



# CAPTAIN JOHN D. MASON

VETERAN PEER OUTREACH PROGRAM



VA



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

## Live Today – Put it Away!

Hello,

The Captain John D. Mason Veteran Peer Outreach Program (part of the Medical College of Wisconsin), on behalf of the Southeastern Wisconsin Suicide Prevention Taskforce and BeThereWis.com, would like to share details regarding your establishment becoming part of Wisconsin's "Gun Shop Project and Safe Storage Program" and being recognized as part of the "Coalition of Veteran-friendly Gun Shop Owners", to help prevent Veteran suicide.

The Gun Shop Project and Safe Storage Program was started in Wisconsin by Chuck Lovelace, lead gunsmith, and owner of Essential Shooting Supplies, LLC., along with Safe Communities Madison-Dane County, and is comprised of two parts:

- **The Gun Shop Project** is an educational piece where we provide gun shop owners and their staff materials on suicide prevention, such as Tips for staff – how to identify warning signs and effectively handle those situations, as well as providing responsible firearm ownership materials, such as 11 Commandments of gun ownership, and suicide prevention resources they can give to their customers upon purchase or rental of a firearm, or recreationally shooting at the range, in order to help prevent suicide.
- **The Safe Storage Program** is where the gun shop/range would provide voluntary, temporary, safe storage of a firearm for a Veteran or individual who is in a temporary crisis.

Additional states that are part of the cause are New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Colorado, and Washington.

Attached please find Chuck's introduction letter and program materials, which explain the program in further detail, as well as the Capt. Mason Program information. We have an entire packet of materials to supply the gun shop/range with, which were put together by the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF) who partnered with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, as well as Safe Communities Madison – Dane County. Additional resource materials can also be viewed at [www.BeThereWis.com](http://www.BeThereWis.com).

Statistics:

- Over 50% of suicides are NOT due to a mental health disorder, it may simply be that they are going through a divorce, missed a promotion, or the feeling of hopelessness while experiencing a dire moment
- Most Veterans own a firearm (7 on average) & 33% have one in their home that is loaded
- 70% of deaths by suicide are through use of a firearm
- The ability to offer time and distance between a person and lethal means during a crisis can save a life

Benefits of Program:

- We can help you recognize signs of potential crisis and provide you with materials about suicide prevention
- Provide storage and be a resource for people in the community who ask, “Where can I store my firearm in a temporary crisis?”
- Listed on our website as a preferred gun shop owner

We hope to have your support to become part of Wisconsin’s Gun Shop Project and Safe Storage Program, as well as be a member of the “Coalition of Veteran-friendly Gun Shops”.

I welcome the opportunity to share the details with you whether in person or over the phone. Please feel free to contact me at (414) 955-8914 or [ssmykal@mcw.edu](mailto:ssmykal@mcw.edu).

I look forward to hearing from you!

Kind regards,

**Susan Smykal**

Captain John D. Mason Veteran Peer Outreach Program  
Medical College of Wisconsin  
Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine  
P: 414-955-8914 / F: 414-955-6285

[CaptainJohnDMasonProgram@mcw.edu](mailto:CaptainJohnDMasonProgram@mcw.edu)

[ssmykal@mcw.edu](mailto:ssmykal@mcw.edu)

[www.VeteranPeerOutreach.org](http://www.VeteranPeerOutreach.org)

<https://www.facebook.com/CaptainJohnDMasonProgram>

Veteran Peer Specialists:

**Program:**

(414) 955-8910

[CaptainJohnDMasonProgram@mcw.edu](mailto:CaptainJohnDMasonProgram@mcw.edu)

**For more information, contact:**

Holly Botsford, External Relations and Engagement Manager  
414-688-7960, [hbotsford@mcw.edu](mailto:hbotsford@mcw.edu)

## **Medical College of Wisconsin Veteran Outreach Program Helps Prevent Suicide with Firearm Safety Initiative**

### *Gun Shop Project and Safe Storage Program Provide Local Gun Shops, Ranges with Prevention Support*

**Milwaukee, April 20, 2021** - The Captain John D. Mason Veteran Peer Outreach Program, on behalf of the Southeastern Wisconsin Suicide Prevention Taskforce and BeThereWis.com, is bringing the Gun Shop Project and Safe Storage Program to local communities across Wisconsin.

The program, developed by Safe Communities of Madison-Dane County, works with Wisconsin gun shops and ranges to provide two levels of support to the gun-owner community that address firearm suicides:

- 1) **Firearm safety:** Gun shops will provide materials to customers and staff about suicide prevention and responsible firearm ownership developed by the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF), American Foundation on Suicide Prevention, and the VA.
- 2) **Firearm storage outside of the home:** The gun shops will provide temporary safe storage of a firearm for a low fee. This service will assist individuals that are in a crisis to voluntarily store their firearm outside of the home.

