
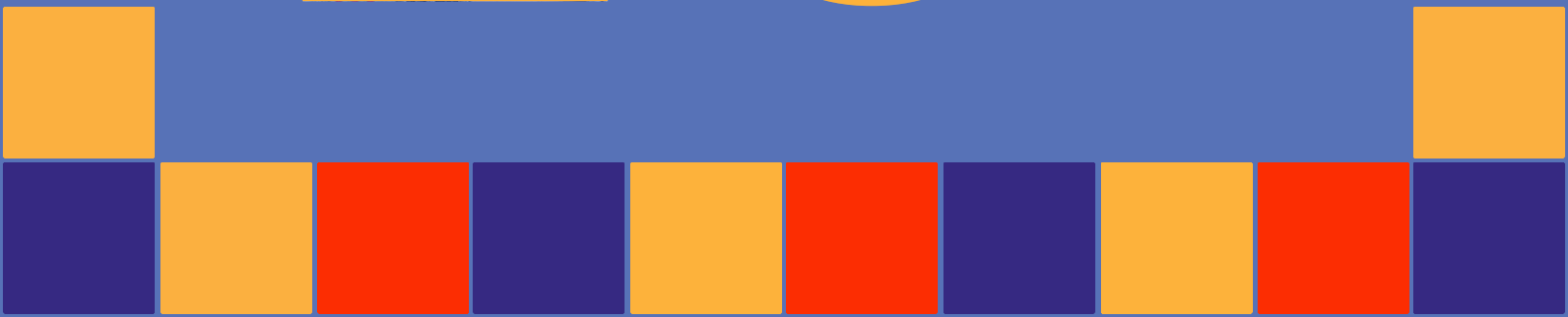
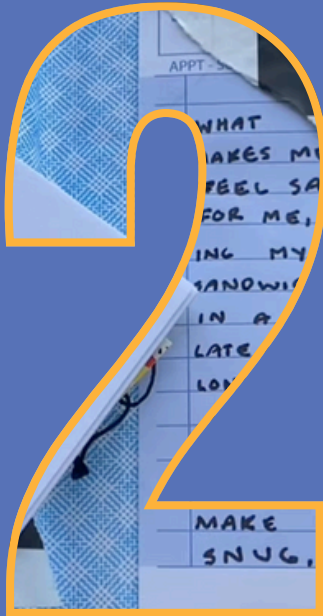


# ANNUAL REPORT

*project*   
*unloaded*



# A Message from Our Founder

## *A potent, effective approach to gun violence prevention*

In a recent conversation with a journalist, he had this to say: *“When I ask people in the field what they see for the future of the gun violence prevention movement, the answer I hear over and over again is Project Unloaded.”*

We see it too. The word is getting out, and here’s why: Not yet four years old, Project Unloaded is already reaching more than **10 million** teens and young adults annually with a peer-driven, fact-based message on why they’re safer without a gun. Through our creative, peer-to-peer social media campaigns and community partnerships, we’re empowering the next generation to choose on their own terms not to own or use guns. When they make that choice, the demand for guns erodes. With fewer guns in our homes and communities, there will be less gun violence.

It’s a data-backed approach: When we reach young people with this message, **at least 15% of our audience moves away from interest in having a gun**, according to our research. That means we’re already moving hundreds of thousands of young people away from interest in having a gun every year. *And we’re just getting started.*



# A Message from Our Founder

This year, we leveraged new tactics and doubled down on what's already working to reach young people with our life-saving message.

- Building on young people's love of video games, we created *Leave Guns in the Game*, a campaign for gamers with the message that outside of gaming, guns add risk.
- We added to young people's existing conversation around mental health with another new campaign, *Working On It*, which aims to normalize the idea that everyone is working on something – and while we're working on our mental health, we're safer without a gun.
- We continued our signature summer program, bringing teens who have experienced gun violence together with advertising industry mentors to create original social media campaigns – building their confidence in talking about the risks of owning and using guns while learning the tools to create engaging, thought-provoking content.
- Adding to our effective offline work, we developed a first-of-its-kind toolkit for young people interested in spreading the message that guns make us less safe in their own youth groups, school clubs or school-wide activations.
- We produced an innovative new research report on how policy makers and advocates can advance firearm risk education.
- We grew the movement of young people challenging the myth that guns make us safer through partnerships with 100+ Gen Z content creators and our expanded Youth Council, Creator Corps, and Alumni Network.

