

Title: Youth-Led Town Hall Discusses the Impacts of School Gun Violence and Community Efforts Around Prevention

Written by Sofia Gilmore, Youth Leader, *Live Well San Diego* Youth Leadership Team

Originally, the *Live Well San Diego* Youth Leadership Team planned to hold two youth-led town halls focused on mental health issues. However, one Youth Leader named Sofia Gilmore had the idea to create a third focused on the topic of school gun violence prevention. Soon after, two other Youth Leaders, Caitlynn Hauw and Jellaiysha Austin joined as well. Their goal was to inspire youth and adults to take action within their communities to prevent gun violence.

The town hall was held on January 5th, 2023, from 6:00 pm-8:00 pm at the San Diego School of Creative and Performing Arts. It was sponsored by [Team Enough](#) and [San Diegans for Gun Violence Prevention](#), two outstanding organizations that work with youth to prevent gun violence in communities across the nation. The audience consisted of high school students, parents, and school board members.

The town-hall was entirely youth created and led. The three Youth Leaders strategically identified an incredible set of panelists, each bringing a valuable perspective into the conversation. The panel lasted about an hour, and consisted of: Alahna Woodburn, youth injured in Kelly Elementary school shooting; Dr. Sandra Weinstein Bever, mother and activist with San Diegans for Gun Violence Prevention; volunteers with [Moms Demand Action](#); Julie Jeakle, Program Manager at the San Diego Public Safety Group Executive Office; Sherry Colgan Stone, Emergency Preparedness and Security Manager for school districts in Southern California, and Youth Leader Sofia Gilmore.

The town hall opened with community guidelines and statistics on gun violence in San Diego County. Following that was Alahna's story of being shot in the Kelly Elementary school shooting in Carlsbad in 2010. She detailed to the audience the ways her PTSD manifests. She competed as a high school track athlete and had to constantly bear the gunfire signaling the start of the race. The panel was then asked questions such as why we work to prevent gun violence and how youth can be involved in implementing solutions. The panel was followed by a community needs assessment led by researcher Daniel Polk who gathered youth-focused input for the [County Gun Violence Reduction Project](#). During this discussion, audience members shared their perspectives and stories related to gun violence. They also identified key issues such as desensitization, misinformation, and lack of action.

Additionally, it provided a platform for community members to share actions they have already taken. For example, youth leader Sofia Gilmore worked with her school and other classmates to install locks on all doors at Canyon Hills High School in case of a school shooting. The town hall event also shared upcoming opportunities for youth attendees to get involved in the *Live Well San Diego* Youth Sector to further conversations that promote a safer San Diego. VIDEO: [Youth-led Town Hall Gun Violence Prevention and School Safety](#)

To learn more about the *Live Well San Diego* Youth Sector visit LiveWellSD.org/youth.

For any questions, please contact LiveWellYouth@sdcounty.ca.gov.