

Durham County: Gun Safety Team

Adapting interventions through wide community partnerships

Focus Area: Firearm Injury Prevention

Durham County Burden: 41 deaths, 68% of homicides and suicides (2011)

Target Population: Children and Parents

Approach: Education, Environmental Change

Overview

The Durham Gun Safety Team works to reduce the number of gun injuries and deaths within Durham County. Started in 1999, the Gun Safety Team provides education and awareness about gun safety throughout Durham. The team originated through the Durham County Department of Public Health, and members represent various partners in the community. The team works to promote conversations about gun safety and offer personalized solutions to issues raised by gun owners. The team also provides gun locks for individuals who do not have a gun lock for their firearms. The gun locks are provided by Project Child Safe and SAFE Kids of Durham.

Selection and Development

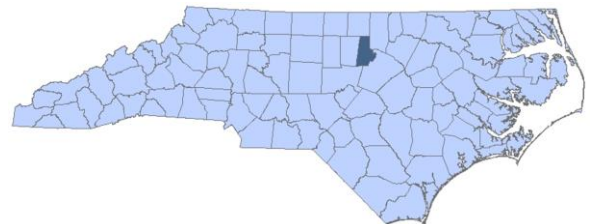
The Durham County Board of Health saw the need for gun safety programs in Durham and recruited Dr. Tamara Coyne-Beasley to lead a partnership with Joanie Ross, a Health Educator in the Department of Health. Dr. Coyne-Beasley, a pediatrician and adjunct faculty member at UNC, was selected due to her creation of the program *Love your kids, lock your guns*. This program is a fully evaluated gun safety program that was shown to increase the number of individuals who stored their guns safely (Coyne-Beasley, Schoenbach, & Johnson, 2001). The program consists of counseling on gun safety tailored to the needs of participants, gun safety information and a gun lock.

Members of the Durham County Gun Safety Team work together to coordinate the gun safety initiatives. Presenters assess the gun safety risks of their audience, and tailor the education content to suit the setting. The program is operated out of the Durham County Department of Public Health and is fueled by passionate volunteers in the community.



Population: 288,133

Median Household Income: \$50,997



Key Program Partners: Durham County Department of Public Health, N.C. Against Gun Violence, Project Safe Neighborhoods, Religious Coalition for Nonviolent Durham, Duke Trauma Center, Community Members

Funding Sources: No external funding

Implementation

The Gun Safety Team meets on the fourth Wednesday of every month. Team members represent a broad group of stakeholder organizations such as the Sheriff's office, Project Safe Neighborhoods, police officers, Duke Trauma Center, Safe Kids, N.C. Partners Against Gun Violence, Religious Coalition for a Nonviolent Durham, North Carolinians Against Gun Violence Education Fund, medical facilities and church groups. Team members have, for the most part, remained constant and the Gun Safety Team invites interested citizens and initiatives to join at any time. The Gun Safety Team also actively seeks viewpoints missing at the meeting. Members of the team are available for any training or event requested in the community. This is important, as the program's gun safety education is volunteer-driven by the members of the team.

The tailored program is presented in a variety of settings including school health events, events sponsored by faith communities, neighborhood events and worksite events. The team has even been invited to the nationally known Dixie Deer Classic, an annual expo for hunting enthusiasts. The education portion of their program will help assess gun safety threats for particular populations and seek solutions to these problems. A major message of the team is "Just Ask," to encourage parents to be aware of the presence of guns in homes where their children visit and play.

Keys to Success

Durham County's experience highlights several important lessons for other communities:

- **Find common ground.** The key to the partnership has been to agree on an underlying goal of protecting children from firearm injury. For Durham, this includes teaching those who have guns to practice responsible gun ownership when children are in the home. This should not be a political issue, and it is important not to get caught up in terminology and, instead, focus on the issue of saving children's lives.
- **Identify community champions.** Passion brought by team members has been a key factor in the longevity of the Gun Safety Team. Both Dr. Coyne-Beasley and Ms. Ross are passionate about the program, and the importance of Ms. Ross's championing within the health department is crucial to keeping the program running. The members of the team volunteer to keep the program running, fueled by their dedication to protecting youth from accidental firearm injuries. Dr. Coyne-Beasley noted that Health Departments have to, "be content in the small changes while still striving for the large changes. They have to be in it for the long haul."

The gun locks are available to any county public health department from Project Safe Child.

Resources: Coyne-Beasley, T., Schoenbach, V. J., & Johnson, R. M. (2001). Love our kids, lock your guns: a community-based firearm safety counseling and gun lock distribution program. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, 155(6), 659-664.

Special thanks to Dr. Tamara Coyne-Beasley and Joanie Ross at the Durham County Health Department.