

## CHRISTOPHER 2X

**“Education, starting in early childhood, is the key to ending gun violence and its devastating impact on kids learning.”**



Imagine you're a mom at home watching a video with your kids and their playmates on a Saturday afternoon when all a sudden your home is being riddled with bullets from a high-caliber weapon.

Bullets through the walls, furniture, shattering the oven door, while you scramble to get the little ones on the floor, covered with your body, and under a bed, to keep them safe.

No imagination is needed. This happened to my daughter Heaven, a child development specialist, who was with six children, ages 1-7, when her home was hit with gunfire from an AK-47 in the middle of the afternoon last Dec. 1. Two neighboring apartments in the new Shepherd Square complex just east of downtown also were hit.

While thankfully no one was physically hurt, the trauma from exposure to such a violent act can interrupt a child's normal development and ability to learn in school.

My daughter's experience and a spike in gun violence last summer - with teens shooting automatic weapons out of stolen cars, kids as young as 13 charged with murder - made me want to shine a light on the impact of gun violence on children and their learning.

As a peace and justice advocate for nearly 20 years, I know my daughter's experience is not unique. In all parts of our city, citizens report hearing gunfire to police every day and gunshots have been heard outside my daughter's apartment multiple times since the day her home was splattered with bullets.

In the first nine months of this year, 65 of the 73 murders in Louisville Metro were from gunfire, and family and friends – including many young children – struggle with the losses. In all, 276 people were shot from January-September, more than 30 people a month.

Children suffer if they get hit by bullet, witness a shooting, lose someone close or live on edge because the crack of gunshots is as common as the chirping of a songbird. They often can't focus or learn in school. Some can't sleep and have nightmares. Some withdraw, others act out or retaliate and resort to violence themselves.

In sharing their stories on the following pages – some redemptive, some tragic – we can all have a better understanding of what this sick culture of gun violence is doing to our children and their ability to learn. We can all do a better job recognizing children who are suffering and providing help they need to succeed in school and reach their potential.

There are many people – teachers, police officers, counselors, therapists, physicians, nurses, others – doing amazing work to help victims and their families. But much more is needed. Here is my call to action as a start:

**Parents/adults with children under your care:** Talk to your child's teacher or school counselor if your child has been exposed to violence so they can be supportive and helpful. Don't assume your child is ok. Seek services for your child through the school or others such as their doctor if your family needs help.

**Teachers:** Know the symptoms of trauma in a child, which vary based on age and the individual child but include acting out, aggressive verbal or physical behavior, or withdrawal and not doing their work. Use school resources to link the child to professional evaluation and help.

**Principals/administrators:** Support teacher training at your schools, and make sure children in need receive evaluations and follow up treatment if needed.

I am deeply grateful to survivors of gun violence and others for sharing their stories. May God bless the victims, survivors and the angels in their lives who support them.

Christopher 2X  
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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christopher 2X". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and a stylized "2X" at the end.