

THE CALIFORNIA WELLNESS FOUNDATION

FALL/WINTER 2011

SPECIAL EDITION
The Yates Legacy

grantee

compelling health stories from california



Shifting a Paradigm To Save Young Lives

With \$118 million funded over 20 years,
California grantees build a movement using
a public health approach to show that violence
against youth is not inevitable, but preventable



Violence Prevention

A Long-term Commitment To Keep Youth Safe

By Frank O. Sotomayor

It was a bold plan, built from a bold vision. The California Wellness Foundation, barely six months in existence, launched the Violence Prevention Initiative (VPI), a 10-year, \$60 million campaign, in 1992. Its goal was clear-cut — to help stem the gun violence that was killing thousands of young Californians each year.

Some skeptics noted that the money could be better spent building prisons. After all, wasn't violence inevitable? California was in the midst of what had become known as the "decade of death," and gun violence had become the leading cause of death for young people. Media reports referred to gangs as "predators" and "urban terrorists." Community members

were portrayed as frightened and helpless. TCWF's leaders insisted that something could and had to be done.

In September 1992, Gary L. Yates, then a senior program officer, made his recommendation to TCWF's Board of Directors for embarking upon the initiative.

"The Foundation has an opportunity to influence a fundamental shift in public perception so that societal violence is seen as remediable and interpersonal violence is seen as preventable," wrote Yates, who, since 1995, has been TCWF's president and CEO.

With the Board's approval, TCWF became the nation's first major philanthropic organization to embrace a public health model for violence prevention. The Foundation embarked upon a long-term, multifaceted campaign to curb violent deaths and

injuries for young people ages 12 through 24.

No one said the Foundation's journey would be without complications. It wasn't. But 19 years later, hundreds of grantees, partners and other committed individuals collectively have made significant strides in preventing violent deaths and injuries. TCWF funding became the catalyst for a chain of developments that evolved into the state's violence prevention movement.

Experts in violence prevention credit TCWF with shifting the issue's public policy paradigm, just as Yates had envisioned.

TCWF "actually got the idea on the map that violence is preventable," said Sandra L. McBrayer, CEO of the Children's Initiative of San Diego, a current Foundation grantee.

CALIFORNIA FUNDERS

During the VPI, eight other foundations joined TCWF by pledging an additional \$10 million for grants to prevent youth violence:

Alliance Healthcare Foundation
The California Endowment
Crail Johnson Foundation
James Irvine Foundation
David and Lucile Packard Foundation
San Francisco Foundation
S.H. Cowell Foundation
Sierra Health Foundation

UCLA researcher Jorja Leap agrees, acknowledging the Foundation for changing the landscape.

“The reaction to violence was suppression, suppression and more suppression,” Leap said, as she recalls her time working as a social worker in South Los Angeles. “When I wanted to refer a young person who needed help, there was no place to go.”

Today, violence is clearly recognized as a public health issue. Thousands of programs — operating with a variety of funding sources — are making a difference in young people’s lives across California.

At the policy level, officials — from politicians to police chiefs — acknowledge that they “can’t arrest their way out of this problem.” Many have accepted this public health model.

Since the completion of the VPI in 2002, TCWF’s funding in violence prevention has continued as one of the eight health issues prioritized in the Responsive Grantmaking Program. During this period, TCWF has awarded about \$58 million in grants, making it the state’s largest private funder of violence

prevention programs. Combined with the initial \$60 million, TCWF has now invested \$118 million through 672 grants for violence prevention. During the first 10 years, eight other California foundations contributed an additional \$10 million toward the VPI.

The Initiative brought together physicians, public health workers, criminal justice officials, researchers, evaluators, ex-gang members, media practitioners, philanthropic leaders, policy consultants and policymakers. And, of course, it has relied on people on the frontlines who work directly with young people.

