

Driving Down Gun Violence Through Community Relationships: Efforts of the Thomasville Police Department

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Firearms have surpassed automobile accidents to become the leading cause of death for children and youth aged 0–24 [1]. Strategies for reducing and preventing firearm injuries and deaths in children and youth include guidance regarding the safe storage of firearms in the home as well as community interventions that include community-based violence deterrence programs. The Thomasville Police Department has implemented three programs aimed at reducing firearm injuries and deaths in children and youth. These programs and partnerships are Safe Kids Northwest Piedmont, Educating Kids about Gun Violence (EKG), and Cops and Kids Coming Together. All three programs are community based and rely on partnerships with other community organizations.

The Thomasville Police Department and Fire Department have collaborated with Safe Kids Northwest Piedmont to help reduce multiple threats facing the children in our area through car seat education, firearm education, and bike safety education. To spotlight the gun violence issue, the Safe Kids Northwest Piedmont Coalition collaborated with the Thomasville Police Department in

2022 to focus on educating the public about firearm safety through proper storage, the safe use of firearms, and the dangers of not following the proper safety protocols. The coalition consists of nonprofit groups; area county health departments; Atrium Health Wake Forest; Luly Beckles, the Injury Prevention and Outreach Coordinator at Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist (also the Safe Kids Northwest Piedmont coordinator); trauma doctors; and nurses from Atrium Health and Novant Health, among others.

In 2022, this coalition held seven home safety workshops that sought to educate the public on gun safety in the home. Four of the workshops were held in English and three were held in Spanish. The workshops were attended by a total of 67 community members, who received firearm safety kits. Members of the coalition also attended other community events such as Touch a Truck, the Carolina Classic Fair, and Share the Health Downtown. Because of the combined outreach, 682 gunlocks were handed out by the coalition in 2022.

In the EKG program, the Thomasville Police Department has collaborated with Thomasville City Schools to help

provide students with the tools to make better choices in life and educate them about the dangers of guns, gangs, and drugs. The program, which officially began in April 2023, started as a joint effort between the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and the Fayetteville Police Department through Operation Ceasefire, a project of the nationwide initiative Project Safe Neighborhoods. In 2022, the Thomasville Police Department was selected by Project Safe Neighborhoods to be a pilot program for EKG in Davidson County. One element of the program is positive interactions between students and police officers. Each student in Thomasville Middle School will attend two 1.5-hour classes taught by School Resource Officer C. Jarrell. According to SRO Jarrell, he had already used the EKG model to counsel students on their decision-making before the program's official start. SRO Jarrell said that he has seen positive results in the students he has counseled using the EKG model (personal communication, C. Jarrell, March 22, 2023).

In 2021, the Thomasville Police Department reached out to the Thomasville Parks and Recreation Department to see if we could be a part of their summer kids' program. Together the Police Department and Thomasville Parks and Recreation came up with Cops and Kids Coming Together, a program where police officers spend time with campers each week discussing gun safety, drug awareness, and different aspects of law enforcement. The campers also take field trips to the police department and the

police academy where they are given tours and participate in hands-on activities. Due to the age of the children in this program, the Thomasville Police Department will not see the rewards of the relationships made and lives changed for several years. The Thomasville Police feel the community and the department will gain dividends from these efforts in the future. **NCMJ**

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Acknowledgments

Disclosure of interests. J.A. serves as captain of the Field Operations Bureau of the Thomasville Police Department, which helps facilitate the relationships made between private and public sectors with the goal of making the community a safer place. This can be accomplished by focusing on a reduction in trauma caused by firearms. No further interests were disclosed.

References

1. Lee LK, Fleegler EW, Goyal MK, et al. Firearm-related injuries and deaths in children and youth: injury prevention and harm reduction. *Pediatrics*. 2022;150(6):e2022060070.

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