

March for Our Lives: Why This March Was Different

“Enough is enough. Today is the beginning of change, today we honor Parkland and all that they have lost. Thank you everyone for being here, you yourselves are making a difference.” Those are the words of **Sofia Capaldo**, senior at Johnson and Wales University and organizer of The March for Our Lives rally that took place in Providence on March 24. Her words were touching, but the undeniably harrowing words came out of the mouths of students from various local high schools and colleges.

As I stood there with my camera and my “Am I Next” sign, it became clear to me why I was moved to tears several times during the rally. These were students. Young adults, most of whom were either two years my junior or two years my senior, and they all had had enough. RI citizens were hearing first-hand what it was like to be a high schooler and fear waking up and going to school every morning. They were hearing first-hand how and why giving a teacher a gun wouldn’t make anyone feel safer. Adult protesters who came out to fight for stricter gun laws left the rally feeling more than ever that change was due, that they owed it to these students to fix the warped system that is at fault for too many lost lives.

This rally was different because it provided windows into the lives of students trying to get an education in a world where school shootings have become the new normal. In previous anti-gun violence marches and rallies that I have seen, politicians speak about how they are going to change the laws and make it so that no more children die at the hand of a gun. The next day, however, there is another shooting and the rally/march that took place the day before goes unremembered.

What those rallies had wrong is that people directly affected by the shootings didn’t speak. Sure politicians can be upset and heartbroken about the events, but at least it wasn’t their best friend who got shot; at least they don’t have to live in fear while attending school; at least they don’t have to hear about it on the news and wonder if they’re next.

Nina Gregg, a sophomore at RISD, is from Parkland, Florida. Some of the people killed were her neighbors and family friends. To her, this shooting is personal and change is in order. After her speech, there wasn’t a dry eye in the audience. I spoke with Nina afterward and she had a message to deliver to protestors everywhere: “I want to stress that it can’t end today. Just because we’re not going to be having marches every single month, people still need to be taking action.” According to Gregg it doesn’t matter how big or small the change is as long as you make one. “Making a post on Facebook or voting and making that change, it’s all so important.”

Another speaker was Coventry High School junior **Tyler Alexander**. Alexander ended his speech on a high note passionately saying, “Years from now, historians will look at us and they will see that we have had enough of being afraid, enough of being ignored and dismissed and enough of being murdered.” Tyler also gave recollections of March 14 when his high school believed there was an open shooter on campus. His memory of the event made it even more apparent that students fearing for their lives in school where they should feel safe is absolutely unacceptable, but it has turned into the new normal.

Capalbo says that it was important for her to have the students be the main speakers because it was their time. "It was important to have the students' voices heard rather than the government officials who are always speaking and getting plastered all over magazines and newspapers. This was about the kids."

The speakers weren't the only students in attendance that day. **Isabella Caban**, a senior at The Met High School was there as a fed-up student and a girl who knows what loss at the hand of a gun is like. "If we had stricter gun control laws, I would still have my father. Living my life without my dad, I can only imagine the life of a parent losing their kid." Caban hopes that from this rally, stricter gun control laws will arise, so no more families have to feel the pain that is all too familiar to her.

Gina Raimondo, Aaron Regunberg and **Jorge Elorza** were also in attendance, and it was clear that they are aware of how much students and young adults matter in this fight for change. "It's literally made the difference. This time it feels like the NRA doesn't have a response. We have a real chance to make a change and it's 100% because of the young people taking leadership. We're all looking to take their lead," said Regunberg.

It's true. Young students everywhere are taking leadership. The Millennials and Generation Z have been thrown a lot in this lifetime. School shootings have made it difficult to fully concentrate in and enjoy our learning environment. Yet we haven't accepted that the way things are are the way they're going to stay. We've fought. As the next generation of politicians, doctors, lawyers and police officers, it's inspiring to see and know that change is something we expect and are willing to fight for.

I'm proud to be a Millennial because that title means I'm someone who aims to empower others and refine the system. This rally was just the first glimpse of what young learners can do. As Regunberg said, things are changing because of us, and we won't stop until we are satisfied.