These types of programs have been successful in New Hampshire, Colorado, Washington, and parts of Wisconsin. Research shows that 70 percent of veteran suicides are by use of a firearm, and more than half of suicides are not due to mental illness.

“Many people that die by suicide might be going through a divorce, job loss or missed promotion, or simply feeling hopeless in a dire moment,” said Chris Swift, Veteran Peer Specialist with the Captain John D. Mason Veteran Peer Outreach Program. Swift is also a veteran.

“It can be within minutes that a person takes their life,” he adds. “Suicidal feelings can be temporary and the ability to offer time and distance between a person and lethal means can save a life.”

Interested gun shops and ranges can sign up to be listed as a member of the “Coalition of Veteran-friendly Gun Shops” on the Gun Shop Project and Safe Storage map at

[BeThereWis.com](http://BeThereWis.com). Once signed up, members will receive materials to assist in providing the services listed above.

For more information or to sign up, email the Captain John D. Mason Veteran Peer Outreach Program at [CaptainJohnDMasonProgram@mcw.edu](mailto:CaptainJohnDMasonProgram@mcw.edu), contact Susan Smykal at (414) 955-8914 or go to [www.BeThereWis.com](http://www.BeThereWis.com).

###

### **About the Captain John D. Mason Veteran Peer Outreach Program**

The Captain John D. Mason Veteran Peer Outreach Program located at [VeteranPeerOutreach.org](http://VeteranPeerOutreach.org) was created in 2018 and named after a Vietnam veteran who lost his own battle with depression and PTSD. The program, in the Medical College of Wisconsin Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine in collaboration with the Milwaukee VA Medical Center, aims to save lives by locating veterans in need and engaging them in VA health services.

### **About the Medical College of Wisconsin**

With a history dating back to 1893, The Medical College of Wisconsin is dedicated to leadership and excellence in education, patient care, research and community engagement. More than 1,400 students are enrolled in MCW's medical school and graduate school programs in Milwaukee, Green Bay, and Central Wisconsin in. MCW's School of Pharmacy opened in 2017. A major national research center, MCW is the largest research institution in the Milwaukee metro area and second largest in Wisconsin. In the last ten years, faculty received more than \$1.5 billion in external support for research, teaching, training and related purposes. This total includes highly competitive research and training awards from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Annually, MCW faculty direct or collaborate on more than 3,100 research studies, including clinical trials. Additionally, more than 1,600 physicians provide care in virtually every specialty of medicine for more than \$2.8 million patients annually.

# SAFE STORAGE OF FIREARMS

What to do with guns when a person may be in crisis.

**FACT:** Safe storage of a firearm for a loved one is a critical way to get them safely through a crisis period and is proven to save lives.


What to do when a person is in crisis? When there is an emotional crisis (like a break-up, job loss, legal trouble) or a major change in someone's behavior (like depression or anger, more drinking) that causes concern, storing guns outside the home until the situation improves may save a life.



*Photo Credit: Wisconsin State Journal*

# Options for Gun Storage

Using the guidelines below, you can help a person in crisis.

- Turn over all firearms to a trusted family member or friend who lives elsewhere. Be sure all firearms are unloaded before transport.
- Contact your local gun shop and ask if they are willing to store the firearms. Tell them that you need temporary storage during a crisis.
- Please visit the BeThereWis website to view a virtual map listing gun shops that will accept firearms for storage in a safe. A small fee is charged for a safety check. [www.betherewis.com/firearm-storage-online-map/](http://www.betherewis.com/firearm-storage-online-map/) 
- Rent a storage facility and secure the firearm there. Ensure the keys or combinations are not available to the person in crisis.
- If it is not possible to get the guns out of the house, lock up all the unloaded firearms in a hard-sided gun case. Remove ammunition from the home or lock in a separate location.
- Use cable gun locks. They are available from healthcare facilities and local law enforcement agencies. Law enforcement can assist in unloading weapons and securing them with cable gun locks.

1155 N. Mayfair Rd.  
Milwaukee, WI 53226  
(414) 955-8910  
CaptainJohnDMasonProgram@mcw.edu



*Thanks to Safe Communities Madison - Dane County  
Promoted by Wisconsin gun shops and the Captain John D. Mason Veteran  
Peer Outreach Program, on behalf of the Southeastern Wisconsin Suicide  
Prevention Taskforce and BeThereWis.com*



March 8, 2021

Dear Fellow Firearms Dealer,

As business owners and gun enthusiasts, we are all concerned about the safe use of firearms. This package of information is sent to you because we want you to join me and Safe Communities Madison-Dane County, along with the Captain John D. Mason Veteran Peer Outreach Program, on behalf of the Southeastern Wisconsin Suicide Prevention Taskforce and BeThereWis.com, in preventing suicide.

