

Training & Technical Assistance

The Care and Feeding of Youth-Supporting Professionals



Starting from Scratch



In 2006, Jamie Keith was hired as Alabama Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy's (ACPTP) fourth Executive Director in its fourth year of existence. Almost immediately, she had to sort out fundamental questions about the identity and future of ACPTP, while continuing to provide assistance to teens, professionals, policymakers, and parents across the state.

Provided with sufficient support, this is no easy task. In a state like Alabama, where friends and colleagues working in the field of adolescent sexual health education can be few and far between, it's even more difficult. ACPTP was (and continues to be) the only organization in the state of Alabama providing education and support for youth-serving professionals working in adolescent sexual and reproductive health. "We could begin to feel a little isolated, a little woe is me," Jamie describes. "There were times early on when you thought, 'Man, how much longer can I do this?'"

When Jamie decided that she needed help, she reached out to Healthy Teen Network. Access to Healthy Teen Network's library of trainings, educational resources, conferences and experts provided Jamie with the resources she needed to build a stronger organization.

Building a Foundation

Collaborating with Healthy Teen Network increased ACPTP's ability to effectively serve educators statewide and make dramatic strides toward the acceptance of evidence-based sexuality education programs (i.e., programs proven through rigorous evaluation to be effective at reducing sexual risk-taking behavior).

"I used to go around the state, and I couldn't point to one evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention program anywhere in the state of Alabama. Those were sad days."

Luckily, with assistance from Healthy Teen Network, sad days wouldn't last long. In 2009, Johnson & Johnson funded Healthy Teen Network to offer broad support for select organizations implementing evidence-based education programs, with the goal of preparing these organizations to compete for the newly funded federal program, the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative. Healthy Teen Network approached Jamie to discuss a

project in Mobile, a county in which abstinence-only education dominated the curriculum in a state with one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in the nation.

The response from Mobile and other areas of the state was encouraging. Youth-supporting professionals from schools and community organizations drove

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up to 5 hours to attend Healthy Teen Network trainings and to receive guidance on the implementation of evidence-based programs.

A ripple effect of knowledge-sharing spread throughout the state, softening

negative attitudes toward alternatives to abstinence-only education and easing the transition to evidence-based programming in some communities.

“Healthy Teen Network helped in getting my organization equipped with the confidence and the knowledge to boldly talk about this issue in a way that’s not off-putting to the various audiences that we interact with.”

Following the Healthy Teen Network trainings in Mobile, ACPTP and affiliated organizations applied for and won a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) teen pregnancy prevention grant, and the Mobile County Health Department has been implementing new programs for the last four years. The impact associated with the grant program has made Mobile County clinics more friendly and accessible to teens, while ensuring that medically accurate, evidence-based information necessary to make smart personal health decisions is available.

More than that, the Mobile project has helped young people find their voice so they can be advocates for what’s important to them, not only in the arena of sexual health education and access to services, but any issue. During the training, youth participants learned how to craft an advocacy message and deliver their message effectively. The skills-building activities led students to remark about how empowered they felt about voicing their concerns and interests to policymakers.

In addition to the Mobile project, the Alabama State Department of Public Health and several individual counties have secured their own federal and private funding for evidence-based programming.

“For Healthy Teen Network to be able to share their expertise with me and then me be able to replicate that same kind of an activity in Alabama, that’s far reaching.”

Finding a Home

Jamie’s experience with Healthy Teen Network wasn’t limited to the confines of a training room or statehouse. In fact, the incredible impact of projects like Mobile is only part of the value created by the human connections that occur behind the scenes.

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As Jamie says, the “care and feeding” of community members is the part of Healthy Teen Network she experiences on a weekly basis. Knowing that there is a

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place to turn, not just for resources but for a genuine connection to colleagues who understand exactly how she’s feeling, this is what keeps her grounded, committed, and renewed.

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it, working on this issue across the country. There aren’t many of us, and having the opportunity to come together both professionally and for some fun is really critically important.”

Today, Jamie is optimistic about the future of sexual health education in Alabama. She’s confident that ACPTP has the support it needs to make a difference and she knows that through Healthy Teen Network she has the network of friends and colleagues necessary to keep moving forward.



Healthy Teen Network

www.HealthyTeenNetwork.org