

Working Together with Diverse Communities:

Young Men's Program Summit

Summit Report



JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc.

Promoting and Improving Health

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Introduction

Preliminary federal data for 2012 reported that teen birth rates were at a record low with 29.4 births per 1000 in the 15-19 years female population. This decline in rates is consistent across all racial and ethnic groups (National Center for Health Statistics, 2013). However, the absolute number of teen births remains high and the United States still leads most industrialized nations in teen births. Data from the National Center for Health Statistics also shows that about three-fourths of the decline is due to effective use of contraception and the delay in onset of intercourse. A significant portion of this decline can be attributed to the promotion of youth development approaches as well as health and sexuality education primarily targeted to youth who either attend school or access health services in a clinical environment. While this is good news, there is still a significant segment of the adolescent population who are not reached by traditional approaches or in conventional settings. Special attention is needed to engage vulnerable and disenfranchised adolescents, who may be out of school or at risk of dropping out of school, involved in the juvenile justice system, and runaway and/or homeless.

Adolescent males have usually been seen as a significant part of the problem surrounding teen pregnancy with very limited attention to their role in prevention. Increasingly, this attitude is shifting and prevention specialists are seeking to strengthen approaches to engage and serve young men. An important part of addressing this paradigm shift is the understanding of which persons and what conditions contribute to young men's views on health and prevention. Equally important are the non-traditional community partners who are vital to nurturing young men's understanding of their health as a whole, and who can message health promotion.

National models of engagement have shown that a holistic approach to meeting the sexual and reproductive health (SRH) needs of men is more effective than a clinical encounter or a workshop on ways to prevent pregnancy (Personal communication from Hector Sanchez-Flores, National Compadres Network/National Latino Fatherhood & Family Institute). Young men are seeking this engagement and it would be helpful to involve them with the same respect and care afforded to young women at the highest risk for becoming young mothers. Therefore, optimizing reproductive health services for young men calls upon clinics to create linkages with a range of supportive services such as recreation, employment and training, and spiritual guidance—that promote healthy social development, a positive self - image, meaningful interpersonal relationships, educational attainment, and integration into the formal economy. This approach becomes the prescription for optimal SRH and requires creating partnerships with non-traditional partners as well as the mobilization of resources in a community-wide supportive environment.

In support of this holistic approach to promote SRH for young men, JSI Research and Training Institute, Inc. (JSI) held a two-day Young Men's Program (YMP) Summit. The Summit was a culmination of a year-long initiative designed to build the capacity of Part A Grantees to engage adolescent males in teen pregnancy prevention (TPP) activities taking into account the circumstances in which young men live, learn, work and play. The program and summit were implemented in collaboration with our partner, Hector Sanchez-Flores from the National Compadres Network/National Latino Fatherhood & Family Institute.

Summit's Purpose & Objectives

The purpose of the Summit was to increase Part A Grantees' skills to engage adolescent males in evidence-based programs and in SRH services that are culturally competent and male friendly while taking into account where a young man is raised, the people with whom he has contact, and the opportunities and challenges of life that may influence his SRH decision making.

JSI developed six Summit objectives focused on increasing participants' capacity to integrate a more holistic approach to male SRH. Objectives are as follows:

1. Identify youth development strategies to engage young men in TPP and begin to develop a plan to implement those strategies within the local projects evidence based interventions (EBIs) implementing partners;
2. Delineate the social conditions that influence young men's view of health, sexual behavior and perception of teen pregnancy and implications for community partnerships;
3. Pinpoint strategies to identify community partners (e.g., clinics, schools, FBOs, etc.) that are well suited to serve the needs of young men for the purpose of EBI implementation and access to sexual and reproductive health services;
4. State evidence-based adolescent friendly sexual and reproductive health services and activities supported through the Clinical Component;
5. Describe and explore opportunities to increase clinical linkages and further promote the sexual and reproductive health of adolescent males through the Youth Leadership Teams and other TPP initiatives; and
6. Outline efforts underway to engage and reach young men in other grantee sites to identify promising practices that are taking root in communities looking to reduce teen pregnancy.

