

## Biography, Thomas Vanden Berk

*“Unlike the multitudes who bemoan the violence and do nothing to help, Tom Vanden Berk has spent his life helping.”*

-- Chicago Tribune columnist Mary Schmich, June 9, 2016



Widely regarded as a passionate and outspoken leader in youth welfare and violence prevention, Thomas Vanden Berk has devoted 49 years to improving the lives of abused, neglected and dependent children in the Chicago area.

As CEO of UCAN from 1987 to 2016, and now as UCAN CEO Emeritus, VandenBerk has been a hands-on change agent in strategic planning, fundraising and nonprofit management, and led the organization from its role as a shelter for 50 boys and girls on the brink of closing to the forefront of child welfare agencies in Chicago. In early July 2016, he transitioned into the role of CEO Emeritus at UCAN where he continues to focus on social justice issues, particularly the disproportionate homicide rate among youth of color, and fundraising for UCAN.

An avid advocate of UCAN's vision that “youth who have suffered trauma can become our future leaders,” Vanden Berk has been a recognized supporter for implementing a culture and practice that fosters positive youth development. Today, UCAN serves more than 11,000 youth and families, and is a leader in trauma-informed treatment, violence prevention, youth development and diversity and inclusion. UCAN's clinical approach to healing is united, culturally relevant and consistent.

Vanden Berk suffered the loss of his 15-year-old son to gun violence in 1992 but has turned anguish into determination, becoming instrumental in informing and educating a long list of child welfare organizations on the importance of strategies to combat gun-related deaths, disability and suffering.

He founded HELP for Survivors, a victim self-help support group for parents and others who have lost children or loved ones to the gun violence epidemic. He is a founding member of The Bell Campaign (eventually known as the Million Mom March), and has served as a board member of the nationally respected Brady Campaign whose mission is to create a safer America that will lead to a dramatic reduction in gun deaths and injuries.

Most recently, Vanden Berk has been the driving force behind the creation of the Gun Violence Prevention Political Action Committee (G-PAC), a non-partisan political action committee which since 2013 has worked to counter the political influence of the gun industry and its lobby efforts in Springfield, Illinois, the seat of the state's government. G-PAC raises the resources necessary to protect and elect public officials with the courage to stand up to the gun lobby. G-PAC provides campaign support to legislators committed to keeping guns out the hands of criminals, gang members, domestic abusers and the dangerously mentally ill.

At every available opportunity, Vanden Berk cites sobering statistics that spell out how each year in Illinois an average of 1,000 people are killed by gun violence and countless others are seriously injured; most are children. The devastation imposed by this epidemic on communities and families is unimaginable. He eloquently repeats how polls show that a majority of gun owners and non-gun owners alike favor sensible gun safety measures to save lives.

A board member of the Youth Network Council who frequently speaks on gun violence and has testified before the U.S. Senate Judiciary subcommittee, VandenBerk has actively worked with Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel on the implementation of sensible gun laws in Chicago. He serves on the governor's Illinois Anti-Violence Commission and is an advisory board member of the NIU Center for Child Welfare & Education; an advisory board member of the Dominican University School of Social Work; and board member of the National Runaway Switchboard. The Council for Health and Human Service Ministries named him the 1998 Executive of the Year.

Over the years, Vanden Berk has been profiled in the media for his passionate support of reasonable gun restrictions. Regarding Chicago's ongoing and still mostly unsuccessful campaign against gun violence, in a June 2016 profile of Vanden Berk, Pulitzer Prize-winning *Chicago Tribune* columnist Mary Schmich wrote: “Has anything gotten better? All I know for sure is that without the work of people like Vanden Berk, things would be a whole lot worse.” Titled “Chicago's persistent violence and a father's fight for change,” Schmich's moving column called Vanden Berk “an ardent local voice for gun restrictions — not a ban, but tight registration laws, pressure on owners and dealers.”

Tom Vanden Berk is the subject of and source for dozens of news media features and stories that chronicle the impact of gun violence in the Chicagoland area and nationally, as well as the impact of trauma in youths' lives and how to support and motivate those who are most directly affected by exposure to trauma.

**THOMAS C. VANDENBERK**  
**2754 Summit Avenue**  
**Highland Park, IL 60035**  
**HM: (847) 926-8454**  
**WK: (773) 588-0180**

**Professional Experience:**

**CEO Emeritus** (7/2016 to present)

**Chief Executive Officer** (10/87 to 7/2016)

**UCAN, Chicago, IL.**

Overall responsibility for the management of full service child welfare agency with:

- Annual Budget growth from \$24-\$45 million
- Three Residential Programs
- Special Education Therapeutic Day School (The Uhlich Academy)
- Professional Foster Parenting Program
- Independent Living Arrangement & Transitional Living Program
- Teen Parenting Service Network
- Psychotherapeutic Out-patient Counseling (Midwest Family Resources)
- Youth Leadership, Education & Advocacy (U-LEAD)
- Other comprehensive preventative & support services

**Board Member, Current**

**Gun Violence Prevention Political Action Committee (G-PAC)**

Non-partisan political action committee providing support to legislators committed to keeping guns out the hands of criminals, gang members, domestic abusers and the dangerously mentally ill.

**Ass't. Executive Director/Director of Residential Services, (1983 to 10/87)**

**Lawrence Hall School for Boys, 4833 North Francisco, Chicago, IL.**

As assistant director, assumed full administrative responsibility in the absence of the executive director; as director of residential services responsible for total management of specialized residential treatment program, group homes and independent living programs.

**Associate Director/Program Director (1980 - 1983)**

**Lawrence Hall School for Boys, 4833 North Francisco, Chicago, IL.**

Acted on behalf of executive director in his absence and aided in program planning, development and implementation.

**Program Director, Lawrence Hall School for Boys (1978 -1980)**

Overall responsibility for three residential program units, i.e., treatment planning for 24 youth; hiring and supervision of 18 staff.

**Work History (con't.):**

**Assistant Director**, Community Safety Program, Chicago, IL. (1977 - 1978)  
Developed and implemented community based crime prevention program in Edgewater-Uptown area of Chicago, with annual program budget of \$250,000.

**Program Director**, Lawrence Hall School for Boys (1975 -1977)  
Direct supervision and responsibility for two residential program units.

**Staff Development Coordinator**, Lawrence Hall School for Boys (1974 - 1975)  
Developed comprehensive in-service training and orientation program for total professional and program staff.

**Unit Supervisor**, Lawrence Hall School for Boys (1973 -1974)  
Direct supervision of child care staff and unit activities, including direct child care.

**Child Care Worker**, Lawrence Hall School for Boys (1971 - 1973)  
Provided direct child care for youth, i.e., parenting role in supervision and direction, including guidance, counseling, discipline and understanding.

**Education:** Roosevelt University, Chicago, IL.  
Masters in Business Administration, January, 1982

Jane Addams School of Social Work  
University of Illinois at Chicago, 1978

University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI.  
Bachelor of Arts in Sociology, June, 1970

**Related Professional Affiliations:**

Member, Child Care Association of Illinois  
Member, Advisory Council of the Child Welfare Training Institute  
Co-chair, Child Welfare Advisory Council  
Member, Illinois Council on Training  
Board Member, National Runaway Switchboard  
Board Member, Council for Health & Human Services Ministries  
~ Member, IL Conference of Council for Health & Human Service Ministries  
Board Member, The Brady Campaign/Million Mom March  
Member, HELP Network of Concerned Professionals  
~ Child Welfare Liaison, Steering Committee  
Member, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Illinois  
Certified Child Care Worker, IL. Association of Child Care Workers