



TAG in Action: The SPOT

As part of its national call to action, **Adolescent Health, Think, Act, GrowSM (TAG)**, in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has identified a number of successful strategies for improving adolescent health throughout the country.

The Goal

The SPOT (Supporting Positive Opportunities for Teens) is a comprehensive health and social services center that serves young people ages 13 to 24 in St. Louis, Missouri. The program's vision is *"Youth partnering with community for social justice and health."*

The Game Plan

The SPOT provides free, confidential medical care, mental health and substance abuse counseling, and case management services to any young person who needs them. In addition, The SPOT also provides a safe place for teens to hang out. Youth can drop in from 1-5 pm in the afternoons to use a computer, take a shower, or grab a snack.

The SPOT was established in 2008 when Washington University School of Medicine's Division of Adolescent Medicine and the Project ARK HIV program for children, youth, and women observed rising rates of HIV, STDs and other preventable diseases among young people. The teams saw an opportunity to intervene to help kids medically and psychologically. Project ARK and leadership from Adolescent Medicine learned that successful programs for high-risk youth were all grounded in a positive youth development approach and provided comprehensive, low barrier access to services.

The SPOT staff is comprised of people who are passionate about working with teens and young adults. They receive training in delivering trauma-informed services and in using a positive youth development approach. The staff is also committed to early screening for STDs and other preventable diseases and connecting youth to any services they need.

The Winning Plays

Youth were engaged in every aspect of The SPOT's development. Youth Leaders worked with the architect and interior designer to create a welcoming and youth friendly space. Youth helped determine the array of services offered and even interviewed job applicants. Staff expected to serve 500 youth in the first year of operation, but they reached 500 in the first quarter and now serve about 3,200 youth annually. The SPOT's Executive Director, Kim Donica, gives credit to the young people. "The youth leaders made a huge difference. We gained their trust and then they told their friends. Youth hear about us by word of mouth. Their first visit is often because they really need something, but they return because they trust us and know The SPOT is a safe place."

Learn More

The SPOT
<http://thespot.wustl.edu>