These objectives represent JSI's support of Part A grantees work to increase numbers of adolescent males who participate in EBIs and those who access clinical SRH services.

Summit Participants

Twenty-two participants from across the United States, representing a diverse group of Part A grantee organizations attended the two-day Summit. Two representatives attended from each of the following agencies: Georgia Campaign for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention, Family Planning Council, PA, Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Campaign of North Carolina, City of Hartford, CT, South Carolina Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, University of Texas Health Science Center, Massachusetts Alliance on Teen Pregnancy, Alabama Department of Public Health, and the Bronx Teens Connection, NY.

Out of the organizations, 100% deliver services to African American youth, 79% deliver to Hispanic/Latino/a youth, 57% to Caucasian, 43% to Asian American, 21% to American Indian, 14% to Alaska Native and 14% to Native Hawaiian. The majority of youth served within these organizations range in age from 14-20 years.

Males and females are equally served by participant organizations; three indicated serving transgender youth as well.

Agenda & Presentations

Thursday - September 26, 2013

The Summit was organized into two days of workshop trainings, discussion, and facilitated group exercises. The focus of the training was how to better integrate young men into Part A grantee programs while highlighting the importance of the impact of young men's environments on their health and well-being. The Summit Agenda is attached and other Summit information can be found at the website: <http://rhey.jsi.com/>.

Introductions and welcome

Participants were welcomed by Myriam Hernandez Jennings (JSI) and the Summit agenda was presented with a review of the year-long YMP. The goals of the Program were reviewed and participants were asked to provide input to shape the initiative for the next Fiscal year. Grantees indicated that they were pleased with the year-long program and enjoyed the speakers and exchange of ideas during calls focused on how to better engage adolescent males.

Session I: Engaging and Serving Adolescent Males Using Youth Development Strategies

Alex Vila, a youth development expert with over 20 years of experience, facilitated several group ice breakers that served as interactive examples that grantees could utilize to create a safer, friendly and more comfortable atmosphere when engaging youth in programs. Her presentations focused on key features of successful ways to engage young people using youth development strategies in prevention and clinical settings. In addition, she addressed societal perceptions of young men and how programs can be shaped at a deeper level to address their actual attributes and personalities. Alex's training gave participants concrete ideas on how to reshape their approach to engagement.

Session II: Health Equity for Young Men: What, Why, How, Whom

Deen Tyler (The California Endowment) focused on health equity for young men, specifically related to how community leaders and conditions have contributed to young men's views on their role in health and prevention related to teen pregnancy. Mr. Tyler presented a history of how African-American men have been portrayed in the media and how the media can be used to reach young men of color with health promotion messages. He also discussed the importance of restoring family, both biological and "extended" with a focus on the inclusion of Elders, and including young men in conversations of love and power. Also, his presentation highlighted the importance of reinstating identity and self-worth and the value of relationships to achieving change.

Friday - September 27, 2013

Session I: Addressing the Sexual and Reproductive Health Needs of Adolescent Males Through the TPP Project: Where We've Been and Where We Can Go

Karen Schlanger of Cicatelli Associates, Inc. focused on addressing SRH needs of adolescent males and highlighted key approaches and activities of the Clinical Component of the TPP initiative. Ms. Schlanger shared some key data related to the needs of adolescent males and the role they can play in TPP. A facilitated discussion provided ideas and suggestions for further enhancing the SRH needs of adolescent males through the community leadership teams and other community-wide activities of the initiative. A group exercise served to elicit best practices for making clinical linkages. Some ideas highlighted the importance of teaching males to prioritize their own health as a whole (not just sexual health), having physicians foster relationships with their teen patients, and offering referral trainings to community providers to support efforts.

Session II: Social Determinants & Young Men's Reproductive Health

Osvaldo Cruz and Mario Ozuna's (National Compadres Network/National Latino Fatherhood & Family Institute) presentation focused on social determinants and young men's reproductive health and ways in which the environment influences health risks and decision-making. It highlighted the need for support activities, such as recreation, employment, training, and spiritual guidance, to promote healthy social development, self-image, relationships, educational attainment, and integration into the formal economy. A group exercise addressed ideas for how to create emotional safety with young men participating in programs.

