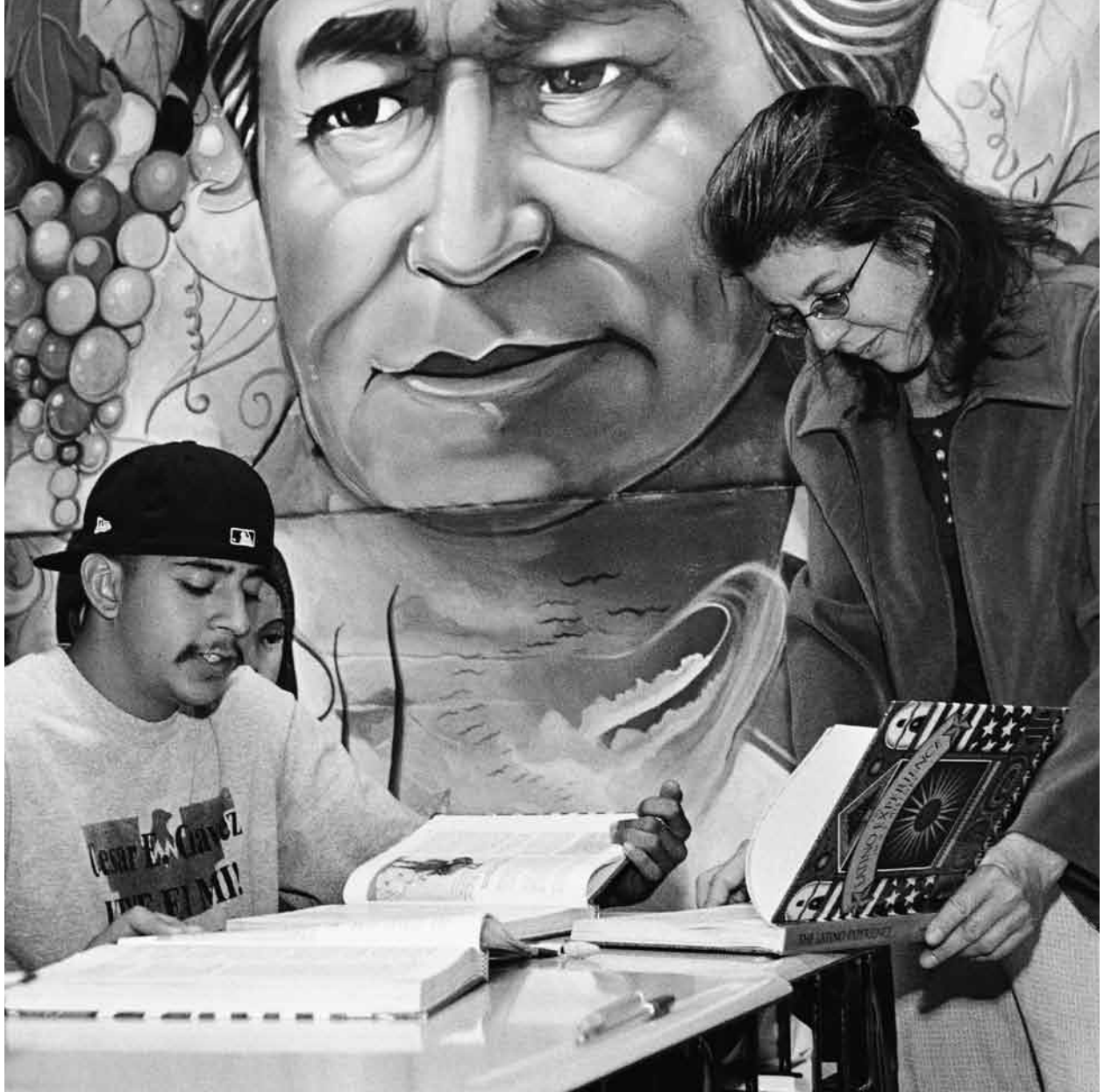


EVALUATING ELUSIVE EVIDENCE



THE CALIFORNIA WELLNESS FOUNDATION (VIOLENCE PREVENTION INITIATIVE)

On April 29, 1992, tensions resulting from racism, poverty, gang warfare, and police corruption brought a literal conflagration to the streets of Central Los Angeles. The riots would eventually leave 53 people dead and 2,300 injured, and cost the city an estimated \$1 billion. Sparked by the acquittal of four white police officers in the beating of Rodney King, the raging unrest in Los Angeles shattered the Golden State's false facade of progress in an ongoing battle with violence and highlighted an undercurrent of racial and economic tension that had gone ignored for too long.

