

ANNUAL REPORT

2022



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A MESSAGE FROM OUR FOUNDER

In January 2022, Project Unloaded launched with a bold idea and a simple message: We can reduce gun violence by changing gun culture and sharing the message that we're safer without guns.

At the core of America's gun culture is the myth that guns make us safer – a myth that most Americans believe. That false promise of safety is driving up gun use and, in turn, gun deaths. Project Unloaded is working to change the narrative on guns through widespread culture change that dispels the myth once and for all.

And when it comes to changing culture, no one is better suited to lead the fight than young people. Data drives everything we do at Project Unloaded, and years of research indicate that while adults rarely change their minds on anything, teens' views are still forming. This is why our cultural campaigns are focused on reaching teens. When young people learn that they're [Safer Not Using Guns](#), they're less likely to say they're interested in having and using guns. Just like cigarette smoking has gone from cool to uncool among teens, we aim to inspire a generational shift in gun culture. Because if we can stop rising rates of gun use, fewer people will be shot and killed. And that's the ultimate goal of this work.



Nina Vinik
Founder and
Executive Director



“Project Unloaded isn't trying to change laws, flip Congress, or even involve adults in their efforts. Instead, the group is targeting teens and young adults to create a new narrative that guns make them less safe.”

“This Non-Profit Has a Plan to Change Young People's Minds About Guns,”
May 2022

Since Project Unloaded's launch almost a year ago we've:

- Reached more than a million young people on TikTok and Snapchat with the message that we're Safer Not Using Guns (SNUG)
- Partnered with TikTok influencers with millions of young followers to carry that message further
- Surveyed thousands of Gen Z members to understand their views on guns and experiences with gun violence
- Briefed leaders in entertainment, tech and corporate responsibility on why gun culture must change and how they can do their part
- Expanded the Project Unloaded team to include a brilliant council of teens
- Earned more than a dozen national press stories making the case that gun culture must change

It's a great start, but it's just that – a start. Gun violence is now the number one cause of death for children and teens in the U.S. Gun deaths are at their highest level in decades. Gun violence takes 120 lives every day and wounds many more, while a slew of high profile shootings make public spaces, including schools, parades and grocery stores, feel unsafe.

A decade after the tragedy at the Sandy Hook School, the movement to stop gun violence is larger and more powerful than ever. But the sobering stats remind us that complacency isn't an option. We must be bold and approach this crisis in new, data-backed ways.

At the end of year one, we know that this is just the beginning. Read on to see what we've done so far, and what we're planning for next year.

Gratefully,

Nina Vinik
Founder and Executive Director



YEAR ONE OF SNUG

In January, we launched the [SNUG](#) (Safer Not Using Guns) influencer campaign on TikTok and Snapchat to reach teens in the greater Houston and Milwaukee areas. In its pilot phase, the campaign saw 15% of audience members shift their views on guns, moving away from the idea that guns make them safer – demonstrating the power, and the possibility, of our work to change gun culture.

1 MIL+

Teens reached by SNUG campaign

160%

Video completion rate of SNUG ads, over industry benchmarks

82%

Positive comments on influencer posts

15%

Teens who shifted views against using guns after seeing the SNUG pilot campaign

By every metric, the campaign outperformed industry benchmarks. SNUG expanded into a dozen cities this fall.

- Houston
- Atlanta
- Phoenix
- Seattle
- Tampa
- Minneapolis
- Denver
- Charlotte
- Sacramento
- Indianapolis
- Pittsburgh
- Milwaukee



RESEARCH + LEARNING

This year, Project Unloaded partnered with Global Strategy Group to [survey 1,000 young people](#), ages 13-25, to better understand Gen Z's experiences with gun violence today. We found that most see gun violence as a major problem and many have experienced gun violence personally. A majority of young people rank gun violence above abortion access or climate change when comparing issues facing their generation.

Among Black and Latino young people, gun violence is an even more pressing concern, with more than 60% of Black and Latino young people having personal experience with gun violence, 72% of Black young people naming gun violence as a major problem, and just 26% of Black respondents saying they felt "very safe" in school.