Session III: Learning From Peers about Male Engagement

The second training session focused on learning from peers about male engagement. This session provided an arena for discussion of strategies and programmatic efforts being used to improve males' ability to make informed decisions about their own and their partners' health and sexual and reproductive health choices. Attendees described the lessons learned in serving males and ways in which their strategies have engaged young men. Towards the end of the session presenters led the group in an activity aimed at highlighting how to increase engagement and retention of young men in EBIs, including: Acknowledge; Values; Sacred Purpose; and Security/Safety. These key strategies can be used to supplement any curriculum implementation, while not compromising fidelity.

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Acknowledge</u> <i>Call youth by name, promote relationship building through ice breakers</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Values</u> <i>Be non-judgmental about their values, don't be shocked by values/responses (respond without condemning them)</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Sacred purpose</u> <i>Ask and inquire about what they feel their purpose is and help youth find their purpose</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Security</u> <i>Offer ground rules to make youth feel safe, clarify expectations of group (who can participate, etc.), support confidentiality</i></p>

Attendees shared examples of best practices to engage young men and plan to integrate additional strategies in curriculum implementation and other group activities.

Conclusion

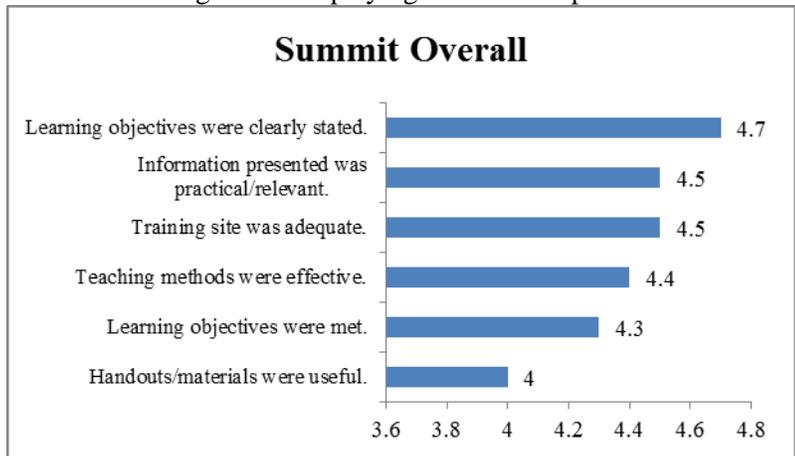
The training ended with closing remarks from Ms. Hernandez Jennings and participants' evaluation of the training's objectives, presenters, and content areas.

Summit Evaluation Results

Summit participants were asked to complete an evaluation form at the end of the training. The evaluation consisted of questions related to (1) participant demographics; (2) demographics of youth served in the organization; (3) training goals and objectives, and; (4) effectiveness of presentation content and delivery. Results were input into Survey Monkey and analyzed.

To rate each of the five presentations, participants used a 0-5 point rating scale (Strongly Disagree =0 to Strongly Agree =5). As a whole, each of the five sessions received a rating of 4.0 or higher for presenter knowledge in content area and each was rated close to 3.9 or higher for displaying cultural competence.

Participants used the same rating scale to evaluate the Summit overall. Again, participants indicated a high rating for content presented as practical and relevant, that teaching methods were effective and learning objectives were clearly stated and met. General feedback highlighted participants’ great appreciation of the dynamic and engaging sessions, the “touching and emotional” nature of the training, and the strong need to create a safer space in which to engage young men.



As a measure of the effectiveness of the training, participants were asked to rate their confidence in their ability to perform tasks in six areas related to the Summit objectives: Before and After the training. In each of the areas, they identified having more confidence in their ability to do the task after the training was complete. Most notably, participants responded with the greatest rating change for ability to “Delineate the social conditions that influence young men’s view of health, sexual behavior and perception of teen pregnancy and implications for community partnerships” and ability to “Outline efforts underway to engage and reach young men in other grantee sites to identify promising practices that are taking root in communities looking to reduce teen pregnancy.”

