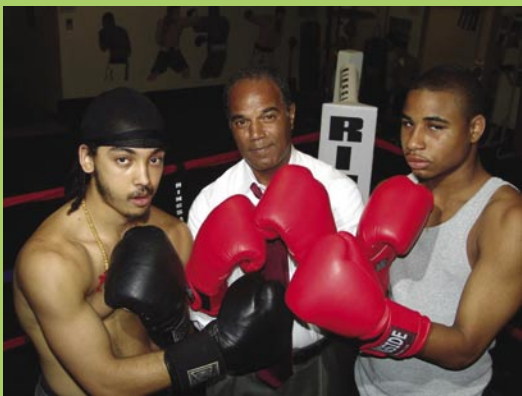




ENGAGING YOUTH... ON THEIR TURF



*Creative Approaches to
Connecting Youth
through Community*



By Abby Kahn, Janet Max, and Pat Paluzzi

PREFACE

Our nation has enjoyed a decade long decline in teen birth rates to reach an all time low. This is good news and should be celebrated. However, the United States still leads most industrialized nations in teen births. We know that about three-fourths of the decline is due to effective use of contraception and the other fourth to delaying the onset of intercourse.

But who is not being reached by our comprehensive sexuality education messages and contraceptive services? Healthy Teen Network believes it is the youth most disengaged from our usual systems of care and ultimately those most in need of positive messages and support. We believe it is our duty to find these young people and use any means possible to support their healthy development and transition to adulthood. We recognize the challenge of doing so, but nevertheless the responsibility is ours. We must find creative approaches that reach youth where they are and engage them in meaningful terms. This means developing new partners and messages and stretching beyond our usual delivery settings.

Healthy Teen Network is very pleased to present you with six examples of programs that have done this and done it well. With generous support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Healthy Teen Network has interviewed program directors and gathered participant stories from these creative approaches so that you may see for yourself the kind of engagement that is possible when we redefine community.

Healthy Teen Network's vision is that all youth make responsible decisions regarding their sexual, reproductive, and parenting behaviors and we believe this is possible if they receive adequate education, resources, and support. It is incumbent on each of us to stretch beyond our comfort zones and provide all youth with the supports they need to safely transition to adulthood.

We believe this can be done—and we believe it can be fun! We are only limited by ourselves. We encourage each of you to read this report and use it to follow your own creative approach to reach out to youth whom you are not currently reaching—to leave your schools, offices, and clinics and venture on their turf. Our young people deserve no less.

Pat Paluzzi, CNM, DrPH

President and CEO
Healthy Teen Network

MAKING A DIFFERENCE...

Healthy Teen Network is a national membership organization devoted to making a difference in the lives of teens and young families. Healthy Teen Network was founded on the belief that youth can make responsible decisions about their sexuality and reproductive health when they have complete, accurate, and culturally, relevant information, skills, resources, and support. Healthy Teen Network serves as a leader, a national voice, and a comprehensive educational resource to professionals working in the area of adolescent reproductive health—specifically teen pregnancy prevention, teen pregnancy, teen parenting, and related issues.

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FOREWORD

The complex process of human development presents opportunities and challenges at every phase. As an infant grows to become a toddler, and the toddler moves through childhood into adolescence and then young adulthood, appropriate guidance and support received along the way help chart a path toward healthy growth and development. In an ideal world, young people receive support from their families, peers, and caring adults in a range of settings that enables them to make a successful transition from adolescence to the next phase in their development. However, few, if any, young people live in an ideal world. And for those youth entering adolescence while also dealing with such challenges as an unstable home life, involvement with the juvenile justice system, or homelessness, the rapid physical, psychological, and social changes they experience during this period only serve to exacerbate the difficulties they face. As a result, many struggle through adolescence, unsure of just how to lead healthy, productive lives and unprepared to handle the new challenges that young adulthood presents.

Still, despite the obstacles these youth face, many of them flourish. They make the transition from adolescent to young adult feeling good about who they are. They believe they can make important contributions to society and will have opportunities to do so, and they know they possess supportive and caring connections to a range of positive people and groups. However, these young people did not travel the unfamiliar road to adulthood without assistance. They were guided by adults, many of whom engaged them as partners in their own development. *Engaging Youth... On Their Turf* offers valuable examples of this youth development process in action. It describes six exciting programs that are employing creative approaches to connect—or reconnect—young people to their communities. These programs illustrate what can happen when caring adults employ a positive youth development approach to reach and involve youths in meaningful activities that build on their assets and potential.