We are losing more than 800 people a year to suicide in Wisconsin and 1 in 5 is a Veteran. More people die by suicide using a firearm than any other means with about 70% of Veterans using a firearm to kill themselves and about 50% of non-Veterans suicides are from a firearm. Suppose the people who know guns and their customers the best, were able to recognize a person in crisis and help them? You could save lives.

*The Gun Shop Project*, a campaign out of New Hampshire, was successful in reducing suicides by bringing suicide prevention specialist and firearm dealers together and designing materials to help gun dealers identify and address potentially suicidal customers who may be purchasing a firearm.

I am encouraging you to participate in this cause by accepting the materials we have sent you. I would also encourage you to offer low cost gun storage for people in crisis along with other states that have joined the Gun Storage cause like, Pennsylvania (Hold my Guns), Colorado and Washington.

The Captain John D. Mason Veteran Peer Outreach Program is providing you these **free** materials. Gun shop retailers and range workers are excellent at answering questions and providing information to assist in a sale or rental; these materials work off that knowledge by:

- **Question and Answer sheet:** an educational tool that explains the role of firearms and suicide prevention to you and your staff
- **Tip Sheet for Wisconsin Retailers and Range Owners:** a review of how to look for potential suicidal red flags, such as a distraught customer whose comments are troubling ("I won't be needed a cleaning kit", or "I don't care what caliber it is") and ways to offer safe options
- **Posters from the National Shooting Sports Foundation:** by displaying a sign in your store, customers feel like they are in a place of safety where they can pick up life-saving resource materials and feel free to talk about this issue.
- **Gun Safety the 11th Commandment:** a guide for you to give your customers with every purchase that promotes general guns safety and storage
- **Contract for Gun Shops and Gun Owners:** Sample contract for you to use for storing guns for individuals.
- **Agreement to Participate in the Program:** This agreement confirms that your establishment will comply with all laws for providing temporary storage of firearms to your customers, be listed for no charge on the Wisconsin Gun Shop Project and Safe Storage Program Map at BeThereWis.Com as a preferred gun shop, and that you are volunteering to provide this service.
- **Certificate:** a certificate appropriate for framing that certifies your gun shop is part of the Program and a member of the "Coalition of Veteran-friendly Gun Shop Owners."

Gun shops are a place where expert advice can be offered about safe storage and gun safety. Gun stores are like the family home of people who enjoy all kinds of shooting sports whether it is for hunting, target shooting, personal or home protection, or competition. There are safety guidelines that must be followed, and you can be the first line of defense to recognize someone who may be suffering from suicidal thoughts. That home needs to take care of the family by taking a leading role in suicide prevention.

Caring for family and friends who are in crisis is what a family does and gun stores can be the place of support in keeping guns out of the hands of people during a brief suicidal crisis by taking the time to talk to customers and really get a sense of their mindset when buying a firearm. This is about education and suicide prevention; something we all can believe in.

As a Veteran and a Gun Shop owner I became the first Gun Shop in Southern WI, and Dane county to start working with Safe Communities of Dane County when approached over three years ago. At the time this initiative hit close to home for me as a shop owner because we had been contacted recently by Dane County Sheriff's Office regarding an individual whom had purchased a handgun from us not two weeks before and used it to die by suicide.

Less than a month later I received news that a second customer who was a Veteran had also taken their life with a firearm, even after reaching out for help. At this news I honestly cannot tell you the guilt that my family felt wondering if we could have noticed something that was amiss in our interactions with our customers, and second guessing how we handled the transactions. To this day we aren't sure, but we have changed our interactions with our customers to try and be more aware of their mindset.

With the news of both of these incidents I worked directly with Safe Communities to not only educate people in the firearms industry with the Gun Shop Project on the signs of someone who may be in a time of crisis, but also to help limit access to a major means of suicide by offering a discrete and simple way to store their firearms without having to resort to turning them over to law enforcement, or be forced to have someone that they may not want to be aware of their situation involved in the storage of their firearms.

With that we began the Safe Storage Initiative, we offered storage at our Gun Shop for someone who may need a time out from their access to them but still as a law abiding citizen deserve our respect and discretion in the matter. We purchased a specific safe to be able to segregate the firearms and offered storage with a minimal fee for a safety inspection until the individual was able to retrieve them after the crisis had passed.