Throughout California in the early and mid-1990s, a climate of divisiveness and retribution reigned as both crime and poverty rates climbed. Politicians clamored for tougher law enforcement and longer prison sentences and residents played out their anxieties at the polls, resulting in harsh new laws targeting immigrants, low-income people, and youth.

California needed to grow an anti-violence movement that could show that the epidemic of violence was not inevitable, that could reverse and prevent the spread of violence, and that could instill hope for a safer, better future for youth – enter The California Wellness Foundation. Created the same year that saw the LA riots, the Foundation soon embarked on a multi-million dollar, decade-long effort to build that movement.

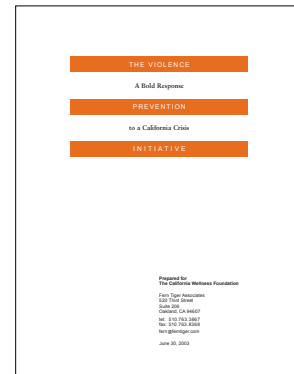
PROJECT DATE:

2002 - 2003

SECTOR: *Philanthropy,
Youth Development*

FTA SKILLS AND SERVICES:

*Research, interviews,
analysis, synthesis,
documentation, evaluation,
writing*



One of the largest health grantmaking organizations in the state, THE CALIFORNIA WELLNESS FOUNDATION works to improve the health of the people of California by supporting health promotion, wellness education, and disease prevention.

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For direction, the Foundation looked to the field of public health, where a growing number of researchers and practitioners had begun to view violence as a health problem rather than an issue solely for law enforcement and the courts.

The Foundation committed \$70 million over 10 years to the Violence Prevention Initiative (VPI) – a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary, community-driven set of strategies that would aim to create the state’s, and perhaps the nation’s, first true youth violence prevention constituency.

Fast forward to 2002: As the project wound down, The California Wellness Foundation turned to Fern Tiger Associates (FTA) to research and write a history of the Initiative – requiring FTA to sum up 10 years of effort by hundreds of people working to curb youth violence; to understand and convey how the Initiative evolved over time; and to put all of that into historical perspective. FTA’s evaluation, it was hoped, would add a layer of understanding regarding the impact of the Initiative that previous, more quantitative studies had lacked.

FTA’s 18-month-long evaluation relied on significant research and analysis, including more than 75 in-person interviews. The resulting 50-page document was laden with quotes from the interviews, providing richness and context.

The Violence Prevention Initiative, funded by The California Wellness Foundation provided \$70 million over a ten-year period; grants focused on four core areas: community action, leadership, policy, and research. In addition, the Foundation funded opportunities for grantees to convene regularly. These convenings often brought together extremely diverse individuals – from academics studying violence to gang and community members experiencing violence directly.

Between 1983 and 1993, when the Violence Prevention Initiative began, juvenile arrests for violent offenses rose by about 70 percent nationally; youth were increasingly likely to be victims of violence as well.

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The report was conceived as four stand-alone but inter-connected chapters (to allow for dissemination as articles or other formats):

- *Countering the Push for Punishment* provided an overview of the VPI itself and explained why the Foundation felt such a significant investment in youth violence prevention was needed.
- *Moving the Needle* examined the challenges faced by the VPI grantees in coming together in a newly created youth violence prevention field and the impacts the Initiative had on that field.
- *Crossing the Divide* analyzed the ways in which the VPI represented a new way of funding to achieve results and the effects it had on other foundations in California and nationally.
- *Elusive Evidence* looked at the challenges and lessons learned from the quantitative evaluation conducted during the first five years of the ten-year project.

The FTA evaluation told a multi-layered story, created by fascinating and dedicated individuals and organizations. FTA's task was to portray the Initiative – why it was created, what happened along the way, what didn't happen, and how its activities were understood and interpreted. The narrative shed light on the intensity of the issue, the passion of the players, the visionary thoughtfulness of the grantmaking, and the impacts made on individuals and communities.

“Twenty years ago the words ‘violence’ and ‘prevention’ were rarely, if ever, used in the same sentence. We’ve learned so much since then.”