

# “Locks for Life”: A Gun Lock Distribution Community Health Intervention Program

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**T**hirty-four percent of children in the United States (about 22 million children) live in a home with a firearm, and *approximately 43% of these homes have unlocked firearms*.<sup>1</sup> According to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control,<sup>2</sup> in 2000, more than 800 unintentional deaths were related to firearms. The National Center for Injury Prevention and Control estimates that there are approximately 3 nonfatal firearm injuries for every death associated with a firearm.

At Southeastern Louisiana University School of Nursing, a group of students chose to develop an intervention to address these statistics as part of a community health nursing course. The faculty member is an ED nurse and EN CARE\* volunteer.

Safety devices, such as trigger locks, in coordination with education, are often suggested as effective short-term deterrents to unintentional firearm injuries. Finn and Allen<sup>3</sup> recount their experience initiating a program entitled “The Key to Firearm Safety,” which encouraged use of trigger locks. In partnership with Wal-Mart, these 2 ED nurses coordinated efforts that resulted in the purchase of 850 trigger locks. Coyne-Beasley et al<sup>4</sup> implemented a gun safety project in which provision of firearm safety information was coupled with distribution of free gunlocks. At 3-month follow-up, their participants reported an almost 50% increase in gun safety practices.

The Southeastern Louisiana University School of Nursing community health clinical group planned the interventional program “Locks for Life” to address gun safety storage patterns in Tangipahoa Parish, Louisiana. This rural parish in Louisiana reported 33.3 per 100,000 deaths from

\*Call ENA at (800)900-9659 to enquire about EN CARE.



FIGURE 1  
Melissa Wafer (second from left) with nursing students.

unintentional injuries for the year 1997.<sup>5</sup> The nursing students worked with 2 agencies to develop the program: Armadillo Firearm Safety Products and the Healthy Farm Families Initiative (HFFI). HFFI is a farm family safety program administered through the Southeastern Louisiana University Nursing School ([www.healthyfarmfamilies.org](http://www.healthyfarmfamilies.org)), funded by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health and sponsored through the Southwest Center for Agricultural Health, Injury Prevention and Education. HFFI sponsors community outreach programs to at-risk agriculturally based families. Students recruited Armadillo Firearm Security Products (<http://www.armadillogunlock.com/>) to provide trigger locks. Armadillo promotes gun safety initiatives on their Web site.

Tangipahoa parish is an area with approximately 1000 farms<sup>6</sup> where the annual Amite Oyster Festival is hosted. Approximately 25,000 to 30,000 people attend the festival, so it is a perfect opportunity to reach this population. The objectives for the "Locks for Life" project were to identify gun storage practices of the festival attendees, increase the

placement of trigger locks on their guns, and raise awareness of firearm safety through educational outreach.

The community health clinical group set up a large booth at the Amite Oyster Festival to house the project (Figures 1 and 2). The nursing students provided one-on-one instruction to festival-goers on the Armadillo trigger lock using real unloaded firearms. Literature promoting gun safety was provided to everyone visiting the booth. A survey was used to assess gun safety practices. One month later, an agreeable sample of those who received trigger locks was contacted to determine the impact of the intervention.

One hundred thirty-five individuals received 216 trigger locks at the Amite Oyster festival and completed a Gun Safety Risk Assessment. The majority of surveyed participants reported that their guns were not locked or stored in a locked area and reported children living in the home. Four participants reported having been involved in a firearm accident in the past. A statistically higher proportion of parents with children at home kept guns locked compared with those participants without children at

home. Many participants (43.8%) owned multiple firearms. One law enforcement officer reported owning 78 guns. When asked the reason for owning guns, most cited hunting (42.5%).

Implications of these findings are that children visiting in homes of friends, grandparents, or neighbors may be at higher risk of unintentional firearm injury. Additionally, firearms used for hunting are predominately rifles, which are known to have more damage potential.

*The majority of surveyed participants reported that their guns were not locked or stored in a locked area and reported children living in the home.*

To evaluate effectiveness, “Locks for Life” trigger lock recipients who granted permission were contacted for follow-up. Of the 19 recipients successfully contacted, 14 had placed trigger locks on their firearms (73.7%), and the other 5 admitted plans to place the locks on their guns (26.3%).

The “Locks for Life” program demonstrates that emergency nurses can make an impact through outreach into communities. There was great interest in the booth throughout the day. We encourage other emergency nurses angered by senseless, unintentional firearm injuries to take initiative through programs like ENA’s EN CARE.

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FIGURE 2  
Melissa Wafer (left) and a student sampling the festival fare.

**Contributions** for this column are welcomed and encouraged. Submissions should be sent to:

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