

We must do better: Look at the facts

Written by Marian Wright Edelman
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Nearly 2,000 people attended Molly Conley's funeral last month to mourn the young humanitarian who was the victim of a random drive-by shooting the day after her 15th birthday. She was shot in the neck while walking with friends to a sleepover in a residential neighborhood in Lake Stevens, Washington. Molly was a 4.0 student best known for her kindness which she used to encourage her parents to care for infants waiting for foster families and to start a group called "Mother's Helper" that raised money to aid victims of domestic abuse.

Caldwell County, Missouri sheriff's deputies went to the home of the Curtis family after receiving an emergency call on January 11, 2012. Their 12-year-old son Steven had mishandled a gun and accidentally shot himself in the head. Steven loved playing football and being outside. He also spent a great deal of time hunting and grew up learning about gun safety and had a hunter's safety certification from the Conservation Department. In Breckenridge, Missouri—a town of just 450 people—hunting safety is an important part of the middle school's agricultural curriculum. Steven's father didn't know how his son got the gun from a locked cabinet that was in their living room.

Eleven-year-old Tayloni Mazyck was walking near her apartment building in Brooklyn on May 31, 2013 with her mother and niece when she was caught in gang-related crossfire. A bullet crashed into innocent Tayloni's chin and lodged in her spine. According to Brooklyn prosecutor Jordan Rossman, she will be paralyzed for life. Instead of walking in her fifth-grade graduation ceremony, Tayloni was transferred to Rusk Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine for the summer. Her mother says some days Tayloni is in intense pain and easily frustrated because she can't do simple things such as scratch her nose; other days she is convinced she will walk some day in the future. Tayloni suffers from post traumatic stress, says she is too scared to go home, and wakes up crying from flashbacks of that terrible night.

These are three of the child and youth stories shared in the Children's Defense Fund (CDF)'s new report *Protect Children, Not Guns 2013*—three of the 18,270 children and teens killed or injured by guns in America each year. Like Molly, Steven, and Tayloni, every one of these children deserved to live their whole lives. We can and must do better. CDF's new report

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documents the truth about guns and the facts about the preventable gun violence epidemic in our nation including the economic cost of gun violence; a state-by-state breakdown on gun deaths among children and teens; comparisons on gun violence rates between the United States and other high income countries; positive and negative state actions on gun violence prevention, and more. It also documents the progress made since the Newtown massacre and lists steps for continuing action with urgency and persistence.

What can you do? Urge your members of Congress to protect children from gun violence by supporting this year common sense gun violence prevention measures including universal background checks and limits on assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazines. We also need policies that support consumer product safety standards for all guns, public funding for gun violence prevention research, and resources and authority for law enforcement agencies to properly enforce gun safety laws. Parents, consider removing guns from your home and be vigilant about where your children play. Boycott products and places that glamorize and normalize dangerous weapons and violence.

Have we been fighting the wrong wars to keep our children safe? Nearly five times more children and teens were killed by guns in 2010 than U.S. soldiers killed in action that year in Iraq and Afghanistan. America's military and law enforcement agencies have four million guns. Our citizens have 310 million. And we have no idea how many of those guns were purchased without a background check. The gun lobby has been enriching gun manufacturers at the expense of our children's safety for far too long. For years the National Rifle Association has blocked the truth and actively fought against the passage and enforcement of gun safety laws. Please use the resources in [Protect Children, Not Guns 2013](#) to find the latest research and actions you can take to protect children, not guns, in your home, in your community, and as a citizen to help create a better, safer America for all children. Together we can—and must—do better right now. So many child lives depend on it.

Marian Wright Edelman is President of the Children's Defense Fund whose Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. For more information go to www.childrensdefense.org.