

Teen emPower! - Helping Youth REACH for Health

Project REACH (Reproductive Education to Achieve Community Health) is a prevention initiative designed to reduce teen pregnancy and improve the overall health of students attending middle and high schools in seven adjacent OKC zip codes: 73107, 73108, 73109, 73110, 73115, 73119, and 73129: The area includes three public school districts: Crooked Oak, Mid-Del, and Oklahoma City. Teen clinics in the targeted area will be involved, also. Project REACH was one of 49 teen pregnancy prevention projects selected to receive 3-year funding from the DHHS Office of Population Affairs.

Collaboration for collective impact is the framework used in Oklahoma County to address teen pregnancy prevention through partnerships. The proposal was prepared by the Oklahoma City-County Health Department (OCCHD), Healthy Teens OK!, Teen emPower Inc.! (TEI), Variety Care Health Centers, and the Health Promotion Sciences Dept., Hudson College of Public Health at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center. The youth-serving program delivery partners are TEI and Variety Care. Thrive Sexual Health Collective for Youth is the grantee and coordinating organization.

Replication of effective evidence-based programs (EBPs) that reach a significant percentage of the student population in each school site is the central focus of the project. EBPs will be incorporated into core classes to align with the school curricula requirements at key grade levels. EBPs are planned for 6th, 8th, 9th, and 12th grades.

Extensive youth engagement activities will give students a prominent role in promoting protective factors, building decision-making skills, and helping health providers improve services for teens. TEI's Sexual Health And Peer Education (SHAPE) program is the major youth engagement effort, involving teens as true partners in prevention. Each year, 30 high school students will be recruited and trained as peer educators to present sessions on peer and social pressures, media messages, and assertiveness skills to 7th grade students, with support from adult health educators.

Innovative support services to address the needs of specific youth populations at higher risk for teen pregnancy, STIs, and sexual victimization will be developed with input from the students. Community partner organizations with expertise and resources in particular program areas will assist in planning and implementing the activities.

Oklahoma County has a high need for expanding health programs for adolescents that reduce risks and increase protective factors. Oklahoma has remained among the handful of states with the highest teen birth rates for over a decade, reporting the fifth highest (worst) rate for ages 15-19 in 2018. Oklahoma County, the most populous and most racially and ethnically diverse county, has the largest number of teen births. The county's teen birth numbers represent one-fifth of all teen births in the state, with teen birth rates in some county zip codes reaching as high as 3-4 times the U.S. average.

For more information, check: HHS/OPA Tier 1 Awards