While not a new concept, positive youth development gained only negligible attention until the 1990s, when questions about what it is and how it works began to increase, as did research regarding its effectiveness. Despite differences in the settings and activities of the six programs described in this publication, all share a common youth development goal: to build on young people's strengths, helping them cultivate their talents, increase feelings of self-worth, and use the confidence and skills they gain to make positive, healthy decisions. In addition, they contain the following program features that have been identified as critical to achieving this goal as well as successfully attracting and retaining young people: **Physical safety, Psychological safety, Appropriate structure, Modeling of pro-social behavior, Supportive relationships with adults and peers, Opportunities to gain a sense of belonging, Meaningful challenges and experiences, and Opportunities to build skills.**

Many youths who are disengaged from mainstream society tend not to be attracted to traditional youth programs. They do not find the activities relevant, interesting, or useful, nor do they feel a kinship with those youths who are participants. However, the programs described in *Engaging Youth... On Their Turf* have experienced success in addressing the major problems of recruitment and retention. Perhaps that is because they are able to provide vulnerable youths with the time and space to focus on identity, including culture, background, or sexual identity; offer a forum for addressing the challenges they face; and provide opportunities to develop self and build on interests and skills.

I applaud Healthy Teen Network for calling attention to these vulnerable youths and for highlighting programs that are committed to reaching and engaging them. I also commend these six programs and hope they will continue, grow, and obtain the kinds of evaluation results that will enable them to improve and expand. I encourage readers to learn more about these programs and the importance of providing a high level of support to young people without usurping their power.

Renée Wilson-Simmons, DrPH

Senior Associate, Adolescent Health & Development
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*“All that is
valuable in
human society
depends upon
the opportunity
for development
accorded the
individual.”*

- Albert Einstein

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the United States has experienced many positive trends in youth behaviors, including decreased rates of teen pregnancy (Darroch & Singh, 1998), substance abuse (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2006), high school dropout rates (Laird, DeBell, & Chapman, 2006), and youth gang involvement (Egley & Ritz, 2006). A significant portion of these declines can be attributed to the promotion of youth development approaches as well as health and sexuality education primarily targeted to youth who either attend school or access health services in a clinical environment.

While this is good news, we must not forget those young people who we do not reach via traditional approaches or in conventional settings. Vulnerable or disenfranchised youth, youth out of school or at risk of dropping out of school, youth involved in the juvenile justice system, and runaway and/or homeless youth seldom benefit from the types of supports that many communities provide young people as they grow up. In addition, due to the complex and transient conditions under which these disenfranchised young people live, adolescent health professionals may find it especially hard to reach them with supportive programs and services. In order to successfully transition into healthy adulthood, however, all young people need positive youth development messages, supportive adults, and opportunities to be themselves.

With this report, Healthy Teen Network, generously supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, highlights six programs that utilize creative approaches to connect youth to a community—or facilitate the creation of a unique community. Healthy Teen Network chose to highlight these programs because we believe they provide good examples of creative approaches to reaching hard-to-reach populations of youth. They not only demonstrate innovation in their approach to engaging youth but also feature positive youth development principles and resilience-building goals.

These six programs were selected for their creativity and, while at varying stages of program development and evaluation, for their apparent success in reaching youth. They engage youth in sports or the arts, connect youth to others like them, and help forge bonds between youth and adults in the communities where they live. These groupings are by no means exhaustive of program types—nor do they fit the definition of science-based programs as defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. They do, however, serve as excellent examples of how to connect youth to and through communities.

ENGAGING YOUTH... ON THEIR TURF

“Community” means different things to different people. Some may identify with a community based on geographic location; others, on racial or ethnic identity; and still others, on lifestyles, interests, or values. Many young people belong to multiple communities, founded on shared relationships, location, or beliefs. Unfortunately, young people may become disengaged from a particular community and disconnected from their peers and supportive adults for a range of reasons. Some fall victim to personal and/or family strife beyond their control, or find themselves involved with the criminal justice system, and others attempt to escape the problems they face by running away, which frequently results in homelessness and other problems. To find support otherwise lacking in their lives, some young people who become marginalized create their own non-traditional communities based on shared circumstances, behaviors, or goals.

