

CHOICE

Chatter
Spring 2008

Study Shows One in Four Young Women Has an STI

On March 11, 2008, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) released the results of a study examining the rate of individuals infected with the most common sexually transmitted infections (STI)—Chlamydia, herpes simplex virus 2, HPV, trichomoniasis—among young women aged 14-19. Nearly a quarter of those in the study tested positive for at least one sexually transmitted infection. Perhaps the most startling information to come out of the study is that 50% of the African-American young women tested had at least one of the STI's, as compared to their white and Latina peers who each had a rate of 20% testing positive. These numbers are particularly pertinent to the Community Education staff, as the majority of youth and teens that they work with are African American. Though these findings are troubling, they weren't a surprise to many at CHOICE. Jaime Beck, Manager of Hotline Programs said that based on her experience, the numbers were about what she expected. She noted that from February to March there was a 36% increase in Hotline calls from teens. Though the increase cannot be directly attributed to the study, it makes clear that teens are in desperate need of the sexual health resources and



information that CHOICE provides. Jaime believes that the study "reinforces the importance of what we're doing... and validates CHOICE as a viable and useful distributor of comprehensive sexual health information."

Educators in our Community Education (CE) department, on the other hand, were surprised by the number of young women infected. Community Education Coordinator Alanna Butler noticed that when discussing the results of the study, many of her students were not surprised by the statistics. Community Health Educator Alejandro Barreto had some of his students read the report and discussed it afterward. Many of them commented on the lack of information known about the STI rate for young men, making it seem that STI prevention is a women's problem. Alejandro believes that it would be beneficial to conduct a comprehensive study that focused on STI rates for both young men and women. This type of in-depth report could help youth see a complete picture of STI rates among their peers.

Clearly, the work of CHOICE is important now, more than ever to help continue to educate young people on how to take control of their reproductive and sexual health. The efforts that CHOICE has put forth with our comprehensive Hotlines and Community Education programs must continue to help build a healthier, better educated society.

CHOICE President's Corner

As the Presidential campaign continues, Americans are bombarded with talk of *CHANGE*. At CHOICE, we too are discussing change. Last year, we began the exciting and laborious process of strategic planning. Undertaking this process is a result of both our commitment to internal change as well as a response to external change in the nonprofit sector. The nonprofit sector has matured in many ways, with more influence, a higher public profile, and more attention to issues of capacity building, accountability, and organization performance.

Strategic planning is creating a vision for the future and managing toward that expectancy. It's an effective process for aligning short-term decisions with long-term goals. We plan to emerge from this process with a strategic plan that will allow us to operate under a vision, mission, and strategy umbrella that focuses the efforts of the organization to best continue our work.

Since January, a group of hardworking staff and board members have committed three Saturdays to challenging discussions on environment, programming, and operations. To

prepare for these sessions, five staff-board work groups researched environmental trends and surveyed a variety of stakeholders. The information, concerns, and ideas culled from the facilitated discussion sessions are being used to develop a three-year plan that is both visionary and realistic. The strategic planning committee is hard at work drafting the plan, which will be presented for approval at our September board meeting.

Throughout June and July, I will be contacting CHOICE supporters—randomly selected from our donor base—asking for input into some of the changes we've been discussing. If you get a call, I hope you'll spare a few minutes to share your concerns, aspirations, and ideas for the future of CHOICE. If you don't get a call but want to provide feedback, please telephone me at 215-985-3355 x113 or through email at brendag@choice-phila.org. As we courageously *take on change*, your opinion is important to us and my door is always open to you!

Brenda Lee Luen

CHOICE Takes Part in International Women's Day

On March 6th 2008 Hotline Counselor Rosemarie Ramos and Hotline Coordinator Alicia Rivera took part in the presentation of the Resolution in Honor of International Women's Day at City Hall. The Resolution was presented by City Councilwoman-at-Large Blondell Reynolds Brown, Councilwoman Marian Tasco and Councilman Bill Green. In addition to receiving the honor, there was also a speak-out organized by various community groups that allowed women in the community to talk about healthcare, immigration, domestic violence, and a variety of other local and international concerns.

The main goal for this event was to present newly elected Mayor Michael Nutter with a women's agenda and try

to reactivate the Philadelphia Commission on Women.

The International Women's Day Celebration on March 8th attracted approximately 150 women who took the time to share their personal and work experiences.

CHOICE also took an active roll in the planning committee for International Women's Day and we were delighted to work with organizations including Women Against Abuse, AACO, Asian American United, SEAMAC, Women's Medical Fund, National Association of Hispanic Nurses, Women in Transition, Women's Community Revitalization Project, Congreso de Latinos Unidos, and many others.

