

# AWAKE

EDUCATE ADVOCATE CHANGE

# 2023 IMPACT REPORT

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Advocates for Women's  
and Kids' Equality Inc.  
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# DEAR FRIENDS,

Ten years ago, AWAKE was established in the Nashville community for one purpose: to make a positive impact on the lives of women and kids in Tennessee. Ever since our volunteer-led community has worked hard to make that mission a reality by focusing on **systems change**. Confronting the root causes of issues, rather than symptoms, and the policies that reinforce them is central to our theory of change. By transforming structures, mindsets, power dynamics, and policies through education and collective action, we seek to create long-lasting, transformational change in the state.


**2023 marked our 10th anniversary as a nonprofit!** This milestone gave us an opportunity to reflect on our growth over the last decade. Since 2020, our team has grown from solely volunteers to three full-time employees; our programming has reached more than 30 local nonprofits and MNPS schools; and we have successfully researched, drafted, and lobbied for 10 bills that have been signed into law. I am proud of the work we've accomplished by remaining true to our grassroots and responsive nature.

While we had much to celebrate, it would be disingenuous not to address the significant pain experienced by our community this year. The gun violence epidemic has increasingly impacted families across the state as the state's gun laws continue to weaken. The tragic mass shooting at The Covenant School this March was a catalyst for many Tennesseans to speak out and demand action, the tangible impact of which has yet to be seen.

Working toward systemic changes hardly ever produces immediate gratification. Instead, it asks us for perseverance, conviction, and bold hope. In my role at AWAKE, I have the privilege of witnessing the antidote to despair when it feels like our efforts are futile and our society is regressing: **community**. When we are working toward an equitable world together, we can share the weight of the struggle. This has looked as extraordinary as a crowd of hundreds of strangers singing "This Little Light of Mine" in the halls of the Capitol or as commonplace as an invitation to a TN Senator's office for refuge (and chocolate) when advocacy work becomes unbearable.

As we look ahead, we know the only constant is change; but we can all be active agents in shaping the future of Tennessee. Although there is unknown ahead of us, the team at AWAKE chooses to believe our efforts are moving us toward more freedom, more justice, and more thriving for ourselves and our neighbors. **I invite you to join us as we create this future together.**

In sincere gratitude and solidarity,



Kelli Nowers  
AWAKE Executive Director



# HISTORY

AWAKE was formed by a group of volunteers who saw an opportunity to work strategically and effectively to create better policies in Tennessee for women, kids, and families. Since 2013, AWAKE has successfully researched, drafted, and guided ten bills to passage addressing issues like health disparities, gender-based violence, and child exploitation; launched a state-wide educational campaign on child abuse prevention; developed a truancy intervention program; and designed a curriculum that helps students learn about healthy relationships and financial independence. Through each of our collaborative efforts, we are guided by the conviction that historically-marginalized communities in Tennessee deserve to feel safe, lead healthy lives, and have equal access to opportunity.

## MISSION + VISION

AWAKE advocates for the systemic advancement of women and young people in Tennessee through education initiatives and policy change. We work toward our vision of a state where all people have equitable access to thrive.





# 2023 BOARD

- Maryam Abolfazli, **Board Chair**
- Jennifer Konyn, **Board Vice-Chair**
- Ryan Sledge, **Board Treasurer**
- Danielle Johns, **Board Secretary**

Ashley Cathey

Beka Stanfield

Carrie Daughtrey

Dominique Donette

Jordan Kimmel

# STAFF

Kelli Nowers, **Executive Director**

S’Kaila Colbert, **Program Director**

Brenda Gadd, **Advocacy Director**



# THE STATE OF TENNESSEE

## *AND WHY OUR WORK MATTERS*

TENNESSEE RANKS  
**37TH**  
IN THE NATION  
FOR WOMEN LIVING IN POVERTY  
SOURCE: US CENSUS BUREAU, 2021

BLACK WOMEN ARE  
**FOUR TIMES MORE**  
**LIKELY TO DIE**  
FROM CHILDBIRTH IN  
TENNESSEE  
SOURCE: TN MATERNAL MORTALITY REPORT

TENNESSEE RANKS 14TH IN THE US FOR  
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND  
10TH IN THE US FOR WOMEN KILLED BY MEN.  
SOURCE: NCADV / VIOLENCE POLICY CENTER

