



Paige Odum, Youth Advocate



Greater Hartford Youth Leadership Academy, Hartford Communities That Care, Inc. December 7, 2022

## My Take on Gun Violence in the City of Hartford

Where do I start?

- Honestly, I never even realized gun violence was a major problem until I came into my teen years;
- I thought it was normal to go to sleep and hear those sounds, and in the next morning you wake up you get a phone call that you lost your uncle, father, brother, or even your friends in class because when you're a kid you don't really realize your surroundings.
- You think it's normal to hear and see certain things and that's why it's so much trauma built up inside of me till this day.
- I feel like once I got into my teen years, I saw that guns were impacting our age group in a negative way from boys posting guns, to them coming to parties with them, to them killing each other over nothing, and it's sad ...
- It's sad that people who I went to school within this very community since kindergarten are now dead, and I hate the fact that you can't even walk around this very community without feeling like you could be next and not even know it;
- And me being 16, I feel like I have been seeing and hearing violence my whole life from just looking out the window.
- In 2021, I lost my uncle, and I heard the gunshots on the phone because when it happened me and all of my cousins were on a Group FaceTime.
- This was his second time being shot – the first time it happened I felt that fear that anyone feels when you get that call but this time it was different because of the sounds .... the sounds of the bullets.
- It felt more real like as if I was right there with him and, honestly, I felt it deep down that he was gone.
- And when that happened that was my last straw;
- I felt like I needed to do something to help, to help my community and to inform them that this is not the way and not the life that we are meant to live;
- In the months following after I was recruited to join the Youth Leadership Academy at Hartford Communities That Care, it was hands down the best decision I made because due to everything I had been through, HCTC gave me a place to release my issues and to figure out how we can prevent this issue from happening to the next person and the next family;
- HCTC is doing it by providing information, giving back, and giving hope, but we can't do it alone. We need more safe spaces that teens can go to so that they can see what they can do to help their community, what they can do to inform their classmates that this is not the way – and that it should never be the choice to kill or be killed.
- You have options. You have the choice to choose your fate ... your future.
- We need the state of Connecticut to fully fund violence prevention and intervention programs to end gun violence in CT. Teens in our city can then realize, they can end this vicious cycle that we mistake for normal ... that we mistake for life. ... Thank you.