Healthy Teen Network believes that, for better or for worse, young people’s decisions about engaging in healthy or unhealthy behaviors are influenced by the standards of their communities. This report highlights six creative approaches that aim to engage youth affiliated with two different types of community. Both types are home to youth who may not typically engage in traditional youth development programs and services. The first three examples—**Plain Talk/Hablando Claro**, **Second Round**, and **Girl Scouts in Public Housing**—target communities where youth live, but which may be impoverished or lack community-wide support systems. The second three examples—**Kulture Klub Collaborative**, **Girl Scouting in Detention Centers**, and **the Hip Hop Project**—are directed at communities of necessity where youth may congregate—or be sent—because of unique circumstances.

Healthy Teen Network invites all professionals who work with youth to broaden our thinking about what it means to be a part of a community and how this concept impacts young people as they grow up. It is Healthy Teen Network’s hope that the examples here will inspire and stimulate program administrators and youth advocates to adopt and adapt similar approaches to reaching youth in their own work.

COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACHES

These programs use approaches that reach youth in the communities where they live.

PLAIN TALK/HABLANDO CLARO

Creative Approach

According to Tammi Fleming, Deputy Director of Plain Talk/Hablando Claro, the program uses an approach that is “more common sense than creative.” Plain Talk is founded on the belief that since the vast majority of parents want to be the primary educators about sex for their children, education about sex should start with parents. Unfortunately most parents are not equipped with accurate information about sex and sexuality, nor do they have the communication skills they need to transfer this knowledge in an appropriate way.

A strength of the Plain Talk approach is its ability to be implemented in diverse community settings and populations and to capitalize upon already existing resources within each site. Whether in Siler City, North Carolina; Vineland, New Jersey; or Albuquerque, New Mexico, the messages of increased communication and access to services originate organically from community members, not from outside program staff. For instance, Plain Talk, referred to as “Hablando Claro” in Spanish-speaking populations, is being implemented in several predominantly Spanish-speaking communities. With the help of bilingual staff, Hablando Claro tailors its message to the needs of Latino communities dealing with unique challenges, such as cultural traditions around sex and sexuality. Plain Talk helps strengthen the relationships between parents and children and between community members, and in this way, strengthens communities.

For example, in a Spanish-speaking community in New Mexico, parents participated in a Hablando Claro home health party. They participated in role-playing exercises and took quizzes to determine how they would deal with situations they may face with their teenage children. “You know when you dance with a boy, you can get pregnant,” one parent recited as part of the dialogue. This scenario illustrated how, often, without accurate information and communication skills, parents may rely on scare tactics when talking to their children about sex. After the two-hour session ended, most parents said they learned more about how to communicate with their children and how important it is. **“I have two young kids now, but they will grow,”** admitted one parent, **“And I will be able to communicate with them.”** (Rodriguez, 2007).

“I have two young kids now, but they will grow... and I will be able to communicate with them.”

- Hablando Claro parent participant

Overview of Program



Plain Talk/Hablado Claro is a community-based program designed to equip parents with the information and skills necessary to improve communication with their children about sex and sexuality, as well as to increase and improve access to high quality reproductive health care for the adolescents in the community. Plain Talk helps parents articulate their values about sex and sexuality to their children with the hope that their children will incorporate them into their own values and behaviors.

Plain Talk has three major goals:

Create consensus among parents and adults about the need to protect sexually active youth by encouraging early and consistent use of contraceptives;

Give parents and other community adults the information and skills they need to communicate more effectively with teens about responsible sexual behavior; and

Improve adolescent access to high-quality, age-appropriate and readily available reproductive health care, including contraception.

One of the core components of Plain Talk is Community-Mapping. Volunteers are trained to conduct surveys on adolescents and adult community members to assess the community's attitudes, knowledge, and beliefs on issues related to adolescent reproductive health and teen sexual behavior. These data are used to develop a community profile, determine important areas of focus, and recruit and involve residents in the program.

Another component is the training of "Walkers and Talkers." These community residents are recruited to serve as the key messengers of the Plain Talk program. They are responsible for building on existing social networks within the community to build awareness about the program and get residents involved through door-to-door recruiting, Home Health Party facilitation, and presenting at community events such as a weekly farmers market, PTA meetings, and health fairs.

“Since parents want to be the primary educators about sex for their children, education about sex should start with parents.”

The final core component of the program is the implementation of Home Health Parties. Through door-to-door outreach, community residents are recruited to host these Home Health Parties. The host then invites neighbors, family members, and friends to participate in a health education session facilitated by the Walkers & Talkers. Home Health Parties provide participants with information on various adolescent reproductive health topics, with the goal of developing a core group of “askable adults” in each community.

