

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGNS: Lessons Learned from the Bronx, NY

THE NEED

The Bronx, one of the five boroughs in New York City, faces disproportionately negative sexual health outcomes among adolescents as compared to the other four boroughs and the nation. The South Bronx contains community districts in great need of support in improving adolescent reproductive health, including the areas of Hunts Point and Morrisania. In 2009, the teen birth rate for Hunts Point and Morrisania were 59.1 and 52.3 per 1,000 females ages 15-19, respectively—almost double the New York City rate and national rate. Youth in the Bronx also have higher rates of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) than youth in New York City and the nation. In addition, the Bronx has the highest poverty rate of the five NYC boroughs and ranks lowest among New York State's 62 counties for health outcomes.¹

BACKGROUND

In 2010, the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) was awarded a cooperative agreement made available through collaboration between the Office of Adolescent Health (OAH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) known as the [*Teenage Pregnancy Prevention: Integrating Services, Programs, and Strategies Through Community-wide Initiatives \(Community-wide Initiative\)*](#). Part of the President's Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative, the purpose of the Community-wide Initiative is to demonstrate the effectiveness of innovative, multicomponent, community-wide initiatives in reducing rates of teen pregnancy and births in communities



with the highest rates, with a focus on reaching African American and Latino/Hispanic youth age 15–19. One of nine organizations to receive funding, DOHMH created the Bronx Teens Connection Project (BxTC) to address the high teen birth rates in Hunts Point and Morrisania and to improve teens' reproductive health.

RAISING PUBLIC AWARENESS TO CHANGE BEHAVIOR

A key strategy for addressing the high rates of teen childbearing and STDs in Hunts Point and Morrisania was the dissemination of public messages about the importance of using both condoms and another method of contraception and role that parents can play in addressing adolescent reproductive health. Specifically, beginning in 2012, BxTC developed a public awareness campaign focused on promoting dual

¹ Guilamo-Ramos, V., Lee, J., & Husiak, L. (2011). *Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health Disparities: The Case of Youth Residing in the Bronx*. Center for Latino Adolescent and Family Health. Accessed from: http://www.clahf.org/files/press-releases/02_white-paper.pdf.

use of both condoms and hormonal contraception, which included a “Teens in NYC” resource guide and app with information for teens about youth-friendly clinical services and reproductive health. The campaign was developed after an internal review of communications materials found that while condom use messages were widespread, DOHMH had provided little public information about other methods of contraception. DOHMH and BxTC felt a new focus on the use of both condoms and hormonal contraception to prevent unplanned pregnancy would be important particularly for addressing teen pregnancy. The goal of the new dual methods campaign was to bring awareness to the importance of using both methods for pregnancy and STD prevention and to direct youth to the Teens in NYC resource guide and app.

A second public awareness campaign was developed based on results from the Bronx Adult Survey on Adolescent

Sexual Health which was conducted in early 2013. This public opinion poll was conducted with adults in the Bronx including an oversampling of the South Bronx and BxTC target areas of Hunts Point and Morrisania. The results indicated that parents needed additional encouragement and support talking to their teens about reproductive health. This information was used to develop a public awareness campaign focused on encouraging parents to talk to their teens about sex. The campaign included information about resources for parents to help with the conversations, and to encourage parents to facilitate teens’ access to contraceptive and reproductive health care services.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND DISSEMINATION

Community involvement was integral to the development of both public awareness campaigns. More specifically, for the campaign focused on encouraging dual method use, a contracted design firm, along with BxTC, conducted multiple focus groups with partner organizations, adults, and local youth. The focus groups were used to develop and test the actual message and images featured. Youth feedback on the visuals led to the use of models from the Bronx in the images instead of stock photos. Final print materials were created in English and Spanish and included four different images featuring racially and ethnically diverse Bronx youth.