Family Planning Health Coverage for Women Begins

On February 1st, Pennsylvania joined many other states in offering a health coverage plan that allows women to obtain free family planning services. This exciting new program is life changing for many of the women CHOICE serves who frequently experience financial barriers to receiving reproductive health care. In order to

be eligible for these free services, women must be citizens or legal residents of both the United States and Pennsylvania, aged 18-44, not sterilized or currently pregnant, have no creditable insurance, and have an income at or below 185% the federal poverty line. Previously, women who could

not afford to pay full price for services paid on a sliding fee scale. For eligible women, essential reproductive health care services such as Pap smears, birth control, and HIV and STI testing are now free of charge with just the swipe of an AC-

CESS card. SelectPlan does not cover abortions but many in the reproductive health field are hopeful that access to free birth control methods and regular contact with reproductive health providers will reduce the occurrence of unplanned pregnancies.

Since the program began, the CHOICE Hotline number

has appeared in promotional materials distributed in the greater Philadelphia area. Hotline Counselors have spoken with 536 women since January about the new program and referred them to sites where the application can be filed. Both the Hotline Counselors and consumers are excited about the program. Jonathan Oppenheimer, a Counselor, stated, that "... overall it seems to be doing wonders for Pennsylvania

women.... [They] are very excited when they hear about it and how easy it is to apply, in particular that it doesn't involve going to the 'welfare' office and enduring the stigma attached to that.... Overall, it has exceeded my expectations."



CHOICE Community Education Continues to Grow

CHOICE's Community Education department (CE) has kept busy this spring educating the Philadelphia Community. With more demand for outreach than the four person staff can handle, CE staff has begun training the Hotline staff to conduct street outreach. This will allow CHOICE to be able to increase the number of those reached this summer.

In the fall of 2007, CE implemented a sliding fee scale for those schools and organizations that are able to pay for the workshops we provide. So far we've exceeded our honorarium goal for the year. All education revenue will go right back into providing education services so that we can continue to provide programming to those organizations that are unable to pay. CHOICE is committed to providing educational services, regardless of an organization's ability to pay.

Our Educators continue to build strong relationships with other community organizations. Our bi-lingual Educator, Alejandro Barreto has begun to collaborate with Women Organized Against Rape (WOAR) and has opened new doors for CE to reach the Latino community. As a result of the increased

work with the Latino community, we are seeing an increase in calls from Spanish speakers on the Hotlines. CE is also expanding its workshop reach to include hospital based youth programs. Community Education Coordinator Alanna Bulter is currently working with the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia's Sickel Cell Youth Clinic to provide our interactive, youth-friendly workshops to young people affected with this disease. Another CE Educator, Sasha Wright, has completed teaching workshops in Mastery Charter Schools for the school year. Sasha's position this year was funded through a grant from the Brook J. Lenfest Foundation to help CHOICE meet the growing needs of this charter school district. CE also has a commitment to reaching LGBT youth of Philadelphia and Tiffany Thompson, Manager of Community Education Programs, has secured a contract with the School District of Philadelphia to join other LGBT organizations in the city that service those youth.

The CE department is looking forward to a summer filled with outreach, workshops, and health fairs, providing Philadelphiaans with reproductive and sexual health information.

CHOICE Spotlight

As one of six professional Hotline Counselors staffing the CHOICE Hotlines, Ash Robbins has lively days filled with providing referrals and short term counseling to callers. Some of the most unforgettable calls are from women looking for prenatal care in Northeast Philly. With very few referrals in that area, their only option for receiving care during their pregnancy is to travel outside their neighborhoods and often face long waiting times before they get an appointment. Even with her busy schedule, Ash identified a need and took action to increase prenatal referrals explaining that, "Conversations with women struggling to find care in their neighborhood and in a timely manner led me to investigate adding more prenatal care referrals to our database." With the help of a survey conducted by the Maternity Care Coalition, Ash has been able to identify nearly 30 prenatal care sites across the city and is in the process of obtaining preliminary information about their practices. In collaboration with the Dept. of Public Health: Division of Maternal, Child, and Family Health, CHOICE is currently setting up site visits to our new potential referrals.



Ash's research and dedication to expand CHOICE's prenatal referrals is just part of her interest in helping women

and children. She began working at CHOICE in August 2007 out of an interest in learning more about healthcare from an advocacy perspective before continuing her education to become a nurse. After she completed the extensive six week Hotline Counselor training, she is prepared to discuss, counsel, and refer on many different topics related to sexual, reproductive, and public health. In addition to counseling over the phone, Hotline Counselors at CHOICE provide short-term case management for pregnant women applying for Medical Assistance, advocate for consumers and write feedbacks to Family Planning clinics, update information and referrals in our database, check appointment availability for Family Planning Clinics, and participate in workshops and other trainings to keep our information fresh.

