University of Southern California: *Keeping It Real Together* (KIR-T)

In July 2015, the HHS Office of Adolescent Health (OAH) awarded 84 Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) Program grants. The University of Southern California (USC)’s *Keeping It Real Together* (KIR-T) aims to reduce sexual risk behaviors among low-income youth in Los Angeles County. KIR-T is a teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease prevention program that seeks to increase youths’ sexual health knowledge, favorable attitudes toward not having sex, and self-efficacy and behavioral skills to delay sex.

The KIR-T project builds upon the success of prior efforts, including their previous OAH-funded project, *Keeping it Real—LA County*. The original project began in 2010 and focused on implementation of *It’s Your Game: Keep it Real* (IYG) in 25 middle schools in the county. A quasi-experimental evaluation showed that students who received IYG in middle school were significantly less likely to initiate sexual activity by 9th grade compared to students who did not receive the program.1

**About the University of Southern California: Keeping It Real Together (KIR-T) Program**

USC is partnering with the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, Division of HIV and STD Programs to implement the project. OAH funding enables staff from both organizations to work side-by-side to provide technical assistance and training, develop and support other KIR-T program strategies in local schools and community settings, and evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies.

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1. The statistics are alarming; however, I know that I can help my daughter prevent pregnancy. Thank you also because today you have let me see that I am very important and irreplaceable in the life of my daughter. Today I make a promise to make a difference in her life.” – Parent who participated in FTT
USC is also collaborating with the Compton Unified School District, Los Angeles Unified School District, and the Soledad Enrichment Action Charter alternative high school system to replicate evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention education in middle and high schools, respectively. Other community partners help recruit parents and guardians to participate in the Families Talking Together (FTT) curriculum and lay community health workers, or “promotoras,” lead the sessions. To date, more than 800 parents have participated in FTT, an evidence-based curriculum that teaches parents how to communicate with their children to prevent or reduce adolescent sexual risk behaviors.

KIR-T engages youth and teachers in the project through advisory groups. A group of student leaders from local high schools advise the KIR-T project on messaging and how best to reach young people. The Teacher Advisory Board, composed of veteran KIR-T teachers, advises the KIR-T staff on program development and sustainability planning.

Why It Matters?
The OAH TPP Program’s funding for the University of Southern California: Keeping It Real Together project is an investment in reducing the rates of teen pregnancy in this country. KIR-T:

- **Addresses Disparities in the Teen Birth Rate.** Although the overall teen birth rate in California has declined substantially over the past two decades, disparities persist in certain geographic areas of the state. Parts of Los Angeles County have teen birth rates more than three times that of the state and national rates. By focusing on the communities with the greatest need, the KIR-T project is making a larger impact on teen pregnancy prevention.

- **Engages the Community.** KIR-T has developed a variety of strong partnerships to expand and enhance efforts to serve youth in middle and high schools with evidence-based interventions. A partnership with the LA Trust for Children’s Health provides youth with the opportunity to give feedback on effective messaging. Partnerships with local community-based organizations (WeCanStopSTDsLA Coalition, the Southern California Comprehensive Sex Education Network, and the Connect to Protect Los Angeles Coalition), along with facilitation of the Community Advisory Group by Cardea Services, enhance KIR-T’s community mobilization efforts.

- **Gives Parents Tools to Communicate Effectively with their Children.** Teens consistently say that parents most influence their decisions about relationships and sex, but many parents do not realize their influence and feel uncomfortable talking to their children about it. By implementing Families Talking Together (FTT), an intervention for parents/guardians, KIR-T empowers parents and guardians with the skills needed to prevent adolescent sexual risk behavior.

About the Office of Adolescent Health TPP Program
The OAH Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program is a national, evidence-based program that funds diverse organizations working to prevent teen pregnancy across the United States. OAH invests in the implementation of programs identified as evidence-based by the HHS Teen Pregnancy Prevention Evidence Review, and provides funding to develop and evaluate new and innovative approaches to prevent teen pregnancy.