We have, with success, implemented this program and served nine different families in the time the program has been running. We have also been able to use the safe as storage for families in emergency situations such as the Black Earth flood and in the case of a home fire. While this may not seem like a huge impact, there are nine families who are still whole, all for the cost of a few spots in a safe, and some time that is priceless!

The one thing I want to reiterate is that this program is not a measure to take firearms from law abiding citizens, but to provide a neutral non-judgmental location where people already come for firearms, repair, and training in their use. By offering this in your community YOU as a business owner and concerned citizen are providing a service that can, and will, save lives right where you live.

While we have relocated our shop to Northern Wisconsin in early 2020, we are still involved in supporting both of these projects and working to bring them into use here in Park Falls WI and Price



County as well. If you have questions or need input from someone in the industry who has successfully implemented these lives saving community services, please feel free to reach out to me via phone or email.

Sincerely,

Chuck Lovelace  
Owner, Lead Gunsmith / Firearms Instructor  
Essential Shooting Supplies, LLC  
311 Saunders Avenue  
Park Falls, WI 54552  
Office: (715) 518-9266

[www.essentialshootingsupplies.com](http://www.essentialshootingsupplies.com)  
[info@essentialshootingsupplies.com](mailto:info@essentialshootingsupplies.com)

Promoted by the Captain John D. Mason Veteran Peer Outreach Program, on behalf of the Southeastern Wisconsin Suicide Prevention Taskforce and BeThereWis.com.

Office: (414) 955-8910

Email: [CaptainJohnDMasonProgram@mcw.edu](mailto:CaptainJohnDMasonProgram@mcw.edu)



<https://www.veteranpeeroutreach.org>

<https://www.facebook.com/CaptainJohnDMasonProgram>

[https://www.betherewis.com/Gun Shop Safety & Storage Project](https://www.betherewis.com/Gun%20Shop%20Safety%20&%20Storage%20Project)

## ***TIPS for Wisconsin Firearm Retailers and Range Owners***

### **Your vigilance could save a life!**

The leading method of suicide in Wisconsin is firearms. Recent findings suggest that often impulsive, crisis-driven suicides occur with guns purchased within that same week, usually within *hours*. Using your knowledge and expertise as a retailer you can often spot when a sale does not feel right, and that could reduce the odds that a gun bought at your store today is used in a suicide tomorrow.

### **Signs that a potential buyer could be suicidal**

*Note: None of these signs clearly indicate someone is suicidal, but if any are present (especially if more than one is present), use extra caution in deciding whether to proceed with the sale.*

- No knowledge about guns AND no interest in learning; asks no questions
- Doesn't care which gun s/he purchases/rents or seem unresponsive to your questions about the purchase
- Gives unconvincing response when asked what s/he intends to use the gun for, or about prior experience or training
- No interest in firearm instruction, maintenance, safety or safe storage
- Mentions recent crisis, such as a divorce, job loss, or other setback
- Makes comments that could suggest suicidality (e.g. "I don't need a lot of ammunition; I won't have the gun for long.")
- Looks anxious, avoids eye contact, conveys a sense of hopelessness
- Appears distraught (shaking, fighting back tears) or under influence of alcohol

### **Options for responding to a potentially suicidal buyer**

- Notify store owner or manager (if applicable) if at all uncomfortable with a prospective sale or rental
- Urge customer with little firearm experience to seek training or a class before buying
- Ask the customer why s/he wants a firearm and how and where s/he plans to use it
- Suggest the customer take some more time to think it over before buying
- If s/he claims to be buying for self-defense, offer to sell pepper spray instead
- Ask person directly if s/he is suicidal (it is well proven that asking about suicidal intent does not spur the thought, and it is well proven that asking about suicide intent and offering help saves lives); if yes, offer National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number (1-800-273-TALK [8255]) and stop the sale
- Notify nearby dealers that someone you denied a sale to may go to their store; notify police who can check welfare later
- Trust your instincts, you are an expert in this field; you are under no obligation to sell a gun to anyone

### **"What else can I do?"**

- Display a suicide prevention hotline poster in your store
- Distribute firearm safety brochures to buyers (The 11 Commandments) that include information about recognizing suicide warning signs and keeping firearms away from suicidal or depressed family members
- Always sell or inquire about a gun locking or safe storage device at point of purchase
- If you are a firearms instructor, consider discussing suicide prevention in your classes. Safe Community can provide you with links to information to meet your curriculum.
- Spread the word. Ask other dealers you know to visit our website to request our free materials.

