

THE CALIFORNIA WELLNESS FOUNDATION

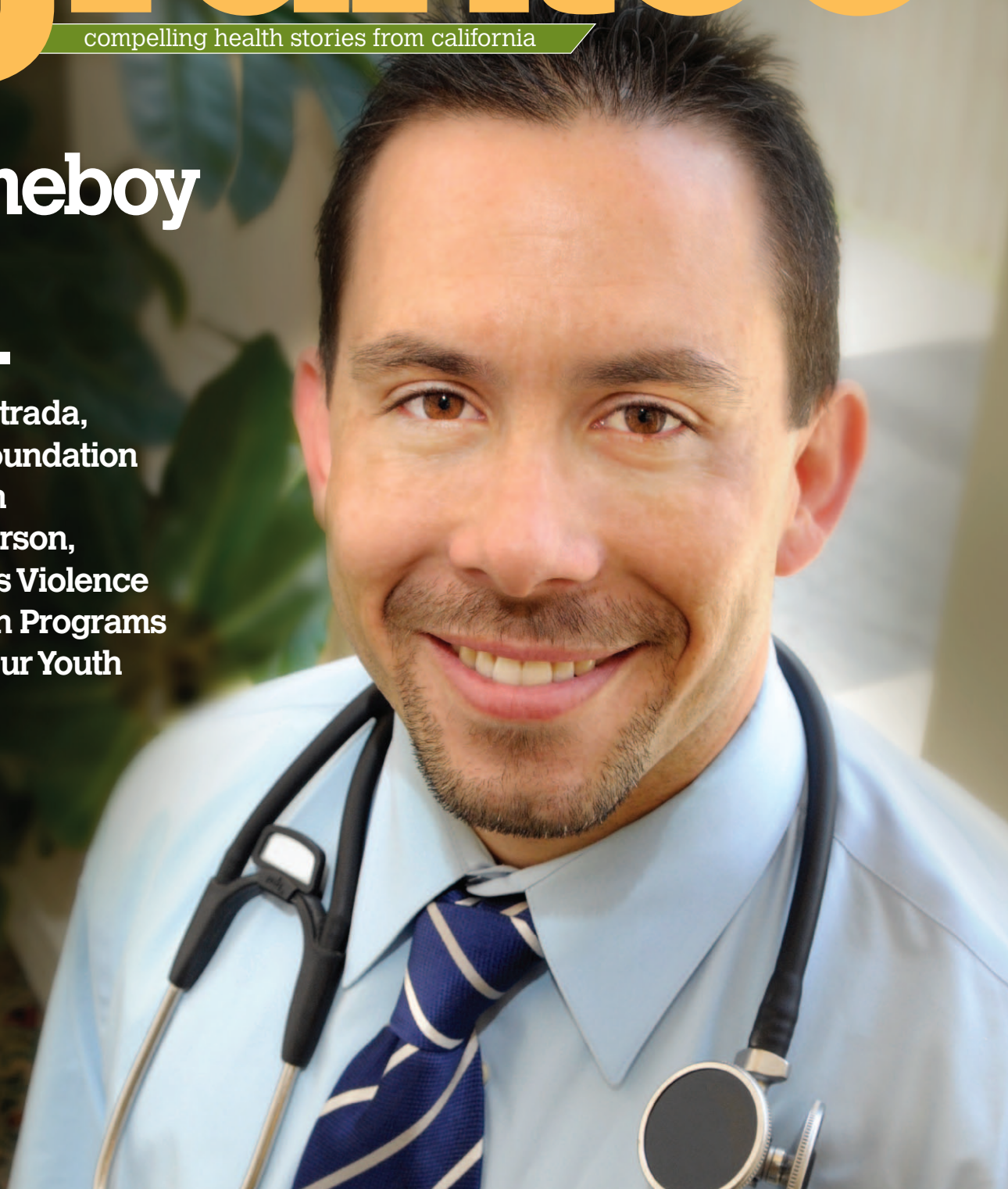
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**Jeremy Estrada,
Former Foundation
Campaign
Spokesperson,
Prescribes Violence
Prevention Programs
To Save Our Youth**



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Getting to the
Root of Oral Health

Isolated No More:
Women Access Health

The 
California Wellness
Foundation



Former Gang Member Featured in Foundation Campaign Says Intervention Program Inspired His Medical Career

Life Transformed

By Adriana Godoy Leiss

It was not the kind of commercial viewers were accustomed to seeing on network television in the 1990s. Twenty-year-old Jeremy Raider Estrada appears as a dark, shadowy figure talking about his rough childhood in the Boyle Heights neighborhood of Los Angeles.

