

# TCWF Evaluations

## THE CALIFORNIA WELLNESS FOUNDATION

### **CAP CHRONICLES: A RETROSPECTIVE LOOK AT THE VIOLENCE PREVENTION INITIATIVE'S COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAMS**

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*I think if it wasn't for these programs and for money out there hiring straight gang members off the corner, I wouldn't be here today to even speak to you. I would be either in the penitentiary hall, in a casket, or on the streets organizing around criminal activity. (Youth Staff, CPI, age 23)*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, violence among youth had reached unprecedented levels in California and across the nation. Homicide is the only leading cause of death among young people that has increased in the last 30 years. Popular and political responses to rising levels of violence among youth incited new juvenile justice reform initiatives in nearly every state across the country. These reforms were tertiary in nature, targeting perpetrators of violent crime by reducing judicial discretion for punishing offenses and increasing options for trying juveniles in adult courts. As a result, an increasing number of young people, particularly males, were spending their adolescent years behind bars.

In the early 1990s, The California Wellness Foundation (TCWF) played a leading role in addressing youth violence in California. Recognizing the relationships between an individual and his or her social environment, TCWF worked collaboratively with academics, community residents, social service providers, public policy makers, and others to reframe the ways in which youth violence is understood. One result of this effort was the development of the Violence Prevention Initiative (VPI), an innovative grant-making project that fully embraced a public health approach to youth violence prevention. The multi-pronged approach entailed 10 years of support for public policy advocacy, research, leadership development, and community mobilization. While each component was important in its own right, the Initiative also aimed to foster collaboration across each of these interventions in order to appreciably address the root causes of youth violence.

This report documents the activities and impact of one component of the VPI—community mobilization. Referred to as Community Action Programs, the overall intent of this component was to support the efforts of community leaders and collaborations to engage youth and adults in grassroots efforts to mobilize around strategies to prevent youth violence. Throughout the years of the VPI, youth violence in California and across the country steadily declined. Debates about the causes of this decline have been widespread. Our objective in this report is not to identify why youth violence declined. Rather, this report documents the impact of the Community Action Programs on the lives of youth, families, communities and institutions in targeted communities.

## **OUR CHALLENGE AND OUR APPROACH**

In January 2002, Childrens Hospital Los Angeles and the Public Health Institute were awarded funding to document the history and impact of the Community Action Programs (CAPs). Our qualitative efforts were designed to elucidate the tales of lives touched, of leadership abilities developed, of efforts to communicate and coordinate, of struggles to alter policies and institutions, and of unintended benefits as well as challenges.

Our research efforts were divided into three phases. The initial phase offered us an opportunity to learn about the CAPs and identify key individuals to include in the evaluation. The second phase consisted primarily of one-on-one interviews with current and former youth participants and lead agency staff, community residents, and collaborating agency partners. The final phase was the analysis of qualitative data and preparation of key findings for dissemination.

In this report, we draw primarily on the 163 one-on-one qualitative interviews conducted for this project. There are a broad range of perspectives represented across different age and ethnic groups. The following types of individuals were interviewed:

- Former and current youth participants (18%), former and current adult lead agency staff (29%), former youth participants who transitioned into lead agency staff positions (18%), collaborating agency partners (26%) and community residents (8%)
- More than half (59%) of the sample are female
- Just over two-thirds (67%) of the sample are Latino/Hispanic
- Nearly half (46%) of the individuals interviewed were involved during the initial years of the VPI (between 1993 and 1995)

Below we describe the essence of what we have learned about the Community Action Programs and the impact they have had on the lives of those most closely involved in them. The heart of the report is organized around five major goals for preventing youth violence that were shared across each of the CAPs. While perhaps not explicitly articulated by TCWF or the CAPs at the beginning of the Initiative, our research brought to light a number of goals that were shared across the different CAPs. We describe these goals and the variety of strategies that were developed to meet them in each community. We also present key challenges that were faced across the CAPs. Finally, we conclude with recommendations from participants for future youth violence prevention efforts.