TENNESSEE RANKS 45TH IN THE US FOR THE STATUS OF  
WOMEN REGARDING INCLUSION, JUSTICE, AND SECURITY  
SOURCE: GIWPS, 2020

**3 IN 4**  
LGBTQ+ STUDENTS IN  
TENNESSEE EXPERIENCED  
AT LEAST ONE INSTANCE  
OF DISCRIMINATION IN  
SCHOOL  
SOURCE: GLSEN, 2019

CHILDCARE IN TENNESSEE  
**COSTS MORE**  
THAN PUBLIC  
UNIVERSITY TUITION  
SOURCE: CDC WONDER DATABASE

# OUR RESPONSE: EDUCATION & DEVELOPMENT

AWAKE's education initiatives have evolved over the years in response to community need, partnership opportunity, and staff capacity. We have served over 800 students and community members since we were established in 2013.

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## I AM AN ADVOCATE PROGRAM

Our flagship program aims to equip students with the tools to be advocates for themselves and change-makers in their communities. The curriculum supports participants in the development of interpersonal and self-care skills, sociopolitical consciousness, understanding of leadership, communication, and organizing skills essential to advocacy work.

## 2023 IMPACT

**260 STUDENTS SERVED IN DAVIDSON COUNTY**

**15 PROGRAMS  
CONDUCTED  
WITH  
COMMUNITY  
PARTNERS**

**AN AVERAGE OF 97% OF  
PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS  
REPORTED INCREASED  
KNOWLEDGE &  
CONFIDENCE IN  
PROGRAM OBJECTIVES**



We need more advocacy work around guns and school shootings because lots of kids die and schools shut down so kids can't learn.

*MOVES AND GROOVES 2023 PARTICIPANT*

Collaboration is important for someone who is trying to make a change because hearing others out is how you earn supports to help you reach a goal.

*H.G. HILL MIDDLE SCHOOL 2023 PARTICIPANT*

An advocate is someone who is not afraid to stand up for what's right, no matter what.

*LAWSON HIGH SCHOOL 2023 PARTICIPANT*

As a group, we have created a definition of the word “advocate.” An advocate is a leader, a supportive person, that works with others to stand up for their beliefs.

We have a saying to help us remember to be advocates:  
“Brains and muscle fights the tussle.”

*DAVIDSON COUNTY JUVENILE DETENTION 2023 PARTICIPANT*

# OUR RESPONSE: EDUCATION INITIATIVES

## STUDENT ADVISORY BOARD

AWAKE's Student Advisory Board is an initiative rooted in the principles of equity and justice that centers the decision-making power of youth. This annual program assembles a cohort of high school students to participate in a leadership opportunity that serves as a catalyst for effective youth-focused service across Tennessee. Our board members convene monthly to lend their insights to AWAKE's educational and legislative goals, engage in discussions with organizational leaders and guest speakers, learn vital skills in advocacy leadership, and embark on self-determined advocacy projects addressing relevant social issues.

## 2023 IMPACT

**THE 2023 COHORT WAS  
MADE UP OF NINE  
NASHVILLE-AREA HIGH  
SCHOOL STUDENTS**

**BOARD ISSUE FOCUS:  
INCREASE THE  
ACCESSIBILITY OF  
MENTAL HEALTH  
RESOURCES FOR TEENS  
IN TENNESSEE**

**THE COHORT'S SELF-DETERMINED  
ADVOCACY PROJECT INCLUDED  
CREATING A MENTAL HEALTH  
RESOURCE GUIDE ACCESSIBLE  
THROUGH THE AWAKE WEBSITE AND  
HOSTING A COMMUNITY EVENT  
DEDICATED TO REDUCING THE  
STIGMA AROUND MENTAL ILLNESS  
AND PROMOTING ACTIVITIES FOR  
MENTAL WELL-BEING.**



# NASHVILLE STUDENT ADVISORY BOARD



**ADHIEU AGUTO**, ANTIOCH HIGH SCHOOL  
**ALAENA SMITH**, ENSWORTH FIRST CAMPUS  
**ANA CLEMENTE**, STEM PREP HIGH  
**DYLAN CONRAD**, VALOR COLLEGE PREP  
**EMILY IANNITELLI**, POPE JOHN PAUL II PREP  
**HATTIE MARTINEK**, HENDERSONVILLE HIGH SCHOOL  
**PRISCILLA PARK**, POPE JOHN PAUL II PREP  
**SIONA BHATTACHARYA**, RAVENWOOD HIGH SCHOOL  
**YOUSSOUPHA CHARLES**, ANTIOCH HIGH SCHOOL



