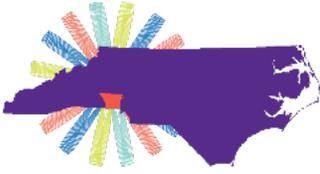


How Gaston Youth Connected Changed a Community — and New Lessons for North Carolina

A supplemental report on the
State of Adolescent Sexual Health

Winter 2016





North Carolina has experienced record declines in its teen pregnancy and teen birth rates. However, many communities and many populations still experience disparately high rates of teen pregnancy and teen birth. In 2010, SHIFT NC (Sexual Health Initiatives For Teens) – then the Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Campaign of North Carolina – launched a novel demonstration initiative to address teen pregnancy in Gaston County, North Carolina. The Gaston Youth Connected initiative took a multi-pronged approach to help the community address longstanding problematic teen pregnancy and teen birth rates by using an array of evidence-based approaches. After five years, the initiative resulted in significant health gains for Gaston County – and provided major lessons for how North Carolina can approach teen pregnancy prevention.

What is Gaston Youth Connected? SHIFT NC’s Gaston Youth Connected initiative was established as part of The President’s Teen Pregnancy Prevention Community-Wide Initiative funded through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) from 2010 through 2015. Gaston Youth Connected was one of nine projects throughout the United States. Each project site was tasked with reducing teen birth rates by implementing a combination of best practices and approaches focusing on program implementation, increasing community engagement, improving healthcare quality and access, and focusing on diverse communities.

Understanding How Gaston Youth Connected Made an Impact — and New Lessons for North Carolina

Component 1: Program Implementation

SHIFT NC worked with 14 program partners to offer evidence-based programs in a wide range of settings, including: during the school day, after school programs, churches, rec centers, health clinics, juvenile detention centers, and more creative settings like bowling alleys. Program partners were highly successful in recruiting and enrolling youth who attended schools in the area’s census tracts with the highest teen birth rates. Seventy-two percent of participants attended one of these high-priority schools.

These programs showed remarkable and meaningful outcomes for participating youth, increasing their knowledge of condoms, contraceptives, and how to access birth control when needed, and increasing their intention use condoms and contraception in the future. While more than 75% of participants entered the programs knowing that abstinence is the best way to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, 39% of entering participants were already sexually active.

New Lessons for North Carolina

Facilitate collaborative approaches. Fostering a team-based approach among program partners helped reduce initial competition for program recruitment and helped partners work together to devise ways to recruit harder-to-reach populations.

Tap into relationships. Positive personal relationships were a key driver of program recruitment. Examples included a pastor who was supportive of youth receiving sexual health information and a football coach who had seen his players become fathers.

Provide more information than standard evidence-based program content. In addition to basic information on abstinence and contraceptive methods, youth need information on how and where to access contraception when they need it.

Engage schools. Taking a broad community-wide approach makes it more natural for schools to be at the table. Finding interventions that meet schools’ needs – in GYC’s case, a program with both teen pregnancy and dropout prevention outcomes – eases implementation.

Program Results

7,620 youth in programs

14 program partners provided
9 evidence-based programs

Report Card

	Before	After
Prevention Knowledge	F	B

All pre-/post-tests on a 10-point grading scale.

Component 2: Linking Teens to Quality Health Services

The initiative focused efforts on three areas: 1) outreach and referral strategies to link teens to health services; 2) strategies to improve the overall quality of teen-friendly services; and 3) supporting the development of the Teen Wellness Center at the local health department.

By helping area health providers understand best practices in adolescent health care, the initiative increased the number of teens accessing needed contraceptive services – while health providers perceived better visits. Developing the Teen Wellness Center helped the health department create an integrated approach to supporting teen health that allowed for no missed opportunities to offer reproductive health services. Creating formal and informal relationships to link young people to care ensured teens could find age-appropriate health services.

New Lessons for North Carolina

Teen-friendly visits pay off for teens and providers. Providers who implemented teen-friendly practices had a range of positive experiences, including an increase in teen clients, more effective visits, and environmental changes that helped visits “start with a positive vibe”.

Develop outreach and referral strategies. Parents and friends were consistently the top healthcare referral sources, indicating that it is important to raise awareness of available services with both parents and teens. Nontraditional partners, including youth-serving businesses like a tattoo parlor, coffee shop, and barber shop, helped spread information on where to access health services.