Confidence in Ability to do the following:	AVERAGE RATING (Strongly Disagree=0, Strongly Agree=5)	
	BEFORE	AFTER
Identify youth development strategies to engage young men in teen pregnancy prevention and begin to develop a plan to implement those strategies within the local projects EBIs’ implementing partners.	2.8	3.9
Delineate the social conditions that influence young men’s view of health, sexual behavior and perception of teen pregnancy and implications for community partnerships.	3.0	4.0
Pinpoint strategies to identify community partners (e.g., clinics, schools, FBOs, etc.) that are well suited to serve the needs of young men for the purpose of EBIs’ implementation and access to sexual and reproductive health services.	2.7	3.6
State evidence-based adolescent friendly sexual and reproductive health services and activities supported through the Clinical Component.	3.5	4.2
Describe and explore opportunities to increase clinical linkages and further promote the sexual and reproductive health of adolescent males through the Youth Leadership Teams and other TPP initiatives.	3.3	4.0
Outline efforts underway to engage and reach young men in other grantee sites to identify promising practices that are taking root in communities looking to reduce teen pregnancy.	2.7	3.7

What Participants Had to Say!

Participants were asked to comment on the least and most useful components of the training, how they will use the information and areas in which JSI can continue to assist grantees.

Several individuals highlighted the following as most useful aspects of the training:

- ❖ Learning from presenters who are actually doing the work with young men and how experience was tied to strategy;
- ❖ Sharing experiences and connecting with colleagues from other states;
- ❖ Understanding the context of young men's lives, environment and barriers they face;
- ❖ Acknowledging and honoring young men;
- ❖ Understanding how people learn and learning preferences in order to engage young men;
- ❖ Learning strategies with activity that would connect youth with each other and facilitators;
- ❖ Having exposure to the Youth Development Framework.

"Very touching and emotional training."

"Hearing from those DOING the work!"

Several participants identified how they will use information from the Summit in order to engage males:

- ❖ Discuss content with community members;
- ❖ Be more aware of methods to create an emotionally safe environment, communicate more mindfully and inform staff members and clinicians on understanding males of color;
- ❖ Focus on acknowledging and honoring young men and their struggles;
- ❖ Implement certain activities with young people whether it be in an EBI or leadership team;
- ❖ Develop more effective methods to access to care;
- ❖ Identify two capacity building opportunities for current partners; strengthen what program partners are already doing;
- ❖ Go back and do more intentional work; conduct a values clarification with project team.

"Meet men where they are and focus on the YLT to come up with ideas on how to reach young men"

Finally, participants were asked to identify what they will need from JSI to continue your work. Most respondents identified a need for further program support and for continued information over email, how to recruit by word of mouth effectively, trainings for community members currently implementing programs, further knowledge of evidence-based programs that meet the emotional needs of youth, and how best to support clinical staff in providing high quality care to young men that is culturally competent particularly for/towards the Latino community. Other comments included needing to bring JSI and National Compadres Network/National Latino Fatherhood & Family Institute to provide additional technical assistance at the community level and further discussion about diversity work.

What participants need from JSI

- ❖ *Tools and concrete strategies*
- ❖ *Support*
- ❖ *Technical assistance*
- ❖ *Trainings*
- ❖ *Focus group results*

The evaluation included an "Additional Comments" section in which the majority of respondents gave strong reviews of the two-day event, including "very well put together, excellent speakers and knowledge." Respondents highlighted eagerness to implement lessons learned. Finally, JSI received additional feedback over email that acknowledged the importance of the "element of emotion" needed for involving youth and that the training was an "emotional and empowering experience...that was very heartfelt."

