

Project Description — PPHSSO Family Communication Project

Community Need: In Oregon, and around the country, teen pregnancy rates have been declining over the last decade. In 2004, there were 3,964 births among Oregon teens, an improvement over previous years. But Oregon still ranks 13th highest in the nation in teen abortion rates and 23rd in overall teen pregnancy rates (Alan Guttmacher Institute). Moreover, the social, economic and health consequences of nearly 4,000 teen births are still profound. Recognizing the interrelationship between teen childbearing and high school drop-out rates, generational poverty, child abuse and negative public health outcomes, the Oregon Benchmarks process continues to make teen pregnancy prevention one of the state's urgent priorities.

Planned Parenthood Health Services of Southwestern Oregon (PPHSSO) is fundamentally committed to helping young people make responsible decisions about sex, and helping families acquire the knowledge and skills they need to provide appropriate guidance to teens. Parents face many challenges in this task, however, including the powerful impact of mass media, which bombards teens with more messages about sex than any previous generation—messages that do little, if anything, to help adolescents develop healthy, respectful attitudes and values about sex. Despite their best intentions, many parents are unsure about how to start the conversation, and sometimes the communication simply doesn't take place. But this communication is absolutely essential. A 2003 survey by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy (NCPTP) found that teens most strongly relied on their parents for guidance in sexual decision-making. At the same time, only 32% of the parents in this study believed they were most influential regarding teens' decisions about sex, while 48% named friends and peers. The importance of parents recognizing their influence and talking to their children about sex cannot be overemphasized; the clear communication of parental values and expectations is key to guiding youth toward healthy decision-making. In fact, the better the parents' communication and support, the more likely a teen is to delay sexual initiation and to avoid early pregnancy (NCPTP).

Project Overview: Our Family Communication Project is designed to assist parents in guiding their children toward responsible sexual behavior. It involves a multifaceted approach, providing parents with solid research data, direct information from teens about their concerns and needs, and expert assistance with communication skills. *All of our efforts promote the expectation that personal values and beliefs about sex will be addressed within families.* Many of these activities have evolved from proven public health approaches we have employed in the past. They now take on greater significance as key components of our long-range public-health initiative, *The New 3Rs: Rights, Respect, Responsibility*. The New 3Rs is aimed at attaining *sustainable* improvements in adolescent sexual health, and has achieved great momentum thus far, thanks to the solid endorsement of state policy leaders. We will now build on this momentum with numerous activities, including The Family Communication Project described here. This project will serve thousands of families directly and also model for our partners—New 3Rs Advocates—the ways in which effective parent-child communication programs may be designed and implemented*:

• **Clergy Collaborations: Family Sex Education Workshops.** Piloted this year in Medford and Ashland, these events supported clergy from several churches in bringing together families from their congregations to learn about adolescent sexual health in the context of their faith tradition.

* As a comprehensive, collaborative, youth-positive effort, *The New 3Rs: Rights, Respect, Responsibility* initiative advances the majority of the Search Institute's 40 Development Assets. The project proposed here — The Family Communication Project — primarily focuses on Assets #1 and #2 — fostering family support and communication.

We will build on the tremendous success of these initial workshops and expand their availability throughout our service region.

- **Town Hall Forums.** These events give teens an opportunity to speak out to adults on the need for accurate information, accessible services and honest conversation about sex. Co-sponsors for these events have included Willamalane Parks and Recreation; Eugene 4J School District; Girl Scouts, Lane County Public Health; YMCA; and First Presbyterian Church, Cottage Grove. We will produce three Town Hall Forums in various locations in 2006, in collaboration with an expanded range of partners, reaching at least 200 youth and parents.

- **Parent Information Packets.** These packets provide a wealth of resources that help parents overcome the awkwardness of talking with their children about sexual topics. Materials include:

- “There’s No Place Like Home for Sex Education,” PPHSSO’s 80-page guide that helps parents share medically accurate, age-appropriate information about sex. This book has been widely acclaimed as an essential resource for parents.
- Fact sheets from national agencies specializing in adolescent sexual health, which help parents understand the developmental and social issues that young people face; the risk factors for teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections; and the broad public acceptance for proven public-health strategies such as comprehensive sex education in public schools.
- A resource guide that lists books, videos, Web sites and other vital resources for parents.

