



Success Story: Center for Black Women's Wellness

Reaching the Community with Peer Educators

The [Center for Black Women's Wellness](#) (CBWW) has a longstanding commitment to serving adolescents; it has provided youth services for more than 20 years. Supported by funding from the [Office of Adolescent Health](#), the organization is implementing the *Teen Health Project* in Fulton County, Georgia to address its high rates of HIV and teen pregnancy.¹ The project's goals are to help youth ages 12-17 delay sexual debut and decrease high-risk behavior by changing peer norms and providing positive modeling influences.

The *Teen Health Project* is a community-level intervention that includes multiple workshops for youth and parents as well as a teen leadership council. CBWW's teen leadership council, named L.O.F.T.Y. (Looking Out For The Youth) Crew is comprised of approximately 25 participants who have demonstrated exemplary behavior and leadership during the program's workshops. The *Teen Health Project* participants are elected as members of the leadership council for a six-month term. During the six months, L.O.F.T.Y. Crew members serve as peer educators and inform other youth about teen pregnancy and HIV/AIDS prevention.



L.O.F.T.Y. Crew in Atlanta at premiere of PSA in 2013. *Credit: Center for Black Women's Wellness.*

L.O.F.T.Y. Crew is a youth-driven group, and over the years members have used an array of avenues to reach their audience. Armed with public speaking skills and intensive training about teen pregnancy prevention and HIV/AIDS, the 2013 L.O.F.T.Y. Crew participated in scripting and filming a teen pregnancy prevention Public Service Announcement (PSA) that aired on ten screens in a local movie theater for a month. The PSA garnered substantial local attention and was spotlighted in *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, Atlanta's largest newspaper. Building upon their film experience, an NBC documentary featured L.O.F.T.Y. Crew as an example of American best practices to prevent HIV/AIDS; this will be shared with communities in Namibia, Africa!

In 2013, Clark Atlanta University invited L.O.F.T.Y. Crew to participate in Youth HIV/AIDS Awareness Day. As part of this effort, the youth helped to recruit 175 college students to receive HIV testing. Furthermore, the group helped to recruit homeless community members to participate in an HIV/AIDS awareness event. The Program Manager of Adolescent Health at CBWW shared that the community members were blown away by the students. One community member said, "They are amazing. I have never met youth who were so knowledgeable."



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Members of L.O.F.T.Y. Crew make a difference in the lives of their community members, and their participation makes a positive difference in their own lives as well. One L.O.F.T.Y. Crew member shares his story:

I learned leadership skills in addition to so much information about pregnancy prevention and HIV/ AIDS. Honestly, you would think I had known more since I was already in high school, but [it was] not until I connected with the L.O.F.T.Y. Crew [that] I really learn[ed] about sexual health. Before that time no one had ever sat down and talked to me about what mattered in those areas and how to truly be responsible. Now [even though I am no longer in the program], I share that information on my college campus. Some people might think it is weird for a young man to be involved with a women's organization, but that never bothered me because it was about teaching every person with the center [...]. I highly recommend the teen council/ L.O.F.T.Y. to any young man or woman and I am thankful for everything I gained through the Center for Black Women's Wellness.

In addition to the teen leadership council component, *Teen Health Project* includes six hours of workshops, two 90- to 120-minute follow-up sessions, and a 90-minute parent education session. The workshops explore topics such as healthy relationship education, peer pressure, adolescent physical development, and making healthy decisions. The program reaches 200 youth per year through its workshops and approximately a thousand more with the activities of the teen council.

As an evidence-based intervention, *Teen Health Project* has been shown to delay sexual initiation among sexually-inexperienced adolescents and to increase condom use among sexually-active adolescents.² Through collaboration between EMSTAR Research and Georgia State University, CBWW is evaluating its program, and staff members are hopeful that outcomes will reflect the positive feedback they have received from their community and L.O.F.T.Y. Crew members alike.

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¹ The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy State Profile: Georgia. Accessed July 11, 2014:

<http://thenationalcampaign.org/data/landing?state=georgia>

² Sikkema K. J., Anderson, E. S., Kelly, J. A., Winett, R. A., Gore-Felton, C., Roffman, R. A., Heckman, T. G., Graves, K., Hoffmann, R. G., & Brondino, M. J. (2005). Outcomes of a randomized, controlled community-level HIV prevention intervention for adolescents in low-income housing developments. *AIDS*, 19(14), 1509–1516.