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A Thousand Joys Marks Ten Years with Gala Event

The groundbreaking Los Angeles nonprofit organization A Thousand Joys (ATJ) celebrates its tenth anniversary on October 1 with a gala event for several hundred invited guests.

The evening’s master of ceremonies is producer/director/entrepreneur Jeff Valdez, whose SiTV network was the first Latino-owned and -run national cable network in the U.S. Event honorees include Oscar Torres, writer/producer of the multi-award-winning film Voces Inocentes (Innocent Voices); and Cuban-born actor William Levy, named by Variety as one of the country’s 10 top Latino stars, and by People en Español as one of its “50 Most Beautiful” for the fourth consecutive year.

The evening begins with a series of themed dinners hosted by members of the organization’s board of directors and supporters, culminating in a concert at the Music Center’s Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. Performers include the Royals, American Idol alumnus David Hernandez and pop and dance sensation Thea Austin. Proceeds from the evening will further ATJ’s work with trauma-impacted schoolchildren through the organization’s signature wellness program, Transform.

Transform currently focuses on students in communities with some of the highest rates of poverty and violent crime. Research shows that exposure to violence can cause trauma that can keep a child on edge and can often lead to angry outbursts and an inability to focus on instructions and tasks. Trauma is one of the top predictors of school suspension and academic failure. Transform employs both traditional and non-traditional activities such as yoga, meditation, mindfulness and drumming to emphasize physical, emotional and psychological balance. This in turn helps students to gain a sense of empowerment and creates lifelong habits of emotional health and self-care.

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“A Thousand Joys aims to achieve a fundamental shift in thinking and practice in our school system that will result in more positive life outcomes,” says ATJ’s Chief Executive Officer Liza Auciello, PsyD. “Students entering our program often lack the skills to effectively manage their behaviors and emotions. After participating in our program, 80% of students report being better able to manage stress, while 75% are better able to handle anger.”

This new mindset, Auciello says, helps students build coping and life skills that enable them to focus in the classroom and have a successful academic career.

A Thousand Joys founder, Raul Alvarado, says the organization plans to expand and replicate the Transform program to help many more students, their families and school staff. To this end, ATJ is developing a model school at North Valley Military Institute in Sun Valley, Calif. The school will integrate Transform principles and practices into its curriculum and then serve as the grounds for ATJ’s Transform Training Academy. Through the academy, school personnel throughout the state and nationally will receive in-depth training and guidance on how to make system and policy changes that support trauma-sensitive learning environments in their own schools.

For more information about A Thousand Joys and its Transform program, visit www.athousandjoys.org.

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