Plain Talk also addresses issues at the service provider level, and one of the program’s overarching goals is to increase access to quality reproductive health services within the broader community. The Plain Talk site administrative team, agency’s board, and other collaborative partners work to build partnerships with service providers in the community to address issues related to accessibility and quality of services.

Results

An evaluation of three Plain Talk sites, conducted by Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) from 1994-1998, found increased levels of communication between adults and sexually active youth as well as increased levels of youth awareness about where to get birth control. In 1994, 33 percent of sexually experienced youth had been pregnant or caused a pregnancy. Four years later, only 27 percent of sexually experienced youth surveyed had been pregnant or caused a pregnancy. The P/PV evaluation found that the Plain Talk framework enabled communities to change the way adults communicated with teens about sexuality.



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SECOND ROUND

Creative Approach

Youth often come to Second Round with a desire to get away from gang involvement and other antisocial behaviors but without the skills to achieve independence on their own. For example, **upon entry to the program, one 14-year old participant admits, “I really would like to get out of the gang, but I can’t let no one catch me slippin’... at least I know they got my back.”** According to program staff, this young person initially exhibited mostly anti-social attitudes and behaviors, challenging authority and making disrespectful comments to other youth. But through daily interaction with a diverse group of youth and the staff’s emphasis on individual accountability, he made a significant transformation. Today, this young person “is one of [the] youth leaders in the program. He has learned all of the boxing skills, has formed a strong bond with program staff, and is becoming a role model for his younger brother and other youth in the program.”

“The Second Round model can be applied in many different settings to engage youth at risk of gang involvement in the community. It doesn’t have to be boxing, it could be music or art... any activity that kids connect with can work. Kids come to learn to box but leave with life skills they can use to navigate the tough conditions of life in their community, including reliance on gangs and other anti-social behaviors.”

- Matt Schnars, Program Director



Overview of Program

Second Round is an exercise-based outreach program that trains youth in boxing as a means to prevent gang involvement and other antisocial behaviors. Second Round draws youth in with an activity that interests them, and then provides a safe space and opportunities for teachable moments.

Second Round arose in response to community members’ concerns, which they voiced through the Wake County Gang Prevention Partnership in 2003, about increased expulsions from school and fights among gang-involved youth. Today, Second Round is administered under the auspices of Haven House Services, Inc., a social service agency based in Raleigh, North Carolina, that also features a crisis intervention program for homeless and runaway youth, a shelter, and a transitional living program.

Second Round’s approach centers on engaging both former and current gang-involved youth through:

After-school boxing training

Peer education

Mentorship

Building leadership skills

“Kids leave with skills they can use to navigate the tough conditions of life in their community.”

Youth work toward physical fitness, build leadership skills, develop self-discipline and time-management skills, and learn about cultural diversity and cooperation. Staff work to link youth with a “full-time” adult—a mentor, parent, counselor, or service provider—they see on a regular basis to help track their behavior outside of the program.



Second Round emphasizes peer training and provides youth with the opportunity to work up to membership in a “CORE” group whose members may earn special responsibilities, including co-facilitating training sessions, leading warm-up activities, or demonstrating basic boxing techniques to new participants. In order to be eligible to join

the CORE group, Second Round participants must demonstrate their commitment to program goals by maintaining at least a 50 percent attendance rate at this program for a minimum of three months. Adult staff and volunteers participate in all training activities alongside youth as equals and avoid “preaching” to the youth, with the purpose of building trust between adults and youth.

Academic improvement is also a focus, and all participants are required to bring in quarterly report cards and behavior reports from their schools. **The space is gang-neutral territory where youth “leave their colors at the door.”** The building that houses the boxing gym also serves as a general drop-in center for youth to access other supportive services such as help with homework.

Second Round initially started with a small, targeted group of gang-involved youth and over time recruitment grew by word of mouth. According to staff, the average age of youth who participate is 15.5 years; roughly 60 percent are African American and 40 percent Latino; 70 percent are in school and 30 percent have been expelled, dropped out, and/or have been suspended for a long period of time.

“I really would like to get out of the gang, but I can’t let no one catch me slippin’... at least I know they got my back.”

