

# PARTNER SPOTLIGHT



AN INTERVIEW WITH  
**DR. PAMELA SMITH**  
CO-FOUNDER

**GAINING UNITY THROUGH  
NON-VIOLENT SOLUTIONS**

**HOW ARE YOU CONNECTED TO THE ISSUE OF YOUTH  
VIOLENCE PREVENTION?**

I was working as the executive director of an afterschool program in Muskegon Heights, MI when the new police chief, the late Joseph Thomas, and I began talking about what could we do about the violence in the area. We were both members of the Social Justice Commission where we presented a proposal for ending gun violence. We came up with the idea to create a new normal in our community, and from this idea, G.U.N.S. was created.



**WHAT IS THE MISSION OR PURPOSE OF G.U.N.S.?**

Our mission is to reduce gun violence in the Greater Muskegon Area, specifically in the city of Muskegon Heights. Our vision is to bring together police, community leaders, educators, parents, and youth, to solve the problem of gun violence in our city. We want to change the narrative so youth and community members understand that police are here on our behalf and that it's possible to work together on a common goal of reducing gun violence.

**WHAT IS YOUR ROLE IN G.U.N.S.?**

My primary role is co-founder of the program (with Janet Robinson), I identify and secure community partners. I helped to establish the concept of G.U.N.S., formalized the program, and developed its mission, vision, goals, and objectives.

**HOW DOES G.U.N.S. SUPPORT YOUTH TO THRIVE?**

We're proactive about identifying when and where youth need support and carrying out those initiatives. We bring youth into our projects and encourage them to take ownership and create environments where they are comfortable sharing their thoughts about gun violence in their communities. We also reach out and listen to youth and let them tell us what needs to be done (from their perspective) to reduce violence in their communities.

**HOW CAN YOUTH BE PART OF THE SOLUTION TO GUN VIOLENCE?**

Youth tell us that they are tired of growing up in a community with gun violence. So they're drawn to talking about what is going on. They want to be an active part of the community violence prevention work and can give voice to solutions. Youth can help keep their communities informed about risks and strategies to protect youth, families, and the community against continued violence.

**IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE IN HONOR OF NATIONAL YOUTH  
VIOLENCE PREVENTION WEEK?**

We need to honor youth and recognize that they are the epicenter of what is going on with all forms of violence. As violence has grown (locally and across the country), youth are watching to see how the adults they look up to are responding. We must turn things around because if we don't, the behavior of apathy towards violence will continue.

**WHERE CAN WE FIND YOU ONLINE?**

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1316871025173693/>

To Learn More, Visit  
<https://yvpc.sph.umich.edu/>

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