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Planned Parenthood of Northern New York

Straight Talk: A Community Intervention Model to Reduce

Unprotected Sex Resulting From Substance Use

Grant Results Report – October, 2008

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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Grant Title: Straight Talk: A Community Intervention Model to Reduce Unprotected Sex Resulting From Substance Use

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Foundation Program Officer: Kelly Hunt

ABOUT THE GRANTEE

For 40 years, **Planned Parenthood of Northern New York (PPNY)** has served the residents of Jefferson, Lewis, and St. Lawrence Counties with programming addressing unintended pregnancy prevention and medically accurate sex education. PPNY is accredited by the Planned Parenthood Federation of America.

Other collaborators on the grant:

The Alcohol and Substance Abuse Council of Jefferson County promotes a healthy lifestyle in the community by providing education, intervention, and assessment/referral services for drugs, alcohol, and other addictions.

Credo Community Center for the Treatment of Addictions provides services and treatment to individuals, groups, families, adults, adolescents, and children whose lives have been affected by substance abuse.

Straight Talk: A Community Intervention Model to Reduce Unprotected Sex Resulting From Substance Abuse

THE PROBLEM ADDRESSED

Rural Jefferson County in northern New York has the highest rate of teen pregnancy in the state. Researchers at the Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University and others have shown a connection between risky sexual activity and teens' use of drugs or alcohol. Nearly one-quarter of sexually active teens and young adults (ages 15 to 24) report having had unprotected sex when drinking or using drugs. The data likely underestimate the full extent of the problem, as young people do not readily talk about these sensitive issues.

PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT

Planned Parenthood of Northern New York, the Alcohol and Substance Abuse Council of Jefferson County, and Credo Community Center for the Treatment of Addictions formed a coalition to create a campaign to raise awareness of the interrelationship of substance abuse and unprotected sex. While existing public service advertising campaigns separately promote the safe use of alcohol and the use of condoms, "no single campaign addressed both issues," says Tess Sacco Barker, Director of Community Relations for Planned Parenthood of Northern New York.

UNDER THE GRANT

During the first three months of the grant period, coalition members conducted three sets of focus groups—teens, 20 to 29-year-olds, and parents—to assess local "North Country" beliefs about the topic and determine which messages would have the greatest communication impact. A second set of focus groups reviewed radio and TV spots before they aired, in order to solicit feedback and further refine the message. Finally, two television commercials and two radio spots under the campaign title *Straight Talk* were aired for nine months, through December 2007.

In-service training was completed at the three participating agencies to provide information on the other two agencies' services and referral processes. Planned Parenthood and the Credo Community Center developed a formal referral process with referral forms.

BARRIERS TO ACHIEVEMENT AND CHANGES TO ORIGINAL WORK PLAN

All three coalition organizations had planned to update their Web pages to include a link to a specially created Web page that would reinforce the media message about the relationship between substance use and risky sexual behavior. However, those plans were changed after the focus groups and client interviews at Planned Parenthood and Credo.

“Most respondents did not feel that a prevention Web page would be effective in reaching those most at risk for engaging in unhealthy sexual behavior,” says Barker. “Clients seemed to feel that most people visit Web sites looking for information and services, not for messages that tell them what *not* to do.” Instead, as clients suggested, the coalition created a MySpace page linked to each agency's Web site that is “more interactive and would be used more often by our target audience.”

PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

“Anecdotal feedback confirmed the *Straight Talk* spots were being aired frequently throughout the day by multiple media outlets, potentially reaching thousands of North Country residents,” Barker says. But because the project involves modifying personal behavior and teen pregnancy or sexually transmitted infection (STI) rates, it will take several years to see any effects of the campaign.

Additionally, according to Barker, it was difficult to track referrals between the alcohol and substance use programs and Planned Parenthood.

“Although we anticipated using written referrals for evaluation and reporting purposes, few clients were interested in concrete referrals. They were more interested in general information such as where to get tested for STIs, where to get condoms, and whom to call if they had questions about alcohol or drug use,” says Barker.

DISSEMINATION OF FINDINGS

Planned Parenthood Federation of America hosts an information-sharing Web site for local affiliates, and Planned Parenthood of Northern New York plans to upload the *Straight Talk* workplan and media spots to this site so that other affiliates may draw from or replicate it.

In December 2007, Planned Parenthood of Northern New York staff gave a presentation on the *Straight Talk* project to a regional Department of Health meeting for health educators.

Staff plans to send a mailing to local health and human service agencies about the project, reiterating its prevention message and reminding them of the reproductive health care services of Planned Parenthood and the substance use services of Credo.

THE FUTURE

The project will continue work on the *Straight Talk* MySpace page and use the ad spots created for the campaign.

“We plan to rotate the spots into our annual media plan, especially during ‘higher risk’ times of the year, such as spring break and prom season,” says Barker. “Because we believe the message is so important and the ads have such broad appeal, we hope to use them over the next year or two to augment our existing patient recruitment campaign and reinforce the message that alcohol and drug use and sexual activity don’t mix.”