All of the efforts have had a common goal: keeping young people out of harm’s way. Through a combination of factors and forces — some known, some not — California firearm deaths and injuries have dropped dramatically in the last two decades.

In 1993, at the peak of gang- and crack cocaine-related violence, 1,396 young Californians between the ages of 12 and 24 were killed as a result of firearm violence. The number of firearm deaths fluctuates from year to year, so it is useful to look at averages for a five-year period, 1991-95, and compare them to averages for the years 2005-09. Using these parameters, firearm deaths for the 12-24 age group dropped 42 percent, and injuries related to firearm assaults

decreased 52 percent, according to statistics from the California Department of Public Health.

Even more illuminating is the use of rates for firearm deaths and injuries, as these numbers better reflect the steady population growth within the age group. Comparing those same five-year periods, the rate of firearm deaths and injuries for this age group declined 54 percent and 61 percent, respectively.

The precise role of TCWF and its grantees in achieving the decline is, of course, impossible to measure because of the interplay of many variables, including new policies, revised law enforcement strategies, and the community initiatives of the type launched by TCWF.

“The reaction to violence was suppression, suppression and more suppression. When I wanted to refer a young person who needed help, there was no place to go.”

“We are proud that TCWF was in the vanguard and is part of the solution that has led to a significant reduction in violent death and injury to youth in our state,” said Julio Marcial, TCWF program director for violence prevention.

Even though violence has been substantially reduced since 1991, the percentage of young people victimized, especially by gun violence, remains alarmingly high, and is still a leading cause of death of California’s young people.

“This high rate of death by gun violence underlies the need to continue intervention and prevention efforts,” Marcial said.

Shoes like these baseball cleats once belonging to 7-year-old Evan Foster, who was killed by gang gunfire, are displayed in an August 2000 Silent March event held in Los Angeles. Events like these help illustrate the number of people killed by handguns each year.

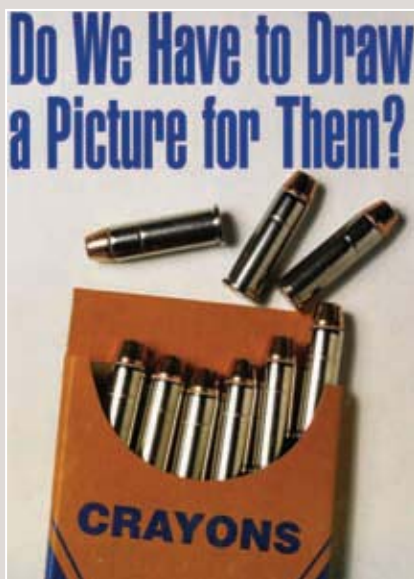


At the Beginning: Drawing From the Pain

When TCWF began work on the VPI, it reviewed reports from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Surgeon General, which had designated violence as a serious public health problem. The Foundation assembled an advisory committee of 45 diverse individuals, including violence prevention practitioners, young people at risk of being victims of violence and former gang members, to help develop the funding strategies for the VPI. The public health approach took into account the physical and social environments that breed or inhibit violence and agents of violence, such as guns.

“The Foundation was really saying, let’s actually engage the people who are the victims but also, in many cases, the perpetrators,” said McBrayer, who is also on the board of the State of California’s Corrections Standards Authority.

The first statewide VPI conference in 1993 brought together grantees representing a diverse set of perspectives. But that gathering also stirred tension as different groups advocated their own



Poster for “Do We Have to Draw a Picture for Them?” an instructional video produced in 1998 as part of Prevent Handgun Violence Against Kids, a multifaceted public education campaign to reduce access to handguns among youth. The campaign was funded by a TCWF grant to Martin & Glantz, LLC.

approaches. A year later, Yates recalls, a unifying transformation occurred.

“Perhaps it was drawn from the pain many felt when the names of these youth who died at the hands of violence the previous year were called out during a moment of silence,” Yates said.