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF CAPS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES**

Community Action Programs were funded in an array of urban and suburban communities in both Northern and Southern California. Of the original 18 programs that were funded, 9 continued to receive funding from TCWF throughout the course of the VPI. They are as follows:

- Barrios Unidos (BU), Santa Cruz
- Community Peace Initiative (CPI), San Francisco
- Community Wellness Partnership (CWP), Pomona
- Escondido Youth Encounter (EYE), Escondido
- Inner City Struggle (ICS), East Los Angeles
- Los Angeles Commission on Assaults Against Women (LACAAW), San Fernando Valley
- La Familia Counseling Center (LF), Sacramento
- People Reaching Out (PRO), Riverside
- West Oakland Health Council, Inc. (WOHC), Oakland

## **STRATEGIES SHARED ACROSS THE CAPS FOR PREVENTING YOUTH VIOLENCE**

During the initial phase of the VPI, each Community Action Program was funded to work in collaboration with members of their community to identify local factors that underlie youth violence. Some accomplished this through community-based surveys and others through focus groups and community meetings. The results of these varied planning efforts were similar. Across each of communities that received CAP funding, participants most commonly identified the following factors as influencing youth violence: poverty, limited employment options, poor education, few after-school activities, and inadequate parental guidance. Rather than placing blame solely on “troubled” youth, CAPs mobilized to address many of the social problems that their respective communities identified. The goals for youth violence prevention that we identified within each of the CAPs reflected the understanding that CAP leaders and community partners had of the relationship between individual behavior and social problems. Their shared goals include, but are not limited to the following:

- Increase Awareness about Youth Violence
- Strengthen Personal Relationships with Youth, Families and Communities
- Empower Youth through Leadership Development
- Advocate for Systemic Change
- Build Bridges through Collaboration

Each of these goals inspired the development of a variety of strategies for reaching them. Without question, the consistency with which each CAP strived to achieve these goals and the successes they had in reaching them varied over time. The histories of the CAPs are as complex as the communities they served. Most CAPs adjusted their initial violence prevention strategies in response to the changing character of their communities and shifts in leadership within the CAPs. Below we highlight the philosophical underpinnings of each shared goal, and the variety of strategies that CAPs developed for achieving these goals within their communities. We also present what we believe to be major contributions of these efforts to youth violence prevention.

### **INCREASING AWARENESS ABOUT YOUTH VIOLENCE**

Each of the Community Action Programs recognized a need during the initial years of the VPI to explore how their communities understood youth violence and what strategies should be employed to prevent it from occurring. Many also identified strengths within their communities that they could draw upon for prevention efforts. This information informed the development of five strategies for educating communities about youth violence.

- From criminal justice to public health: reframing youth violence  
One of the greatest challenges faced by CAPs in community mobilization efforts was the politically popular criminal justice approach to addressing youth violence. Much like the leadership at TCWF, most CAP leaders understood youth violence as symptoms rather than end products of youth behavior. During the early years of

the VPI, TCWF helped disseminate a common language that CAP leaders could use in their efforts to reach out and educate key stakeholders in the communities they served. By participating in VPI conferences and other related forums, CAP leaders learned and adopted a public health framework for understanding youth violence. This framework provided an overarching structure for the strategies they developed to prevent youth violence, and was embraced by youth, community residents, and collaborating partners who participated in the CAPs.

- Raising awareness about factors underlying youth violence  
Strategies that CAPs developed to raise awareness about youth violence extended well beyond the conventional dissemination of statistical information. From the outset, TCWF leaders and CAP grantees understood violence as a combination of individual, interpersonal, social and environmental factors. Careful attention was paid to strategies of education; CAP leaders and collaborating partners catered outreach strategies and educational messages to target audiences through age-appropriate and culturally relevant channels. Among youth, these channels included peer-to-peer education models and messages delivered through popular media. Among families and community members, strategies also included one-on-one outreach and small community forums, among others.
- Challenging dominant perceptions of youth violence  
CAP leaders also recognized early on that if prevention efforts were to be successful within communities, they would have to address perceptions that violence is an inevitable and “normal” part of everyday life. One strategy for breaking down these perceptions was to organize public events, such as peace walks and Town Hall meetings, which provided youth and residents with a sense that others are concerned about youth violence. Several CAPs also worked to break down stereotypes of youth, particularly youth of color, generated through popular media. These efforts inspired people to question their perceptions, opening the door for the possibility of action.
- Engaging youth in the process of educating communities about violence prevention  
Once individuals are open to the possibility of change, the next step was to engage them in the process of educating themselves and others about factors underlying youth violence. Many CAPs relied on peer-to-peer models of education, whereby a core group of individuals were educated and then trained to reach out to their peers and continue the cycle of education. This model was used for working with youth as well as families and community residents.
- Raising awareness about life options  
Finally, CAPs also recognized that without an awareness of life options and opportunities for new experiences, youth who are at greatest risk for the perpetration of violence would have limited motivation to change their behavior. CAPs addressed this by creating opportunities for youth to get out of their everyday environment and participate in new life experiences.

