

# A DEADLY YEAR

The community is unsettled after the number of gun violence incidents in Kansas City peaked last year

IN 2023:

**182**

**HOMICIDES  
IN KANSAS CITY**  
\*according to kcpd

**KANSAS CITY  
RECORDED MORE DEATHS BY  
HOMICIDE  
THAN ANY OTHER YEAR  
ON RECORD**  
\*according to  
KC Star

**17** SCHOOL  
SHOOTINGS  
IN KANSAS  
\*according to wisevoter.com

**HOMICIDE RATES  
INCREASED  
7% FROM  
2022 TO  
2023**  
\*according to kcpd

**MAIN CAUSES OF  
2023 HOMICIDES:  
ARGUMENTS  
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE  
ROBBERY**  
\*according to  
kcpd

**167 OF THE  
HOMICIDES  
INVOLVED FIREARMS**  
\*according to  
KC Star

**NEARLY HALF OF  
HOMICIDE VICTIMS  
WERE MALES AGES**

**18 TO 34**  
\*according to KC Star

**KANSAS CITY HAS** just experienced its most deadly year on record, with a total of 182 homicides, almost all of which have involved guns, this high rate of gun violence may be affecting SME.

Within the last few weeks, there has been a rumored gun threat at East. The rumors started when a picture of a student

with a gun at East started to circulate. “Those rumors started spreading during fourth hour,” says Senior and co-president of East Against Gun Violence Emma Coleman, “and obviously it was during that horrible week of there was a lot of racism and the way the school dealt with it was getting a lot of backlash. So I was just generally very scared because I didn’t know what I could believe.”

The rumor was responded to by many students immediately leaving school, according to Coleman.

Coleman has been a co-president of East Against Gun Violence for several years, and has devoted that time to activism.

“It was national walkout day, so me and my other co-presidents, we wanted to make our school participate in the walkout.” said Coleman, “We encouraged everybody to wear orange, and we had around 200 people show up, which was awesome, and I think that speaks a lot about how people feel about this topic.”

Coleman has collaborated with other anti gun violence organizations as well.

“I was reached out to by Judy Sherry, who’s the president and founder of the Kansas city chapter of Grandparents for Gun

Safety. She invited me to speak at their big annual fundraiser,” said Coleman, “I was a panelist alongside some other activists.”

Coleman’s group is devoted to a single cause, “Protesting gun violence as a whole and asking the government to make any change at all.”

The government is doing something, according to Overland Park Police Departments Officer Newman. Newman explains that the areas experiencing the most gun related crimes seem to be mainly dealing with crimes of opportunity.

“Everybody’s short staffed everywhere,” says Newman.

She says that the KCMO area, which experienced an especially high homicide rate is a good example of this. According to Newman, guns are brought into an area by drugs and criminal activity, the people that are involved seem to know about the low number of officers.

Newman believes that solving gun violence is complicated, but that it can be affected by factors in the home. She says that adults should be, “more responsible and better about locking our guns.” Shootings can only occur if the shooter has access to a weapon. Stopping access may be a first step.

However, access has not been stopped yet. There have been many school shootings in recent years, typically by students.

“When I lived in Colorado there was something called the STEM shooting,” said Freshman Audrey Squires, “I actually was really, really close with the shooter. He went to my voice studio.”

Eighteen year old Devon Erickson was the shooter. He killed one person, and injured several other people.

“He used to be such a happy kid,” said Squires, “I could see

him slowly going down a rabbit hole and then when I got the news that it was the shooter, I literally didn’t talk for three days.”

To this day Squires is still affected by what happened.

“I had really bad nightmares for like three years consistently” said Squires, “I couldn’t sleep through the night.” People don’t seem to realize though.

“I had a teacher literally use the anniversary of the STEM school shooting,” said Squires, “which is already a hard day for me, and I had them use that as an example, and they were like, ‘but this will never happen to you.’”

A similar situation happened at Highlands Elementary school.

Freshman Maddie Torkelson was in fourth grade when the shooting occurred. She said that the school went on lockdown and they didn’t know why.

“All of a sudden a friend of mine started crying,” said Torkelson.

The crying student had gotten a text from her dad telling her that there had been a shooting. A kid who was staying across the street had fired several shots through his bedroom wall at the school.

The shooter was shot by a dare officer, and no one in Torkelson’s classroom was harmed. She says that the entire situation was very confusing.

“But we really knew what was actually going on,” said Torkelson.

With high homicide rates and a visible increase in gun violence in recent years, it is important to make a change.

“Don’t be afraid to speak up about issues that you are passionate about,” says Coleman, “Because that is the only way to make change. And nobody wants to sit idly by and watch more people die at the hands of gun violence.”