The Foundation resolved to focus on gun violence first. It mapped a funding strategy that encompassed four interactive components: research, leadership development, policy advocacy and community action programs.

David Steinhart, Juvenile Justice Program director at Commonweal, said the combination of a “sound vision and a winning strategy” put VPI on the path to success.

Grantee Research, Advocacy and Saturday Night Specials

In a concerted attempt to shift the public perception to view violence as a preventable health issue, TCWF embarked upon a research-based, multimillion-dollar public education campaign as part of the public policy component. The Foundation funded the establishment of the Pacific Center for Violence Prevention (PCVP) to develop policies, provide training and create a resource library on violence prevention. Martin & Glantz, LLC, a TCWF grantee that specialized in public education campaigns, worked with PCVP and contracted with pollsters and advertising agencies to create television ads and a citizen engagement drive.

One of several TV spots said: “More kids are killed by handguns than car crashes.” TV viewers were asked to call 1-800-222-MANY (now retired) to receive a citizen involvement kit. “The campaign turned the dominant gun lobby message around and said that too many handguns are the problem and tapped into the public support to keep youth safe,” said Laurie A. Kappe, at the time a senior associate at Martin & Glantz. She now heads

i.e. communications, LLC, a TCWF consultant.

In 1995, the Foundation was among the first in philanthropy to fund a statewide video conference that linked policymakers in Washington, D.C., to Sacramento, Los Angeles and 16 other California sites. At the gathering, Garen Wintemute, M.D., M.P.H., presented findings from his TCWF-funded study titled “Ring of Fire.” As director of the Violence Prevention Research Program at UC Davis and an emergency room physician, Wintemute knew firsthand the devastating effects of gun violence. His research had uncovered unsettling findings:

- Six gun manufacturers encircling Los Angeles produced nearly 686,000 so-called “Saturday night specials” in 1992.
- The factories were manufacturing a third of all handguns made in the country.
- Federal data showed that Ring of Fire guns were 3.4 times as likely to be involved in a crime as handguns of other major manufacturers.
- The guns were inexpensive to buy because they were cheaply made.

“Federal law prohibits the importation of poorly made, easily concealable handguns by imposing size, design and performance standards,” Wintemute had said in his study. But such standards were not being imposed on U.S.-made Saturday night specials. He advocated banning production of these handguns by requiring that they conform to criteria applied to imports.

Kappe recalls the impact of Wintemute’s appearance at the video conference event.

“His presentation was riveting and persuasive,” Kappe said.

Immediately following the videoconference, community meetings were held to respond to the policy options presented. The momentum

continued and within a few months, regional meetings were conducted involving law enforcement, youth and TCWF-funded community action programs. Letter-writing campaigns were launched, and information was circulated to 10,000 opinion leaders. At the same time, the gun lobby took notice and mounted its own campaigns to thwart any handgun legislation.

Responding to the growing gun violence prevention movement, more than 300 cities and counties passed ordinances to restrict access to handguns, placing additional pressure on the Legislature in Sacramento. With funding from the Foundation, Legal Community Against Violence created a “how-to guide” to create local ordinances and provided information and support to city attorneys, local officials and supportive state legislators. In 1997, the Legislature approved a ban on the so-called “junk guns,” but Gov. Pete Wilson vetoed it. Two years later, a package of measures ultimately won approval. Gov. Gray Davis signed six bills, including a manufacturing ban on Saturday night specials.

As a result of the ban, Wintemute said, most of the factories went out of business and one remained that produces target-shooting guns. A sharp drop in gun violence began to occur nationwide, but Wintemute does not ascribe a cause-and-effect relationship from ban to decline.

“I would say that it was likely to be one factor,” he said, citing “a scientist’s caution.”

One of the next campaigns involved increasing public-sector investment in violence prevention. In the 1997-98 fiscal year, California spent \$41.8 million for youth crime and violence prevention programs, a tiny fraction of what it spent on juvenile law enforcement and incarceration. At the time, Foundation-funded polling found that Californians, regardless of political party affiliation, favored having more dollars dedicated to violence prevention programs.

