

# Heartland Coalition AGAINST GUN VIOLENCE

## 8TH ANNUAL COMMUNITY FORUM

### Gun Violence: Strategies to Curb

Monday, October 11, 2021

#### AGENDA

- 9:00-9:15** **Opening**  
**Judy Sherry, President, Grandparents Against Gun Violence**
- Welcome**  
Clai Lasher-Sommers,  
Board Member, GunSense Vermont & GunSense New Hampshire
- 9:15-9:45** **Keynote Speaker**  
Megan Ranney, MD, MPH
- 9:45-10:00** **Q & A with Dr. Ranney**  
Moderator Robyn Thomas, Executive Director, Giffords Law Center
- 10:00-11:00** **Panel of Local Leaders:  
Strategies to Address Root Causes of Gun Violence**  
**Homelessness** Chris Stout, Hope Faith  
**Unemployment** Father Justin Mathews, Reconciliation Services  
**Early childhood education** Deidre Anderson, United Inner City Services  
**Living Environments** Chris Harris, Harris Park
- 11:00-11:20** **Panel Q & A**
- 11:20-11:30** **Break**
- 11:30- 12:30** **Breakout Sessions**  
*Each will be repeated so attendees can attend all three*
- 11:30- 11:50** **Using the Arts to Prevent Gun Violence**  
Mike Meyer, Band of Angels, & Cathy De Forest, Founder, Vision Quilt
- 11:50- 12:10** **Keeping Children Safe from Gun Violence**  
Denise Dowd, MD, MPH & Shayla Sullivant, MD
- 12:10- 12:30** **Socially Responsible Surgery for Gun Violence Victims**  
Rob Winfield, MD, FACS & Tanya Zakrison, MD, MPH, FACS

The Heartland Coalition was organized in 2014 by Grandparents Against Gun Violence and is based on the belief that like-minded local groups would be more successful if they worked together to further the cause of reducing gun violence, and to build a critical mass of supporters. Through its sponsoring organizations, the Coalition represents more than 10,000 individuals.

A primary function of the Heartland Coalition is to sponsor community forums to educate the public about the issue of gun violence and promote action steps to reduce it.

#### SPEAKER BIOS

##### WELCOMER

**Clai Lasher-Sommers Board Member:  
GunSense Vermont &  
GunSense New Hampshire**

Clai Lasher-Sommers has been a leader in the gun violence prevention movement for more than 30 years. Her own experience as a gun violence survivor, after being shot by her stepfather at age 13, has shaped her lifelong advocacy at the local, state and national levels. Clai has spent years advocating for the prevention of gun violence and its frequent partner, domestic violence.

Previously, Clai was executive director of States United to Prevent Gun Violence. She now acts as a consultant to groups that want to approach gun violence within rural communities. She is a board member of GunSense Vermont and GunSense New Hampshire where she works on educational programs for the public and advocates for common ground gun violence reform.

##### KEYNOTE SPEAKER

**Megan Ranney, M.D.**

A practicing emergency room physician in Rhode Island, Dr. Ranney is a nationally-recognized advocate for approaching gun violence as a public health epidemic.

She graduated summa cum laude from Harvard with a bachelor's degree in history of science and from Columbia University with her medical doctorate. At Brown University, she earned her master's degree in public health where now teaches as an associate professor of emergency medicine. Dr. Ranney also served in the Peace Corps as a volunteer in Cote d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) in west Africa.

During the pandemic Dr. Ranney was a CNN medical analyst and also appeared frequently on MSNBC, BBC, NBC, PBS and NPR, among other media.

##### FORUM MODERATOR

**Robyn Thomas, Giffords Law Center**

Returning as Forum moderator, Robyn Thomas has spent 15 years advocating for gun violence prevention. She's the executive director of the Giffords Law Center, founded by former Congresswoman and gun violence survivor Gabby Giffords.

Robyn's analysis of gun violence and gun legislation has appeared in The New York Times and Newsweek, and she's been interviewed on 60 Minutes, PBS News Hour and Fox News and CNN, among other media.

A graduate of Duke University, Robyn earned her law degree from the University of Miami School of Law and practiced in New York City before joining Giffords in 2006. Born in South Africa, she moved with her family to New Jersey as a child.

##### PANEL

###### Education:

**Deidre Anderson, United Inner City Services**

A longtime advocate for early childhood education, Deidre Anderson leads United Inner City Services (UICS) as its chief executive officer. Each year some 300 children receive educational services at its St. Mark Center at 12th & Brooklyn in KCMO. Two new UICS facilities recently opened: Metro Child Center at 39th & Troost and North Center in Pleasant Valley, MO.

Deidre believes early childhood education, including learning conflict resolution skills, lays the groundwork for future academic and personal success.

She received a bachelor's degree in elementary education from Simpson College in Indianola, IA, and a master's degree in public administration from UMKC where she serves on its public affairs advisory council.

###### Living Environments:

**Chris Harris of Harris Park**

Chris Harris grew up in the same Ivanhoe neighborhood on Kansas City's east side he has devoted 23 years revitalizing.

He bought the city block across from his childhood home and began its years-long transformation into Harris Park, 40th and Wayne. It's now a four-acre supervised community gathering spot for neighborhood families with a nine-hole pitch-and putt golf course, a children's playground, basketball and volleyball courts and horseshoe pitches. Statistics show crime in the area has dropped and home prices have risen.