*Thanks to Safe Communities Madison-Dane County*

*Promoted by Wisconsin gun shops and the Captain John D. Mason Veteran Peer Outreach Program on behalf of the Southeastern Wisconsin Suicide Prevention Taskforce and BeThereWis.com (3/4/21)*

## SHOOTING A GUN

**1. Seek Proper instruction.** Attend a reputable firearms safety handling course or seek private instruction before attempting to use a firearm. Before handling a new gun, learn how it operates. This includes knowing its basic parts, how to safely open and close the action, and how to safely remove any ammunition if loaded. Remember, a firearm's mechanical safety device is never foolproof. The safety device can never replace safe firearm handling.

**2. Wear eye and ear protection as appropriate.** Firearms are loud. They can also emit debris and hot gases that can cause injury. For these reasons, safety glasses and ear protectors are recommended.

**3. Be sure your gun and ammunition are compatible.** Only cartridges or shells designed for a particular gun can be safely fired by that gun. Most guns have their cartridge or shell type stamped on the barrel. Ammunition can be identified by information printed on the box and stamped on each cartridge. Do not fire the gun if there is any question about the compatibility of the gun and ammunition

**4. Carry only one gauge/caliber of ammunition when shooting.** Smaller ammunition can be accidentally placed in a gun chamber designed for larger ammunition, creating an obstruction and a very hazardous situation. Remove unfired ammunition from clothing when

you are shooting to avoid accidentally mixing different ammunition next time you go shooting.

**5. Be sure of your target – and what's beyond.** Be absolutely sure you have identified your target without any doubt. Equally important, be aware of the area beyond your target. This means observing your perspective area of fire before you shoot. Never fire in a direction where there are people or any other potential for mishap. It's simple: *think first, shoot second*.

**6. Don't mix alcohol or drugs with shooting.** Alcohol, as well as any other substance likely to impair mental or physical functions of the body, should not be used before or while handling firearms.

## OWNING & HANDLING A GUN

**7. Keep your finger off the trigger until you are ready to shoot.** There's a natural tendency to place your finger on the trigger when holding a gun. Avoid it! Your trigger finger should be extended, pointing forward, pressed against the side of the firearm, above the trigger area.

**8. Keep the action open and the gun unloaded until ready to use.** Whenever you pick up any gun, immediately check the action and check to see that the chamber is unloaded. If the gun has a magazine, make sure it is empty. Even if the magazine is empty or removed, a cartridge may still remain in the firing chamber. If you do

not know how to open the gun's action, leave it alone or get help from someone who is knowledgeable.

**9. Always point the muzzle in a safe direction.** Whether you are shooting or simply handling your gun, never point the muzzle at yourself or at others. Common sense should dictate which direction is safest depending on your location and various other conditions. Generally speaking, it is safest to have the gun pointed upward or towards the ground.

**10. Store your guns safely and securely when not in use.** Hiding guns where you think children or others will not find them is not enough. Always store your guns unloaded and locked in a case or gun safe when not in use, with ammunition locked and stored in a separate location.

**11. Consider temporary off-site storage if a family member may be suicidal.** When there is an emotional crisis (like a break-up, job loss, legal trouble) or a major change in someone's behavior (like depression or anger, more drinking) that causes concern, storing guns outside the home until situation improves may save a life. Friends and some police departments (if an officer is called to your home to assist) may provide temporary storage. Any firearms retailer can recommend and sell you a secure gun safe or gun lock. Putting time and distance between a firearm and a suicidal person saves lives.

## CONTRACT TO HOLD FIREARM Gun Shop Project and Safe Storage Program

This service is to provide a safety check of your firearms. You may also use this opportunity to dispose of unwanted ammunition.

This contract is between the firearm owner and his/her designee and (Gun Shop): \_\_\_\_\_.

The owner of the firearms is \_\_\_\_\_ (phone) \_\_\_\_\_.

The designee is \_\_\_\_\_ (you may name more than one) and (phone) \_\_\_\_\_.

You as the owner or designee are voluntarily turning over firearms to (Gun Shop) \_\_\_\_\_ for a safety check. For the price of \$ \_\_\_\_\_, your firearms will be stored for 1, 2 or 3 months to provide time to perform the safety check. Please specify:

One month

Two months

Three months

At the end of \_\_\_\_\_ months, you will be contacted to assess if you wish \_\_\_\_\_ to hold your firearms for another \_\_\_\_\_ months. At the end of \_\_\_\_\_ months, or 6 months maximum, you must pay all fees and your firearms will be returned to you and/or your designee. You may also opt to discuss selling your firearm, if you so desire.

The firearm cannot be serviced or returned before \_\_\_\_\_ months.

