

# Perspectives



## Finding Hope Again through Thrive Together

by Jess Perreca Jr.



Thrive  
Together

OAC'S Youth and Families Program

**"Healing starts when we feel  
safe enough to *thrive*."**

### Coming Back to a Place I Belong

I came to the 2025 *Your Weight Matters* National Convention because I needed a reset. I first attended an OAC National Convention in 2018 in Denver, and it stayed with me. That weekend gave me something I did not often feel at the time: connection. I belonged. Coming back this year, I felt both excited and nervous. I knew I would see familiar faces and meet new ones. More than anything, I wanted to return to a space where I did not have to explain myself, a place where people understood me without judgment and believed in me. That is exactly what I found again. And this time, something else stayed with me in a deeper way.

### Watching Thrive Together

The OAC's Thrive Together program for teens stood out right away. The kids connected quickly, almost naturally. Watching them felt like watching a younger version of myself, surrounded by peers who understood what it meant to live in a larger body and move through the world that way. It brought me back to the rare moments in my own childhood when I felt accepted and supported. Those moments mattered more than I knew at the time. Seeing Thrive Together teens experience that kind of belonging made me smile.

Then came the Saturday Night Gala. During the Gala, several teens took the microphone and shared what Thrive Together meant to them. In just a few minutes, my emotions shifted. I felt proud and happy for them, but I also felt a deep sadness rise up. They had something I wanted so badly as a kid, something I once had myself and something I lost.

### A Memory that Stayed with Me

When I was about 10 or 11, I read a newspaper article about a man in my community who had lost more than 600 pounds. He had started a program for kids like me. I remember bringing the article to my parents in tears and begging them to help me get involved. They did. I became part of the program and lost nearly 60 pounds. More importantly, I felt seen. I felt supported. I felt hopeful for the first time.

Then one day, the program ended. The support disappeared. The community faded away. I felt abandoned. I struggled emotionally and physically and gained the weight back and more. That experience stayed with me. I have often wondered how different my life might have been if that sense of connection had lasted longer.

## Why Thrive Together Felt Different

That is why Thrive Together hit me so hard. It felt familiar, but also different in important ways. Thrive is not built around one person. It is thoughtful and intentional. The kids had space to talk openly, learn from one another and simply be themselves. Parents were included too, which mattered deeply. When I was a kid, our parents were not part of the experience. Seeing that made me hopeful, not because it promised quick change, but because it showed commitment. It showed that the OAC is building something meant to last.

## What It Sparked in Me

Seeing the Thrive Together program reminded me how powerful it can be to simply show up and share your story. I may not have all the answers, but I do have lived experience. I know what it feels like to be full of hope and to feel that hope slip away. Being part of the OAC community allows me to turn those experiences into something meaningful by showing up, listening and staying connected.

To the Thrive teens, I want you to know this: your voices matter. Your stories matter. Sharing them helped me heal a part of my own.

## A Place to Belong

At the 2025 National Convention, I saw hope take shape in a new way. I saw kids and parents building connections. I saw a community that shows up and stays. I saw young people who knew they belonged. If you are struggling or feeling alone, please know this. You do not have to do it by yourself. There is a community here. Most of all, there is a place where you belong. Healing starts when we feel safe enough to thrive.

### About the Author:

*Jess Perreca Jr. lives in Michigan and is a husband, father and OAC Community Member who shares his personal health journey with honesty and heart. He is passionate about connection, compassion, and helping others feel seen and supported within the community.*

## About Thrive Together:

Thrive Together is a youth and family program created by the Obesity Action Coalition to support teens and parents affected by weight and health challenges. The program focuses on connection, shared experiences and learning together in a space that feels welcoming and supportive. Families can stay connected beyond events by signing up for the Thrive Together newsletter, which shares stories from the community, helpful resources, upcoming opportunities and ways to stay involved throughout the year. To learn more or sign up, visit [ObesityAction.org/thrive-together](https://ObesityAction.org/thrive-together).



Donate to Thrive Together



# PUTTING OUR MISSION INTO MOTION

Every initiative we lead is rooted in our commitment to uplift and support individuals affected by obesity.



**Thrive Together**  
Empowering youth and families with resources to thrive

**STOP WEIGHT BIAS**

Challenging weight bias and pushing equality forward



**OAC ACTION**

Mobilizing advocates to create change

**obesity care week™**

Raising global awareness to rethink how we care for obesity



Helping individuals start the conversation about weight with a healthcare provider

... And that's not all.  
**Explore more at**  
**ObesityAction.org**





# ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



VIBRANT COMMUNITY



NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS



ANNUAL CONVENTION



ADVOCACY



PUBLIC EDUCATION

## LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

### Through the OAC Community, you can get access to:

- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
  - Community Discussion Forum
  - Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
- AND MUCH MORE**



**JOIN TODAY: GO TO [OBESITYACTION.ORG/JOIN](http://OBESITYACTION.ORG/JOIN)**

[info@obesityaction.org](mailto:info@obesityaction.org)

(800) 717-3117 | (813) 872-7835 | Fax: (813) 873-7838



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