

Youth Empowered and Involved in their Community with the Help of the Teen Outreach Program

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The South Carolina Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy (Campaign), like the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, set a goal to reduce the incidence of teen pregnancy in the state by one-third between 1996 and 2005. How will this goal be met?

The Campaign believes that if we focus on high risk areas and implement proven effective strategies, then significant changes in South Carolina's rates can be achieved. As a result, one of our strongest efforts is the continuous search for new and innovative strategies and curricula that have been proven to achieve reductions in teen pregnancy, coupled with the promotion of their use among local coalitions across the state. Additionally, we emphasize the importance of listening to the "youth voice" an often forgotten, yet crucial component of programs that are successful in reducing teen pregnancy.

Currently, the Campaign is promoting the Teen Outreach Program (TOP) throughout the state. In doing so, the Campaign implements the above strategies simultaneously and addresses



Members of "Word Up Teens" take time for a picture after a recent event.

objectives from its Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) - sponsored "Communities Caring for Teens Project." South Carolina is one of five state-wide and three national organizations that have received funding from the CDC to promote the use of best practice interventions in local communities.

In July 2003, the Campaign contracted with Cornerstone Consulting Group, Inc. to

provide a TOP training to 20 interested facilitators from across the state of South Carolina. The participants left the training with the materials and skills they needed to implement the program in their communities. In addition, the Campaign offered mini-grants to each county program in attendance to help offset the cost of implementation. As part of the training process, facilitators were encour-

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aged to utilize the skills of the youth selected to participate in TOP activities. The program lends itself to youth participation and involvement, including many opportunities for the youth to "show off" their skills and let their voices be heard in the community. As a long-range goal, the Campaign plans to utilize participants from various TOP groups from across the state in the development of a state-wide Youth Advisory Council.

The Anderson-Oconee Council on Teen Pregnancy Prevention attended the initial Teen Outreach Program training. Although the Council had an established and active youth council before the TOP training was held, the need to enhance the program was recognized. Polly Edwards, Director of the Anderson-Oconee Council, saw TOP as a great way to add more structure to their existing activities, while also promoting youth service in the community. According to Ms. Edwards, "the Teen Outreach Program provided us with an opportunity to increase the involvement of young people in the community and implement a proven effective prevention approach at the same time."

"Word Up Teens" (WUT), the name given to the Anderson-Oconee County youth council, was established during Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month in May 2002. Now, in collaboration with the Campaign, the Anderson-Oconee Council on Teen Pregnancy Prevention provides WUT participants the opportunity to participate in the Teen Outreach Program. Since its inception, the group has provided a total of 340 community service hours in addition to over 60 hours in meetings to plan, organize, and debrief events. WUT is divided into three service areas: direct service (to individuals in the community), indirect service (through other community agencies), and civic action (giving a youth voice to issues in the community).

As part of the 300+ hours of service to their community, WUT participants have volunteered at a homeless shelter, adopted a teen pregnancy prevention program for youth ages 8-11, developed t-shirt designs for all youth programs related to the Council on Teen Pregnancy Prevention, assisted younger youth programs in implementing community service projects, collaborated with the Women's Initiative Council of United Way of Anderson County, participated in the Festival of Trees for Foothills Alliance, and facilitated lessons on the myths of teen sexuality. Additionally, four lucky members of WUT were able to attend this year's Annual Youth Summit in Washington, DC. WUT is currently working on activities for May Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month 2004 that include a billboard contest,

many community-wide awareness projects, and promotion of the National Campaign's online quiz including setting up sites at all local high schools and the mall. The goal of this year's WUT is to adopt one non-profit a month and assist them in providing services to the community. Already, benefits of the young people's involvement can be seen throughout the community and participant's behavior. The SC Campaign is in the process of conducting a more detailed evaluation of TOP in Anderson, and across the state.

Since the initial TOP training in July, the Campaign has hosted two additional facilitator trainings, both partially sponsored by the "Communities Caring for Teens Project," and now has a certified Teen Outreach Program trainer on staff. To date, there are 60 trained facilitators in South Carolina representing programs in 24 counties. For more information about the Campaign's state-wide implementation of the Teen Outreach Program, contact Forrest Alton at (803) 771-7700 or falton@teenpregnancysc.org. To find out more about "Word Up Teens" contact Harmony Edelman at (864) 260-5632.

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