“I am struck by the incredible courage, character and commitment of so many individuals working on this issue.



Clockwise from top left: Lorna Hawkins, executive director of Drive By Agony and a 1993 California Peace Prize honoree; David Muhammad, chief probation officer of Alameda County and a 2000 VPI community fellow; and Wayne Sakamoto, director of the Safe Schools Department of the Murrieta Valley Unified School District and a 2002 peace prize honoree.

Combined with grantees’ advocacy efforts, that preference translated into legislation and appropriations in Sacramento, and by 2000, \$383.3 million annually was budgeted for violence prevention.

Grantees provided information that set the stage for the Arnold Schwarzenegger-led Proposition 49, the After School Education and Safety Act approved by California voters in 2002. The measure created programs for youth, especially during the hours between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m., which had been found to be the peak times for crime and violence against school-age youth. Prop. 49 provides \$550 million annually to programs operated by schools and community agencies, a figure that has stayed constant, even during the state’s financial downturns. And overall, state spending for after-school, youth violence prevention, gang intervention and re-

entry programs exceeded \$750 million for fiscal year 2010-11, according to Commonwealth’s Steinhart, who tracks the spending figures each year.

Leadership Recognition: The Ripple Effect Multiplies

Three programs were launched under the VPI’s leadership recognition and development component. Community Fellows provided grants to individuals involved as violence prevention practitioners to pursue specific projects and to mentor youth with leadership potential. The Academic Fellowships boosted the number and diversity of health professionals with a focus on violence prevention. The California Peace Prize, which continues today, honors three Californians annually for exemplary efforts to prevent violence and promote peace. In recognition of their efforts, each

receives a cash award of \$25,000.

The programs all helped push the needle forward on violence prevention and, in some instances, helped fellows and peace prize honorees advance efforts in their own communities.

Take David Muhammad, a 2000 community fellow. Working as a journalist, he brought a writing program to youths in Alameda County Juvenile Hall. At a TCWF gathering, he met Martin Jacks, head of The Mentoring Center of Oakland and a 1995 community fellow. Through that connection, Muhammad accepted a job at the center and later became its executive director. The center, a TCWF grantee, focuses on prevention programs and in mapping re-entry paths for young people about to leave incarceration.

“That community fellowship significantly aided my career trajectory,” he said.

Muhammad later took two positions on the East Coast. Earlier this year, he returned to Oakland as chief probation officer of Alameda County, where he is responsible for overseeing 20,000 people on probation, a 600-member staff and a \$90 million budget.

Yates says he continues to be struck by the incredible

courage, character and commitment of so many individuals working on this issue and recalls one person in particular — Lorna Hawkins, a 1993 California Peace Prize honoree.

“Lorna Hawkins had lost not one, but two sons to gun violence. She had used this tragedy as a catalyst to develop a violence prevention program in her neighborhood,” he said. “Over the last 19 years, I have met hundreds of dedicated people like this who make a difference in the lives of young people every day.”

Another peace prize honoree, Wayne Sakamoto, has been engaged in violence prevention for 25 years in San Diego and Riverside counties. He now directs Safe Schools for the Murrieta Valley Unified School District, a TCWF grantee, working to stop the formation of gangs.

Sakamoto compares the work of TCWF to the propelling of hundreds of stones into a pond and seeing a ripple effect multiply from both individual and collective efforts. Sakamoto says he and others who have been funded by TCWF have been inspired by that ripple effect.

“In turn, we’ve created our own ripple effects that impact the community in a positive way,” he said.

CALIFORNIA YOUTH CRIME AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAMS

Total State Funds from FY 1996/97 through 2010/11 (millions of dollars).

