

Teen ACTION

The Teen ACTION (Achieving Change Together In Our Neighborhood) initiative establishes after-school service learning programs serving middle- and high-school students in high poverty and high teen pregnancy neighborhoods.

| <i>Agency</i> | <i>Start Date</i> | <i>Number Served per year</i> | <i>CEO Budget (City FY 08)</i> | <i>Total Budget (City FY 08)</i> |
|---|-------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| The Department of Youth and Community Development | November 2007 | 4,000 | \$5,700,000 | \$5,700,000 |

Problem Statement

Although the rate of teen births in NYC has been declining over the past decade, the correlation between teen pregnancy and poverty persists. In 2004, there were 8,415 live births to teenagers in NYC, and, in an overwhelming majority of these cases, the mother was unmarried and poor. Mott Haven, NYC's poorest community district, also has the highest rate of teen pregnancy (16%).¹

Teen pregnancy is one of several risks that young people living in poverty face during their transition into adulthood. Other risks include school suspension, sexually transmitted infections, substance abuse, and other unhealthy behaviors. Although out-of-school time programs have been shown to reduce some of these risks, older youth are less likely than younger children to participate in these programs.² An enhanced intervention model that is more attractive to this population is therefore justified.

Research and Evidence

For many middle- and high-school students, low participation in out-of-school programs is the norm,³ and providers often struggle to engage older youth in their programs.⁴ Additionally, experts have found that many youth programs “provide only limited opportunities for youth to participate in community service types of activities. Where these opportunities do exist, they usually occur only periodically and for small numbers of the most engaged youth. Even fewer youth appear to have opportunities in these programs to explore the communities around them and understand how they can play an active role in their communities.”⁵

Service Learning (SL) programs offer youth an opportunity to participate in community service combined with a structured curriculum that seeks to develop leadership skills, civic engagement, and social responsibility.⁶ SL engages youth in relevant, real-life issues that may have greater appeal for teenagers. This focus has the potential to draw in youth who would not otherwise participate in any after-school activities.⁷ SL may also be a useful strategy to foster the social, emotional, behavioral and intellectual competencies that can reduce risk behaviors.⁸ The potential benefits of SL programs appear to be greater for adolescents than for younger children, since adolescents can address more complex issues and take on

more adult roles and responsibilities. Challenging activities and supportive programming can help promote problem-solving and critical thinking skills that help youth enrolled in these programs stay on track.⁹ Youth driven programs like Teen ACTION allow adolescents to make decisions and provide time for reflection, and in doing so foster engagement and promote responsible behaviors.

Research also suggests that SL programs can have a positive impact in the short term. For example, a study of the Teen Outreach Program (TOP), a nationally implemented model, found that, during the academic year that students were enrolled in the program, there was a substantial reduction in the rate of teen pregnancy, course failure, and school suspension for participants, when compared to a control group.¹⁰ These findings are substantiated by other research. A study of another nationally implemented model, Learn and Serve, found that participants in the program had lower pregnancy rates during the school year in which they participated. Other studies have shown that service learning participants in grades 7-12 were more cognitively engaged in English language arts compared to non-participants; and that, service learning has the potential to engage “at risk” seventh and eighth graders.¹¹

Studies of various types of after-school programs have consistently shown that the longer participants remain in the program, the greater its impact.¹² These results have been demonstrated in the context of SL programs. For example, the evaluation of the Quantum Opportunities Program (QOP) showed greater program effects (as measured at the end of each high school year) for youth who attended the program for 2 or more years than for youth who attended for fewer years.¹³ Similarly, an evaluation of the Reach for Health Community Youth Service Program targeting African-American 7th and 8th graders also found stronger positive effects for teens who stayed involved for at least two years than for those who participated for only one year.¹⁴

Program Description

Teen ACTION employs an asset-based approach that is aimed at expanding the scope of things young people can do. It promotes positive life skills, a sense of efficacy and self-worth, and responsible citizenship among participants. This focus in turn helps to prevent negative outcomes such as teen pregnancy and school suspension. Teen ACTION incorporates successful service learning components, such as: meaningful community service, structured classroom-based activities, reflection on the service experience, positive adult role models, and opportunities for participants to partake in decision-making. Allowing participants to help shape service assignments and giving them the opportunity to exercise leadership are emphasized in the program.

Teen ACTION programs, operating under contract with the Department of Youth and Community Service (DYCD), will be located in up to 60 after-school sites in high need neighborhoods.¹⁵ These programs build upon the provider and agency capacity developed in recent years through Out-of-School-Time contracts. Service Learning also increases the after-school options for youth and is expected to draw in students not currently participating in after-school activities.