“My mother used drugs,” he says in the ad. “My father disappeared. I joined my first gang when I was nine. . . . In 1992, my probation officer convinced a judge not to send me to prison. I was sent to a program called Rite of Passage. I learned how to learn. I learned right from wrong.”

A warm light shines on Estrada as the commercial progresses—and he’s shown transforming from a tough street kid to a young man in a crisp white shirt and necktie. He says that his new-found love of learning has inspired him to become a doctor: “I might still cut you open one day, but now it will be to take out your appendix.”

That public education campaign TV spot, made in the late 1990s and viewed by millions of Californians, was a major component of The California Wellness Foundation’s Violence Prevention Initiative (VPI), launched in 1992. The Foundation’s 10-year, \$60 million statewide grantmaking program was the first major initiative of its kind in the United States to address violence as a public health issue. Its campaign intentionally avoided unpaid public service announcements, opting for paid advertisements to ensure targeted audiences were reached during prime viewing times.

Gary L. Yates, president and chief executive officer of TCWF, was instrumental in shaping the pioneering initiative

for the Foundation. “The public education campaign played a pivotal role in increasing the investment of community-based programs to help prevent violence against youth,” he said.

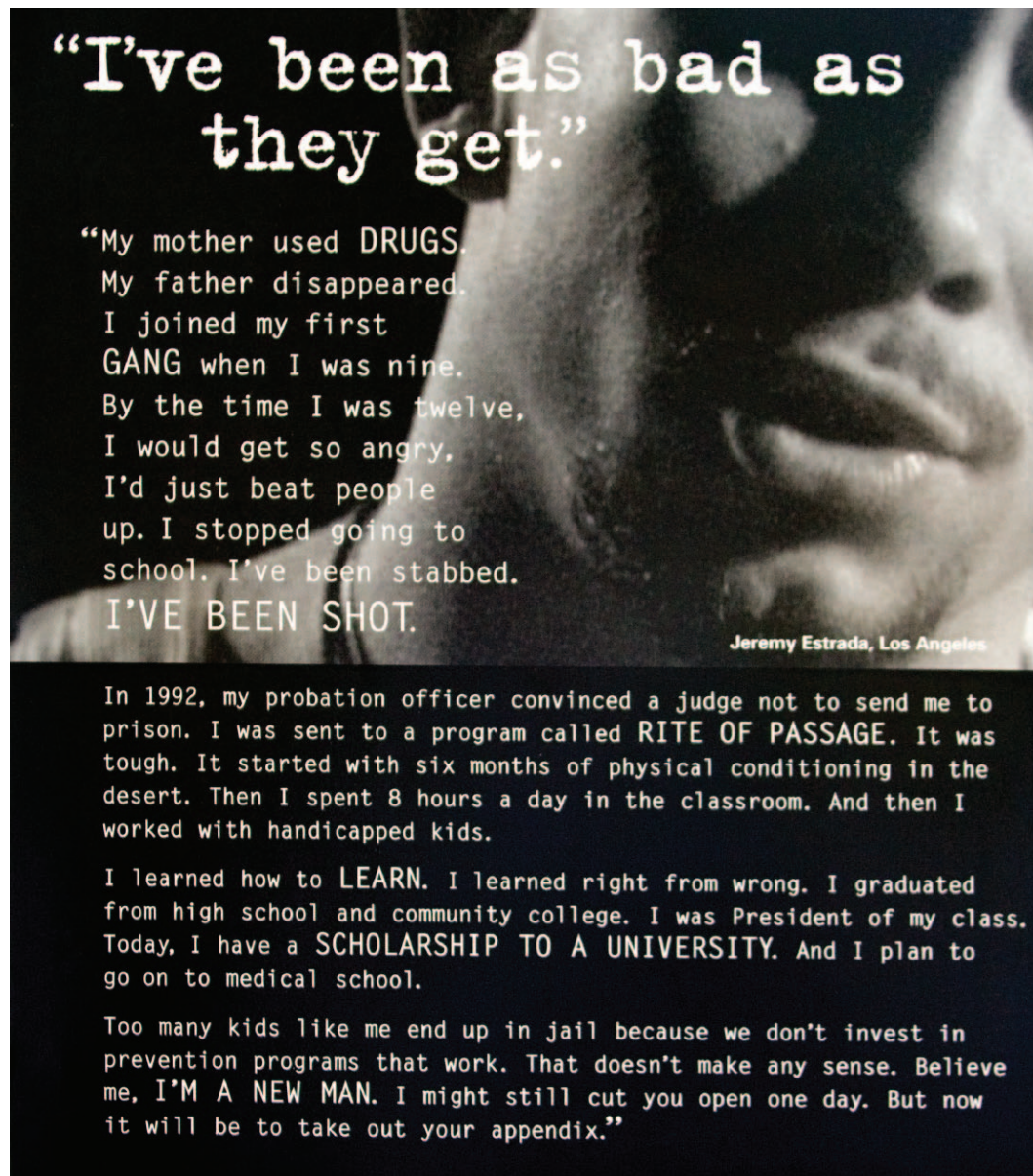
The VPI campaign was funded by a grant to Martin & Glantz, LLC, which retained the production company Zimmerman & Markman to create the commercial. Looking back, Gina Glantz, co-founder of Martin & Glantz, recalled that Estrada first came to the Foundation’s attention when he testified before the California Legislature on the viability of intervention and prevention programs, referencing his own experience at Rite of Passage, as effective ways to address violence.