## **STRENGTHENING PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUTH, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES**

Most CAP-funded communities were marked by divisions and disconnect between and

within neighborhoods, community organizations and social institutions. Racial tensions and economic disparities often underlie these divisions. CAP leaders recognized that violence might only be prevented by strengthening social safety nets within their communities and developing strategies to heal existing wounds. Efforts to meet these goals took a number of different forms.

- Providing a safe space to engage youth and residents  
In many communities, there were few public spaces that were emotionally and physically safe for youth, families and community members to engage in educational, social and recreational activities. Lead CAP agencies provided such a space for many people. To reach out and develop trusting relations between youth and residents within communities, CAP leaders had to maintain a strong presence in their respective communities and be able to relate to those with whom they were trying to engage. Many CAPs also recognized the importance of reaching out not only to youth, but also to their parents and siblings.
- Linking youth and residents to supportive systems  
In an effort to provide youth with guidance and promote emotional and spiritual healing within communities, a number of CAPs provided support and therapeutic services to youth and families as part of their violence prevention activities. Many also developed mentoring programs for young people, which provided them with positive role models in their lives. For many youth, mentors were an important source of support and guidance.
- Strengthening bonds within families  
Another key strategy embedded within many activities organized by the CAPs was to improve communication and understanding between youth and their families. Through youth-focused workshops on family relationships and family-centered activities, youth were exposed to strategies for communicating their feelings to family members, particularly during stressful periods. Participants expressed new appreciations for parents and siblings and the role they play in their lives.
- Fostering positive relationships among peers  
CAPs developed a number of strategies for bringing youth together from rival gangs, neighborhoods and schools in an effort to break down the stereotypes and misperceptions that fuel eruptions of violence within many communities. These divides were particularly difficult to overcome and often had to be fused “one person at a time.” In order to accomplish this, CAPs organized activities that brought youth from different neighborhoods together. Recreational activities, such as sports and weekend retreats were among the most successful strategies for encouraging youth to develop relationships built on tolerance rather than violence.
- Raising awareness and pride in one’s cultural background  
Many young people, particularly youth of color, have few opportunities to learn about their political and cultural heritage. CAP leaders strongly believed that drawing on positive images of youths’ cultural backgrounds is a powerful strategy for raising awareness about the positive contributions that leaders from a diverse array of ethnic and cultural backgrounds have made towards social and political

change. Awareness was raised through educational activities as well as the incorporation of traditions and ceremonies into events sponsored by the CAPs.

- Creating community connections and building a movement  
Youth, residents and staff involved with the CAPs often noted that CAP-related activities helped foster a greater awareness and understanding of issues within their communities that positively and negatively influence youth development. Heightened awareness often brought about changes in people's sense of connection to, and responsibility for, their communities. This became a springboard for greater involvement in community relations and events.

## **EMPOWERMENT THROUGH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

Many CAP leaders, having been raised in the communities they served, were acutely aware of the need for nurturing youths' personal growth and cultivating new community-based leadership. Though varying in approach, most CAPs adopted holistic approaches to facilitating youths' growth and development. Through these efforts, CAP leaders hoped to empower a cadre of new leadership to ensure the continuity and expansion of efforts to improve the lives and well being of young people, their families, and their communities. They facilitated the development of leadership among youth and community residents by focusing on the following:

### **Building self-awareness and self-esteem**

A prime undercurrent flowing through the philosophies and goals espoused by CAP leaders and participants is a belief that a positive sense of self is important for countering impulses to engage in violent and dangerous activities. Personal growth was fostered through one-on-one counseling and mentoring, and introspective activities that encouraged youth to ask questions of themselves, their families, and their peers. Periods of personal growth are also often accompanied by personal pain, which is critical to acknowledge when working with young people and adults.

