

Building Resilience in Adolescent Communities of Color

Eddyson Altidor, Jenna Gobel, Sadik Karma, Sumanya Kumar, Timothy Lagosh, Brian Liang, Alison Lopez-Valdivia, Raquel Manley DMD, Conor McCarthy, Jack Mountain, Mishil Nana, Iram Nasreen, Catherine Qiu, Jose Rodriguez-Sanchez, Vanessa Russo, Caroline Thomas, Madeline Walker

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Abstract

The Adolescent Interest Group hoped to explore the unique issues this population faces. The Interest Group considered how the population can build resilience and how to establish resilience specifically in our communities of color. Group meetings consisted of article reviews, guest speakers, community outreach, and curriculum development. The speaker, Dr. Anton Alerte, discussed factors that build resilience and then highlighted specifics for African American adolescents. Over the course of meetings, the Interest Group was involved with a group called Pathway-Senderos in New Britain, Connecticut. Members of this Interest Group and other UST members developed and oversaw short curriculums designed to address prevalent issues this inner city adolescent population experiences. The Interest Group concluded with the development of 3 curriculums to be used for future involvement with the Pathways-Senderos group. The monthly article review topics and takeaways from the guest speaker were considered to design relevant curriculums with resiliency development in mind.

Background

The goal of the UST/Adolescent IG was to explore adolescent health and gain the tools to treat adolescents in the future while simultaneously engaging our local communities. Our project was to explore resilience in adolescent communities of color and create activities to educate high risk teens in coordination with Pathways-Senderos. Resilience is defined as the ability to adapt well in the face of hard times. Young adults face a myriad of stressful situations as they transition from youth to adulthood. The COVID-19 pandemic has added an extra layer of stress from isolation, increased social media use, and/or the death of a loved one. It is important to build resilience in adolescence to help them thrive despite the challenges they face. Pathways-Senderos is an after-school program for high-risk teens in New Britain, CT that seeks to eliminate teen pregnancy by addressing its root causes. UST/IG students participated in the program in order to better understand what makes this program so successful.

Objectives

- Educate ourselves regarding challenges adolescents face and how to encourage the development of resilience
- Learn specific issues facing adolescents of color
- Provide a platform for adolescents to talk about their health and various challenges they may face in relation to their health with the theme of developing resiliency

Methods

1. The group consists of 3 co-leads, who are 2nd years, a senior UST coach, an alumni partner, and 12 other students.
2. The group met on a monthly basis and the leadership team had an additional monthly meeting.
3. Each meeting had 2-3 student led current event presentations related to adolescent health and subsequent student led and focused discussions.
4. There was 1 guest speaker on the topic of building resiliency in communities of color
5. UST/IG students went to Pathways-Senderos about every other Friday afternoon beginning in December '21. (smoking cessation, stress relief, self esteem enhancement)
6. There was 1 adolescent case study discussed
7. Created 3 short curriculum pathways for future outreach

Results

There were a total of 5 meetings; 10 article presentations; 1 guest speaker, 1 case study, and development of 3 curriculums. We reviewed relevant topics in adolescent health and how to expand our role in addressing the topics discussed

Educational Efforts:

- Monthly article review topics:
 - Suicide, eating disorders, mental health, continuity of care, access to opioid use disorder treatment, use and availability of contraception and condoms, queer sex education, the “Don’t Say Gay” bill in Florida, inadequate fruit and vegetable intake, substance use, and risky sexual behaviors
- 3 short curriculums developed for future outreach activities:
 1. Healthy Eating
 2. Safe Sex
 3. LGBTQIA+ allyship
- Guest speaker presentation:
 - Takes a long time to build resilience, need to start at young age
 - Protective factors include ≥ 1 trusted adult at home and/or at school; we need to help adolescents find and identify these individuals
 - Factors that help build resilience in African American teens:
 - Positive racial self-identity; positive self-concept; emotional self-efficacy; cognitive development; academic self esteem
 - The assumption in the African American community, from when kids are very young, is that they’re not going to make it very far in life, told that they’re less gifted, not as capable. This is what we need to curtail, even in our history taking
 - “Assume you’re walking into the room of the next Lin Manuel Miranda...you’re looking at the prequel/backstory of what could be an incredible future...treat them this way!”
 - We should look at the protective and positive factors, change the ways we ask questions so they look more like this
 - “What topics in school are you good at? What are you really good at? What kind of friend are you (the funny one, flirty one, social one, wise one)? What are your dreams?”



Fig 1. Dr. Anton Alerte (guest speaker) A practicing pediatrician in Hartford and an Associate Professor of Pediatrics and Co-Director of the Clinical Suite Courses at UConn Health

Drinking straw vs. Coffee stirrer straw activity - Smoking Cessation at Pathway-Senderos

Drinking straw activity: pass out a straw to each student, have them pinch their nose, and breathe out of the straw for 30 seconds

- How did that feel? Was it hard? Was it easy?

Coffee-stirrer straw: have the students do the same thing for 20 seconds instead of 20

- Ask the same questions

The drinking straw relates to how a smoker breathes normally. The coffee stirrer straw demonstrates how a person with chronic lung disease breathes normally.