Integrate services in one place. By creating a one-stop shop for all health visits – from sports physicals to birth control needs, from immunizations to STI tests – the Teen Wellness Center created an environment where teens were able and willing to seek health services.

Train professionals on long-acting reversible contraceptives (LARCs). Public and private providers noted that professional development specifically on LARCs helped them provide better contraceptive counseling to patients.

Healthcare Results

10 partner healthcare sites adopted teen-friendly practices

11,123 youth with at least one reproductive health visit at a partner site

60% of the county's sexually active 15-19 year old girls received contraception from a partner provider

25% selected a LARC, compared to 7% nationwide

Source: GYC Final Evaluation

Final Gaston Youth Connected Results

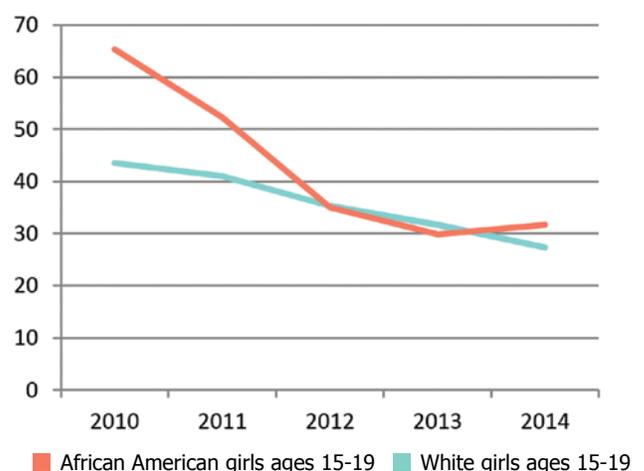
Major Findings:

- Nearly 40% reduction in teen birth rates in the first 4 project years*
- Achieved parity between white and African American teen birth rates

Year	Teen Birth Rate*	Teen Pregnancy Rate*
2010	48.5	59.9
2011	43.9	48.8
2012	36.8	42.7
2013	32.6	37.5
2014	29.7	not available

*Rates are per 1,000 15-19 year old girls

Closed longstanding disparities between African American and white teen birth rates



Note: 2014 teen pregnancy rates will be available in January 2016. Teen birth and pregnancy rates for the full five years will not be available until Fall 2016/Winter 2017.
Rates Source: NC State Center for State Health Statistics

Component 3: Stakeholder Education

Helping community leaders understand teen pregnancy and teen pregnancy prevention built an environment that supported best practice approaches. Early community surveys showed 96% of Gaston County residents thought the community should do more to address teen pregnancy. However, perceived disagreement over approaches or community will were barriers.. Project staff and community leadership team members worked together to assess community support and communicate the high levels of local support to leaders in the community.

New Lessons for North Carolina

Use data to educate stakeholders. Local leaders who attended community presentations noted that the focus on local data was particularly effective in helping them understand local needs and project approaches.

Engage the broader community throughout the project. Community members appreciated being a part of conversations about community needs and the project. Many audience members noted an increased sense of community accountability for reducing teen pregnancy.

Component 4: Community Mobilization and Sustainability

Three leadership teams facilitated community mobilization and sustainability efforts. A Core Partner Team helped project staff plan, implement, and monitor the project. A Community Mobilization Team provided diverse community voices and facilitated community connections and outreach. A Teen Action Council helped staff and key stakeholders understand youth perspectives, while helping connect their peers with community resources.

New Lessons for North Carolina

Educate leaders to increase ownership. While leadership team members were committed to the project's goals, ongoing use of data, sharing successes, and demonstrating project integrity helped increase members' commitment and engagement and reduce perceptions of controversy.

Keep focus on the big picture. Highlighting both successful project tasks and ongoing declines in the county's teen pregnancy rate fueled buy-in and continued enthusiasm for the work of the initiative.

Define sustainability broadly. Focusing on systems-level changes does much of the work of sustainability in larger institutions like schools and health departments. These changes can continue to impact youth without additional funding.

Component 5: Working with Diverse Communities

Like many North Carolina communities, Gaston County had long struggled with health disparities, including teen birth rates that disproportionately affected African American and Hispanic/Latino teens. In addition, many local youth attended schools in geographical areas with significantly higher teen birth rates.