Next Steps

Based on the evaluation results the two-day Summit was well received. Through presentations and group exercises participants demonstrated an understanding of the importance of integrating a holistic approach to health within programs. Ultimately, sharing of best practices through group discussions engaged participants to focus on novel, innovative ideas to increase numbers of adolescent males participating in EBIs and in accessing clinical services. Summit evaluation results suggest that participants intend to integrate lessons learned into the work they do with young men, or by sharing information with community partners. Moreover, participants highlighted one of the Summit's key points: the need to think beyond just programmatic efforts to include strategies that better create a safer, more comfortable and engaging environment for young men.

JSI identified the following focal areas for technical assistance for the remaining two years of the CDC community-wide initiative:

- ❖ Identification and inclusion of messages that encourage young men to see their own health as a whole, not just sexual health;
- ❖ Identification and inclusion of holistic health messages that will catalyze the facilitation of clinic linkages as well as the identification of community resources for EBI facilitators;
- ❖ Identification and inclusion of strategies for creating emotional safety during EBIs;
- ❖ Identification and integration of ice breakers that encourage sharing of personal stories in a non-judgmental space in EBIs;
- ❖ Utilization of key strategies into EBIs: Acknowledgement; Values; Sacred Purpose; and Security/Safety.

JSI will further discuss priorities with participants regarding male integration on the next YMP phone call. In the upcoming and last year of the project, JSI will continue to address needs through training, meetings and calls with the YMP representatives, and continued communication with the CDC about their male integration goals. JSI will continue to collaborate and partner with all the nationals and experts in the field who support Part A grantees in their work with adolescent males.

The findings from the Summit will be prioritized in JSI's work plan and will remain an important part of JSI's response to grantees' training needs.

Working Together with Diverse Communities:

Young Men's Program Summit

Agenda



JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc.

Promoting and Improving Health

Agenda for the Young Men's Program (YMP) Summit

Hilton Boston Back Bay Hotel
40 Dalton Street, Boston, MA 02115
September 26 – 27, 2013
JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc.

Goal

Increase Part A Grantees' skills to engage adolescent males in teen pregnancy prevention programs and in sexual and reproductive health services that are culturally competent and male friendly, taking into account where a young man is raised, the people with whom he has contact, and the opportunities and challenges of life presented to him that influence the health risks he faces and his sexual and reproductive health decision making.

Objectives

At the end of the Summit, participants will be able to:

1. Identify youth development strategies to engage young men in teen pregnancy prevention and begin to develop a plan to implement those strategies within the local projects EBIs' implementing partners;
2. Delineate the social conditions that influence young men's view of health, sexual behavior and perception of teen pregnancy and implications for community partnerships;
3. Pinpoint strategies to identify community partners (e.g., clinics, schools, FBOs, etc.) that are well suited to serve the needs of young men for the purpose of EBIs' implementation and access to sexual and reproductive health services;
4. State evidence-based adolescent friendly sexual and reproductive health services and activities supported through the Clinical Component;
5. Describe and explore opportunities to increase clinical linkages and further promote the sexual and reproductive health of adolescent males through the Youth Leadership Teams and other TPP initiatives; and
6. Outline efforts underway to engage and reach young men in other grantee sites to identify promising practices that are taking root in communities looking to reduce teen pregnancy.

Thursday, September 26, 2013 (8:45 am – 5:30 pm)

8:45 am – 9:30 pm

Facilitator: Myriam Hernandez Jennings, JSI

Welcome & Check In

Review the Young Men's Program: How is it working and shaping future work? This will be an opportunity to revisit the goals of the Young Men's Program. Participants will be able to have input in shaping the initiative for the next Fiscal year.

9:30 am – 12:00 pm

Presenter: Alex Vila

Engaging and Serving Adolescents Males Using Youth Development Strategies

Young people vote with their feet. Do you want to increase your service numbers in a quality way that leads to quantity? This training will introduce participants to the power of youth development strategies in a prevention and clinical setting to engage young people. The session will focus on safety, relationship building and youth leadership to be effective in attracting and retaining a key population: young males of color.

