



YOUR Blessed Health (YBH) HIV/AIDS Prevention and Community Mobilization Flint/Genesee County, Michigan



Project Overview

- **YOUR Blessed Health (YBH) is a health education program designed to increase the capacity of 44 faith-based organizations and their faith leaders on the North and East sides of Flint to address HIV/AIDS among African American adolescents ages 11-25.**
- YBH includes five components: knowledge and skill building sessions for youth; information sessions for interested adults; training of pastors' wives and other church leaders who facilitate YBH; church events to raise the awareness of congregants; and community-based activities to build relationships between churches, strengthen interdenominational ties, and connect churches with community services and residents.
- The project is a partnership between YOUR Center, a faith-based community-based organization providing comprehensive HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment services to predominantly African Americans, the University of Michigan School of Public Health, and local churches.
- YBH received funding from the Ruth Mott Foundation for the 6-month pilot study (October 2006 to March 2007) and was awarded additional funding during the expansion of YBH (January 2008 to December 2009).
- YBH has indirectly reached more than 8,000 congregants and community residents through church-specific and community awareness activities.

Background: Sexual Health Problems in Flint/Genesee County, Michigan

- In Genesee County, African Americans are 4 times more likely to have HIV/AIDS than Whites.
- In 2007, African Americans living in Genesee County were diagnosed with Gonorrhea and Chlamydia at rates of 13.3 and 8.0 times greater, respectively, than the rate of Whites.
- Genesee County is presently experiencing a syphilis outbreak; in 2008, there were 82 reported cases of primary and secondary syphilis compared to an annual average of 4.8 cases during 2003-2007.

Highlights of YOUR Blessed Health Intervention Efforts

Church-specific Activities:

- Girls and Boys Nite In: Faith leaders (e.g., pastors and pastor's spouses) were asked by YBH staff to present elements (e.g., values and communications skills) of the YBH curriculum to 125 youth ages 11-19.
- Pastors included information in church bulletins regarding the syphilis outbreak; sermons and liturgical skits were delivered to bring HIV prevention messages to the forefront; sexual education was woven into existing programs such as the traditional Sunday school classes, bible study, and adult prayer groups.

HIV/AIDS Community Awareness Activities:

- Town Hall Meetings were held every other month with 50-70 participants including local, state, and federal politicians, the health department, health care representatives, residents, school representatives, and faith community.
- During the Juneteenth Celebration of 'African American Emancipation Day', condoms and literature were distributed along a 3-mile parade route, an HIV presentation was delivered, and HIV testing was provided.

YOUR Blessed Health Project Success

- The project has trained 3,391 youth and adult congregants, pastors' spouses, and other church leaders in 44 churches.
- To date, 430 people have been tested for HIV at YBH events, including dozens of pastors.

Policy Implications of YOUR Blessed Health

- We urge Congress to allocate funding to HIV/AIDS prevention efforts in Genesee County and to engage the secular community (particularly local and state politicians) to participate in YBH sponsored community events.

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