The owner and designee will need to pick up the firearms, or the designee alone may pick up the firearms.

The store will not sell you any ammunition during the time you are picking up your firearms (after \_\_\_\_\_ months), nor will it return or refund you for any ammunition you disposed of when dropping off the firearm.

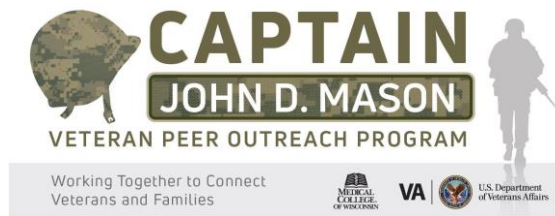
Your name, weapon, or the fact it is being serviced here is confidential and private, except as necessary for federal licensing requirements.

Note that the \_\_\_\_\_ month pick up date is listed here \_\_\_\_\_.

Note that the 6 months pick up date, the limit of the service offered, is \_\_\_\_\_.

Description of firearms:

Store information:



**Welcome to the Wisconsin Gun Shop Project and Safe Storage Program to help reduce suicides!**

We are excited that you would like to participate in this Wisconsin based program as designed by the Dane County, Wisconsin, Safe Communities program. This program is being promoted by the Captain John D. Mason Veteran Peer Outreach Program and the Southeastern Wisconsin Task Force on Veteran Suicide Prevention.

We ask that you provide us your contact information and sign this document indicating your agreement to be listed on the Wisconsin Gun Shop and Safe Storage Program Map located on BeThereWis.com.

By signing this form, you acknowledge:

- A. Your participation is voluntary.
- B. Your establishment will comply with all laws for providing temporary storage of firearms to customers.
- C. Your establishment agrees to be listed on the Wisconsin Firearm Safe Storage Facilities Map.

Thank you!

Please complete the following information so we can add you the program:

Name (First & Last): \_\_\_\_\_

Firearm Store name: \_\_\_\_\_

Store Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Store City: \_\_\_\_\_

Store Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: (    ) \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please sign here:**

\_\_\_\_\_

I am authorized to sign for the Firearm Store and provide this service.

Send completed form to:

- Tosa Health Center  
Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Medicine  
Attn: Susan Smykal – Capt. Mason Program  
1155 N Mayfair Rd  
Milwaukee, WI 53226
- Email: [ssmykal@mcw.edu](mailto:ssmykal@mcw.edu)
- Complete online at [www.BeThereWis.com](http://www.BeThereWis.com): [https://mcwisc.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_29r6SNpto21tG3Y](https://mcwisc.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_29r6SNpto21tG3Y)



Facebook



# CAPTAIN JOHN D. MASON

## VETERAN PEER OUTREACH PROGRAM



BeThereWis



VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

### The Captain John D. Mason Story

*Our Mission is to: Help motivate Veterans and their families to engage in Veteran Administration health systems, seek eligible VA benefits and/or connect with other health care systems. The primary goal is to provide Veterans with the knowledge and resources to live a healthy and productive life. This will be accomplished by developing a sustainable outreach program of Veteran Peers who use their unique skills and Veteran affiliation to develop a connection with Veterans and their families.*



#### Captain John D. Mason

- John served in Vietnam with the Second Battalion, Twelfth Marines, Third Marine Division
- He was awarded the Bronze Star Medal with the Combat "V" for his valor and honorable service
- John reflected on his military training and values when faced with personal & professional challenges
- John was kind, smart, funny, hardworking, and a man of impeccable values and integrity who loved his family (wife & two children) & friends deeply
- He struggled silently for years with depression and PTSD stemming from his time in Vietnam
- John didn't want to burden his family or friends with his inner struggles. That, combined with the stigma of mental illness, prevented him from seeking sufficient treatment for his symptoms
- In 2013, financial distress and pain from a back injury caused his illness to overpower him and he died by suicide
- John left five suicide letters, and wrote, **"Get me to the VA so they can stop someone else"**

#### Captain John D. Mason Outreach Program

- **The Captain John D. Mason Veteran Peer Outreach Program** was created by the Medical College of Wisconsin and the VA
- The numbers of Veteran suicides, combined with a focus on Veteran camaraderie, led to the idea to hire a Veteran Peer Specialist
- The program aims to save lives by locating Veterans in need and engaging them in VA health services and other Veteran community resources as needed, and secondly, to provide hope and empowerment to fellow Veterans
- The peer has direct access points to hand a Veteran off instead of them getting lost or overwhelmed by the system
- Beyond the roles of disseminating information about VA health services to Veterans not yet enrolled in VA healthcare and helping to enroll, the peer will also support his Veteran peers in:
  - Articulating their goals for recovery
  - Identifying barriers to achieving these goals
  - Advocating for themselves to obtain effective health services