Fig. 2a. Smoking cessation activity example performed at Pathway-Senderos

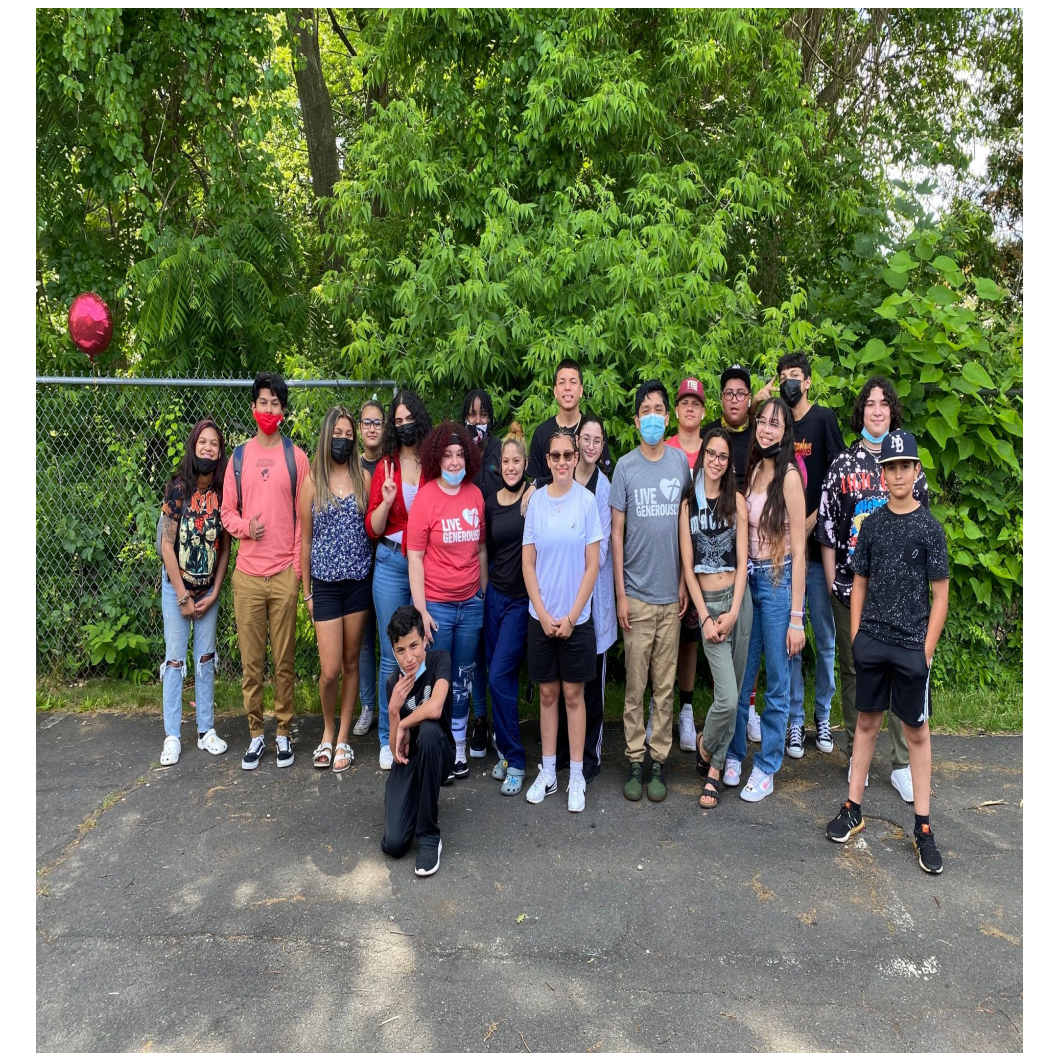


Fig. 2b. Adolescents from the Pathways/Senderos Center

Discussion

Adolescent's are a unique population because this period of life is transitional. Some components of adolescence don't fit into what is generally associated with pediatric patients, but adolescents are not yet adults. This transition from pediatric to adult has unique health implications, as both physically and mentally these young people are changing. They are gaining more independence and starting to make more decisions for themselves.

With growing older and gaining independence, these patients are faced with social challenges from exposures to new situations, including romantic relationships, sex, and drug and alcohol use. On top of that, they're balancing responsibilities from their parents or caregivers, and they're concerned about doing well in school and planning for their futures.

It is because of these challenges and new experiences adolescents face that we wanted to specifically address resiliency. We looked at resiliency with the lens of our communities of color:

What implications does belonging to a community of color mean for the development to adulthood? What resources or lack of resources are present for these groups?

Students within Pathways/Senderos program are more likely to be from lower income households with spanish speaking parents. These students are actively experiencing the issues we discussed in our monthly article reviews. By applying knowledge surrounding these issues and understanding what needs to be employed to build resilience we can establish worthwhile short curriculums for these adolescents.

Conclusion and Future Direction

The Adolescent IG successfully met the goals of the community outreach project by developing various activities to educate teens on important health topics to help build resilience. We are hoping to provide these activities to other after school programs across the state of Connecticut. We also hope to volunteer at other programs similar to Pathways across CT in order to better understand what makes one of these youth programs so successful and how we can contribute to them.

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