The packets will be distributed in various venues and promoted via a public service announcement featuring our Teen Theater and Governor Ted Kulongoski. This PSA will be widely broadcast beginning in October, 2005 — National Family Sex Education Month. Based on a scene written by our Teen Theater called “I Want You to Know,” the PSA features young actors directly addressing an adult audience with their desire for honest, respectful communication about sex. The Governor then reinforces this message, and this is followed by a toll-free number (1-866-Kits4us) that parents can call to request a packet. We expect to distribute 4,000 packets in 2006.

- **“Talking to Your Kids About Sex” Workshops.** Becoming an “askable” parent is our theme in parent workshops, conducted by our expert staff in an environment that invites self-awareness and skill-building. We expect to reach 1,000 families in 2006 with these workshops.

- **Native American Version of “There’s No Place Like Home...”** As described above, this parent guide has proved a valuable asset for parents wondering where to begin and how to continue conversations with their children about sex. We will work with Brad Victor, Director of Indian Education for the Oregon Department of Education, to distribute 1,000 copies of this beautifully illustrated, culturally adapted version of our guide.

We are requesting \$22,750 from the Oregon Community Foundation for all of the above activities, which will directly benefit thousands of Oregon families.[†] Moreover, these activities will enhance our partnerships with 100 New 3Rs Advocates — inspiring them to collaborate and/or conduct similar activities to benefit their own constituencies, thereby reaching thousands more.

By supporting the Family Communication Project, OCF will significantly contribute to a com-

[†]Other activities of the Family Communication Project include: two parent-daughter fairs (supported by the Annie E. Casey Fdn), and a full season of performances by our award-winning Teen Theater (funded by the E.C. Brown Fdn).

prehensive plan that will have both immediate and long-term benefits for our communities.

Qualifications

PPHSSO serves eight counties in Southwestern Oregon, with six reproductive health clinics and two rural outreach sites. In 2004, we served 30,000 clinic clients, comprising nearly 60,000 visits. Since 1999, we have quadrupled the number of patient visits, making us one of the fastest-growing Planned Parenthood affiliates in the nation. PPHSSO also offers extensive education and training to the communities we serve, including youth-oriented programs on topics such as postponing sexual involvement, healthy relationships, birth control and sexual protection, parent-child communication, and sexually transmitted infections. We also provide trainings for young adults, parents, and professionals who work with youth and families. In 2004, we provided 760 educational programs, reaching more than 29,000 people.

As one of the leading affiliates in the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, we have been recognized for service innovation, executive leadership, and financial performance. PPHSSO was awarded the #1 designation among all Planned Parenthood affiliates nationwide in the Federation's most recent "Best Places to Work" survey. We have a well-established history of launching ambitious projects that result in valuable services for our communities. This has been facilitated by our participation in the Oregon Family Planning Expansion Project, which, coupled with sound fiscal management and efficient service delivery, has created a positive result of operations and a substantial increase in our net assets over the past several years. In the interest of wise stewardship and long-term sustainability, our board is committed to reinvesting these assets to significantly expand capacity. To complement this strategy, we continually seek to diversify funding sources for our highest-priority projects, and this includes strong partnerships with numerous foundations. These relationships enable us to establish new and vital services in innovative, forward-looking ways — all in partnership with the greater community.

PPHSSO has an extremely engaged Board of Directors, some of whom have been affiliated with our agency for a decade or more. The board has approved *The New 3Rs: Rights, Respect, Responsibility* as a mission-driven agency-wide priority. The executive staff championing The New 3Rs initiative—President and CEO Bill Sheppard and VP of Education and Training, Mary Gossart—have each been with PPHSSO more than 20 years. Thanks to their dedication and deep connections in the community, The New 3Rs is considered a national model for adapting proven public-health strategies to help youth develop healthy sexual attitudes and behaviors.

Results and Follow-Up

We expect the thousands of families who participate in Family Communication Project activities, or who receive materials produced as part of this project, will experience much greater awareness of the need for open dialog about adolescent sexual development and health — an essential first step in facilitating communication. We also expect these families will find that the initiation and continuation of these conversations will be improved. Each of the activities will have an evaluation component, which will assess the value participants receive from the event or materials, and provide an opportunity for qualitative feedback on new learnings, insights, and expectations. With the parent packets, in particular, we will conduct longer-term evaluations to determine the ways in which packet components helped improve parent-child communication.

Future funding is being addressed by several significant grants we have pending for our next two years of New 3Rs work, which includes the Family Communication Project as a key component.