SAFE Students will reduce gun violence by involving students in the solution. We are a network of high school and college groups that seeks to educate our communities through youth activism.

SAFE Students was created in July of 1999, after 95 Colorado students went to Washington DC to tell their nation's leaders to put aside politics and pass reasonable gun legislation. The group of young lobbyists met with the President, Vice President, and members of Congress to ask for their support. The students were so motivated by that trip, that they decided to continue their efforts.

Our message is this: student activism can reduce gun violence. The path to activism is easy. It can begin with a letter, a conversation, or a newspaper article that sparks an opinion. America's students are bright, opinionated, and motivated. By showing students that they can make a difference, they will be empowered to lead this country into the future.

Our plans include marches, community education, and media advocacy. Members of SAFE Students are encouraged to get involved in any way possible. Next year we will return to Washington for a larger event. We will be present at the party conventions next summer. We will make our voices heard in the campaigns of 2000. This year is the most important ever for student action against gun violence!

It is vital to involve students in this movement, because thousands of young people are targets of gun violence every year. As a result, the student voice in America is growing. SAFE Students will unite and amplify the power of that voice.

We need to you to contact us as soon as possible:

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Listen to what our nation's leaders are saying about SAFE Students

"These young people represent millions of Americans who have come together at the grass roots to take action. They have come to Washington to hold our feet to the fire and to make their voices heard. And I thank them for coming . . . Now, it's time for Congress to listen to the lobbyists who truly matter -- our children."

-- President Bill Clinton

"SAFE Students' co-founders David Winkler and Ben Gelt have made a tremendous contribution toward the gun safety debate. They have raised awareness of the issue among their own generation and in a short time they have gained national recognition for their efforts. It is time legislators listen to our young people and enact reasonable gun safety measures to make our schools and communities safer."

-- U.S. Representative Mark Udall (D-CO)

"When I see young people like you coming to Washington, it makes me proud of your generation."

-- U.S. Representative Scott McInnis (R-CO)

"We can't let you go into a new school year without this congress taking action."

--U.S. Representative Marge Roukema (R-NY), July 15, 1999

The activities of SAFE Students have been covered by the national media, including the NY Times, Washington Post, Newsweek, USA Today, The Today Show, Good Morning America, NBC Nightly News, ABC World News Tonight, CBS News with Dan Rather, Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher, Denver Post, Rocky Mountain News, Associated Press, Los Angeles Times, and the BBC.

"The students are an articulate, well-informed, multiethnic group, determined to participate in the democratic process, to work through the system to bring about change . . . This is not a passing fad for this generation. It is their defining moment."

-- Diane Carman, The Denver Post July 17, 1999

Now listen to the students

"On April 20, I lost two close friends . . . I want to give something back to my friends and all the people who have been killed by gun violence."

-- Erin Flynn, 15, Columbine High School

"We are the students of today, the voters of next year, and the leaders of tomorrow. We will be heard."

-- David Winkler, 18, Co-founder of SAFE Students

"This is an ongoing problem -- its not going to go away. All these shootings are just building our resolve to do something."

-- Allison Tease, 16, The Cate School (CA)

"We need to get our message across to people in the Senate and the House that we mean business and that we're not going to go away."

-- Laurel Salerno, 15, Columbine High School

"It's a tragedy that 15 people died at Columbine. But how many other people die in the inner city every day and get no attention at all?"

-- Lorena Macias, 17, Denver North High School

"I don't get why politicians can't compromise. I wish the message would get out that they need to stop acting like 5-year-olds. Our elected representatives walk around like someone stole their gummy worms."

-- Rosa Chavez, 17, Jefferson County Open School

"Students know first hand about the problem of gun violence in America, now is the time for us to help solve it."

-- Ben Gelt, 18, Co-Founder of SAFE Students

Here is one activity that you can do in your own school!

Organize a student-led Gun Violence Awareness Week

This program is a peer-based education curriculum design to teach high school students about the problem of gun violence. The curriculum is a weeklong program consisting of a poster campaign, five short public-address system announcements and a student-led discussion lasting for one regular class period (45 minutes to one hour). SAFE Students provides training to students at the school on how to engage their peers in a structured discussion of the causes and solutions to the problem. These students will go to a different class each day, during their off period or as arranged with specific teachers. The program can be tailored to meet the specific needs of the school. The overall message is that gun violence is a public health problem that can be solved through education and awareness.

Curriculum Outline

- 1) Posters -- designed by students from models provided by SAFE Students
- 2) Daily announcements -- one minute long announcements including facts and explanations
- 3) A period long discussion -- a student-educator will visit a different class each day
 - Introduction to SAFE Students and student-educator
 - Video introduction to gun violence -- school shootings, history of guns in US, current public health problem
 - Discuss student reactions to video
 - Defining the problem** -- public health problem not a "gun control debate"
 - Introduction of statistics --
 - US vs. other nations (eight times higher)
 - Youth gun violence rates (25% of gun violence between 15-19)
 - Minority gun violence rates (leading killer of Black/Hispanic youth)
 - Cost of treating gun-shot victims (50% taxpayer funds)
 - Discuss the escalation of violence (From fist to knife to guns)
 - Discuss solutions** -- student awareness of firearms
 - Education of public
 - Alternatives to violence (weapons)
 - Student activism -- telling parents, friends, neighbors

Gun violence has recently captured the attention of the nation, and our young people. Gun violence is a real public health problem, especially among our youth. The firearm homicide rate for people between 15-24 is up 150% even though national homicide rate has decline 19% over the last ten years. 60% of high school students in a recent national survey said they could get a gun within a week. Gun violence follows an escalation of violence in our society. By teaching students to understand the escalation of violence, they can get involved to stop it.

The value of this program is that the students are brining the message to other students. This education will pass on to the community in dinner table conversations, church sermons, and media coverage. By participating in the Gun Violence Awareness Week, schools ensure that their community becomes involved in the solution.