*John's best friend Joe Tate was moved to start a program that would benefit Veterans because of the loss of his friend.*

**Facebook** - Scan QR Code Top Left

**Live Today - Put it Away** - Scan QR Code Top Right

[www.VeteranPeerOutreach.org](http://www.VeteranPeerOutreach.org)

*VOW 9-Line (262) 456-7059*

*9Line@vowvillages.com*

*Veteran Peer Specialists (414) 955-8910*

*CaptainJohnDMasonProgram@mcw.edu*

## Gun Shop Project Inception and Q&A

In 2009 in New Hampshire, in the course of less than a week, three people (with no connection to each other) legally purchased a firearm from the same store and killed themselves within hours of the purchase. The Medical Examiner's office brought this to the attention of their mental health liaison, and a small group of firearm retailers and mental health/public health practitioners met to explore whether there is a role for gun stores in preventing suicide. The group was later adopted by the NH Firearm Safety Coalition. The co-chair of the coalition has remained the same, it is the owner of the gun shop who transacted the fatal sales.

The project, called The Gun Shop Project developed materials with and for firearm retailers and range owners on ways they can help prevent suicide. Its objectives are to:

- Share guidelines on how to avoid selling or renting a firearm to a suicidal customer
- Encourage gun stores and firing ranges to display and distribute suicide prevention materials tailored to their customers

The Gun Shop Project is now nationwide, and the NH Safety Coalition freely shares all their materials. In Wisconsin, the project was launched in Dane County. I was the person who ran this project for Dane County and received positive support from the NH coalition as I adopted their materials.

The Gun Shop Project was widely accepted by gun shop owners (just one gave push back) but time has not permitted for me to revisit the shops in Dane County to see how many maintain their materials. I give full support for this project. It takes some time to set up, train and to produce the materials and secure partners but the relationship between the gun shops and the community partners is invaluable.

The Gun Shop Project is most valuable because of the partnership it brought from suicide prevention advocates and gun shops. The foundation of the project is that safety is part of the gun and suicide prevention cultures. No one is immune from the tragedy of suicide, so with the focus on saving lives, there is a shared community-strengthening commitment for both partners, which fosters understanding and knowledge. This isn't anti-gun; this is anti-suicide.

## Gun Shop Project Inception and Q&A

Realizing that impulsive firearms suicides (people who make a gun purchase and use it immediately in their death) are 10% of the firearm suicides, yet firearms make up about half of all suicides, it meant The Gun Shop Project would work even better if there was a role for gun shops for people who already own firearms. This realization was a nagging problem for me, but when I stopped at Essential Shooting Supplies in Mount Horeb, I found the gun shop owner, Chuck Lovelace, with the answer.

Please note that in your assembly bill, I see a promising mash up. You have drawn on the positive ideas of The Gun Shop Project (prevention materials available in the store for customers, training for gun shop personnel to prevent selling or renting to suicidal customers) but I see you also included Safe Storage. Safe Storage as a project, was the answer to my nagging problem of reaching out to firearm owners who may be in a temporary crisis.

The more Chuck and I talked, the more we realized that by letting gun shops be the site of safe, temporary, voluntary storage of firearms, we could help people who were in crisis, owned firearms, and needed a respectful and understanding local storage place. I explained to Chuck that only two evidence-based strategies were proven to prevent suicides: Have primary care physicians diagnose and treat depression and keep firearms out of the hands of people for the time they were in crisis. Firearm suicides are often the result of both long-term problems (substance misuse and untreated mental illness) and short-term problems (despairs like relationship problems, job and financial problems, isolation, loss, hopelessness, and a feeling of burdensomeness). During the time of these struggles, safe temporary storage of firearms, if not with a friend or family, could be offered at gun shops. As Chuck points out, he's not there to be your therapist, and he really doesn't need to know your personal trials, but he would very much like to have the role of providing safe, temporary storage of firearms. Safe Storage is voluntary, there is a small fee charged by the gun shop to keep it dignified and give the gun owner some skin in the game. Chuck and I developed paperwork for the storage, and Chuck can tell you more about the inventory details.