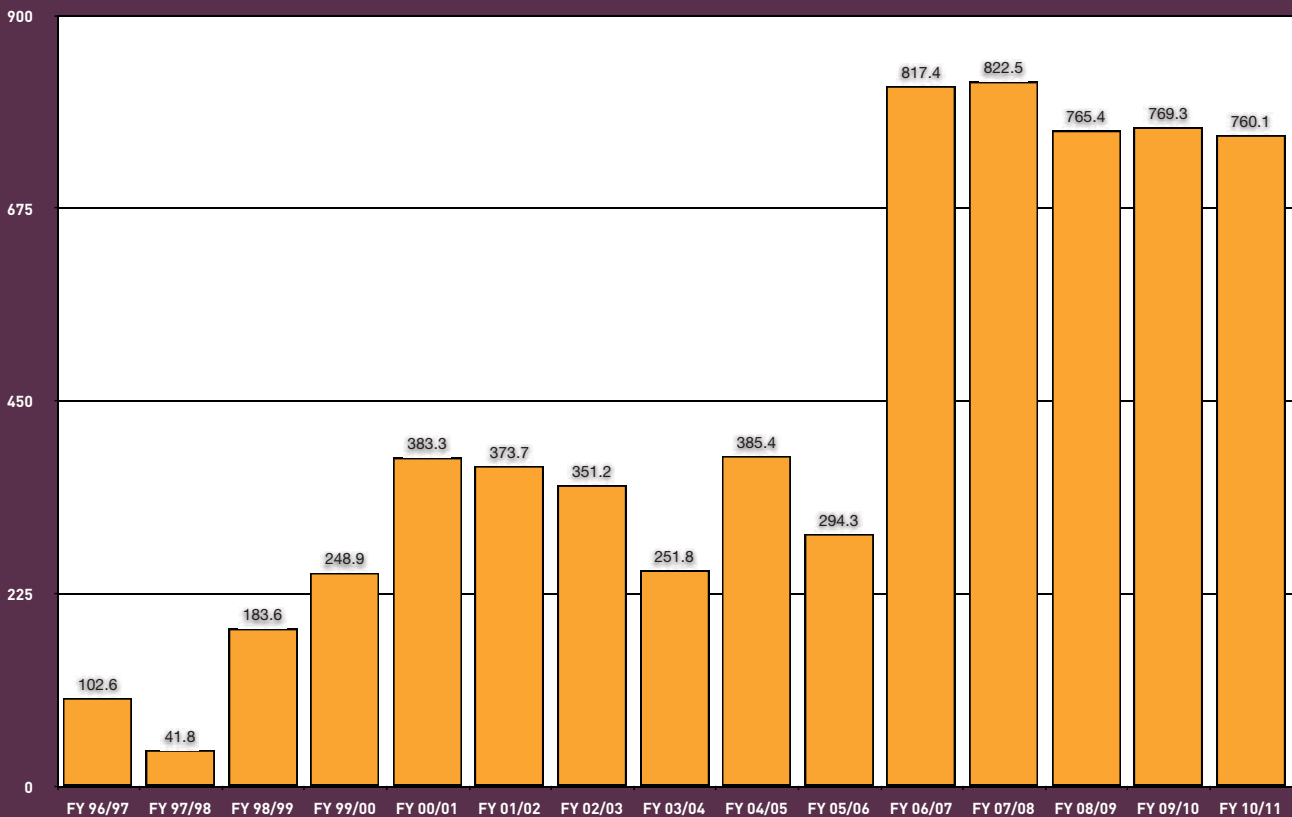


Chart compiled by Commonweal. Sources: California Department of Finance; California state budget and budget trailer bills; individual state agencies and departments.

Kudos

In recognition of his leadership, the Foundation's President and CEO **Gary L. Yates** was honored in May by the Children's Hospital Los Angeles ChampionFund, which acknowledged his legacy of promoting adolescent health and wellness throughout California.