- 14-year old participant upon entry to Second Round

Results

To evaluate the effectiveness of the program, Second Round administrators adapted a scale used by researchers at Texas A&M University (Witt & Crompton, 1997) to gauge the existence of risk and protective factors among participants. Only CORE members were tracked for behavior change using both monthly post-tests as well as face-to-face interactions as data-gathering methods. A January 2006 report found improvements in several outcomes, including:

- 91 percent of youth met their goal of not re-offending;
- 82 percent had reduced suspension rates; and
- 95 percent avoided an unplanned pregnancy since the time they started participating in the Second Round program.

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GIRL SCOUTS IN PUBLIC HOUSING

Creative Approach

The Girl Scouts in Public Housing (GSPH) Initiative of the Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA) purposefully reaches out to girls who may not have access to positive youth development activities that could help build resilience among these vulnerable girls and might counteract tendencies toward such adverse and health-compromising behaviors. The GSPH program came about through a partnership formed in 1999 between the US Department of Housing and Urban Development and GSUSA. Nationally, 26 percent of residents living in public housing communities are between the ages of six and 17 (SPEC Associates, 2006). While many of these children and young adults thrive and have a strong foundation for positive decision-making, many others have an increased risk for delinquency, truancy, substance abuse, violence, teen pregnancy, and other risky behaviors.

“There are a lot of girls in my school that get pregnant or have parents who don’t care for them at all. . . . With Girl Scouts, my future is so much better, and I don’t worry anymore because I have good friends looking out for me.”

- Journal entry from a participant of the Girls are I.T. program

For example, in 2006, the Hornets’ Nest Council in North Carolina ran a *Girls are I.T.* program, which educated girls about information technology (I.T.) and potential careers in this field. The *Girls are I.T.* program, which “aims to increase access to technology by meeting girls where they are, both geographically and experientially” (Barker & Cohoon, 2006), helped girls first learn about improving self-esteem and resisting peer pressure, then moved on to in-depth learning with computers.

The program pinnacled with a youth-led service-learning project in which the girls designed a web site for a local business. According to a journal entry from another participant of the *Girls are I.T.* program, “**There are a lot of girls in my school that get pregnant or have parents who don’t care for them at all. . . . With Girl Scouts, my future is so much better, and I don’t worry anymore because I have good friends looking out for me.**”



Overview of Program

The purpose of the GSPH initiative is to provide relevant character-building programs that build self-esteem and leadership and teach life skills to girls living in public housing communities. The GSPH initiative establishes programs at or near public housing communities that promote youth development, academic excellence, and the prevention of substance abuse, violence, and teen pregnancy among girls and young women residing in low-income areas. **As one participant puts it, “I didn’t come to Girl Scouts for nothing. I want to get out of the gangs, and coming to Girl Scouts is my way out!”**

Individual councils implementing a Girl Scouts in Public Housing program are required to focus their curricula and activities in one of a few areas, including:

Literacy and/or the creative arts

Science, math, and/or technology

Sports, nutrition, and/or fitness

Social issues and life skills (e.g. financial literacy, anti-drug/alcohol abuse education, conflict resolution, violence prevention, and tolerance education)



Results

A January 2006 evaluation of the Girl Scouts in Public Housing initiative (SPEC Associates, 2006) demonstrated its benefits. Youth and adult participants surveyed overwhelmingly agreed that:

- The programming increased girls' sense of belonging; the girls learned communication and relationship-building skills;
- They developed relationships with positive adult role models;
- They discovered their abilities and learned how to work as team members;
- They learned problem-solving skills; and
- The girls learned about and were able to help bring about positive change in a larger community outside of their public housing environment.

"I didn't come to Girl Scouts for nothing. I want to get out of the gangs, and coming to Girl Scouts is my way out!"

- GSPH Participant

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COMMUNITY-BUILDING APPROACHES

These programs use approaches that help youth create unique communities, at whatever place in life they find themselves.

KULTURE KLUB COLLABORATIVE

Creative Approach

Kulture Klub Collaborative (KKC) is a non-profit arts organization located in downtown Minneapolis, Minnesota, that brings together artists with homeless teens.

For many homeless and runaway youth, KKC offers a stable environment where their strengths are valued and creativity encouraged. Director Mike Hoyt, says KKC “bridges survival and inspiration” by providing youth the opportunity for creativity as well as the skills to communicate their needs and advocate for themselves. KKC demonstrates that artistic practice can help at-risk youth communicate their life experiences and creativity while learning how to interact with others and as a group. KKC’s model follows a positive youth development approach in allowing youth to be creative and self-assured and encouraging youth to build relationships with staff.