“Jeremy not only had a compelling story—he also had the natural instincts of a great communicator,” said Glantz, now a senior advisor for the Service Employees International Union in Washington, D.C. “It was his honest telling of his story and his desire and commitment to shape his future that led to the powerful ad that featured him.”

Because the concept of violence as a public health issue was not widely accepted at the time, Martin & Glantz retained pollsters Ed Goetas, a Republican, and Paul Maslin, a Democrat, to conduct unprecedented bipartisan polling and focus groups to gauge public opinion. The polls and interviews showed that Californians wanted and were ready to invest in prevention strategies aimed at youth.

The next step was to find a compelling way to present these strategies to the public. Laurie Kappe, now president of i.e. communications, worked on the campaign at Martin & Glantz. “We needed a face for the statistics and a way to demonstrate the value of investing resources for youth,” Kappe said.

“ Jeremy not only had a compelling story—he also had the natural instincts of a great communicator. It was his honest telling of his story and his desire and commitment to shape his future that led to the powerful ad that featured him.



“I’ve been as bad as they get.”

“My mother used DRUGS. My father disappeared. I joined my first GANG when I was nine. By the time I was twelve, I would get so angry, I’d just beat people up. I stopped going to school. I’ve been stabbed. I’VE BEEN SHOT.

Jeremy Estrada, Los Angeles

In 1992, my probation officer convinced a judge not to send me to prison. I was sent to a program called RITE OF PASSAGE. It was tough. It started with six months of physical conditioning in the desert. Then I spent 8 hours a day in the classroom. And then I worked with handicapped kids.

I learned how to LEARN. I learned right from wrong. I graduated from high school and community college. I was President of my class. Today, I have a SCHOLARSHIP TO A UNIVERSITY. And I plan to go on to medical school.

Too many kids like me end up in jail because we don’t invest in prevention programs that work. That doesn’t make any sense. Believe me, I’M A NEW MAN. I might still cut you open one day. But now it will be to take out your appendix.”

▲ Campaign print ad, circa 1997.