Yates will be recognized this fall with three additional awards: in September, the Center for Community Health and Well-Being is honoring him as a "founding champion" who has helped the organization provide quality health care to vulnerable women and families in South Sacramento; in October, the California Primary Care Association is recognizing Yates as a "Hero" for his vision and efforts to raise awareness and support for community clinics and health centers; and in November, the National Hispanic Health Foundation is presenting him with the Hispanic Health Leadership Award for his leadership and commitment to improving the health of underserved populations.

In September, High Desert Resource Network is honoring TCWF with the 2011 Chairman's Award for the Foundation's funding of the social service sector. ▼



TCWF-sponsored conferences and events — such as these — provide a space for nonprofit providers, advocates, researchers, policymakers and others from diverse sectors to build skills, develop knowledge and facilitate the discovery of unexpected allies.

Work in the Field: A Program Continuum

Looking at the issues through a public health lens, Muhammad points out that a young person's environment plays a key role in his or her perception of violence.

"Most young people who get caught up in violence and the criminal justice systems grow up in similar neighborhoods with concentrated poverty, blight, high unemployment, low-performing schools, liquor stores, and easy access to guns and drugs. These are environmental issues," Muhammad said. Moreover, when young people grow up in such a destructive environment, destructive behavior too often becomes far too normal.

"We have to address the entire environment that has given rise to the behavior through a holistic response," he said.

As the Foundation's Marcial travels throughout the state, he observes those environments. He also listens to young people and their concerns.

"Can you imagine being a 12-year-old and not knowing if you're going to make it home because you might cross the wrong street?" he said.

With that and other stark realities still present in many neighborhoods, TCWF today makes grants to a continuum of violence prevention services. This is how Marcial describes them:

- **Prevention:** "We've learned that mentoring and after-school programs are essential because they offer constructive alternatives to gangs, drugs and crime, and also can help improve school-day attendance and increase academic achievement."
- **Intervention:** "This involves providing services to youth at the highest risk of becoming a victim of violence, some of whom are formerly gang-affiliated or incarcerated. These youth need access to job training, job placement and mental health counseling. The goal is to help those who have made a first mistake not to make the second or third."
- **Re-entry:** "This is working with currently incarcerated young people and developing plans for them so, once they exit the system, they don't go back." Such programs offer counseling, tattoo removal, job training and placement to help keep formerly incarcerated youths from reoffending.