# OUR RESPONSE: EDUCATION INITIATIVES

## YOUTH ADVOCACY SUMMIT

This was the inaugural year of AWAKE's Youth Advocacy Summit, a full-day event immersing middle and high school students in a comprehensive exploration of a systemic social issue and empowering them to create innovative solutions. Participants learn the root causes, implications, and existing interventions of a relevant social issue, then divide into teams to create an advocacy solution project to pitch to a panel of judges.

## 2023 IMPACT

**SUMMIT ISSUE FOCUS:  
HOMELESSNESS IN NASHVILLE**

**THREE STUDENT GROUPS PRESENTED THEIR OWN SOLUTIONS FOR HOMELESSNESS TO OUR PANEL OF ESTEEMED JUDGES INCLUDING COUNCILWOMAN ZULFAT SUARA, JUVENILE COURT JUDGE SHEILA CALLOWAY, AND THE MAYOR'S OFFICE POLICY ANALYST KAYCEE ENSIGN.**



# YOUTH ADVOCACY SUMMIT



The winning team pitched "The Happy Homes Project:" an innovative housing project advocating for a sustainable community of compact homes made from recycled, multifunctional materials. The project's framework is based on fostering interpersonal connections and nurturing a collective sense of stewardship, facilitating the transition of residents towards the next phase of their life journey.



# OUR RESPONSE: **POLICY CHANGE & ADVOCACY EFFORTS**

We accelerate systemic changes by identifying laws that negatively impact the lives of women and young people. Together with our statewide partners and champion lawmakers we have drafted, lobbied for, and passed ten bills that have had an immediate and significant impact on the lives of thousands of Tennesseans.

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**2014: SURVIVOR'S SAFETY BILL**

**2015: UPDATE TO THE STRANGULATION LAW**

**2015: AGGRAVATED PROSTITUTION AMENDMENT**

**2016: CYTOMEGALOVIRUS (CMV) BILL**

**2016: ANTI-STALKING BILL**

**2017: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OFFENDER NOTIFICATION**

**2018: CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION BILL**

**2018: DV OFFENDER NOTIFICATION UPDATE**

**2021: CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION BILL**

**2023: ADVOCATE CONFIDENTIALITY BILL**

# OUR RESPONSE: POLICY CHANGE & ADVOCACY EFFORTS

## 2023 IMPACT

### ✓ THE ADVOCATE CONFIDENTIALITY BILL SIGNED INTO LAW

After four years of working to codify confidentiality for victim advocates, the bill was signed into law this summer. This new law protects communications between advocates and survivors of sexual abuse and gender-based violence. Confidentiality creates a safer environment for victims of abuse in Tennessee to report and seek needed resources. The years-long journey of this bill proves the power of grassroots advocacy, statewide coalitions, and perseverance.

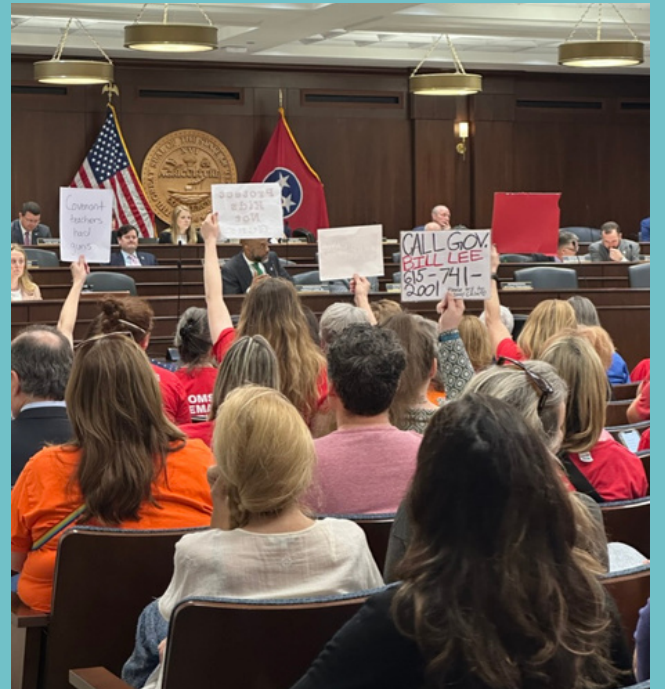
### ✓ FACILITATED **16** COMMUNITY ADVOCACY TRAININGS

Trainings occurred both in-person and virtually and included Advocacy 101: Demystifying the Tennessee Legislature, Policy 101: Tennessee's Gun Laws, Conscious Volunteer Training, and Action Planning intensives.

