



Carissa Phelps, J.D., M.B.A.

Director of Strategic Accounts of The WhyTry Organization

Carissa Phelps is a motivational speaker and advocate for at-risk and transitional age youth. The Carissa Project has produced an award winning short documentary based on Carissa's life story and has given Carissa a platform from which to share her inspiring story and best practice approaches to building resiliency with school administrators, nonprofit program directors, and county agencies.

Carissa grew up in one of the most impoverished regions of the Country in a family of 11 children. She was abandoned at the age of 12, and was sent to group homes, juvenile hall and eventually lived on the streets of Fresno, Coalinga, and Huron, California. Despite harsh circumstances, Carissa returned to a continuation high school at the age of 15, earning a high school diploma in just two and a half years. She went on to attend Fresno State where she graduated *summa cum laude* in mathematics. After her undergraduate work, Carissa taught high school math for one year and then continued on to UCLA where she completed both her J.D. and M.B.A.

In 2007 and 2008, Carissa partnered with Virgin Mobile USA's pro-social marketing campaign as a spokesperson on the issue of teen homelessness for their RE*Generation campaign.

Carissa recently joined The WhyTry Organization, an organization that focuses on teaching key social and emotional skills that help motivate youth to overcome poverty, violence and failure. Carissa presents the principles of The WhyTry Organization to teachers, counselors, social workers, and youth correction workers at numerous state and national conferences.

Recent Keynotes:

- Homeless Youth Coalition
- National Safe Place Conference
- California Wellness Foundation
- Fresno Institute for Urban Leadership
- WHCC Leadership Conference
- Cultural Heritage Institute
- Los Angeles Unified School District Annual Resource Fair
- Girls for a Change
- Children Uniting Nations: Our Promise to At-Risk Youth