12:00 pm – 1:30 pm

LUNCH

1:30 pm – 3:00 pm

Presenter: Alex Vila

Morning Session Continued

3:00 pm – 3:30 pm

BREAK

3:30 pm – 5:00 pm

Presenter: Deen Tyler, The California Endowment

Health Equity for Young Men: What, Why, How, Whom

Young men have usually been seen as a significant part of the problem surrounding teen pregnancy with very limited attention to their role in prevention. Increasingly, this thinking is shifting and prevention specialists are seeking to strengthen approaches to engaging and serving young men. An important part of fulfilling this paradigm shift is understanding who and what conditions have contributed to their views on health and prevention. As well as recognizing who are the non-traditional partners within communities that are vital to helping young men in understanding that they have "health", so that prevention messages have a fertile place to rest and grow. Young men are seeking this engagement but strategies should be developed with the same respect and care afforded to young women at the highest risk for becoming young mothers.

5:00 pm – 5:30 pm

Closing

Friday, September 27, 2013 (8:45 am – 3:00 pm)

8:45 am – 9:00 am

Facilitator: Myriam Hernandez Jennings, JSI

Welcome & Check In

9:00 am – 10:15 am

Presenter: Karen Schlanger, Cicatelli Associates

Addressing the Sexual and Reproductive Health Needs of Adolescent Males Through the TPP Project: Where We've Been and Where We Can Go

In this session we will describe key approaches and activities of the Clinical Component of the TPP initiative, including the No Wrong Doors, No Missed Opportunities framework and basic information about the teen-friendly and evidence based sexual and reproductive health services promoted through the initiative. We will also share some key data related to the sexual and reproductive health needs of adolescent males and the roles adolescent males can play in teen pregnancy prevention. We will end the session by facilitating a discussion about potential ways the sexual and reproductive health needs of adolescent males can be further enhanced through the CLTs and other community-wide activities of the TPP initiative.

10:15 am – 10:30 am

BREAK

10:30 am – 12:00 pm

Presenters: Osvaldo Cruz and Mario Ozuna, National Compadres Network/National Latino Fatherhood & Family Institute

Social Determinants and Young Men's Reproductive Health

The environment in which a young man is raised, the people with whom he has contact, and the opportunities and challenges of life presented to him will influence the health risks he faces and his sexual and reproductive decision making. For this reason, enhancing the reproductive health of young men potentially necessitates a range of support activities—such as recreation, employment and training, and spiritual guidance—that promote healthy social development, a positive self-image, meaningful interpersonal relationships, educational attainment, and integration into the formal economy.

12:00 pm – 1:00 pm

LUNCH

1:00 pm – 2:30 pm

Facilitators: Osvaldo Cruz and Mario Ozuna, National Compadres Network/National Latino Fatherhood & Family Institute

Learning from Peers about Male Engagement

While male engagement has taken many forms over the years, the term has come to encompass any clinical, community outreach, and/or educational initiatives that improve males' ability to make informed decisions about theirs and their partners' health and sexual and reproductive health choices. Presenters and participants will describe strategies they are utilizing in their particular settings to engage young men and will outline the lessons learned in serving males.

2:30 pm – 3:00 pm

Evaluation & Closing

Young Men's Program Summit Speakers

Oswaldo “Ozzie” Cruz has been focusing primarily on working with at risk youth through community based programs, school evidence based programs and detention centers for the past fifteen years. Mr. Cruz currently holds the position of Prevention Specialist at El Sereno Healthy Start where he works with at risks boys and young men. Within his role in Healthy Start he delivers services at three schools, Farmdale Elementary, El Sereno Middle and Wilson High School. Mr. Cruz is also a member of The National Compadres Network (NCN), a not-for-profit organization that responds to local and national requests to address the growing needs of the Latino community, with a primary focus on providing services to Latino males. NCN has a cadre of nationally recognized leaders in many fields that provide consultation and technical assistance locally and nationally, guides and assists in the development of local “circulos” and provides training for service providers in a number of culturally competent curriculums addressing a variety of issues to include family violence, gang violence, teen pregnancy prevention, teen fatherhood, Latino Male Youth Rites of Passage, Fatherhood literacy, fatherhood parenting and other areas. Mr. Cruz currently facilitates a teen fatherhood program at Wilson High school, there he delivers fatherhood parenting classes for students who are enrolled in school and are expecting and or parenting fathers. It is through his experience and involvement in curriculum development that he continues to provide the necessary resources and support to improve the quality of life of young men, fathers and their families.