### ✓ HOSTED **2** DAYS ON THE HILL WITH **70** ATTENDEES

Community members attended our lobbying day during this year's Regular Legislative Session and the Special Legislative Session on Public Safety to advocate for equitable policies, attend committee meetings, and hear from a panel of partner organizations and issue experts.

# POLICY CHANGE & ADVOCACY EFFORTS



# OUR RESPONSE: POLICY CHANGE & ADVOCACY EFFORTS

## 2023 IMPACT

On March 27th the Nashville community experienced an unfathomable tragedy as three 9-year-olds and three adults lost their lives during a mass shooting at the Covenant School. In response, AWAKE stepped into a leadership position co-organizing a peaceful rally just three days later and mobilizing the community to advocate for laws that could prevent firearm death.

**NEARLY 63% OF  
TENNESSEE'S  
INTIMATE PARTNER  
HOMICIDES  
INVOLVE A GUN.**

SOURCE: GIFFORDS LAW CENTER

**TENNESSEE RANKS  
11TH IN THE  
COUNTRY FOR GUN  
DEATHS, WITH A  
RATE THAT IS 53%  
HIGHER THAN THE  
NATIONAL AVERAGE**

SOURCE: SYCAMORE INSTITUTE

**GUNS ARE THE  
LEADING CAUSE  
OF DEATH FOR  
CHILDREN AND  
TEENS IN THE US**

SOURCE: CDC WONDER DATABASE



**576**  
TENNESSEANS SIGNED A PETITION IN  
OPPOSITION TO A LAW TO ARM  
TENNESSEE TEACHERS AND STAFF

**125**  
PEOPLE SENT EMAILS ASKING  
COMMITTEE MEMBERS TO VOTE NO ON  
EXPANDING PERMITLESS CARRY

**1200**  
CONCERNED COMMUNITY MEMBERS  
REGISTERED TO ATTEND THE RALLY;  
THOUSANDS WERE PRESENT

# AS WE LOOK FORWARD TO 2024

WE HAVE PLANS TO MAKE AN EVEN  
GREATER IMPACT ACROSS TENNESSEE

& YOUR SUPPORT MAKES A *DIFFERENCE*

**BECOME AN ADVOCATE  
SOCIETY MONTHLY DONOR**

[AWAKETN.ORG/ADVOCATE-SOCIETY](https://awaketn.org/advocate-society)



**MAKE A ONE-TIME GIFT**

[AWAKETN.ORG/GIVE](https://awaketn.org/give)



**WRITE A CHECK**

PO BOX 68332 NASHVILLE, TN 37206  
PAYABLE TO: AWAKE TN



# THANK YOU

OUR CRITICAL WORK IN TENNESSEE IS SUSTAINED BY AWAKE'S  
ADVOCATE SOCIETY, A MEMBERSHIP OF MONTHLY RECURRING DONORS.

Andrew Hunt  
Angela Favaloro  
Anita Turlington  
Annie Cowherd  
Ashley Shults  
Bob Bernstein  
Bonnie Dow  
Brooke Gray  
Carrie Daughtrey  
Dahron Johnson  
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Sara Beth Myers  
Savannah Pflueger  
Sean Siple  
Sherry Deutschmann  
Susan Buck  
Sylvia Zelaya

JOIN THE ADVOCATE SOCIETY TO SUPPORT OUR 2024 EFFORTS

**[AWAKETN.ORG/ADVOCATE-SOCIETY](https://awaketen.org/advocate-society)**



# THANK YOU

TO THE BUSINESS PARTNERS AND GRANTERS WHO BELIEVE IN OUR MISSION





**EDUCATE  
ADVOCATE  
CHANGE**