In her spare time, Ash is training to be a doula, an experienced, non-medical assistant who provides physical, emotional and informed choice support in prenatal care, during childbirth, and during the postpartum period, who is available to enhance the health care team and work along side of doctors and midwives. Ash's training was provided by the Philadelphia Alliance for Labor Support who provides doulas free of charge to low-income families. Ash states that "Being a doula parallels a lot of the training, research, and work experience I have had at CHOICE. Conversations with women about the choices and barriers they have encountered in their pregnancies have inspired me to continue work on these issues." Ash continues to work on issues at CHOICE such as looking into pregnancy support that include the home-nurse visiting programs for first time moms, postpartum counseling, doula services, and information for undocumented pregnant women.

"I found out everything I thought I knew about sex was wrong and now I'm more comfortable with it."

Philadelphia High School Student

Your Tax Stimulus Check Could Help Thousands

You may be one of the millions of American households who will receive a check from the Federal Government as part of the 2008 Tax Stimulus Package. While there are many ways to spend this additional income, we would like you to consider donating some, or all of your tax stimulus check to CHOICE so we can continue to provide high quality sexual and reproductive education and referrals to more than 55,000 individuals in the Philadelphia area each year.

For more than 35 years, through times of national economic uncertainty, seven presidents, six mayors, and countless challenges to reproductive rights, CHOICE remains committed to breaking down barriers for access to care. Your tax stimulus income will help ensure that CHOICE continues to provide these vital services for years to come. If you have any questions or would like more information about donating your tax stimulus check or other ways you can give to CHOICE, please contact our Development Associate, Bethany Andorfer Morley at bethany@choice-phila.org or at (215)985-3355. Thank you for supporting CHOICE.

CHOICE Board Chair Receives Leadership Award

At the 10th Annual *Women Making a Difference* reception, held March 28, Councilwoman-at-Large Blondell Reynolds Brown saluted 11 women leaders who have "dedicated their lives to uplifting their communities." We are proud to announce that Jody B. Greenblatt, President of the CHOICE Board of Directors, was acknowledged as one of the "*The Next Generation of Leadership Making a Difference*."

The annual event, produced by Councilwoman Brown, is held during Women's History Month to honor public service minded women who have significantly contributed to the community. The event benefits local nonprofit groups that support women, arts education, and youth programs.

"What you do from nine to five is not the critical factor because all of us are out here to make a living," the councilwoman said, explaining the selection criteria. "I'm interested in what you do in the space you occupy after five o'clock." A long time supporter, Ms Greenblatt was elected to the CHOICE Board of Directors in 2004, and assumed the demanding role of Board President in 2007, continuing to devote countless *after five* hours to CHOICE. An attorney specializing in children's welfare, she is the mother of a young son.

CHOICE CHATTER

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Spring

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CHOICE Services

The CHOICE Hotline helps callers make informed personal decisions about their sexual and reproductive health care needs. CHOICE counselors provide education, counseling, and referrals to people who are often in crisis when they call and require immediate, accurate, and unbiased health care information. Call the CHOICE Hotline for answers to your questions about: Birth Control, Emergency Contraception, Pregnancy Options, Prenatal Care, HIV/AIDS, and Sexually Transmitted Infections. Call (215) 985-3300 or 1-800-848-3367.

The State AIDS Factline provides HIV/AIDS related information, counseling, and referrals to medical and social service providers for people throughout the state of Pennsylvania. Call 1-800-662-6080.

The Blueprint for a Safer Philadelphia is a 10-year community-based violence prevention program designed to eliminate youth homicides in Philadelphia. The Blueprint Hotline serves as a clearinghouse to link parents and teens to educational and family support services, connect individuals to volunteer opportunities, and engage community organizations to work with one another to combat youth violence in the city. Call 1-888-570-BLUE.

The Maternal and Children's Health Line provides assistance to pregnant women and families with children applying for free and low-cost health insurance programs. Health Line counselors also provide information and referrals for children's primary medical care services, including immunizations, and advocate for consumers who experience difficulty navigating the health care system. Call (215)985-3301.

For Information in Additional Languages: Spanish speakers can call: (215) 985-3350, for TTY: (215) 985-3309. For assistance in any language other than English/Spanish, CHOICE uses a third-party translation service to interpret calls.

The CHOICE Community Education Department provides information through workshops and outreach efforts to more than 28,000 individuals each year. Educators provide workshops and information to participants as young as nine through adulthood. CHOICE is approved by the Philadelphia Public School District to teach and provide sexual education materials in the schools. To arrange a program, call (215) 985-3355.

For more information about our workshops and Hotlines, or to receive materials, please call CHOICE at (215) 985-3355 and we will be happy to assist you.