

## The First Shot Projects

A Sustainable Project Based Model

### The Mission of The First Shot Projects

**For students and educators to identify instances in society where people are suffering and or loosing their lives. Educators will guide students in conducting research about the issues that are causing harm and about the victims who are being harmed. The student vetted research will be organized and featured in student created magazines, websites, Instagram Posts (Social Media Posts), videos, short movies, etc. The student created works will then be presented to elected and appointed officials, and to the community to initiate legislative/executive change and if necessary, a rethinking of societal norms.**

Sustainable and successful student led projects are are built with the following critical components:

- Start with a novel idea, that may even be perceived as controversial (if the envelope is not pushed then nothing changes), that students would rally around and get excited about.
- The project must be driven by students but it must be facilitated by an educator who has committed himself/herself to the project's success.
- The Educator must also gradually release her/his facilitation responsibilities to other students.
- The project must address a current crisis in society that is victim centered and that leaders and elected officials can't seem able to address.
- Technology must be used extensively as a means of internal and external communications and a structured but a freeform work environment must be cultivated.
- An academic platform must be constructed to guide the students' research and to validate findings. The foundation of the platform must rest on proven academic practices.
- The idea of fact based research and validation of findings must be the cornerstone of the project.

- It must be ensured that the students are being informed by experts and professionals. Some professionals that have informed The First shot Project: Dr. Lawrence Feldman, former MDCPS School Board Member; Mrs Alexandra Pecharich, Editor of The FIU Magazine; Maria Wright, Gun Control activist and Mother of Jerry Wright (Pulse Victim), Daniel Mayorga, Teacher and Immigrant Rights Activist; Olga Caballo, Special Ed. Teacher and Mindfulness Expert; Ro Achon, former Apple Executive; and Andrew Boryga, The Sun Sentinel General Assignment Reporter.
- The project must be capable of utilizing the widest possible spectrum of student talents, personalities, and cognitive abilities (Writers, artists, singers, public speakers, political types, environmentalists, academic geniuses, academic low performers, etc.)
- Student project assignments should be fluid and allowed to gradually evolve into permanent responsibilities. Furthermore, some students should be allowed to just show up and perhaps do nothing; the idea is that they will benefit from simply being in the environment.
- The Project must have ongoing activities and an annual terminal activity that involves meeting with elected officials, other leaders, and the community at large. (The Firstshot students were hosted by former School Board Member, Dr. Lawrence Feldman. They visited the offices of Congressman Mario Diaz Balart, former Congresswoman Debbie Murcarcel Powell, and Donna Shalala.
- If these critical components are present: there will be an impact on student lives and on society; students will begin to build an authentic base of issue related knowledge; students will be permanently tied to civic engagement and will begin to comprehend its significance; people will begin to notice and more students will join the project.

Some of the validating coverage that the Project has received in the past three years:

CBS-4: <https://miami.cbslocal.com/2020/03/10/everglades-k8-gun-violence-student-magazine/>

WLRN Radio:

<https://www.wlrn.org/education/2020-01-29/miami-teens-hope-their-magazine-will-convince-congress-to-take-action-on-preventing-mass-shootings>

NPR Radio:

<https://www.npr.org/2020/02/14/804823530/miami-middle-school-students-hope-their-magazine-will-help-end-gun-violence>

FIU Magazine: <https://news.fiu.edu/2020/alumnus-gives-flight-to-young-teens-civic-activism>

The Project's Social Media Presence:

Instagram: @dwtbfirstshot

Twitter: dwtbfirstshot

Making sense out of nonsense.

Website: [www.dwtbfirstshot.org](http://www.dwtbfirstshot.org)

The First Shot Project was conceived in the wake of The Marjory Stoneman Douglas mass shooting to help middle school students, in a Speech and Debate class, process the horrors of that event. The goal was to simply memorialize victims of mass shootings in a student created magazine by having them conduct research, write letters to legislators, write editorials, write poetry, gather statistics, and then draft position statements. Here is a copy of the second edition of The Firstshot magazine: [www.dwtbfirstshot.org](http://www.dwtbfirstshot.org)

The First Shot Project quickly evolved from a Speech and Debate exercise to a project that involved students from my five math classes. Almost instantaneously students from the entire middle school wanted to be a part of the First Shot Project. Since that time the Project has active members from over 12 Miami Dade County Public Schools. The current focus of the Project is to memorialize the victims of The Pulse mass shooting on our Instagram Page (#dwtbfirstshot), our Twitter Page (dwtbfirstshot); and our website (dwtbfirstshot.org). Each academic discipline has a very important place in the completion of our annual projects.

The students have had zoom sessions with Amanda Grau, Pulse survivor who was shot four times while hiding in the bathroom; Maria Wright, mother of Pulse victim Jerry Wright; Scott Bowman, the Communications Director of The One Pulse Foundation; and Nikole Parker, Director of Stakeholder and Community Relations at The One Pulse Foundation. Contacts with these Pulse stakeholders have empowered the students to write, draw, and to advocate more vociferously for meaningful gun reform legislation, mental health funding, and improved school security.

The internal focus of The Project is to attract students from across the entire spectrum of cultures, races, classes, economic status, and cognitive abilities and to provide them with an opportunity that will be life changing and self affirming. Self affirming because the inherent structure of our Public Schools does not equitably provide affirmation to all students. The First Shot Project has become a safe space for those students who are traditionally pushed to the fringes of the classroom and school space to find and experience unmitigated success and affirmation. The ultimate goal is for all First Shot students to become permanently civic minded and for them to always affirm the validity of all human beings.

As the students balance life, school, extracurricular activities, and the First Shot Project, they begin to understand the importance of organization and perseverance. The Covid-19 crisis has tested the integrity of The Project and the students have responded in a resounding manner. They responded to the crisis by initially researching and publishing The First Shot Coronavirus magazine that was delivered to the national leaders of America's response to the Coronavirus (Dr. Anthony Fauci, Dr Birx, Dr. Hahn, etc).

[https://issuu.com/angelinacttm/docs/first\\_shot\\_pandemic\\_magazine](https://issuu.com/angelinacttm/docs/first_shot_pandemic_magazine)

#### Goals For 2020 - 2021 Pandemic School Year

- A First Shot presence in 12 Miami Dade County Public Schools
- A published First Shot Magazine (3rd Edition)
- 49 Pulse Victims drawn and researched and posted on Instagram, Twitter, and our website.
- The recruitment of 120 students from around the state of Florida to write letters to all 120 State legislators around the issues of: School Safety, Mental Health Services, and Gun Violence Prevention.
- The creation of a Rapid Response Team that informs our followers of unreported mass shootings and the recovery and progress of mass shooting survivors.
- A documentary about the past, present, and future of The First Shot Projects.

The motivation for this project was a need to address a very confusing and difficult situation that my teen students were confronted with, and that no adult, including myself, had a trustworthy answer to. Sometimes this is the best that a teacher can do: support the students as they endeavour to find answers to life's difficult questions by self directed research and inquiry.

Attached is the link for the Pulse Project Student Manual and Guide. This document is the centerpiece of The Pulse Project and it serves as a flexible instructive resource for students and teachers alike who are working on the 2020 - 2021 iteration of The Project.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ORW9VOjTCEcXSzhAxk--qtFeJVor2CJXj2K2dLTn27I/edit>