As mentioned above, the campaign focused on parent-child communication about sex was developed based on results from a community-level survey. BxTC surveyed over 900 adults in the community with an oversample of both parents and adults living in Hunts Point and Morrisania. Results indicated that Bronx adults overwhelmingly support sex education for youth and many parents said they actually talked to their children





about sex. But most believed that other adults in the community did not talk to their young people in the same manner as they did, and respondents reported that parents need help making those conversations productive. They also reported that while they supported contraceptive use among teens, they didn't often help facilitate access to methods. Using this information, BxTC contracted with an agency to develop the public awareness campaign. Much like the dual methods campaign, multiple focus groups were conducted to develop and test messages and images used in the materials. The final materials were created in English and Spanish and included posters and postcards with stock photos featuring racially and ethnically diverse adults and teens.

The community was also involved in the distribution of campaign materials. For example, key project partners, young people and adults, disseminated posters and postcards at community events including health fairs, meetings, and other outreach events. Partner organizations displayed campaign materials and distributed postcards to clients. The dual methods campaign was also featured on buses and bus shelters as well as the City's Metro newspaper during key awareness months like Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month. Since the launch of the campaigns, over 7,000 posters and postcards have been distributed, and the Teens in NYC mobile app has over 11,000 downloads.

LESSONS LEARNED:

A few key lessons can be distilled from the development and distribution of these two public awareness campaigns in the South Bronx.

1. Include the target audience from the beginning and in all steps. Use a deliberate process to gather input and feedback on messages and images that will resonate with the target audience. BxTC used both focus groups and surveys to design and test messages, find and/or create images (using youth models from the Bronx), and distribute campaign materials.

2. Develop a realistic timeline from the beginning and allow for flexibility.

From start to finish, BxTC's parent/child communications campaign took approximately two years. When developing a timeline, consider such factors as changes in organizational leadership, the need for multiple revisions, and contract negotiations (if using an outside firm). Depending on your organization, there may be several layers of approval needed before a design can be finalized and distributed. Keep this in mind and allow for appropriate review time. While you cannot plan for unexpected emergencies or a change in organizational priorities, have a "plan b" and allow for flexibility in your timeline.

3. Ensure you have the budget.

Developing and distributing a public awareness campaign can be expensive. When putting together a budget consider the organization's abilities (i.e. graphic design) and plan for distribution (i.e. social media vs. print). Do you need to hire a graphic design or public relations firm? Do you need to conduct focus groups and offer participants a stipend? Do you need to conduct a community-wide survey? Will you use digital/social media to distribute or traditional media? Answers to these questions can help determine your budget needs.

4. Make it easy to distribute. For both print and social media communications campaigns, keep the “ask” of partner organizations simple. Partner organizations are often overwhelmed with “asks” from other organizations while still handling their own work and priorities. Give the organization a list with options for how they can help distribute the message. For example, an easy task would be for an organization to hang a poster in their waiting room or send an already crafted tweet with the awareness campaign linked. Some organizations will be able to get more involved, but give options.

NEXT STEPS

DOHMH has plans to continue both the dual methods and parent/child communication public awareness campaigns. To increase their reach with current campaigns, DOHMH hopes to develop a digital media campaign. With new funding, DOHMH will use the same process to develop a strategic dissemination plan for new awareness materials that will expand citywide.

Evaluation of the two campaigns has focused on distribution numbers and downloads of the Teens in NYC app. Moving forward, DOHMH would like to examine new ways to evaluate the effectiveness of their public awareness campaigns. DOHMH is working with other localities interested in using the campaigns in their own jurisdictions and with their own branding.

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About The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy:

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization supported largely by private donations. The National Campaign’s mission is to improve the lives and future prospects of children and families and, in particular, to help ensure that children are born into stable, two-parent families who are committed to and ready for the demanding task of raising the next generation. Our specific strategy is to prevent teen pregnancy and unplanned pregnancy among single, young adults. We support a combination of responsible values and behavior by both men and women and responsible policies in both the public and private sectors.