When fewer people choose to own and use guns, fewer people will die from gun violence. That isn't a pipedream. It's a data-driven strategy that we're proving feasible every day. With continued support, we can meet this problem at scale and break the cycle of gun violence. **Because gun violence starts with a gun.**



With gratitude,

**Nina Vinik**

Founder and President

# 2025 at a glance



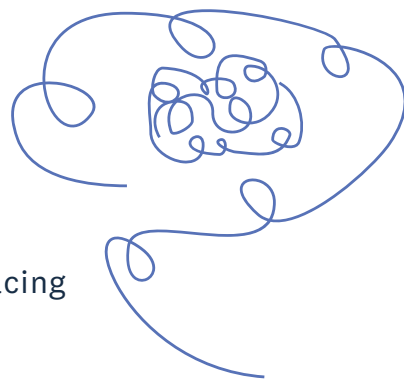
## 10 MILLION+ REACHED

Across all platforms, our campaigns connected with **over 10 million teens and young adults** this year.



## NEW VERTICALS CREATED

We unveiled **first-of-their-kind firearm risk education campaigns** that connect with young people through their conversations around mental health and their love of gaming.



## NATIONAL TOOLKIT LAUNCHED

We launched **an activity guide for young people** and youth-facing programs interested in sharing why guns make us less safe.

## ORIGINAL RESEARCH PUBLISHED

Our **new research report** outlines a policy agenda to advance firearm risk education.



## COMMUNITY PROGRAMS EXPANDED

Our “Social Media for Safer Communities” programs engaged **nearly 500 teens** in afterschool, popup and summer sessions.

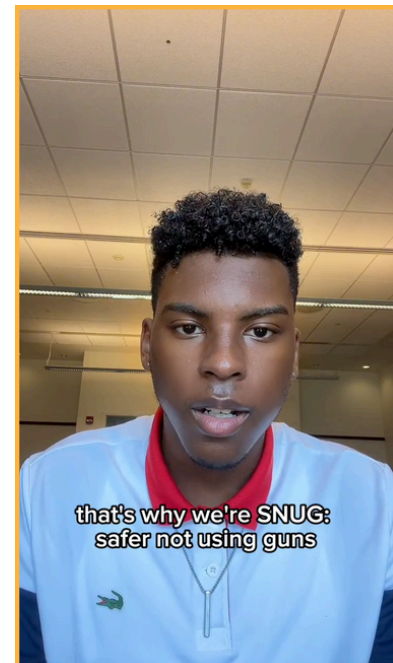
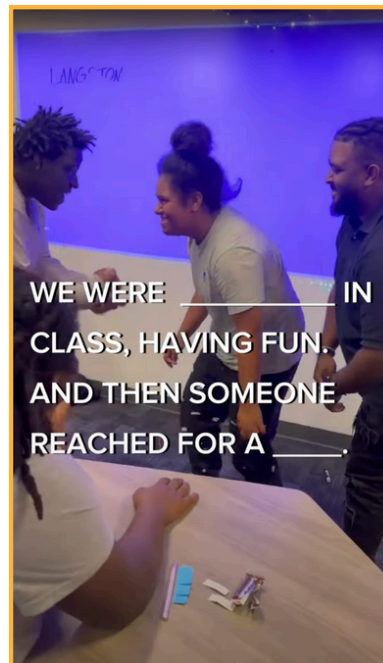


# Culture Change Campaigns

## *Reaching Young People at Scale*

Project Unloaded’s social media campaigns follow a simple, effective playbook: In 20 seconds or less, we reach teens and young adults with engaging content made by their peers and including a fact on why Gen Z is safer unarmed. It’s a data-backed strategy: Every time we’ve tested the impact of our campaigns and messages, we’ve seen young people move away from interest in having a gun by at least 15%.

Thanks to the sheer volume of content available online, young people are quick to swipe away from anything that doesn’t resonate with their experiences or interests. This means that to continue to engage young people, our campaigns must remain relevant to their interests and activities online. With that goal in mind, this year we expanded our portfolio from two campaigns to four, ensuring we reach diverse segments of Gen Z by tapping into their unique online communities and passion points.