- Developing opportunities for communication and expression  
Expression of emotions, ideas, and opinions are skills that many young people do not have the opportunity to develop in their everyday lives. In the absence of these skills, violence becomes a means of communicating anger, frustration and resentment. CAPs developed activities that afforded youth creative outlets for expressing themselves and building skills for communicating with others. These outlets included art workshops, creative writing, storytelling, and the creation of short films. CAPs also made concerted efforts to create forums where youth could freely articulate their thoughts and communicate their emotions.
- Creating alternatives and options through skill building experiences  
Over the course of the Violence Prevention Initiative, hosts of young people were exposed to educational and career training opportunities that were designed to encourage young people to reassess their life paths and ambitions. Several CAPs developed curricula for leadership training workshops; others created internship opportunities within their agencies or other social service agencies in their communities. Both leadership and employment training were considered important in raising youths' perceptions of life options.

- Empowering youth to play a critical role in violence prevention  
Raising awareness about life options, encouraging youth to practice their styles and means of communication, and facilitating recognition of alternative life paths are all important elements in the process of empowering young people to play an active role in their communities. CAPs made concerted efforts to integrate young people into each step of the process of developing, implementing and refining violence prevention and youth development activities. CAPs have contributed to the development of a number of young people, many of who continue to be leaders within their communities.

## **ADVOCATING FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE**

Over the course of a decade, Community Action Programs engaged youth and communities in the process of advocating for changes in policies and procedures that negatively impact youth and foster violence. In addition to supporting youth who were at greatest risk for involvement in violent exchanges, CAPs simultaneously advocated for systemic changes as a long-term strategy for violence prevention. Successful advocacy efforts across each of the CAPs shared a common commitment to engaging youth and community residents in every stage of grassroots organizing. Among the many successes over the last decade were a ban on the sale of Saturday Night Specials in several cities, prohibition of the sale of guns and ammunition at the Southern California Gun Show held at the L.A. County Fairgrounds, changes in school policies that interfere with learning opportunities for youth, and the development of an alternative, peer-based system of adjudication for juveniles who have committed minor offenses for the first time. Some efforts have yielded greater success in altering policies than others. Many participants did not define their experiences in terms of success or failure, but in terms of learning experiences from which they continue to benefit in subsequent efforts to create systemic change. Steps employed to mobilize communities and alter policies are included in this section.

- Utilize information about root causes of violence to inform mobilization strategies  
In order to inform residents and local officials about the root causes of violence within communities, many CAPs spearheaded research projects that provided a systematic means of gathering information. Most research initially consisted of surveys conducted with community residents. Several CAPs continued to expand upon these efforts over the years, engaging youth in projects to map local places where guns and ammunition could be bought and sold and locations of advertisements for alcohol and alcohol outlets. One CAP interested in issues of educational justice also conducted surveys with high school students on a local campus to document inequities in support for students to access higher education.
- Develop training opportunities for public policy advocacy and systemic change  
Education and awareness about the possibilities of changing policies that negatively impact youth were important steps in the process of mobilizing communities. The next step was to provide opportunities for interested individuals to learn how to effectively lobby for changes within different environments and target audiences. CAP leaders believed that trainings were most effective when they were experiential, engaging, and comprised of a series of steps taken over



- time. The long-term impact of these trainings was evident in the stories of youth participants, many of whom continue to be active in their communities today.
- Engage young people in teaching about histories of social and political activism  
Many trainings developed for youth and community residents focused attention on culturally specific struggles for peace and justice in the United States and elsewhere. Drawing on the teachings and writings of a broad range of activist leaders, CAP leaders taught many young people the meaning of civil disobedience and the power of peaceful demonstration. Leaders within the CAPs also shed light on the many positive contributions that people from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds have made toward improving the lives of all people.
  - Advocate for change  
Over the last decade, a number of short-term and long-term changes were made as a result of efforts spearheaded by local CAPs. Many have been instrumental in advocating for changes within local institutions, particularly high schools and juvenile justice systems. Within communities, a number of CAPs have also organized to change city and county policies that run counter to violence prevention efforts. Many attribute their successes to effective engagement of individuals, organizations and institutions in the development and mobilization of resources needed to support their efforts.

## **BUILDING BRIDGES THROUGH COLLABORATION**

During the early years of the VPI, community collaborations were recognized as an important strategy for implementing and sustaining community-wide violence prevention efforts. Many CAP leaders noted that although they valued the concept of collaborations, they were much more difficult to foster than originally anticipated. Very few of the original CAP collaborations were maintained over time, many dissolving in the face of philosophical discord, competition for funding, or lack of a cohesive vision. Despite their challenges, many lessons were learned about what role collaborative efforts play in prevention efforts, what factors foster effective partnerships and what factors pose challenges to their longevity. We present three different models of collaboration that were found across the CAPs and illustrate their successes and challenges in achieving their goals.

