

For Immediate Release
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Darcy Pollan
Director of Communication and Events, Peace Over Violence
213-955-9090 ext. 113
darcy@peaceoverviolence.org



Sharell Dixon

James Campos

TWO LOS ANGELES TEENS SELECTED TO REPRESENT PEACE OVER VIOLENCE IN LARGEST NATIONAL EFFORT TO PROMOTE HEALTHY TEEN RELATIONSHIPS

Peace Over Violence and youth leaders to participate in national Start Strong Kick-Off and Teen Summit to combat teen dating violence and abuse through youth empowerment

Los Angeles, CA – Two local teens, Sharell Dixon and James Campos, have been selected to represent Los Angeles at the national kick-off of Start Strong: Building Healthy Teen Relationships (Start Strong), the largest initiative ever funded to target 11-to 14-year-olds to promote safe and healthy relationships as the way to prevent teen dating violence and abuse. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Blue Shield of California Foundation* are investing \$18 million in 11 communities across the country to identify and evaluate the most promising pathways to stop dating violence and abuse before it starts. Ms. Dixon and Mr. Campos will stand alongside other Start Strong teens, experts in the field, and community advocates from across the country for the first time in San Francisco, CA to officially launch Start Strong and will also participate in the first Start Strong Teen Summit that will empower youth to help shape this national initiative.

metro headquarters

605 west olympic boulevard, suite 400
los angeles, california 90015

213 . 955 . 9090 office
213 . 955 . 9093 fax
213 . 955 . 9095 TDD

west san gabriel valley center

892 north fair oaks avenue, suite D
pasadena, california 91103

626 . 584 . 6191 office
626 . 584 . 6193 fax
626 . 584 . 6160 TDD

24-hour hotlines

626 . 793 . 3385
310 . 392 . 8381
213 . 626 . 3393

video phone

213 . 955 . 9249
626 . 584 . 6118

peaceoverviolence.org
info@peaceoverviolence.org



In November, Peace Over Violence was chosen as one of the 11 community organizations nationwide to receive \$1 million in funding from Blue Shield of California Foundation as part of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's national Start Strong initiative. As part of this initiative, Start Strong Los Angeles will rally the entire community, including teens, parents, caregivers, educators, coaches and community leaders to build environments that support healthy relationships and ensure violence and abuse are never tolerated.

This national kick-off is the first collaborative meeting involving teen leaders from all 11 Start Strong sites with ages ranging from 14 to 18. Together more than 100 teens, community partners, practitioners and experts will convene to generate new ideas on how to combat this growing epidemic and share innovative plans from their own communities. The youth summit, will involve workshops on community building and creating social movements, as well as the design and development of the "Start Strong Youth Network," a mechanism for teens from all of the different Start Strong sites to share information and best practices and collaborate with other Start Strong youth from across the country.

"I am excited to be a part of this initiative because of what it means for teens across the country. As teens, we need to use this opportunity to make a change and contribute to a solution to teen dating violence," Sharell Dixon said.

Teen dating violence and abuse is a significant public health issue in this country. According to the 2007 national Youth Risk Behavior Survey, one out of ten high school students nationwide had been hit, slapped, or physically hurt on purpose by their boyfriend or girlfriend. Alarmingly, a new study to be released at the Start Strong launch will reveal that dating violence is beginning as early as 6th grade. Peace Over Violence along with partners USC's Institute for Multi-media Literacy, El Centro Del Pueblo and LAUSD have developed a comprehensive community plan for this 4-year initiative to address the community's needs and prevent violence among youth. This plan will focus on four core strategies involving education, policy change, community outreach and social marketing campaigns to empower local teens to develop healthier relationships.

"This prevention effort will increase the capacity of the community to support healthy relationships," said Abigail Sims, Start Strong Los Angeles Project Director at Peace Over Violence. "James and Sharell exemplify the commitment of the next generation to create respectful relationships. They are trailblazers and their leadership is integral to this new prevention paradigm."

Through the Start Strong grant provided by Blue Shield of California Foundation, Peace Over Violence is working with the Family Violence Prevention Fund to implement the Start Strong initiative in Los Angeles.



“Youth are breaking out of the Chris Brown/Rihanna mold and stepping forward to build healthy relationships,” said Blue Shield of California Foundation President and CEO Crystal Hayling. “Start Strong encourages both boys and girls to find a positive path away from teen dating violence. We’ve reached critical mass on this important issue this year, and Start Strong is playing a lead role.”

(* Robert Wood Johnson Foundation is funding ten sites around the country and Blue Shield of California Foundation is funding one site in California.)

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About Peace Over Violence

Formerly the Los Angeles Commission on Assaults Against Women, Peace Over Violence is a social service agency dedicated to building healthy relationships, families and communities free from sexual, domestic and interpersonal violence. For more information, visit www.peaceoverviolence.org.

About Blue Shield of California Foundation

Blue Shield of California Foundation, one of the largest healthcare grantmaking organizations in California, has committed a total of \$24.6 million since 2002 to ending domestic violence in the state. For more information, please visit the Web site at www.blueshieldcafoundation.org. The Foundation was formed by Blue Shield of California, a not-for-profit corporation with more than 3.4 million members, 4700 employees and more than 20 offices throughout California. For more information about the company, please visit www.blueshieldca.com.

About Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation focuses on the pressing health and health care issues facing our country. As the nation’s largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to improving the health and health care of all Americans, we work with a diverse group of organizations and individuals to identify solutions and achieve comprehensive, meaningful and timely change. For more than 35 years we’ve brought experience, commitment and a rigorous, balanced approach to the problems that affect the health and health care of those we serve. When it comes to helping Americans lead healthier lives and get the care they need, we expect to make a difference in your lifetime. For more information visit www.rwjf.org.

About Family Violence Prevention Fund

The Family Violence Prevention Fund works to end violence against women and children around the world, because every person has the right to live free of violence. The FVPF has continued to break new ground by reaching new audiences including men and youth, promoting leadership within communities to ensure that violence prevention efforts become self-sustaining, and transforming the way health care providers, police, judges, employers and others respond to violence. Its public education campaigns, conducted in partnership with The Advertising Council, have shaped public awareness and changed social norms for 15 years. For more information, visit www.endabuse.org.