

What This Christian Alternative to Boy Scouts Is Doing to Combat Gun Violence in America

Tragically, there has been a lot of gun violence lately. On Labor Day weekend, two mass shootings occurred in El Paso, Texas, and Dayton, Ohio, killing a total of 30 people. And it seems like every other day that we hear of another gun fight breaking out in an American city. Whenever things like this happen, people immediately demand we get rid of guns or increase gun control.

But what if the gun violence problem goes much deeper than gun control? Mark Hancock, CEO of Trail Life USA, says fatherlessness is a huge factor in gun violence. Trail for Life USA was founded as an alternative to Boy Scouts after the latter organization became more and more left wing. One of Hancock's goals is to provide a male-focused, unapologetically Christian atmosphere where young boys can simply be boys and learn how to grow to be real men.

"Boys get a rough treatment [in society]," Hancock tells me on the "Strang Report" podcast. (Click [here](#) or click on the podcast icon in this article to listen to that episode.) "They're now twice as likely to be declared special education, three times more likely to be diagnosed with ADHD, and the suicide rates are just soaring. Boys are falling behind girls in every single academic category."

Hancock says society's treatment of boys is no excuse for violent behavior. But he points out that, historically speaking, men were the ones who were tough and went to war. Heroism in men was celebrated. But now, society is chipping

away more and more natural opportunities to be tough and to be a hero.

"We're taking recess out of school so they can't even win at tag or red rover," he says. "We're taking all these things out of boys' lives that allow them to experience risk and competition, that allow them to experience success and failure and to recover from failure to go on to be successful.

"So it's no wonder we have boys who are confused about their own purpose and who don't have the connections that they should have. And in their frustration, they're acting out."

What Hancock describes reminds me of experts in Canada who said dodgeball in schools was tantamount to legalized bullying. These researchers wanted Canada to ban the sport from schools.

The dodgeball debacle seemed foolish to me when we have a more dire problem of male violence to deal with. According to the Federal Bureau of Prisons, the vast majority of people incarcerated—almost 93%—are male. And from what I could tell, the majority of people seemed to be men in those awful videos of mob-style beatings in Minneapolis last month.

"At some point, we have to make this connection—26 out of 27 last mass shooters didn't have a father at home," Hancock says. "Who's going to make the connection and say, 'Maybe the issue isn't guns. Maybe the issue isn't mental health'? Although that's a big part of it, if you take the father out of the picture, you have more mental-health issues than you would have if he were present.

"So you're seeing these effects, but the root cause that is common in so many things in the scene today is fatherlessness."

Sadly, organizations like Boy Scouts that used to promote valuable principles no longer do so. Hancock says that over

the last five or six years, Boy Scouts has abandoned its traditional groundings. So Trail Life USA is trying to fill that void. He says the organization is not awards-based but instead focuses on character, leadership and adventure.

“We started five years ago and have had tremendous growth,” he says. “We’re in over 800 churches in 49 states with members in all 50 states and 30,000 members across the country. Parents are loving the character and leadership opportunities for their sons, and the boys are loving the adventure. Boys want to be outdoors. They want that risk. They want that competition.”

But Trail Life USA isn’t just about the boys. After the young boys go to bed, Hancock says, the dads often stay up and talk around the fire.

“That’s where the [dads] have deep conversations about parenting and the things they’re struggling with,” he says. “One of the best secrets about Trail Life USA is that it’s also a powerful men’s ministry where men are dealing with real-life issues, challenges they’re having at home that they’re working out together. They’re learning from each other.”

Hancock tells me single moms have approached him to thank him for the organization’s impact on their sons. One woman’s husband died when their son was only 2 years old. She cried out to God to put godly men in her son’s life who could help him learn what it means to be a man.

“[She said], ‘My husband would want me to thank you.’ So even fatherless boys and single moms are receiving ministry.”

To learn more about Trail Life USA, visit [trail.life](#). You can also find out how this Boy Scouts alternative is impacting young men for Christ by listening to my full interview with Hancock! {eof}