Mario Ozuna-Sanchez was born and raised in East Los Angeles, and grew up in a family impacted by alcoholism, domestic violence, gangs, and drug addicted family members. As a result of decisions he made during his adolescence, Mario became a father at the age of 15. However, he was able to accomplish his goals of finishing high school and going to college. Mario has over 16 years of experience developing and implementing cultural rites of passage, teen pregnancy prevention, gang intervention, and community violence prevention services in Santa Clara County, specializing in East San Jose. He is nationally recognized for his skills at developing and delivering culturally relevant services to reach and welcome the most marginalized young men and men in the community. Mario is a Senior Training and Program Specialist for the National Compadres Network, the lead national organization of the National Latino Fatherhood & Family Institute and the California Fatherhood Initiative.

Karen Schlanger, PhD, MPH is a Senior Technical Advisor of Performance Management and Quality Improvement at Cicitelli Associates, Inc. (CAI), a non-profit public health training and capacity building organization. At CAI, she serves as Senior Technical Advisor for the clinical component of the CDC/OAH Community-wide Teen Pregnancy Prevention initiative and Director of the Region IV STD-Related Reproductive Health Training and Technical Assistance Center (STDRRHAC). Karen received her MPH from UNC Chapel Hill and her PhD in Public Health from the University of Georgia. She has 17 years' experience developing and managing public health programs, conducting qualitative and quantitative program evaluations and research, providing training and technical assistance in community and clinical settings, and extensive experience addressing issues of health equity, access, and in enhancing health outcomes for individuals and communities.

Deen Tyler learned the distinction between a career and calling when he delved into community work as a fifth grade teacher. In the classroom he developed a passion for youth and realized the importance of education, positive relationships, family involvement, and the concept that education transcends the classroom. Deen has received a grant from Citibank to launch Dade County's first Business Club, was the Director of Programs position at TACOLCY Center of Liberty City, and has recently been selected National Urban Fellow. As a fellow, Deen will develop skill sets necessary to influence those in power to make the underserved a priority, inspire the underserved to make themselves and their communities a priority, and implement infrastructure that creates opportunities for youth to be self-sufficient thereby avoid self-destructive behavior.

Alejandra "Alex" Vila earned her B.A. at CSU East Bay, where she studied Humanities, Anthropology and Psychology. She also has a Masters in Divinity and Sacred Theology from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. A product herself of the youth development process, Alex has over 20 years of experience in the field. She has worked as a youth minister for the Catholic Church, a counselor at a shelter for youth runaways, a community gang specialist, executive director of a Boys and Girls Clubs and a field consultant and trainer. Alex understands the need to serve and educate youth populations that are difficult to serve, such as gang-involved youth; children with disabilities; recent immigrants, non-English speaking youth; gay/lesbian families and homeless youth. She has a passion for community collaboration and inclusion, as well as leadership development for both youth and adults.

JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc.

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About JSI:

John Snow, Inc., and its nonprofit affiliate JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc., are public health research and consulting firms dedicated to improving the health of individuals and communities throughout the world.

JSI builds local capacity to address critical health problems, collaborating with local partners to assist countries, governments, communities, families, and individuals to develop their skills and identify solutions that meet their public health needs. Through management assistance, research and evaluation, education, and training, JSI works to enable agencies and health professionals to provide appropriate services in an effective and compassionate manner.

For over 30 years, Boston-based JSI and its affiliates, including World Education, Inc. and the Institute for Family Health in Russia, have provided high-quality technical and managerial assistance to public health programs worldwide. JSI has implemented projects in 104 countries, and currently operates from eight U.S. and 81 international offices, with more than 500 U.S.-based staff, and 1,500 host country national field-based staff.