As they deal with the daily struggles of homelessness and providing for their basic needs, allowing these vulnerable young people with the opportunity to be creative, to express themselves, and to just have fun can be incredibly significant. For example, one young woman who first came to KKC was especially tough and street-smart, used to defending herself, and quick to instigate confrontations when she felt threatened. During a photography session, this young woman created a self-portrait of herself clearly smiling. With KKC’s help, this young woman now has a photograph of herself to mark a point in time where she was happy.

Overview of Program

According to one statewide study of homeless and runaway youth (Wilder, 2005), on any given night in Minnesota, 500 to 600 homeless youth ages eight to 17 are on their own. These youth face especially tough life circumstances, with nearly one out of two experiencing physical or sexual abuse at some point in their life.

“The program ‘bridges survival and inspiration’ by providing youth the opportunity for creativity as well as the skills to communicate their needs and advocate for themselves.”

- Mike Hoyt, KKC Director

According to Director Mike Hoyt, KKC serves as a “second-tier social service agency,” offering homeless and runaway youth the opportunity to create and learn about art in their community. **The program aims to engage youth with the arts where they already access services.** KKC is housed alongside YouthLink/Project OffStreets, a crisis drop-in center, which provides basic services daily, including meals, a health clinic, a transitional living program, GED preparation, case management, showers, and laundry facilities.

Kulture Klub Collaborative’s three main goals are to:

Provide youth with consistent access to art;

Provide consistent opportunities for youth to express themselves publicly through art; and

Create healthy communities by connecting homeless and runaway youth to a broader community through art.

KKC runs a variety of programs with youth who also access Project OffStreets services. One program is “Art View,” where youth go into the community for weekly viewings of art and cultural events in the Twin Cities, which includes theater, visual art, film, music, artist lectures, and dance performances. Another is the “Artist-in-Residence” program, whereby youth participate in weekly workshops with local individuals of artistic excellence in all media, including visual art, performance, media arts, writing, dance, and music. KKC also offers youth the opportunity to show their own art and organizes “open mic” events for youth performances. Youth who are especially committed and talented have the opportunity to earn KKC scholarships to pursue further training in the arts.

Results

At present, only nominal evaluation has been conducted on KKC’s long-term impact on the behaviors of youth who participate in its programming. Evidence of its impact can be gleaned from anecdotes recorded by staff as well as a one-time survey of current and past participants administered at a holiday party. One story recounts how a transgender youth’s experience with KKC allowed her to build her self-confidence enough to perform in front of her peers and go on to further explore her sexual identity. Another participant who started out singing at KKC-organized “Kabarets,” began to take voice lessons at a local art school and, with the aid and mentorship of KKC staff, continues to study years after leaving the program.

“With such a transient population, one-time chats can be transformative. Staff members listen to the young people and have the conversations that no one else will have with them. Because KKC provides such a safe environment, the youth feel comfortable taking risks and stepping outside of what they know. A lot of these kids come with labels, and we offer the opportunity to come up with new definitions for themselves.”

-Sue Pohl, Social Service Coordinator



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GIRL SCOUTING IN DETENTION CENTERS

Creative Approach

Girls under the age of 18 have become the fastest growing segment of the juvenile justice population. Many girls in detention centers come from backgrounds characterized by abuse, neglect, and family fragmentation, with parents who have themselves been incarcerated. According to a 2006 report from the US Department of Justice-Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, between 1985 and 2002, the overall delinquency cases for females increased 92 percent, compared with a 29 percent increase for males. Despite their growing numbers, these young women remain an underserved, often ignored, population.

The Girl Scouting in Detention Centers (GSDC) initiative came about through a partnership between the Girl Scouts of the USA and the US Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Dedicated to serving all girls at risk of continuing the cycle of female incarceration, GSDC is offered at 35 Girl Scout councils in 25 states. With GSDC, the Girl Scouts is the only gender-responsive organizations that support this growing population of young women and encourages them to build upon their own strengths and form a new foundation of healthy behaviors.

For example, the Girls Scouts' Arizona Cactus-Pine Council runs a GSDC program called *Youth in Transition*, which partners with a prostitution diversion program to provide a 16-week life-skills class for girls in the Arizona Department of Juvenile Corrections. Mentors work with incarcerated girls to build a relationship, develop a transitional plan, and set goals. After a girl is released, the mentor helps her connect to community services, find a job, re-enroll in school, and find better ways to spend recreational time. One young woman, a ward of the state and a recovering methamphetamine user, now paired with a mentor, says, **"I've always been pushed away. People always give up on me, and she hasn't. It feels good to have somebody."** This young woman plans to attend college soon, and her mentor is helping her find a part-time job (Villa, 2007).

