



G R A I N E Y P I C T U R E S

State Farm PRESENTS *Difference Makers*

Healing Power

Pete Carroll helped build A Better LA to combat violence in a community he loves. The results have been stunning

Pete Carroll can remember exactly when he knew he needed to create A Better LA to fight gang violence in Los Angeles. Carroll was Southern Cal's football coach when, during a single week in November 2002, he kept hearing heartbreaking radio reports. "By Thursday," Carroll says, "11 kids had been killed in related incidents."

He called an old friend and mentor, the late Lou Tice, whose Pacific Institute aided in community and leadership development. "We always said we were going to do something together," says Carroll, now the Seattle Seahawks coach. "I said, 'I know what we can do. We can stop these kids from killing each other.' That was how it started."

When Carroll and Tice held their first meeting, everyone from sheriff's deputies to a congresswoman to the news media attended. To quell the rise in violence, especially among the city's youth, A Better LA sought to merge outreach efforts with social work, police involvement and community-minded initiatives.

UNITED FOR THE CAUSE

That initial gathering helped forge common ground among disparate groups. Brian Center, executive director of A Better LA, says the results have been staggering. Over the past nine years, the organization's efforts have helped decrease murders 63% and 55% in two target areas of south Los Angeles, as homicides citywide have fallen to 40-year lows. "Pete was so charismatic and sincere and passionate," Center recalls. "He brought people together in a really unique way."

Carroll's commitment goes far beyond photos and financial support. He's stayed close to the cause even after taking the Seahawks job and starting a Seattle chapter. He routinely engages with the outreach workers that A Better LA deploys. Often, the workers have grown up in gang culture and can help young people navigate life in violent neighborhoods. The group has excelled at building relationships among enemies, so that conflicts that used to spiral into violence instead can be resolved through conversation. "We never went [into neighborhoods] with any big solutions," Carroll says. "We just listened and tried to learn what was going on."

On one of those nights, he met a young man named Diamond, a convicted felon who couldn't get a job and had a girlfriend and child to support. Carroll invited him to work at a USC football camp. Diamond would handle jobs at the camp often in the following years, and he now volunteers with A Better LA for outreach initiatives. Not every story has such a happy ending. Carroll built a relationship with another gang member who had played football in high school. The two began speaking regularly on the phone. "And three months later," Carroll says, "he was dead, caught in the crossfire at a party."

Still, there has been more progress than disappointment. Carroll pours his legendary energy into the foundation, but he deflects credit. Instead he champions intervention workers who accompany him into tough neighborhoods, or social workers and public employees who have worked so hard to reduce violent crime.

No matter who gets credit, there's no question that this cause—his cause—truly has helped save lives. "This, to me," Carroll says, "is just the right thing to do."

—Nando DiFino



Even after moving to Seattle, Carroll stays connected with A Better LA and the neighborhoods it serves.

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PETE CARROLL

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