
October 5, 2009

Daniel Callister, Esq.
President of the Board
National Campaign to Stop Violence
910 17th Street, NW, Suite #200
Washington, D.C. 20006

Dear Mr. Callister:

I was privileged to attend this year's Annual Banquet in Washington, D.C., where I heard the testimonies of youth from all across the country whose lives had been personally and deeply touched by violence. I was profoundly moved by what I witnessed: the voices were authentic, powerful, and bespoke the commitments that these youth had made by taking up the challenge to end the cycle of violence in their own lives and the lives of their families and those in their communities.

As a scientist and a physician working in this area for the last quarter century, I was particularly struck by the power of what you are accomplishing by the "Do the Write Thing" approach that encourages youth to put words to their personal histories, using their essays, stories, or sometimes poetry to communicate to others about how violence has touched their lives. In essence, these youth are turning lemons into lemonade – using something that has been traumatic in their lives to serve a higher purpose: transforming their own lives by touching others' hearts through their words and stories.

Whether you knew this or not when you developed the program, but in effect, you are using the very best methods science has discovered in recent years about how we can best facilitate personal change: by drawing from the traumatic threads of these youths' own lives, your program actively guides them to weave a beautiful new tapestry with authentic power to shape their futures and those of others they will come in contact with.

I applaud you for this outstanding work, and am honored to assist you in any way I can. Please do not hesitate to call on me, whether in my role as the Co-Chair of the Division of Child Psychiatry and Psychology at the Mayo Clinic, or in my role as President and CEO of the REACH Institute, whose mission is to promulgate the best scientific methods for improving children's mental health across the country. "Do The Write Thing" is a stellar exemplar of what we hope all communities will adopt.

Keep up the great work!

Peter S. Jensen, M.D.
Co-Chair, Division of Child Psychiatry
& Psychology, Mayo Clinic Rochester

President & CEO
The REACH Institute