At Milwaukee's Cardinal Stritch University, Chris majored in sociology, then returned home working as an assistant coach with the Kansas City Knights minor league basketball team before beginning his community park.

###### Unemployment:

**Father Justin Mathews of  
Reconciliation Services**

A Kansas City native, Fr. Justin serves as executive director of Reconciliation Services (RS) at 31st and Troost offering help to those struggling with mental health issues and unemployment, among other problems.

Last year RS devoted over 2,600 hours of therapy and case management services to its clients. RS also provided clients help in securing more than 1,000 IDs and documents such as Social Security cards, which are prerequisites for most employment.

Fr. Justin graduated cum laude in business from Belmont University in Nashville where earlier he had been a singer and songwriter. He then earned his master's degree in divinity from St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in Yonkers, NY, and was ordained in 2006.

###### Homelessness:

**Chris Stout of Hope Faith and Tiny Houses**

Returning to Kansas City after being injured in 2005 while deployed to Afghanistan, U.S. Army

veteran Chris Stout soon realized homelessness among veterans was a critical problem.

Six years ago, he and other veterans co-founded the nonprofit Veterans Community Project (VCP) that has built 49 tiny houses (240 to 320 square feet each) for homeless veterans at Veterans Village, 89th & Troost. In 2018 CNN recognized Chris as one of its ten "CNN Heroes." VCP is expanding to other cities with its first satellite campus of tiny houses in Longmont, Colorado, near Boulder.

Chris now serves as director of programs at Hope Faith Homeless Assistance Campus at 70th and Virginia, KCMO.

##### BREAKOUT SESSIONS

###### Using the Arts to Prevent Gun Violence

**Mike Meyer and Band of Angels**

Connecting children with music has been the foundation of Meyer Music since its 1966 start, selling and renting pianos plus band and orchestra instruments.

In 2010 Mike Meyer, one of six Meyers working in the business today, expanded that connection in co-founding Band of Angels with FOX 4 WDAF-TV. The nonprofit has refurbished some 2,500 used musical instruments, then made them available to students in financial need through out the metro so they become engaged in a creative, positive activity and participate in school bands and orchestras.

Band of Angels also provides scholarships for students attending summer music camps. Among its community partners: Bank of America, Hallmark and the Dixon Family Foundation.

**Cathy DeForest, PhD, of Vision Quilt**

Six years ago Cathy DeForest combined her teaching skills with her art talents when she founded Vision Quilt, a nonprofit to prevent gun violence based in Ashland, Oregon.

Its goal is to "create solutions to gun violence through the power of art and inclusive dialogue" by encouraging people across the country (including GAGV supporters) to create panels expressing their feelings about gun violence. The panels are then shared online as part of a virtual quilt at [www.visionquilt.org](http://www.visionquilt.org)

A former English teacher, school administrator and consultant, Cathy is a graduate of the University of Pittsburgh. She earned a master's degree in education from Boston College and later her doctorate in organization development from Pittsburgh.

###### Keeping Children Safe from Gun Violence

**Denise Dowd, M.D.**

Currently a professor of pediatrics at Children's Mercy Hospital, Dr. Dowd has spent 44 years in the health care profession, the past 33 years as a pediatric emergency physician. Her career has been built on integrating clinical care with teaching, advocacy and research with a particular focus on the safety and development of children by preventing childhood injury and violence.

In 2017 Dr. Dowd was the first recipient of Grandparents Against Gun Violence's Advocate of the Year and has continued her support of GAGV. She received her medical degree from St. Louis University's School of Medicine and her master's degree in public health from the University of Washington in Seattle.

**Shayla Sullivant, M.D.**

Child and adolescent psychiatrist Dr. Shayla Sullivant began her psychiatric work as a research assistant at the New York State Psychiatric Institute in New York City. Since 2010 she's been on staff at Children's Mercy Hospital where she's an associate professor.

Her current work focuses on how to reduce suicide risks for children. She has lectured widely on "Means Matter," stressing the importance of safely storing firearms.

In 2018 Dr. Sullivant was recognized as Advocate of the Year by Grandparents Against Gun Violence and continues supporting GAGV's Lock It For Love program that distributes free gun locks.

A graduate of Creighton University, she earned her medical degree from the University of Kansas.

###### Socially Responsible Surgery for Gun Violence Victims

**Rob Winfield, M.D.**

Among his varied medical and research positions, trauma surgeon Dr. Winfield directs trauma research at the University of Kansas Medical Center where he also serves as division chief of its Trauma/Critical Care and Acute Surgery Division. He was a panelist at the 2019 Community Forum and spoke movingly about the frustration of repeatedly treating the same victims of gun violence without understanding and solving its underlying causes. Toward that end, he has convened multidisciplinary teams of professionals to focus on the relationship between structural inequality and interpersonal violence. A graduate of the University of Illinois, Dr. Winfield received his medical degree from Southern Illinois University's School of Medicine in Springfield.

**Tanya Zakrison, M.D.**

As a trauma surgeon working in Chicago, Dr. Zakrison has regularly treated victims of gun violence. She is also part of a growing movement among medical professionals looking beyond the operating room to understand the structural and societal causes that frequently lead to firearm-related injury and death.

She received her medical degree from the University of Toronto where she completed her general surgery residency and a fellowship in adult critical care medicine. She also earned a master's degree in public health from Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and is currently an associate professor of surgery at the University of Chicago where she is director of critical trauma research.