



**TAKING A STAND**  
 “I’m making a difference when someone who is misguided on what love is, who’s willing to go jail for someone else, makes a turnaround,” says LIPSTICK program director Rose (left, with Rollins, center, and Leathers).

People FINDING SOLUTIONS TO GUN VIOLENCE

# THEY REFUSE TO BE USED

Teaching women not to buy or hide guns for their partners, the leaders of Operation LIPSTICK aim to stop murders on their streets **By JEFF TRUESDELL**

After her 21-year-old son Danny was found shot to death in Roxbury, Mass., in 2007, Ruth Rollins struggled to accept his fate. Danny had been running with a violent street crowd, and Rollins says she felt judged by others, as if her son had it coming. “It is like our babies don’t matter,” she says, “but all babies matter. I wanted to be part of the solution.”

She found that chance in a grass-roots effort that was just then forming in Boston called Operation LIPSTICK (Ladies Involved in Putting a Stop to Inner-City Killing). The nonprofit advocacy group works to disrupt the flow of guns on the streets by teaching women they’re complicit if they buy, hide or hold guns for men—oftentimes their abusers—whose criminal pasts prevent them from legally obtaining or holding guns themselves.

According to a 2007 U.S. Justice Department report, handguns purchased by women are 50 percent more likely to be used in crimes than ones bought by males—and a 2010 Wisconsin study of guns used in crimes reported that a majority of those weapons had been bought by minority women. Rollins, 54, became LIPSTICK’s first field director, alerting women that they could lose their jobs, their homes and their kids if they are linked to a gun used in a crime.

Last year the Suffolk County, Mass., district attorney credited LIPSTICK with helping to reduce gun cases against women by 33 percent. Now the organization has more than 5,000 signed pledge cards from women

and chapters in New York and the San Francisco Bay Area; Judy Rose, 34, and Shante Leathers, 28, who succeeded Rollins as program director and field director of LIPSTICK, keep the mission going. “Deaths are happening every day,” says Leathers, who lost friends to gun violence and who joined to do all she can to protect her son Noah, 5. “This is a place to share our voices.”

That support has been essential for Rollins as she works to prevent other senseless deaths like her son’s—whose murder is still unsolved—and get guns off the streets. LIPSTICK “is a sisterhood,” she says. “When I started telling my story, I started healing. It has given me hope to help other mothers.” ●

**‘Giving women tools to combat gun violence is empowering’**  
 —JUDY ROSE, PROGRAM DIRECTOR

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