- Building collaboratives to affect community change  
CAPs that built this model of collaboration in their communities regarded collaboration as a fundamental component of their community initiative, and demonstrated a commitment to address common interests and needs through collaborative efforts. These collaborations were often modeled on the premise of grassroots decision-making, whereby problems, decisions and solutions are identified and discussed. Key strategies for building this model included: bringing a diverse groups of people together, creating structures for effective consensus building, and identifying issues, problems and strategies to address them that transcend any one agency. Although some CAP collaborations that espoused this model are no longer working together, their initial efforts have subsequently inspired many other local stakeholders to collaborate around a range of social and health-related issues.

- Building collaborations to strengthen CAPs  
Other CAPs regarded collaborations and interagency partnerships as a mechanism to complement and strengthen their own violence prevention activities. These collaborations were often strategic, involving stakeholders primarily from the institutions and agencies with whom the CAPs were most involved. More successful and long-term collaborations that espoused this model tended to be inclusive in their partnerships and had more diverse representation of stakeholders from the community. The strategies used to organize these collaborations included: mobilizing community resources to support youth, mobilizing community members around specific issues, and keeping respect for others at the forefront of collaborative efforts.
- Statewide Alliances and Advocacy  
Efforts to affect policy change at the regional and Statewide level were strengthened by collaborative efforts across each of the Community Action Programs as well as the various arms of the VPI. Cross-site conferences and regional policy meetings helped strengthen the relationships formed among CAP leaders and provided opportunities to exchange ideas and resources to learn from each other.

## **CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED ACROSS THE COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAMS**

Without doubt, CAPs inspired a number of positive changes within the communities they served. For as many highs as they experienced, however, there were an equivalent number of challenges. Periods of great growth and development often emerge from periods of turmoil and hard work. We identified three broad categories of challenges that were experienced across each of the different CAPs. Within each category, there are several inter-related challenges that are important to highlight for future prevention efforts.

- Challenges within agencies
- Many CAPs had charismatic leaders who were passionate about issues related to youth and violence. While inspiring, these same leaders also possessed traits that caused schisms within their professional relationships. Some participants described leaders with whom they interacted as having difficult personalities and unwilling to take seriously the ideas and opinions of others. Other leaders were described as having difficulties maintaining healthy boundaries in their work.
- A common challenge across the CAPs, especially during the early years of the Initiative, was a reported disparity between the scope of work originally envisioned and the resources needed to implement and sustain them. Many CAPs experienced frustrations linked to setting too many goals, working in too many sites, and conducting outreach in too many locations. Unattainable goals and staff that were spread too thin quickly gave way to burnout among CAP staff.
- Another challenge reported by many participants was a tension between activist-oriented Community Action Programs and service-oriented parent agencies. CAPs and their parent organizations often clashed in their philosophical

understandings of problems experienced within their communities and approaches to addressing them.

- Challenges in working with target populations
- Youth. Efforts to reach out and engage young people, particularly those who are at highest risk for violence, proved to be more difficult than many imagined. Many have faced incredible challenges in their lives and had life experiences that fed impulses to solve problems through violence. Staff sometimes felt ill-prepared to support a young person during times of great distress. Young people also have vibrant energies that can be short-lived if not constantly engaged. Developing leadership skills and empowering youth often raised expectations that there would be opportunities for putting new skills into practice. Some CAP staff noted that they did not always have enough time or resources to provide on-going support and mentorship to youth leaders.
- Parents. Nearly every CAP recognized the importance of including parents in efforts to prevent violence. However, many parents have competing priorities that compromised their ability to be consistently involved in CAP activities. Some parents also struggled with their own experiences with violence and substance use and were difficult to engage at any level. Immigrant families were a specific population that posed particular challenges, in part because of perceived cultural and generational gaps between parents and children.
- Communities. A number of factors within communities themselves posed challenges to CAPs' efforts to mobilize communities around youth violence prevention. In part, these challenges stemmed from a dearth of economic opportunities and resources for youth and families. Another challenge faced was discord between the desire for radical changes to be made within communities among residents and the slow-pace, and often reluctance, of institutional partners and political figures to implement changes. Efforts to enact public policy changes, such as gun control legislation, also faced tremendous opposition within conservative communities.
- Sustaining youth violence prevention efforts  
Many lead agency staff voiced concerns that the great strides they made within communities would not be sustained without continued funding. Although many have attempted to secure funding for continued violence prevention work, a poor economy and competing interests among many funding entities has challenged many communities in their efforts to continue direct action and community mobilization efforts.

