Role of Philanthropy in Promoting a Civil Society:
Lessons from The California Wellness Foundation

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National Funding Collaborative on Violence Prevention
Keynote Address -- March 25, 1999
Fort Worth, Texas

The California Wellness Foundation (TCWF or Foundation) was established in 1992 as a result of the conversion of Health Net, one of California's largest HMOs, from not for profit to for profit status. The Foundation's mission is to improve the health of the people of California by making grants for health promotion, wellness education and disease prevention. Toward that end the Foundation provides approximately $45 million in grants each year.

The Foundation has adopted an approach to grantmaking that allocates a substantial portion of its funds to strategic grantmaking initiatives within priority areas to which the Foundation has significant, long-term commitments. These priority areas are Violence Prevention; Community Health; Population Health Improvement; Teenage Pregnancy Prevention; and Work and Health. The Initiatives focus our resources on a priority area intensively and for long enough time to achieve measurable results.

In 1992, The California Wellness Foundation made violence prevention the focus of its first grantmaking initiative to improve the health and well-being of Californians. Strategies and approaches that have assisted public health practitioners in reducing death from disease and unintentional injury are being modified and adapted to help prevent violence in California. Since youth are disproportionately represented as victims of violence, the Foundation focuses its efforts on preventing violence against young people ages 24 and younger.

Recognizing the complexity and depth of the problem of violence, TCWF in conjunction with the following foundations: James Irvine, Sierra Healthcare, Alliance Healthcare, San Francisco, S.H. Cowell, David and Lucille Packard, Crail Johnson, and the California Endowment is providing $70 million over a ten-year period to fund and evaluate a comprehensive, multi-faceted violence prevention effort. The Violence Prevention Initiative (VPI or Initiative) has four grantmaking components: the Policy Program, Community Action Program (CAPs), Leadership Program and Research Program. While conceptually distinct, these components are essentially interdependent and must be interactive to obtain the greatest impact.

The goal of TCWF's Violence Prevention Initiative is to prevent violence against youth in California. The Foundation plays a role in increasing the health and well-being of Californians by enhancing the public's understanding that societal violence is remediable and that interpersonal violence is preventable, thereby increasing the public's support for and involvement in, the implementation of public policies and community actions that reduce violence. The Initiative puts the issue of violence in a public health perspective that focuses on prevention.
Personal violence is defined as the intentional use of physical force against another person or against oneself, which either does, or easily could, result in injury or death. Violent or "intentional" injuries are inflicted upon the self (suicide and suicide attempts) or upon others (homicide, assault, abuse [child, spousal, partner, elder], and sexual assault/rape). Societal violence is defined as a consequence of oppressive environments and systems, within which an individual's or a group's fight for survival all too often erupts in interpersonal or self-harm. The causes of violence are complex and no single, comprehensive solution will prevent it because no single factor is a necessary component in the etiology of all injuries due to violence.

At the direction of the Foundation's Board of Directors, the Initiative is managed by TCWF staff, which is responsible for the overall guidance, coordination, development, planning, and evaluation of the VPI. In addition, staff convenes an Advisory Committee to provide technical assistance, guidance, and advice to TCWF about the goals, strategies, and activities of the VPI.

The VPI was authorized by the Foundation's Board in October of 1992 and over the next year staff developed and implemented a competitive request for proposal process. By the end of September 1993, this process had resulted in the funding of eighteen Community Action Projects (CAPs), ten community fellows, six academic fellow sites, seven research grants and grants to establish the Pacific Center for Violence Prevention (the VPI's public policy center) and a statewide public education campaign.

In carrying out its coordination role, Foundation staff convened all grantees and advisory committee members for the VPI's first annual conference in December 1993. After all the hard work of the previous year in making the grants and getting programs up and running, staff had high expectations for the outcome of the conference. They saw this as the beginning of the development of a "statewide network of violence prevention activists" that the VPI hoped to produce.

These high expectations were quickly dashed on the "rocks" of the realities of bringing together more than 300 individuals from numerous cultures, ethnicities, backgrounds and perspectives. The conference was marked with distrust, anger, conflict and disrespect. Staff left the conference depressed with little hope that the high expectations envisioned for the first five-year phase of the VPI would be achieved.

However, in the year that transpired before the second annual conference, something happened. It may have been the results of the 1994 elections (including California's punitive "3 strikes law") which were a real threat to the programs and concepts of the grantees. It may have been the few moments of silence at the beginning of the conference when more than two dozen names of youth lost to violence over the past year were called out by community based grantees.