I support voluntary safe storage. Safe Storage holds enormous potential to save lives by providing safe temporary storage of firearms when people are in a crisis. A suicidal crisis can be transient, help can come in many forms for treatment, intervention, and support, but keeping people alive during this time and working hard to get them well takes an entire community—gun shops, coalitions, families, legislator



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### The Gun Shop Project FAQ—Harvard School of Public Health—Means Matter

(taken directly from: [www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/gun-shop-faq/](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/gun-shop-faq/))

#### A Q&A with the NH Firearm Safety Coalition

##### **1. Won't a suicidal person just use something else if they can't get a gun?**

Sometimes, yes. But almost every other method is less lethal than a firearm so there's a greater chance the person won't die in their attempt. Also, other methods allow time for rescue or give the ambivalent attempter some time to change their mind mid-attempt.

##### **2. If a suicidal person substitutes another method and doesn't die, won't they eventually figure out a way to kill themselves later?**

Suicidal feelings often pass over time. Studies that follow people over many years have found that roughly 90% of those who survive a suicide attempt do not go on to die by suicide, including those who made a very serious attempt, like jumping in front of a train.

##### **3. Suicide is a sensitive subject—I'm concerned about offending my customers or making them feel uncomfortable.**

It's true this is a difficult subject, but it's also true that thoughtful conversations about hard topics can produce good outcomes, in this case even save lives. A customer might see our poster or brochure in your store, for example, and talk to his newly divorced brother about letting him hold onto his guns until his deep depression lifts. Your store may have just helped save a life without your even knowing it. That said, it is very important to us to ensure our materials share information in a respectful manner. Please let us know what you hear!

##### **4. Suicide is a personal choice—it's your right to end your life. Who am I to intervene if someone doesn't want to live anymore?**

Suicide is certainly a personal choice. Some people attempt suicide after a lot of deliberation and are virtually certain life is no longer worth living. But many attempt during a crisis and most are ambivalent. Over half of attempters report less than an hour passed between deciding on suicide and making the attempt, according to several studies. Often people who have survived serious attempts say something like: "The moment I jumped I said to myself...What did I just do? I don't want to die..." Also, thousands of people in their teens and twenties kill themselves each year in the U.S.—too young an age to give up on life.

##### **5. Does relocating the guns for a while always work?**

Reducing access to firearms and other lethal means is only part of a broader suicide prevention plan. Those considered actively suicidal are best protected by not being left alone until they are feeling better. Getting professional help and the support of other family and friends is strongly advised. The Suicide Prevention Lifeline is 1-800-273-TALK (8255) and is available 24/7.

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### **6. I'm concerned I'll be sued if I refuse to make a sale or rent a firearm to someone who passes the background check.**

The two largest gun shops in NH and ME have never been sued for this reason. Stores and ranges are NOT violating 2nd amendment rights by refusing a purchase or rental if we suspect something isn't right; it is well within our legal rights to deny a transaction (as long as this denial is not simply based on a person's race, ethnicity, religious beliefs, or sex). In fact, there have been instances where store owners have been sued by the family of someone who purchased a firearm and killed themselves soon after.

### **7. Customers could be acting funny for other reasons besides suicide—first time customers are often a little nervous and don't know anything about guns.**

It's hard to know for sure if someone is suicidal. The Tip Sheet is meant to help your staff identify customers who exhibit some "red flags." Usually new customers are eager to hear purchasing advice from staff and will gladly respond to questions we may ask as we try to help them select the best firearm for their purposes. It's those who are reluctant to converse with staff about the purchase, or who seem to be troubled, who require extra caution. You should "go with your gut" and your experience.

### **8. The Tip Sheet says one in ten firearm suicides were with recently purchased guns. That sounds like a lot—I've been in business for many years and never thought a customer was suicidal.**

It sounded like a lot to us, too. But that number comes straight from the office of the NH Medical Examiner. When the ME's office investigates a death, sometimes they'll find a receipt for the gun in the victim's pocket or next to the gun, so they know it's a recent purchase. Hopefully you and your staff will never come across a suicidal customer but being prepared should that unfortunate day come could save a life.

### **9. I have had a customer purchase a gun for suicide, and he didn't exhibit ANY warning signs at all. You can't always spot people who are serious about killing themselves.**

There's no way all suicides can be prevented. But there have been occasions when a dealer asked a person who seemed shaky whether they should really be buying this gun and they admitted they were considering suicide. One family wrote our co-Chair (owner of Riley's Sports Shop) and said that his question saved their mother's life. The more ambivalent someone is about suicide, the greater the opportunity for intervention.

### **10. What do I say to a customer who keeps a gun at home for self-defense but is worried about someone at home who's going through a rough time?**

It depends on how that gun is stored. If a customer's loved one at home (or with keys to their home) is going through a rough time, they may want to re-evaluate the accessibility of that firearm to that person. Suicide may be the bigger threat that your customer has to guard against in the short term until the situation improves.