## **PREVENTING YOUTH VIOLENCE: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS**

Below is a summary of recommendations for future youth-focused prevention and intervention efforts, which were identified by our evaluation team through reviews of reported successes, challenges, and lessons learned offered by our study participants. Although they were made in the context of a youth violence prevention initiative, we

believe that these recommendations are applicable in a variety of different initiatives that seek to improve the interpersonal, familial, social and environmental conditions that impact young people today.

- Build the capacity of community-based organizations to accomplish goals  
Community-wide changes take time and a commitment of adequate resources to develop and implement strategies for reaching identified goals. Many CAP leaders have suggested that if public and private grant-making agencies are committed to improving the lives of young people and their families, they need to provide long-term support for programs, services, and community mobilization efforts. Grant-making agencies can also invest in communities by providing technical assistance to support the growth and development of community-based organizations.
- Establish goals that are relevant to communities and possible to attain  
Many social problems that exist in urban and suburban environments, like youth violence, are often not isolated, but complexly rooted among other social problems. Each community has its own strengths and challenges that influence how these problems manifest and what strategies are appropriate for addressing them. CAP prevention efforts were most effective when communities were allowed to organize and identify their own intervention priorities and strategies for prevention. Leaders within communities who facilitate this process must balance the identified needs and ambitions of community members and the resources available to develop and implement strategies for change.
- Adopt a holistic approach to working with target populations  
Many CAP leaders and participants have alluded to the fact that there is no one cause of youth violence, and therefore strategies for preventing its occurrence must espouse a holistic approach. By holistic approach we mean a focus not only on addressing the behaviors of individuals, but also attention to factors that influence their emotional well-being, spiritual growth, family relations, educational accomplishments, employment opportunities, and other aspects of their lives that are important to an overall sense of self. A holistic approach requires resources, some of which can be generated from within agencies and others that can be brought to individuals through collaborative efforts.
- Create environments that foster open dialogue and respect for diversity  
In interviews conducted with participants, a common element underlying continued involvement with their respective Community Action Programs was a perception that their voices were being heard and opinions respected. To be effective, agencies and groups who are committed to working with individuals in their communities must create environments that are safe for expressing differences of opinion and constructive in their approach to handling conflict. Community leaders must also make sure that diversity exists within collaborations that are brought together and that youth and community residents are not alienated. Successful partnerships were forged in these communities when diversity and an ethic of open dialogue were embraced by all participants.
- Invest in the process of developing leaders  
The future of our communities rests in the hands of young people. We need strong

leaders to carry forward political and social struggles to improve the lives of all individuals. This requires a long-term investment in strategies to “build leadership from within” and support the growth and development of young people. As many CAPs have highlighted, there is not a “one-size-fits-all” model of leadership. Rather, every person is recognized as leader with unique strengths that can potentially contribute to the improvement of our communities. Emerging leaders need to be nourished through mentoring and supported to discover the responsibility they have to effect social change.

## **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

Throughout the 10 years of the Violence Prevention Initiative, each of the Community Action Programs experienced tremendous change, sometimes moving forward in their efforts to prevent youth violence and sometimes taking a few steps back. It would be misleading to portray the history of the Community Action Programs and their overall impact on the communities they served in a progressively linear narrative. Although many of the CAPs shared similar successes and challenges, they experienced them at different points throughout the Initiative and in different community contexts.

There were times during the course of the Initiative that each CAP excelled in their efforts to mobilize communities, resulting in a number of important changes in local and State gun control policies, a prioritization of local resources for youth services, and an increase in public attention to factors influencing youth violence, among many others. There were also times when CAPs faced insurmountable problems that challenged their successes and slowed down their progress towards achieving their original goals and objectives. The problems that inhibited progress and success occurred at inter-agency, community and individual levels. Although the question of whether or not CAPs were successful in achieving their goals was not the focus of this evaluation, we firmly believe that each CAP positively touched the lives of many young people, their families, and their peers. Many of the young people we talked to during the course of this project continue to be involved in a wide array of efforts to improve the lives of youth in their communities. This new generation of leadership fostered by the Community Action Programs is a legacy of the Violence Prevention Initiative that will be long enduring.