Whatever the cause, it was clear that a transformation had taken place. The second conference was marked by trust, comradery, respect and commitment. A critical mass of the grantees (not necessarily a majority) began to see themselves as a "violence prevention movement." This movement has continued to strengthen and grow to this day and far exceeds the Foundation's hoped for "network of activists."
The first five years of the VPI have produced a number of lessons. I will summarize a few:

- **Grantmaking is Grantmaking**: Grantmaking is certainly more art than science, especially when attempting to develop and implement a grantmaking program as large and complex as the VPI. What seems to be true is that some grants will work and some won't. There have been many accomplishments. For example, more than 40 Californian communities have passed ordinances to prevent the sale of Saturday night Specials, and public opinion surveys indicate the state's citizens have increased their support for prevention. Many state officials now use statements from the VPI public ad campaign like "Handguns are the leading killer of kids in California." and violence has dropped in most of the communities funded.

On the other hand, about one third of the community projects and perhaps half of the researchers did not achieve the goals on objectives of their grants. There were deficits in the other VPI components as well. In some cases results were completely absent and funding had to be stopped for several projects. That's grantmaking.

- **Language is Important**: When we began the VPI, we had as our goal "to prevent youth violence in California." We gave equal weight to the issue of youth perpetration and victimization. Over time we learned that this balanced approach was a mistake because the mass media has a heavy over-emphasis on youth perpetration. We now have as a goal "to prevent violence against youth" and we put the focus of our efforts on the victimization of young people.

- **Technical Assistance**: It has become clear that we did not put enough resources into technical assistance (TA) for the CAPs during the first phase of the VPI. Beyond the resource issue we are still struggling with the best approach to TA. Should it be local or statewide? Should there be a central provider or should each CAP have funds to purchase TA as it identifies needs? How do we get "breadth" and "depth" at each CAP with TA provision?

- **Collaboration is not Nirvana**: All CAPs in the VPI were required to form a collaborative within their local communities. This worked for some and was a disaster for others. There is no evidence to date that having a collaborative is a key to having an effective community-based violence prevention program. Also, we asked grantees to consider collaborating across the VPI, especially on public policy issues. As I mentioned previously, the initial attempts at this were difficult across such a diverse group, but the ultimate result certainly proves the phrase "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts." We have come to see that successful collaboration requires: 1) common purpose; 2) trust; and 3) a critical mass of the group actualizing #1 and #2.

- **Funders cannot lead**: While funders can, and often do provide leadership for each other they cannot and, in my opinion, should not lead grantees. The inverse power relationship between funder and grantee is real and no matter how much we strive to "level the playing field" it will remain unlevel. Also, while many of us may have
experience working in public policy or at the grass roots community level, once we are in philanthropy we are no longer part of these activities. Grantees must lead other grantees and the best thing we can do is get out of the way and empower them to do so. We can also point in a direction, help keep the "eye on the prize" and convene the grantees so that they can collaborate and find ways to work together. In fact, an annual convening may be one of the most important things a funder can do for grantees working in violence prevention. This is hard, wearing work and a conference provides an opportunity for renewal that is absolutely necessary.

- **The work isn't done:** Violence rates have been dropping across the United States for over five years. The same is true for California. That's good news, but the level of violence remains too high -- in California it continues to be the number one killer of our young people. In general, foundations tend to have a short attention span for funding priorities. We are often attracted to an issue by the data but when the numbers change we can begin to think the problem has been addressed and that it's time to move on to other things. With violence, nothing could be farther from the truth. The intractable nature of violence is one of the reasons the VPI was authorized for ten years. As funders, now is the time to redouble our efforts and commitment, not cut back.

- **Remarkable people are everywhere:** Perhaps the most profound lesson we have learned from the VPI is how many remarkable, strong, committed individuals there are working on this issue. Every year we identify three individuals who are doing stellar work in their communities and provide them with the California Peace Prize, a $25,000 gift in recognition of their efforts. They range from community activists to educators to law enforcement officers to juvenile court judges and they are representative of hundreds of others who work every day to prevent violence in their communities. Lorna Hawkins received one of the first Peace Prizes in 1993. Several years before, her oldest son had been gunned down on a Los Angeles street corner. He was a good student with a future who was in the wrong place at the wrong time. Lorna turned her grief and loss into a community-based program working to keep other youth from a similar fate. One year later, her other son was killed in the same manner.

   If someone killed all of my children, it would rip my heart out. I don't think I could find compassion or empathy for my day to day work. But that's what Lorna does. She redoubled her efforts and to this day works to keep other young people safe. She is an inspiration to us all and an example of hundreds we have met in the VPI.

   There is an old African proverb that says: "Every morning in Africa, a gazelle wakes up. It knows it must run faster than the fastest lion or it will be killed...Every morning a lion wakes up. It knows it must outrun the slowest gazelle or it will starve to death. It doesn't matter whether you are a lion or a gazelle...When the sun comes up, you'd better be running." I know this about Lorna. Every day when the sun comes up she is running to keep young people safe. I also know that if we work to prevent violence then whether we are a public official, a community activist,
an educator, a Foundation program officer or president...when the sun comes up we better be running!