TWO DECADES OF CHANGE

Selected Key Events in the History of California's Violence Prevention Movement

- 1984** The public health approach to the study and prevention of interpersonal violence receives formal recognition when Surgeon General C. Everett Koop says: "Violence is every bit as much a public health issue for me and my successors in this century as smallpox, tuberculosis, and syphilis were for my predecessors in the last century."
-
- 1992** The California Wellness Foundation is founded.
- The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) establishes the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC) as the lead federal organization for violence prevention. The Division of Violence Prevention becomes one of three divisions within NCIPC.
-
- 1993** TCWF allocates \$30 million for first phase of the Violence Prevention Initiative (VPI).
- TCWF funds establishment of the Pacific Center for Violence Prevention to promote the public health perspective on violence and advocate for policies reducing firearm injuries and death among youth.
- A special edition of *Health Affairs* addresses violence as a public health issue — the first special issue to examine violence as a preventable public health problem.
-
- 1994** TCWF grant awarded for public education campaign, "Prevent Handgun Violence Against Kids."
- Dr. Garen Wintemute of UC Davis publishes "Ring of Fire," which finds 80 percent of junk handguns are made in L.A. County.
- The Little Hoover Commission issues the report "The Juvenile Crime Challenge: Making Prevention a Priority," which presents a detailed legislative and administrative strategy for improving the state's youth crime prevention efforts.
-
- 1995** "Prevent Handgun Violence Against Kids," a video conference, links Washington, D.C., to Sacramento, Los Angeles and 16 other sites.
- 1995** "Violence Prevention: A Vision of Hope," a report prepared by the state attorney general's 26-member Policy Council on Violence Prevention is released. It concludes that state and local governments and community organizations must implement policies and programs that reduce deaths and injuries from firearms.
- California Firearms Injury Surveillance Program established at California Department of Health Services.
-
- 1996** West Hollywood passes first local ordinance banning junk gun sales.
- Gov. Pete Wilson signs State Senate Bill 1760, providing \$50 million in grants to counties for reducing juvenile crime and delinquency. The law calls for developing a continuum of responses to the problem of juvenile crime, with an emphasis on prevention, early intervention and treatment.
-
- 1998** TCWF announces second-five-year phase of the VPI.
-
- 1999** CDC publishes "Best Practices of Youth Violence Prevention: A Sourcebook for Community Action."
- Resources for Youth public education campaign launches.
-
- Gov. Gray Davis signs package of gun violence prevention bills into law, including statewide junk gun ban, an assault weapons ban, gun show accountability and security, and more.
-
- 2000** The World Health Organization (WHO) creates the Department of Injuries and Violence Prevention.
- Gov. Davis signs the Schiff-Cardenas Crime Prevention Act, appropriating \$120 million for community-based programs.
-
- 2001** "Youth Violence: A Report of the Surgeon General" is released.
- New TCWF campaign, "Choices for Youth," launches at press conferences in Los Angeles and Sacramento.
- Little Hoover Commission releases "Never Too Early, Never Too Late To Prevent Youth Crime and Violence."
-
- TCWF launches the Responsive Grantmaking Program, which includes violence prevention as one of eight health issues prioritized for funding.
-
- 2002** WHO publishes the first World Report on Violence and Health.
-
- 2003** 10th anniversary of the California Peace Prize.
-
- 2004** Prop. 49, the After School Education and Safety Act passes, providing \$550 million to programs operated by schools and community agencies.
-
- 2005** 2nd Milestones of a Global Campaign for Violence Prevention is held in conjunction with TCWF's Conference on Violence Prevention in San Francisco.
- CDC awards a major grant for leading national efforts to prevent violence to the Prevention Institute's Urban Networks to Increase Thriving Youth (UNITY).
-
- 2007** Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and the Legislature create the Governor's Office of Gang and Youth Violence Policy.
- The National Council on Crime and Delinquency, in partnership with the National League of Cities, launches the 13-city California Cities Gang Prevention Network, which develops comprehensive, multisector action plans that focus on violence prevention and gang intervention.
-
- 2008** The City of Los Angeles launches the \$24 million Gang Reduction Youth Development initiative as a violence reduction strategy.
-
- 2010** President Obama launches the National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention.

Kudos

In May 2011, the Welcome Back Initiative (WBI) was honored as one of four recipients of the Pluribus Unum Prize, a national program that recognizes efforts to promote immigrant integration. **José Ramón Fernández-Peña**, a TCWF 2011 Champions of Health Professions Diversity Award honoree, is the founder and director of WBI, a San Francisco-based organization with nine centers across the country that assists internationally trained immigrant health professionals enter the U.S. health workforce.

Staff Updates

TCWF recognizes **Magdalena Beltrán-del Olmo**, vice president of communications, and **Hsiau-lu (Cheryl) Lau**, senior financial analyst, for 15 years of service to the Foundation — and recognizes **Lauri Green**, program assistant, and **Earl Lui**, program director, for five years of service (staff shown clockwise from top left). ▼



Christopher Yanov, founder and executive director of Reality Changers, which provides after-school and mentoring programs for at-risk youth in San Diego County.

◀ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 28

TCWF also funds violence prevention programs for leadership development as well as organizations that inform policymakers and opinion leaders about the effective policies and programs for preventing violence against youth.

