

L.I.P.S.T.I.C.K – Ladies Involved in Putting a Stop to Inner City Killing - may not be familiar to many living away from an urban center - but it should be. LIPSTICK is a community-based organization of women helping women keep guns out of the wrong hands to make their neighborhoods safer. LIPSTICK grew out of research that shows women play an outsized role in the marketplace for illegal guns. LIPSTICK is the first grassroots organization in the country to address this problem. It is supported by more than 50 leading Boston community organizations and the US Department of Justice, MA Department of Public Safety, Harvard School of Public Health, Suffolk County District Attorney, MassHousing, and more.

At 7:00 p.m. on Thursday, September 20 in the Sudbury Police Building, the Sudbury--Wayland--Lincoln Domestic Violence Roundtable will join with the League of Women Voters to present a forum on the work of LIPSTICK and its relevance to all of us.

What follows is a condensed version of a conversation between President of the Sudbury--Wayland - Lincoln Domestic Violence Roundtable, Sue Rushfirth and LIPSTICK Executive Director, Nancy Robinson.

SR: Please tell me a little about yourself.

NR: I was a writer, the mother of a young son and living in Newton when I became concerned about gun violence. I was shocked to learn that gun violence is the #1 killer of African American boys as young as age 12.

I remember talking with groups of progressive, well-meaning people in the suburbs and Back Bay about gun violence prevention, but shootings that were happening just a few miles away in Boston's neighborhoods were not even on their radar. I believed we had to broaden the conversation and include a sharper focus on solutions to urban gun violence.

SR: Describe the road to LIPSTICK.

NR: I was hired as Citizens for Safety's Executive Director in 2008. CFS had made a name for itself by pioneering gun buybacks and contributing to a 70% reduction in gun violence in the mid -1990s. When I became Executive Director we wanted to build on the work CFS had begun, by continuing to get crime guns off the street while doing more to prevent them from flowing into the community in the first place. We saw that we needed to go upstream to find the source of these guns. Where did the gun come from? This became our rallying cry. We sought to make 'Where did the gun come from?' a ubiquitous and routine response to every shooting.

SR: What did you discover?

NR: One of the answers to the question, 'Where do crime guns come from?' is, surprisingly, women. According to research published in the Journal of Urban Health by University of California Professor Garen Wintemute, women are disproportionately involved in straw purchasing guns for people who cannot buy guns legally. Women are often pressured, coerced, bribed, or sweet-talked into buying and hiding guns for boyfriends, husbands and other men who are legally prohibited from owning guns.

SR: LIPSTICK was formed in 2012 and has already made an important difference. Please describe the work

NR: LIPSTICK is women helping women say No! when asked to straw purchase, hide or carry guns for men who cannot pass criminal background checks. We utilize various tools and strategies to give women and girls the education, peer support, and confidence to refuse to be used to take a life. Our methods include workshops and outreach to women through domestic violence and homeless

shelters, beauty shops, churches and schools, community centers, and more.

There is a little-known connection between female gun traffickers and victims of domestic violence. Women in abusive relationships are easy prey for gun traffickers. Pressure to straw purchase guns is just another form of power and control. A Philadelphia woman testified that she tried to jump out of the car on the way to the gun store, but the man pulled her back in and forced her to straw buy guns. She later learned that one of the guns ended up in the hands of a 13- year -old boy.

We are currently working on the first guidelines for service providers to identify, support and counsel women who are at risk of being recruited to straw purchase firearms.

SR: How is LIPSTICK funded?

NR: We have actually been accomplishing a lot on a shoestring budget. We cobble funds together from a range of sources: foundation grants, corporate sponsors, and individuals who care about creating safe communities where children can grow up without the fear of gunfire.

SR: How do you measure your success?

NR: The Suffolk County District Attorney credits LIPSTICK with a 33% drop in gun crimes by women. We have also created the first billboard in the country to warn women and girls of the perils of firearms trafficking, and have spread the word to tens of thousands of women through coverage in the New York Times, CNN, NPR, Gawker, Cosmopolitan Magazine and other national media. We are building an awareness of straw purchasing as a serious crime that did not exist before and warning women not to throw their lives away out of a misplaced loyalty to a man.

SR: Some of us will regard ourselves as being unaffected by gun violence. These are not our sons and daughters. Why is this topic important to all of us no matter where we live?

NR: Three reasons immediately come to mind. Firstly and most importantly – these are our sons and daughters! Do mothers separated by a zip code care any less for their children? Every mother deserves to be able to send her children off to school without worrying whether they will be shot and killed --like Raekwon Brown who was standing on the sidewalk during a fire when he was gunned down. As a student of American history, I regard gun violence, and the way it disproportionately affects communities of color, as one of the most egregious civil rights abuses of our time. Secondly, coercive relationships exist everywhere, in every community. Anyone living in an abusive situation is at risk of being pressured into buying or holding guns illegally. It can - and does - happen in the suburbs. Finally, -these guns are out there and they threaten all of us. Trafficked guns move in and out of communities, across state lines, and into the wrong hands every day. We know what we need to do to shut down the delivery systems, and it does not necessarily involve new gun laws. It involves caring enough to talk with your sisters and daughters, and supporting the women who are leading the LIPSTICK movement.

SR: How can we support LIPSTICK?

NR: Talk to your sisters, daughters and girlfriends about where crime guns come from. Make a donation at [www.operationlipstick.org](http://www.operationlipstick.org). Go on our web site and take the LIPSTICK Pledge not to buy, hide, or hold guns for someone else. Your actions will demonstrate that urban and suburban parents can unite to keep guns out of the wrong hands.

SR: Thank you Nancy. We look forward to seeing you on September 20, 2016.