In Year 1, the program offers a minimum of 120 hours of service learning, with at least 40 hours devoted to service activities and at least 40 hours devoted to structured learning, over a minimum of three months. Hours will increase in Years 2 and 3, subject to contract renewal. Providers are offering the program either in weekly meetings for a few hours at a time or in longer blocks of time over weekends or during the summer when school is not in session. Participants are eligible to participate in the program for multiple years. DYCD contracted with The After-School Corporation (TASC) and its subcontractor,

Global Kids, to develop a curriculum and to offer technical assistance and capacity building services to providers. TASC will train providers on how to implement the curriculum, help providers meet recruitment and retention goals, troubleshoot challenges, and help providers forge relationships with community partners. Providers are responsible for developing and maintaining appropriate service placements and supports for program participants. Each provider has also established linkages with on- or off-site healthcare providers.

Target Population

The program serves young adults who are between the ages of 13 and 21 and in the 6th to 11th grade.

Expected Outcomes

Short-Term:

- Increase youth attendance in school and connection to community
- Reduce risky behavior
- Encourage use of health, reproductive health, and mental health services
- Encourage supportive relationships with caring adults
- Develop personal responsibility among participants

Long-Term:

- Reduce rates of teen pregnancy
- Reduce risky behavior leading to sexually transmitted infections and substance abuse
- Increase academic achievement and graduation rates

¹ CEO Report, 27.

² Lauver, Sherri; Priscilla M.D. Little, and Heather Weiss. "Moving Beyond the Barriers: Attracting and Sustaining Youth Participation in After School Programs." *The Evaluation Exchange*, Volume X, No. 1, Spring 2004. See also, Little, Priscilla and Sherri Lauver. "Engaging Adolescents in Out-of-School Time Programs: Learning What Works." *The Prevention Researcher*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2005, pages 7-10.

³ Lauver et al., 2004; Little and Lauver, 2005.

⁴ See, for example, Hall, Georgia, Laura Israel, and Joyce Shortt. "It's About time – a look at OST for Urban Teens." *NIOST* Feb 2004. Anecdotal evidence and DYCD participation data and contractor feedback also suggest that it is much harder for providers of youth services to attract and engage teenagers compared to younger children.

⁵ Gambone, Michell Alberti, Hanh Cao Yu, Heather Lewis-Charp, Cynthia L. Sipe, and Johanna Laco. "A Comparative Analysis of Community Youth Development Strategies." Circle Working Paper 23. The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement, October 2004. <http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/WP23Cao.pdf>.

⁶ Allen, Joseph P., Susan Philliber, Scott Herrling, and Gabriel P. Kuperminc. "Preventing Teen Pregnancy and Academic Failure: Experimental Evaluation of a Developmentally Based Approach" *Child Developments*, Vol. 68, No. 4. (Aug. 1997), pp.729-742.

⁷ For an indication of the popularity of service learning, see, "Afterschool and Service Learning." Issue Brief, No. 9. The Afterschool Alliance, June 2004.

⁸ See for example, National Youth Leadership Council November 2, 2006 and July 6, 2006 http://www.nylc.org/happening_newsarticle.cfm?oid=5453; Impacts of Service-Learning on Participating Students. RMC Research. March 2005. http://www.service-learningpartnership.org/site/DocServer/S-L_Impacts_Fact_Sheet_-_Mar_05.doc?docID=801.

⁹ Balfanz, Robert and Liza Herzog. "Keeping Middle Grade Students on Track to Graduation," presentation for the Philadelphia Education Fund, February 2006. See also: "New York City's Middle-Grade Schools – Platforms for Success or Pathways to Failure?" NYC Coalition for Educational Justice Report January 2007.

¹⁰ Allen et al., 1997.

¹¹ Billig, Shelley H. "Heads, Hearts and Hands: The Research on K-12 Service Learning." RMC Research Corporation, no date. Available at: http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/Billig_Article2.pdf. Retrieved from the world-wide web on January 17, 2007.

¹² Chaput, Sandra Simpkins, Priscilla M. D. Little, and Heather Weiss. "Understanding and Measuring Attendance in Out-of-School Time Programs." Harvard Family Research Project. Number 7, August 2004. <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/resources/issuebrief7.html>.

¹³ While there were no significant differences between QOP participants and the control group at the end of the first year, after two years, scores for participants were higher in all eleven academic and functional skill areas measured, and the difference was statistically significant in five areas. By the time youth in the study were leaving high school, participant scores in all areas were much higher than those of the control group and all differences were statistically significant. See, Maxfield, Myles et al., "The Quantum Opportunity Program Demonstration: Implementation Findings." Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. MPR Reference No.: 8279-080, August 2003.

¹⁴ O'Donnell et al., 1999.

¹⁵ SL programs will be located in DYCD Out-of-School Time or Beacon Community Center program sites.