Another distinctive aspect of the Foundation's grantmaking has been its commitment to providing core operating support to organizations to sustain programs and to build organizational capacity, such as the ability to strengthen an agency's fund development plan. Some funders prefer to give scholarship money, said Christopher Yanov, executive director of Reality Changers, a TCWF grantee in San Diego. But, he said, flexible funding to cover everyday costs is necessary.

Programs "can't exist without paying the utilities or staff salaries," Yanov said. (For more about Reality Changers, see page 31.)

Looking Back, Looking Ahead

In December 2010, Gary Yates announced his intention to retire at the end of 2011. As the driving force behind the Foundation's violence prevention efforts, his influence is lasting.

"Few individuals in California have contributed as significantly to reducing violence as has Gary," said Father Greg Boyle, executive director of Homeboy Industries and a 2000 California Peace Prize honoree.

Looking back 19 years since the beginning of the Violence Prevention Initiative, Yates lauds the vision of the Foundation's first Board of Directors and the first TCWF president, Howard Kahn.

"The Foundation was brand new and for a health funder to launch such a unique effort was quite controversial in philanthropic circles," Yates said.

And, because Yates was involved in the development and implementation of the VPI, he says he is extremely gratified by its achievements.

"Violence is now viewed as a public health problem that can be prevented; the state of California has prioritized funding to prevent violence against young people; a field of violence prevention practitioners has been created and expanded; and, most importantly, thousands of young people in California are alive today because of the hard work of grantees and others throughout the state." 📺

REALITY CHANGERS: TURNING LIVES AROUND THROUGH ACADEMICS



Madison High School student Chris Lopez in his UC San Diego dorm room on the first day of the Academic Connections summer institute. He credits Reality Changers for guiding his path toward college.

Things could have taken a really bad turn for Chris Lopez. He was suspended from middle school three times. He was into tagging and some of his buddies had joined gangs. Which way would Lopez go?

Fortunately, Reality Changers, a San Diego mentoring program, helped him make the right choice. That was three years ago. Now, here he was, on a recent Saturday, peering out from a 10th story dorm window at UC San Diego, getting ready to tackle his third college course while still in high school.

"I made up my mind that I wanted to make something of my life and not end up in prison," 17-year-old Lopez said. Last semester, at Madison High School, his grade point average soared above 4.0.

Before Reality Changers, Eduardo Corona's life had been scarred by gang activities.

"I once faced six years of juvenile incarceration," Corona said. But, Christopher Yanov, the dynamic 32-year-old executive director of Reality Changers, helped persuade a judge to "give me another chance." Corona

improved his grades and earned awards at the UCSD Academic Connections program, a summer institute for high school students.

"Reality Changers showed me how to change my life," he said. Corona, 19, is now in college and directs a Reality Changers program for students at the middle school he once attended.

Yanov founded the program in 2001 with \$300 and four students. Now the program serves 175 young people, providing a safe place for at-risk youth, one-on-one mentoring and academic tutoring. About 150 others are on the waiting list, hoping to join the program. Reality Changers has presented 175 program graduates and current program participants with \$2.5 million for tuition to attend Academic Connections and for college scholarships.

After finishing the summer program, Yanov said, the teens gain confidence because "they know they've already earned six units of college credit." Program graduates attend dozens of colleges across the country, including Harvard, which recently accepted its third

Reality Changers student to begin classes this fall.

In 2008, Reality Changers received a three-year, \$225,000 core operating support grant from TCWF. That grant became all-important, Yanov said, when the economy faltered and other grant support lessened.

"We wouldn't have been able to continue operations without that core support," he said. "Luckily, we were able to ride out the storm until the end of 2010 when we got new grants."

Reality Changers has become a nationally recognized program that caught the attention of U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan, who has visited the agency twice over the past two years. During his recent visit, Duncan praised the program's work and commented that he sees it as a model for other U.S. cities.

"This program is helping young people from neighborhoods with the highest rates of gang violence and homicides in San Diego become the first in their families to attend college," said Julio Marcial, a TCWF program director. 🙌