"I've always been pushed away. People always give up on me, and [my mentor] hasn't. It feels good to have somebody."

- GSDC Youth in Transition participant



Overview of Program

In the GSDC initiative, girls currently living in temporary detention centers—awaiting adjudication, as wards of the court, or as court-referred delinquents—participate in Girl Scout troop activities that promote the development of life skills.

Girl Scouting in Detention Centers activities and components include:

Developing life skills`

Self-esteem building

Building trust within girl-adult relationships

Financial literacy workshops

Fostering girls' self awareness

Mentorship opportunities

Service learning projects

Career exploration facilitation

Academic enrichment

Building leadership skills

Drug education programming

In addition to weekly Girl Scout troop meetings, GSDC supports these girls in various ways, including help with attaining their GED, support preceding reentry into the community, and assistance with obtaining transitional and independent living arrangements through local state agencies. Program content, which primarily focuses on mental, physical, and emotional well-being, is supplemented with guest speakers on topics such as bullying, crime prevention, fostering safe communities, as well as the visual and linguistic arts. The girls in long-term detention also may take part in periodic field trips to educational and community events.

Results

In 2006, the Girl Scout Research Institute conducted an evaluation of the GSDC initiative using a multi-method approach, including participant surveys, site visits, staff interviews, participant interviews, implementation data, and document review. The evaluation found that the program positively impacts the social and personal development of the girls involved in the juvenile justice system. Among the evaluation's key findings was the development of a positive future orientation, with:

- 78 percent of girls surveyed reporting that they were more likely to set positive and healthy goals; and
- 82 percent reporting they were more likely to plan for a better future after participating in GSDC.



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THE HIP HOP PROJECT

Creative Approach

The Hip Hop Project aims to help youth become self-sufficient through creating Hip Hop music, as well as participating in music training and mentorship with individuals in the music industry. Formed in 1999 by Chris “Kazi” Rolle, then a teen struggling to make it off the streets and into the music industry, the Hip Hop Project is designed to give young people confidence in their abilities, as well as knowledge and skills they can use in the future.

“The Hip Hop Project appeals to kids who don’t fit into the ‘traditional’ mold of school activities like more ‘corny’ after-school clubs like ‘Year Book.’ Most of the kids who come to the program are on the verge of dropping out, and the Hip Hop Project provides them with support and stability, as well as an avenue for self-expression otherwise missing in their lives.”

- Princess, Director

In a hearing before Congress in support of increasing funding for homeless and runaway youth programs, Kazi related how his involvement with Art Start and the Hip Hop Project changed his life. He said, “I was that kid—homeless with nowhere to go.... Not having resources influenced my choices.” As a testament to the power of supportive programming to change young people’s lives, in 2000, Kazi was featured on the *Oprah Winfrey Show* in a segment called “People Who Are Using Their Lives.” Kazi has since passed the torch of leadership to Princess, a former “graduate” of the Hip Hop Project who now serves as the Director.

A key component of the Hip Hop Project is the development of strong personal relationships among staff and participating youth. As one youth notes, having been through months of working toward their goals of creating music together, the group members came to feel like a family, with Kazi as a mentor or father figure to many of the youth. Through intensive sessions with adults in various sectors of the music and entertainment industry, these young people learn about succeeding in the music business. **More importantly, these formerly “at-risk” youth learn to trust and respect their peers, and as they set long-term goals, they build confidence in themselves and hope for their futures.**

Overview of Program

Hip Hop Project participants meet bi-weekly at the Art Start offices to participate in verse-writing workshops run by student facilitators, share their progress with others, and get help with their music as well as other areas in their lives. Academic achievement is a requisite for involvement in the Hip Hop Project and, as one staff member put it, “this is like a basketball team. If you don’t go to school, you’re gonna be benched.”



Main components of The Hip Hop Project include:

After school music-writing workshops

Hands-on industry experience

Mentorship with supportive adults

With the support of Hip Hop mogul Russell Simmons and use of a studio donated by actor Bruce Willis, Hip Hop Project youth recorded and released their first album in 2003. In 2006, Pressure Points Films produced a feature-length documentary film about the Hip Hop Project, which featured the first group of youth to “graduate” from the program.