# Culture Change Campaigns

## LEAVE GUNS IN THE GAME

When it comes to gun ownership and use, we know that young men are a critical demographic to reach, and we know many of them are playing video games on YouTube and Twitch. We launched [Leave Guns in the Game](#) not to blame video games for violence (there's no evidence for that), but to draw a clear distinction: Guns may be power-ups in a game, but in real life, they add risk.

“*Our research shows that gaming is a key way young people learn about guns...Our goal is to take that myth [that guns make us safe] head on.*

– Project Unloaded Youth Council Alumni Lead Shiven Patel in [The Trace](#)

- **Impact:** Our initial ad set earned a massive **17% average video completion rate** – triple industry benchmarks. In total, **more than 2.2 million** young gamers across the U.S. will see the campaign this year.
- **Platform growth:** Gamers on our team livestreamed with Twitch streamers, playing first-person shooter games like Valorant and Fortnite while discussing why – in the real world – guns add risk, not safety.
- **Validators:** *Leave Guns in the Game* launched in partnership with over a dozen gaming creators with a combined following of 6.3 million. These partners created [YouTube Shorts of fictional conversations](#) between their favorite characters, leveraging storytelling set inside the world of gaming to highlight the risks of using guns. Others [spoke to their audience directly](#) and created [thought-provoking content](#) about the differences between guns in gaming and guns in real life.



*With streamers and partners, Project Unloaded's Managing Director Taylor Maxwell spoke about our gaming work at Games for Change Festival in NYC.*

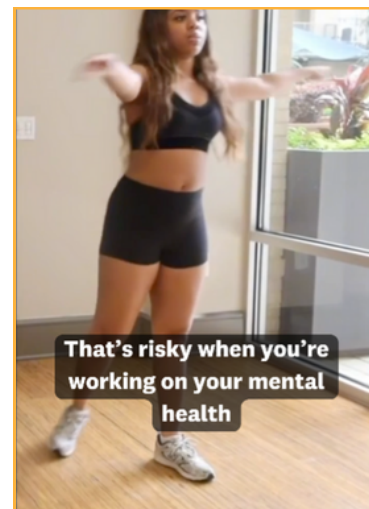
# Culture Change Campaigns

## WORKING ON IT

### *Building on Gen Z's conversations around mental health*

In May, during Mental Health Awareness Month, we launched *Working On It*, a campaign that spreads a simple message: Everyone is working on something – while we're working on our mental health, we're safer without a gun around. The campaign grew out of [our 2024 research](#) into the intersection between Gen Z's mental health concerns and their views and experiences with guns and gun violence.

- **Scale:** So far, *Working On It* has **reached 1.7 million young people** in urban, suburban and rural communities in Dallas, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia and Central Oregon.
- **Engagement:** Our young audience watched campaign videos to completion **more than 170,000** times.
- **Amplification:** Project Unloaded partnered with dozens of Gen Z influencers to connect with our audience about gun risks and mental health through their favorite internet niches and creators they already love. Creators leveraged [comedy](#), [sports](#) and even [ice baths](#) to talk about why guns make our mental health journeys less safe.

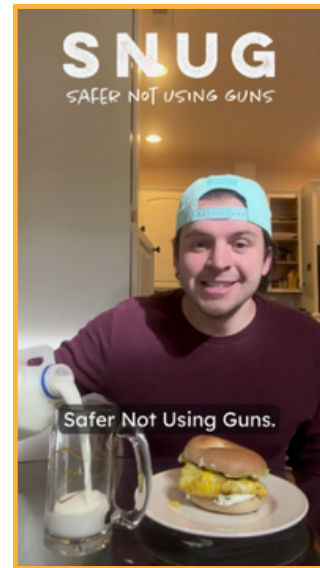


# Culture Change Campaigns

## SNUG (Safer Not Using Guns)

Our longest-running campaign continues to be a powerhouse. *SNUG* reaches a wide swath of teens who are undecided about gun ownership in cities including Charlotte, Columbus, Denver, Detroit, Fresno, Houston, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Santa Barbara, St. Louis, Phoenix, Pittsburgh and Seattle.

- **Impact:** *SNUG* reached **2.7+ million young people** via ads on Snapchat, Instagram and original content from Gen Z content creators on TikTok and Instagram.
- **Action:** Driven by new ad formats and videos from trusted creators, young people clicked to learn more on [YouSNUG.com](https://www.yousnug.com) **more than 150,000 times**.