By thoughtfully and authentically engaging diverse stakeholders in a variety of roles – on leadership teams, as program facilitators, as staff – the initiative developed relationships and connections capable of addressing disparities. Attention to diversity and minority representation helped the initiative achieve one of its most notable outcomes: a closing of the gap between white and African American teen pregnancy and birth rates.

New Lessons for North Carolina

Use diversity as a lens for all project components. Discussions on diversity were included when assessing local needs, cultivating leadership, and implementing programs, while concentrating on diverse communities and social determinants allowed the project to address situations where stigma or discrimination are hatched or perpetuated.

Normalize strategies through genuine engagement. Minority communities' distrust of systems – especially historical distrust of public health systems – is real and understandable. Relying on community leaders to be part of the initiative at every level helped build trust and normalize education, health access, and contraceptive choice.

The Gaston Youth Connected Legacy

Lessons learned from SHIFT NC's Gaston Youth Connected initiative are influencing how leaders approach prevention — both in North Carolina and across the country. Here are examples of how the Gaston Youth Connected legacy is improving North Carolina communities.

Healthy Youth of Onslow & NC Youth Connected

Funded by: The Duke Endowment, Office of Adolescent Health

Building on Gaston Youth Connected's community mobilization work, SHIFT NC launched Healthy Youth of Onslow in 2014. The community coalition, with funding from the Duke Endowment, rallied leaders from Onslow County to raise awareness of local teen pregnancy needs. The coalition's work paved the way for NC Youth Connected, a new signature initiative from SHIFT NC funded by the federal Office of Adolescent Health. The 5-year initiative will build on Healthy Youth of Onslow's community mobilization work by adding program implementation, clinic improvement, and healthcare linking components. NC Youth Connected will also launch a multi-pronged approach in Cumberland County. Between 2015 and 2020, SHIFT NC anticipates a 50% reduction in teen pregnancies across these two counties.

Every Teen Counts

Funded by: Office of Adolescent Health

Every Teen Counts, a new initiative to boost the capacity of North Carolina's foster care and juvenile justice systems to support adolescent health, was developed based on two core lessons learned from Gaston Youth Connected. First, authentically approaching the needs of vulnerable populations showed that youth in foster care and juvenile detention centers needed specialized programs and support to provide trauma-informed support and information. Second, sustainability can be achieved by creating structural improvements to systems. Through Every Teen Counts, foster care agencies and juvenile detention centers serving nine counties will receive capacity-building services to strengthen how they help some of North Carolina's most vulnerable young people.

All Together Now & Greensboro Health Access Initiative (name to be determined)

Funded by: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Cone Health Foundation

Recent research has illustrated the major contribution that increased contraceptive use has played in the reduction of teen pregnancy rates, as well as the important role that teen-friendly medical care can play in helping young people choose more effective contraceptive methods. Building on this research and lessons learned on healthcare provision and access during Gaston Youth Connected, Greensboro and Durham County are preparing to embark on major clinic improvement and linking initiatives. Funded and led by the Cone Health Foundation, a to-be-named initiative will help improve the teen-friendliness of partner health providers in Greensboro. The initiative will also build on community mobilization lessons to strengthen local support for adolescent health. SHIFT NC will provide technical assistance across all components of the initiative. With funding from the CDC, SHIFT NC launched All Together Now in late 2015. All Together Now will help Durham's publicly funded health providers adopt best practices for teen care, while creating strong community networks to help link young people to the care they need.

Acknowledgements *How Gaston Youth Connected Changed a Community – and New Lessons for North Carolina* is based on the Gaston Youth Connected final evaluation report by Joy Sotolongo. Special thanks to the Gaston County community, especially our partners and leadership team members. Thanks to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for funding the initiative, and for providing guidance, technical assistance, and support. Thanks also to SHIFT NC staff who worked to make the initiative a success: Sally Swanson, Sarah Davis, Amanda Fuller, Michelle Reese, Joy Sotolongo, and Kia Thacker.

About SHIFT NC SHIFT NC (Sexual Health Initiatives For Teens) is leading North Carolina to improve adolescent and young adult sexual health. After 30 years of success as the Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Campaign of North Carolina, the organization expanded its scope in 2015 to have a more comprehensive impact on young people's health.



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