

**Increasing Students' Awareness of HIV/AIDS: An Evaluation of
the Get Healthy, Get Smart Project**



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SAMETRIC RESEARCH

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This final evaluation report highlights the major accomplishments in YEAR2 of the Elton John HIV/ AIDS Awareness grant, which was awarded to the National Urban Technology Center by the Elton John Foundation. The purpose of the grant was to promote HIV/AIDS awareness among New York City middle school students. The report is schematically organized into the following sections: 1) Overview of the conceptual framework that guides the evaluation; 2) description of program components, services and implementation; 3) brief description of the YLA modules used in the project; 4) overview of the evaluation design; 5) presentation of the findings, and 6) conclusion and recommendations. The evaluation is based on a pretest/ posttest design in which baseline and follow-up data were collected from approximately 380 students who were all in the *GHGS* Project during the 2008-2009 school year.

There were three major components to the *GHGS* initiative during the 2009 academic year. These were: (1) A robust professional development experience for 41 teachers from 32 participating schools in Manhattan and Brooklyn, New York; (2) the creation of informal behavioral milestones toward which students strove and (3) the integration of the YLA STD/HIV and health modules in the science, advisory and or health classes of participating teachers.

The following are highlights of the major findings:

General Finding

- Overall, the findings presented in the report indicate that the Elton John Foundation grant, which was used to support the Get Healthy, Get Smart Initiative had a significant influence on student knowledge about HIV/AIDS in particular, and the importance of proper nutrition and health in general.

Specific Findings

Peer Pressure

- There was a sharp increase in the percentage of students who felt confident in their ability to say NO to activities that they think are wrong. On the baseline roughly 69.8% of the students indicated that they can say No to wrong activities; compared to 80% in the follow-up study.
- Fewer students in the follow-up study as compared to the baseline reported that they are likely to take more risks when they are with their friends than when they are alone. This positive change was found to be statistically significant.
- Students became more socially and emotionally competent by the end of the project with respect to withstanding the effects of peer pressure. By the end of the project year, they were less likely to engage in risky behaviors as a function of peer influence than they were at the beginning of the year.

Diet and Nutrition

- Attitudes about nutrition improved appreciably. Almost two thirds of students strongly agreed that what they currently eat impacts their health in the future. This represents a 10% increase over the number of students who held a similarly strong opinion at the beginning of the year. Moreover, there were significant behavioral changes as well. Students reported eating fewer times at fast food chains, incorporating more fruits and vegetables in their daily diets and exercising more frequently.

HIV/AIDS and other STDs

- At the baseline, 83% of the students failed to answer at least half of the questions related to their knowledge of HIV/AIDS and other STDs correctly. On the posttest that number was reduced to 49%. This improvement was found to be statistically significant.
- The average number of questions that were answered correctly on the posttest (at follow-up) was much greater (46.41) than the average at baseline (35.35). Hence, it is reasonable to infer that the GHGS project was instrumental in bringing awareness and providing students with accurate information on STDs to include HIV/AIDS.
- Students who are most knowledgeable about sexually transmitted diseases are those who understand the importance of diet, exercise and their relationship to one's health, students who have a measure of self confidence and students who are more resistant to peer pressure.
- Both Hispanic and non-Hispanic students tended to have poor knowledge about HIV, AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases; however, Hispanic students in particular, had the least amount of accurate information about STDs both at the baseline and at the follow-up when compared to non-Hispanic students
- Young girls were more likely to believe that condoms have very little protective value than young boys.

Family Relationships

- When they were resurveyed, more students reported improved relationships between themselves and their parents than was evident in the baseline.

Conclusions

The results summarized above are encouraging given the alarming statistics on the disproportionate high numbers of Hispanic and African-American youths who are infected with a preventable sexually transmitted disease. This study, like others, underscored the lack of information and misinformation that are prevalent among school-aged youth; and the role of projects such as Get Healthy, Get Smart in educating students about their health. While there are several key lessons that this two-year project has taught, perhaps the most salient is the need for programs such as *GHGS* to adopt a comprehensive strategy in bringing HIV/AIDS awareness to young people. A multi-prong approach that tackles such issues as peer pressure, appreciating one's body

by attending to diet and nutrition, building social emotional competencies and encouraging healthy family relationships is more likely to produce favorable outcomes than an approach that is narrowly tailored to focus exclusively on HIV/AIDS awareness. Moreover, there is credible evidence from the data in this study, that subgroups of students are particularly vulnerable, for example girls and Hispanics; and hence there is a need to develop strategies specifically directed at targeting these groups.