Timed to coincide with the launch of the public education campaign, the paid TV commercial ran statewide for 12 weeks in early 1997. During that time, Estrada joined Foundation spokespersons at six news briefings—conducted in both English and Spanish—held in major California media markets.

Estrada was also a key participant in a statewide videoconference for the public education campaign in April 1997. This was an opportunity for policymakers, law enforcement officials, judicial officers, health professionals, advocates, policy experts and youth to talk about the strategies that worked. A pioneering use of technology at the time, “Resources

for Youth: An Honest Dialogue,” was broadcast simultaneously from Los Angeles and Sacramento, connecting 32 sites throughout California.

Twelve years later, Estrada vividly remembers the experience. “The exposure was incredibly humbling,” he said. “The reality is that I’m just one person. So many others experience tragedies and have their own mountains to overcome.”

A May 2009 graduate of the Georgetown University School of Medicine in Washington, D.C., Estrada has nearly reached the pinnacle of his own “mountain.” In June, he will enter the University of Chicago’s Internal Medicine Residency Program. After

his residency, he intends to pursue a fellowship in cardiology and ultimately plans to go back into the community to treat underserved patients who have cardiovascular disease.

Estrada returned to the Foundation in November to deliver the keynote address at the 2008 TCWF California Peace Prize awards banquet. He began his speech with the familiar story of his transformation and went on to praise the intervention and prevention programs of community nonprofits as playing an essential role in violence prevention.

“Rite of Passage deserves credit,” he said. “But on that same note, every single one of you in those chairs deserves credit. Because all of you, despite lack of funding,

despite lack of recognition, despite lack of support—you go out there and do what you want to do out of the kindness of your hearts.”

Since leaving the alternative sentencing program in August 1996, Estrada has volunteered his time to mentor youth who are struggling to turn away from gangs and violence. As an unofficial ambassador for Rite of Passage, he continues to advocate for youth violence prevention programming. In 1999, he spoke at an international conference on juvenile justice in Poland. More recently, he addressed a conference of the Pennsylvania Juvenile Court Judges’ Commission.

Closest to his heart, however, is the program that helped him turn away from violence. “Going back to Rite of Passage is like going back home for me,” he said, adding that—for him—working with the agency is nothing like community service. “I never lost that connection. The kids are my family.”

Nowadays, Estrada continued, it’s easy “to forget how bad things used to be because of how good things are now. Rite of Passage takes me back and lets me see the potential for these kids. I know that this work is what The California Wellness Foundation’s grantees do every day.”

The Foundation believes that its investment in the Violence Prevention Initiative has played a key role in reducing violence against youth in California.

“At the conclusion of the VPI in 2002, the number of youth annually killed by gun violence was about half that of what it was when we launched the Initiative,” said TCWF’s Yates. “It is difficult to measure precisely to what extent the reduction was due to the work of the VPI grantees and to what extent it was due to the other organizations and individuals who joined the growing violence prevention movement. But the compelling fact remains that thousands of young Californians were saved from gun violence during the life of the Initiative.”

TCWF continues to prioritize violence prevention through its Responsive Grantmaking Program.

Since 1993, the Foundation has provided 601 grants, totaling approximately \$110 million, for violence prevention-related activities.

Julio Marcial, TCWF program director, noted that because the Foundation has partnered with individuals like Estrada and communities most affected by violence, significant advances have been made to identify, prioritize and implement successful strategies.

“What has transpired over the past 17 years has exceeded our expectations,” he said. “A synergy of people and organizations has, in effect, created a statewide network that is working toward one common purpose: reducing violence against youth in California.” 🏆



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- Visit our website at <http://www.tcdf.org> or <http://www.CalWellness.org> to see highlights of the “Jeremy” TV commercial and excerpts from Jeremy Estrada’s keynote address at the 2008 TCWF California Peace Prize awards banquet.
- Also visit our website to read past newsletter articles that feature TCWF grantees working on the issue of violence prevention in California.
- Visit Rite of Passage’s website at <http://www.riteofpassage.com>.