“*Gen Z has the power to leverage our social media know-how to change gun culture for good.*

– Olivia Brown, Project Unloaded Associate Director of Youth Engagement in [AdAge](https://www.adage.com)

## Guns Change the Story

This campaign grew out of our 2023 research focused on the experiences and views of Black and Latino teens living in areas with elevated rates of gun violence. It continues to grow and improve as teens in our Community Partner Programs contribute their own ideas and content. Some of the top-performing campaign content this year came directly from them.

- **Impact:** **More than 1.7 million young people** saw the campaign in neighborhoods impacted by gun violence in Atlanta, Chicago, and Sacramento.
- **Platform growth:** *Guns Change the Story* became our first campaign to run on YouTube and it received a positive response on the platform.





# Community Partnerships

## Deepening Our Impact Offline

While our campaigns reach millions online, our community programs deepen our impact offline. In 2025, we reached **nearly 500 young people** through community and pop-up events. We also enhanced our curriculum and expanded opportunities for young people and youth groups to engage with our work.



## Flagship Summer Program

Our inspiring "Social Media for Safer Communities" program returned for a third year in Chicago. Working in collaboration with After School Matters, Al Raby School for Community and Environment, Breakthrough Urban Ministries, and the Ark of St. Sabina, 56 teens from Chicago's South and West sides spent six weeks developing their own social media campaigns spreading the message to their peers that guns make us less safe. Ninety percent of our teen participants had first-hand experience with gun violence

Our partners at Havas Chicago, a global advertising agency, joined us again as mentors to support teens in bringing their ideas to life. The work culminated in a pitch competition on August 1st in Havas's downtown office space where teens presented their campaigns to their peers and a panel of judges.

**Impact:** We surveyed participants at the start and end of the program. In initial surveys, 35% of participants said they "definitely will" own a gun in the future. By the end of our 6 weeks together, **teens moved away from interest in gun ownership by nearly 20 points.**



# Community Partnerships

## School-Year Programming

Our school-year programming continues to expand. With semester-long and workshop-style afterschool programs, teens learn how to use social media to make positive social change as they learn the facts on why they're safer unarmed. With new training and knowledge, teens create content that we then add to Project Unloaded's campaigns, expanding the reach exponentially.

This year, partners for school-year programming included: After School Matters, Big Brothers Big Sisters Chicago, Breakthrough Urban Ministries, Chicago Public Libraries, Pass the Mic, Roseland Ceasefire, Sacramento Youth Center, Strides for Peace and the University of Virginia Gun Violence Solutions Project.

“*[The program] made me more aware of the dangers and less likely to see guns as a solution for safety.*

– Teen participant in our Spring 2025 afterschool program

## The Project Unloaded Toolkit

In September, we expanded our reach with the new [Project Unloaded Toolkit: A Guide for Young People Building Safer Communities](#) in partnership with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). This resource allows partners anywhere in the country to facilitate conversations and activities centered around the message that guns make us less safe, without the need for direct support from the team at Project Unloaded.



# Youth Leadership

Our young leaders are the heart and soul of everything we do at Project Unloaded. From our campaigns to our research, partnerships and social media content, our Youth Council is a core part of our team and our partners in every step we take as an organization. The 2025-2026 Youth Council was selected from our largest-ever applicant pool and is our most active and engaged cohort yet.

**Inspiring Retreat** In October, the Youth Council gathered for our annual retreat. The retreat is the council's time to meet and bond in person while planning future projects and dreaming up big ideas. This year's retreat was led by our co-chairs, two second-year Youth Council members. Our Alumni and Creator Corps leads also joined and facilitated sections of the day.



**Viral Moments** In the hours after the killing of Charlie Kirk, our Youth Council Co-Chair shared an idea for a simple graphic, shown right. The post earned 1.3 million views and more than 4,770 shares and helped to double our Instagram following overnight, proving that young people are hungry for a third way forward.

**Creator Corps** To harness the creativity of teens outside the Youth Council, we expanded our Creator Corps. This group engages in monthly social media challenges and is led by two former Youth Council members.

It's not left or right.

It's not us or them.