30%

Have experienced gun violence personally

60%

of Black and Latino youth have experienced gun violence personally or know someone who has

50%

worry about shootings weekly or more frequently

THE TRACE

“The point of view of Project Unloaded is that changing gun culture really does have to start with young people,” Vinik said. “This is research that really supports our theory of change.”

“Young People Fear Gun Violence, But Also Think Guns May Keep Them Safe,” September 2022

In spite of these fears and lived experiences, young people also overwhelmingly said they believed that guns make them safer. The survey gave us clues about how the myth of guns as a mechanism for safety may be spreading.

Survey results also gave us reason for hope. When young people were presented with the facts on gun risks, nearly 20% of them across all demographics shifted their views against the idea that guns make them safer - providing further confirmation that our strategy can work.

20%

Nearly 20% of young people moved away from the idea that guns make them safer after seeing messages on gun risks

HOW YOUNG PEOPLE LEARN GUN MYTHS

72%

of young people learn about guns from friends & family

46%

of boys and young men named video games as a source for gun information

62%

of Black young people listed TV & film as where they learned about guns

ELEVATING YOUNG LEADERS

In October 2022, we launched our [inaugural youth council](#) with 12 teens from across the country who are helping develop upcoming campaigns, advising on social media and partnerships and assisting on other projects. Some have years of experience in gun violence prevention activism. Some joined the movement after experiencing gun violence firsthand. All were drawn to join Project Unloaded because of our mission to change culture. Together, their views and insights impact all of our work. In the months after the council's launch, members have already been quoted in outlets including [USA Today](#), [the Washington Post](#), [The Trace](#), [Elite Daily](#) and in [local media outlets](#) as well.

The launch of the youth council followed a successful summer internship program, in which young people joined our team to expand our organizing, social media, earned media and research capacity. One intern reworked our facts webpage to more clearly make the case that guns make us less safe. Another devised a plan for offline SNUG events and organized a series of conversations with young people about our SNUG campaign. Each provided valuable insights and contributions from which Project Unloaded continues to benefit.



“There is a debate surrounding it, but when you look at the facts there really isn't much room for interpretation or debate. Guns make us less safe.”

Youth Council member Karly Scholz, October 2022

ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH + PARTNERSHIPS

This year, Project Unloaded hired new staff to expand our organizing, marketing, social media and communications work and strategy. We'll continue to grow our team with an incoming Program Manager who will support our youth council and external partnerships.

We're expanding our reach by connecting with new partners in entertainment, corporate social responsibility, influencer engagement and gaming, and by sharing our story with media outlets. We've earned more than a dozen press mentions and profile pieces in outlets including [USA Today](#), [the Washington Post](#) and [MSNBC](#). We also shared our message and theory of change through essays in [Newsweek](#), [Chicago Tribune](#), and [PostIndustrial](#).

MEDIA MENTIONS INCLUDE



2023 PREVIEW

Project Unloaded’s goals are ambitious. We exist to change gun culture and help inspire a generational shift that will lead to fewer people choosing to use guns. If we’re successful, we’ll see fewer people killed and wounded by gun violence. It will take time, but we believe we can get there.

The Washington Post

“They just want kids to truly understand the danger — not the cool — that comes with guns. Impossible? Cigarettes became gross in a single generation.”

“Sick of Hoping Politicians Will Act, Gen Z Decides to Make Guns Uncool,” October 2022

In the year ahead, we’ll build on the solid foundation established in 2022, by:

- Continuing to invest in research and data, deepening our understanding of young people’s views and experiences with gun violence
- Expanding our successful SNUG campaign, introducing it to new cities and continuing to optimize the message and creative collateral based on performance data
- Launching new campaigns targeting young people in communities struggling with high rates of gun violence, and in areas where gun suicide is a growing challenge
- Exploring new ways to reach young audiences beyond social media, including partnerships with community organizations, entertainment and gaming
- Leveraging the expertise and creativity of our youth council to grow our social media presence and capacity

Culture rarely changes overnight. But with time, dedication and your help, we will change gun culture and save lives. Thank you for supporting our mission.