The Hip Hop Project is just one program run by the non-profit organization, Art Start, which serves homeless and runaway youth as well as youth in alternative high schools and coming out of detention centers in New York City. Art Start houses a drop-in center and provides programming in several areas in addition to the Hip Hop Project, including an “Arts in the Shelters” project, a “Media Works” project, and a mentoring program. Art Start’s “learner-centered approach to arts education” aims to “nurture the voices, hearts, and minds of under-served children and teenagers and help them transform their lives through the creative process” (About Art Start, 2007).

Results

Art Start reports that 93 percent of youth in its teen programs either stayed in school, completed their GED, or went on to college or employment. Although no formal evaluation of the Hip Hop Project has been conducted to date, many of the first graduating class have gone on to relative success both in music and other ventures. One graduate of Art Start launched his own youth-led community-based organization, Team Revolution, while two Hip Hop Project students began working with major music labels. In addition to recording their own music, the youth have performed at many open-microphone and performance events.



“Formerly ‘at-risk’ youth learn to trust and respect their peers, and as they set long-term goals, they build confidence in themselves and hope for their futures.”

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<http://pressurepointfilms.com/thehiphopproject.html>

CONCLUSION

The reality is that youth come from all types of communities, and it is there—on their turf—that we, as youth-serving professionals, must reach out to them. Professionals accustomed to working with ready audiences of youth in school classrooms or clinical exam rooms may not immediately feel comfortable or know how to engage youth in more non-traditional settings. Health professionals may feel unprepared to address the complex issues in young people's lives.

We must somehow bridge this divide. Youth-serving organizations and institutions—whether public or private, corporate or non-profit, business or entertainment—must be flexible and pursue non-traditional collaborations in order to reach youth at the intersections of such systems. We need to change how and where we reach out to youth in order to engage all youth.

FIRST STEPS: These are some first steps that professionals can follow when thinking about implementing one of the creative approaches to reaching youth in non-traditional communities highlighted in this report—or forging a new approach.

Talk to youth. When either thinking of utilizing a new approach or taking an established program in a different direction, seek out youth in non-traditional settings and get their first-hand input.

Start with what you have. There never seem to be enough resources to implement the ideal approach. However once off the ground, a program that addresses a community need will resonate and gain momentum, and begin to attract essential support.

Collaborate. Find out if existing organizations and/or agencies work with the population in consideration and/or provide services that an identified non-traditional population could benefit from and explore all possibilities for effective partnerships.

“We must expand our view of community and use all available resources or entire populations of youth will be missed.”

Community-based organizations must recognize the full breadth and depth of all youth communities before they will be able to effectively work with all youth. We must expand our view to include those youth living in communities founded not only on shared locations and relationships, but also on circumstance and experience, through choice as well as dependence, and based on common goals. We must use all tools at our disposal and all approaches available to reach all young people. Otherwise, entire populations will continue to be passed over or ignored. Often, these are the young people who stand to benefit the most from opportunities for personal development. In order to impact adolescent health on a national scale, we must broaden our concept of community and change the way we approach serving youth. **We must truly engage youth on their turf.**

PROGRAMS

Plain Talk/Hablando Claro
Tfleming@ppv.org
www.plaintalk.org

Girl Scouts in Public Housing
(212) 852-8681
dtartaglia@girlscouts.org

Girl Scouting in Detention Centers
(212) 852-8065
ciafrate@girlscouts.org
www.girlscouts.org/program/program_opportunities/community/gsbb.asp

Second Round
(919) 833-3312 ext 120
mschnars@havenhousenc.org
www.havenhousenc.org

Kulture Klub Collaborative
(612) 252-1248
info@kultureklub.org
www.kultureklub.org

The Hip Hop Project
(212) 966-7807
kazi@hiphopproject.com
<http://www.art-start.org>
<http://pressurepointfilms.com/thehiphopproject.html>

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES

Healthy Teen Network
(202) 547-8814
www.HealthyTeenNetwork.org

The Institute for Youth Development
www.youthdevelopment.org

Building Partnerships for Youth
<http://cals-cf.calsnet.arizona.edu/fcs/index.cfm>

National Youth Development Information Center
www.nydic.org

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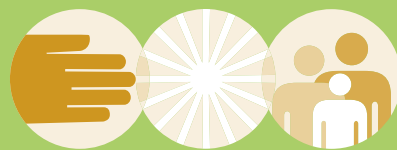
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Healthy Teen Network

MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES
OF TEENS AND YOUNG FAMILIES