

Transformations in self, philanthropy & community

When one person makes positive changes in life, it can inspire a ripple effect. In the case of **Richard Carmona, MD, MPH**, the world has benefitted from his unlikely journey from poor kid – very poor kid – in New York City to 17th Surgeon General of the United States.

As a child, he knew hunger and homelessness. He got health care only when his grandmother's home remedies of herbs and incantations failed. Dr. Carmona remembers going to Richard Izquierdo, MD, who served the city's poorest people at his tiny Bronx office. "He put the first stitches in my head," Dr. Carmona recalls.

Dr. Carmona dropped out of high school, joined the U.S. Army, earned his GED, and served as a Special Forces medic and weapons specialist. After Vietnam, he went on to college, medical school, a master's degree in public health and four years as America's top doctor.



"After I served as Surgeon General, Mel and Enid Zuckerman asked me to help with their philanthropy," says Dr. Carmona, who had known Canyon Ranch and its founders for years. "I believed in their goals, and they'd always been generous, but it was a random approach. How could they tell if they were making a lasting difference?"

That's when Dr. Carmona became Vice Chairman of Canyon Ranch and President of

Canyon Ranch Institute, transforming well-intentioned giving into *smart philanthropy*.

"I got together the best team, starting with Jennifer Cabe, our executive director," he says. "We had permission to use Canyon Ranch intellectual property to set up public health programs in low-income areas. The first place we tackled was right where I started, in the South Bronx. If we could make a big difference there, we could do it anywhere."

Meanwhile, Dr. Izquierdo had founded Urban Health Plan, a community health center. He's now 86 years young, and his daughter Paloma Hernandez is CEO. UHP serves more than 60,000 people. Dr. Carmona

saw his old South Bronx neighborhood as the perfect place to pilot a community health program based on the weeklong Life Enhancement Center experience at Canyon Ranch in Tucson.

The Canyon Ranch Institute Life Enhancement Program was introduced in 2007, and more than 700 people have participated nationwide in underserved communities. The results are impressive: Graduates adopt healthier behaviors, lose weight, are less depressed, lower their blood pressure, manage stress better, know more about health and improve their eating habits.

"There's a network of health now. We've seen sustainable improvement across the communities – better health literacy, kids getting vaccinated, fresh fruit is available where it didn't used to be, and support for fitness and nutrition."

Because of its success, the Canyon Ranch Institute Life Enhancement Program has expanded to many low-income communities, rural and urban, and new CRI programs are being developed.

"Our sole purpose is to encourage better health, and the enthusiasm is contagious. We see families transformed, exercising together, kids being more active, planting community gardens," Dr. Carmona says. "We are health entrepreneurs who partner with our investors to make real, sustainable change. The possibilities are endless." ●

Canyon Ranch Institute® is a nonprofit public charity that makes Canyon Ranch healthy living programs and education available in low-income communities everywhere. To learn more, volunteer, or to add your support, please visit canyonranchinstitute.org.