

The California Wellness Foundation Violence Prevention Initiative

Handguns are the number one killer of youth in California.

That simple message launched a public education effort for The California Wellness Foundation's Violence Prevention Initiative that has garnered support across the state. Key opinion leaders have become champions for violence prevention, numerous allies have emerged to help communicate the need for policy change, and communities have rallied around local ordinances to prevent youth violence and increase resources for youth.

The California Wellness Foundation first awarded Martin & Glantz (now known as FowlerHoffman) with a public education grant in January 1994, charging the firm with developing a plan to reduce youth access to firearms. Over the course of the project, the foundation invested \$8 million in public education grants to Martin & Glantz for the Violence Prevention Initiative, extending the project from two years to five years to seven years. The firm developed and implemented strategies to educate opinion leaders, community leaders, policy makers, and the general public about the devastating effects of handgun violence against California youth.

The public education efforts centered around two primary campaigns, Prevent Handgun Violence Against Kids and Resources for Youth. The centerpiece of the communications strategy was the education of opinion leaders and the creation of opportunities for these leaders to reshape public dialogue and policy discussion about access to handguns and youth violence prevention strategies. For both campaigns, the firm maintained contact with opinion leaders by mail, phone, fax, and e-mail through a custom-built database of more than 11,000 records. More than 6,000 of these opinion leaders—among them elected officials, healthcare providers, law enforcement officials, firearm policy experts, business leaders, educators, religious leaders, advocacy workers, youth leaders and other grantees—interacted with the campaigns.

Prevent Handgun Violence Against Kids

The first year of Prevent Handgun Violence Against Kids began with a short run of television spots and multiple press conferences featuring the mothers of young victims of handgun



violence, trauma physicians, law enforcement officers and The California Wellness Foundation leadership. Participation in and support for the campaign were manifest in numerous ways. Key California communicators consistently used facts promoted by the campaign. For example, former Attorney General Daniel Lungren repeated campaign messages at a statewide violence prevention conference and Glendale Police Chief James Anthony did so during an NBC *Dateline* segment. Many opinion leaders also engaged the support of their organizations. The League of Women Voters in California formally adopted the campaign's four policy options, and the California PTA voted to support a ban of "Saturday Night Specials."

Since the inception of Communities on the Move, a spin-off effort to educate California opinion leaders on firearm and ammunition ordinances, more than 39 California locales have passed bans on "Saturday Night Specials." In total, 72 cities and counties have passed 181 firearms-related regulations.

In 1999, Gov. Gray Davis signed what he called "the toughest gun-control laws in the nation." These five new laws prohibit the manufacture and sale of assault weapons, ban "Saturday Night Specials," limit the frequency of handgun purchases to one per month, require trigger locks on all firearms sold in the state, and increase the regulation and oversight of gun shows. "A strong majority of Californians clearly demanded and supported such action, and I made a commitment as a candidate for Governor to deliver it," he said.

Thanks in part to Martin & Glantz's efforts, a grassroots network of violence prevention advocates has been created to keep pressure on state and local officials to do more to prevent violence against youth in the coming years.

Resources for Youth

Building on the support generated by Prevent Handgun Violence Against Kids, Resources for Youth aimed to involve youth and opinion leaders in efforts to increase support for youth programs, such as community centers and after-school activities, as a proven way to reduce youth violence. The campaign also sought to shift the portrayal of young people from "part of the problem" to part of "the solutions."



In April 1997, more than 2,000 opinion leaders, ranging from community-based organizational leaders to religious leaders to chiefs of police to elected officials, attended a videoconference to launch the campaign. The event attracted statewide media attention, and was supported by the League of California Cities, The California Police Chiefs Association, the Chief Probation Officers of California, the California State PTA and The League of Women Voters of California. Since the event, more than 1,100 concerned advocates, community and opinion leaders and youth signed on to form a network as a means to get involved and organize around violence prevention.

To create a tool for advocates on the local level, Martin & Glantz created Mapping Neighborhood Potential for Youth Violence, a project wherein communities, youth and youth organizations identify places in their own neighborhoods that have potential to reduce violence. They take their “maps” to opinion leaders to show how increased resources for youth programs at the identified sites could turn them into violence prevention success stories. More than 200 participants have participated in the mapping project. Thomas Brothers Maps Educational Foundation has donated support by providing customized maps for participating communities.

Although the jury is still out on the ultimate effectiveness of the Resources For Youth campaign, initial indicators for the impact of the RFY effort are positive:

- There’s been a demonstrable shift in attitudes among the public about youth. Polling has found that the proportion of respondents who see youth primarily as victims (as opposed to victimizers) nearly doubled between 1996 and 1998.ⁱ
- In 1997, fifty cities and counties in California issued proclamations pledging to take action to increase resources for youth.
- The Legislature increased its spending on violence prevention programs by 140% in three years. Total state spending for youth crime and violence prevention programs rose to \$247 million in FY 99-00 from \$103 million in FY 96-97.ⁱⁱ
- Funding for programs during the critical after school hours, when kids are most at risk of violence, has been a key theme of the Resources For Youth campaign since the beginning.



In 1998, then-governor Pete Wilson signed three bills setting up the After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnership Program, which authorized \$50 million in grants to start new after-school programs for children through ninth grade.ⁱⁱⁱ In 1999, Wilson's successor, Gov. Gray Davis, signed legislation authorizing the program for three more years and increasing the funding to \$85 million a year.

- Los Angeles County has drawn on its welfare-to-work funding to create one of the largest locally supported after-school programs in the nation.

i Martin & Glantz with R. Chavez, p.42.

ii D. Steinhart and L. Brown, *Commonweal* — The Juvenile Justice Program, October 1998, Bolinas, CA, p. 1.

iii D. Steinhart and L. Brown, p.2