**It's the guns.**

project  
unloaded

# Thought Leadership & Research

**Research on Policy Opportunities to Advance Firearm Risk Education** We released research on Risk Education to Prevent Gun Violence: A Roadmap for Policy Makers and Advocates. By analyzing other public health successes, we provide a blueprint for policymakers and advocates on policy opportunities to educate young people and other prospective firearm buyers about the risks of gun ownership and use. Our report explores mandated school-based curriculum, consumer-facing policies, and publicly-funded large-scale public education campaigns, and the research supporting these ideas.

**Convening Leaders in Gun Violence Prevention and Culture Change** We hosted a first-of-its-kind convening of leaders and allies from the gun violence prevention movement, philanthropy, and entertainment – united by a shared goal: leveraging culture to reduce gun violence. We delivered a report to our partners following the conference outlining shared learnings and next steps.



**Evaluation Project with Yale School of Public Health** We've launched a 3-year project with researchers from the Yale School of Public Health to evaluate Project Unloaded's firearm risk education model. As part of this partnership, we will bring our *Guns Change the Story* campaign and community partner programming to Hartford, CT for a formal evaluation of its impact. Hartford Communities that Care is partnering with Project Unloaded on community programming and the creation of a study cohort.

# Looking Ahead

In 2025, we developed a new three-year strategic plan that will serve as our roadmap moving forward as we look beyond our startup phase to our next phase of sustained, scalable growth. Next year, we'll continue to educate, engage and empower the people who are poised to change the culture when it comes to gun violence: young people. Here's what's planned for 2026.

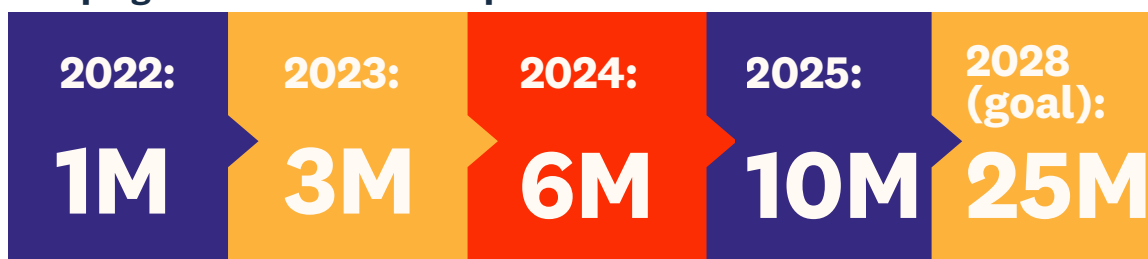
“Too often, it feels like teens are treated as the villains in the story of gun violence...But what if, instead, we treated young people as what we really are — the ones best equipped and most determined to build a safer future for all of us.

– Project Unloaded Youth Council Co-Chair Celia Fuentes in the [Chicago Tribune](#)

## >> Reach More Young People Online & Offline

Every year, we've increased the number of young people who see and engage with our campaigns spreading the message that guns make us less safe. By 2028, we aim to reach half of young people nationwide - roughly 25 million teens and young adults.

### Campaign Reach to Date & Expected



We will also work with more than 100 Gen Z content creators in the coming year to amplify our message through their own original content. Offline, we'll distribute our new toolkit to youth groups and youth-facing organizations nationwide, optimizing our activities and approach as we go.

# Looking Ahead

## >> Build on our Thought Leadership

Following release of our report on policies to advance firearm risk education, we're moving to the next phase of this initiative: outreach to partners and implementation of our policy recommendations. We'll also conduct new impact research to assess the effectiveness of social media campaigns to shift attitudes and behaviors around firearm use, using real-time data tools through the online platform Snapchat.

## >> Create New Content & Partnerships to Engage Teens

To reach teen boys in the online places where they're already talking with peers and spending their time, we will expand our *Leave Guns in the Game* campaign through partnerships and additional campaign creative.

With a goal of preventing youth firearm suicides, we will grow our mental health-focused *Working On It* campaign with new partnerships and resources.

Inspired by the winning campaign from our 2025 summer pitch competition, we'll develop new creative to engage teens at greatest risk of experiencing gun violence with the facts on why they're safer without a gun.



**Thank you for believing in the power of young people to rewrite the story of gun violence in America.** With creativity and purpose, we can change our country's deadly gun culture for this generation and generations to come.