

## Locally-Developed HIV/AIDS Prevention Intervention Profile



### New York State

**Project title:** A-Tech (AIDS Prevention & Technology)

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**Population served by this intervention:** High risk adolescents and young adults ages 13-21.

**Length of time this intervention has been funded:** Five years

**Goal:** To reduce the risk and prevalence of HIV/AIDS, STDs and unplanned pregnancy among high risk youth ages 13-21.

**Intervention specific activities:**

A-Tech is guided by the Trans-theoretical Model of Behavior Change (TTM), Positive Youth Development and Cognitive Learning Theory.

The foundation of A-Tech is the ten session group-level intervention, *Proud, Educated, Empowered, Responsible* (P.E.E.R.) curriculum, developed by the AIDS Council and evaluated by an independent evaluator (Provider Consulting Solutions, Inc.) for efficacy in 2005. A-Tech, designed in conjunction with youth, integrates P.E.E.R. with ten additional technology-

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based sessions that reinforce each of the main topic areas and engage youth in skills-building in a culturally competent manner. Technology was integrated into this intervention due to input from the target demographic via focus groups. Every other session (*Rewind* sessions), youth create a technology-based project (music, video, podcast, stop motion animation, web page etc.) that reinforces information and skills learned in previous sessions. These projects have a corollary benefit of providing youth with skills applicable in work environments, thereby increasing their employability.

Sessions are mixed gender or single gender and group size is generally 7-10 participants. A-Tech groups are facilitated at sites where at-risk youth congregate (e.g. Job Corps, community drop-in center, housing authority community center, alternative school setting etc.). Each 90-minute session utilizes a participant and/or a trained peer educator as a group leader to co-facilitate session content and activities with the staff facilitator.

A-Tech sessions are experiential, activities-based and tailored to the group dynamics. All sessions build behavioral skills that impact risk and risk reduction. The A-Tech Curriculum includes 20 sessions. The *Rewind* sessions reinforce the information and skills obtained in the previous sessions via technology projects created by youth to share with friends, families, social network communities and others.

- Week 1: Getting To Know You
- Week 2: HIV 101
- Week 3: HIV Rewind
- Week 4: STDs 101
- Week 5: STD Rewind
- Week 6: Healthy Relationships
- Week 7: Healthy Relationships Rewind
- Week 8: Communication
- Week 9: Communication Rewind
- Week 10: Self-Esteem
- Week 11: Self-Esteem Rewind
- Week 12: Decision Making
- Week 13: Decision Making Rewind
- Week 14: Goal Setting
- Week 15: Goal Setting Rewind
- Week 16: The Real World
- Week 17: The Real World Rewind
- Weeks 18 & 19: Taking it to the Streets
- Week 20: Conclusion and Final Project Presentation

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For more information about content for these sessions, including viewing sample sessions, contact T.J. Smith.

### **Social determinants of health/co-morbidities addressed by this intervention:**

- STD
- Viral hepatitis
- Incarceration
- Substance use/abuse
- Domestic violence
- Other:       Sexual health rights & responsibilities
- Unplanned pregnancy

### **New technologies utilized in this intervention:**

- Mobile phones
- Podcasts
- Social networking websites (e.g. Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, etc.)
- Other:       Prevention focused computer games, music with prevention message and/or prevention website created by youth
- Public Service Announcement for TV, YouTube, websites

### **Costs of developing and implementing this intervention:**

Project staff time funded by New York State Department of Health grants. The independent evaluation of the intervention funded by foundation grants

Technology equipment (e.g. laptops, video cameras, cell phones, disposable cameras, music keyboards, software, etc.) purchased through a combination of funding sources including New York State Department of Health grants, federal member-item funds and private grants. After initial purchase of equipment, costs are limited to staff time, travel and limited supplies.

To view an Equipment Table, highlighting suggested equipment needs and approximate prices, contact T.J. Smith.

### **Evaluation findings related to this intervention:**

The core, non-technology curriculum (P.E.E.R.) was evaluated for efficacy with teens and young adults in 2005. Pre and post evaluations identified the following outcomes:

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- 50.4 percent increase in the number of participants who reported consistent condom use or increased condom use.
- 70.4 percent of participants accessed testing offered by the AIDS Council or another agency.
- 16.6 percent increase in the number of youth who reported their partners had also received HIV/STD testing.
- 14 percent increase in the number of participants who reduced the number of sexual partners by at least one.
- 11.1 percent of participants reported a return to abstinence.
- 8.4 percent increase in the number of participants who identified they had decreased the number of "casual" sex partners by at least one.

A-Tech is currently being evaluated for efficacy. The evaluation is expected to be completed in December 2011. Currently, the AIDS Council offers HIV/STD testing on-site before and/or after the group sessions and anecdotal data shows that pairing HIV/STD testing with the intervention increases the likelihood of youth accessing testing. Based on data obtained following previous A-Tech programs, stratified by program site, it was found that:

- Housing Authority: 100 percent of youth who completed all sessions of A-Tech received HIV/STD testing.
- Community drop-in site: 70 percent of participants chose to test with the AIDS Council. One youth was too young to test due to rapid testing technologies utilized by the AIDS Council but she was referred to another agency for testing.
- Alternative School: Although testing was not provided at the Alternative School, 63 percent of participants who completed A-Tech reported receiving testing at a Youth Outreach Center where the AIDS Council provides testing.

### Lessons learned:

Working with technology:

- *Be sure to have a good system in place for the transport and security of technological equipment:* Implementation of interventions at a variety of community sites necessitates carrying equipment for technology projects, which can sometimes be difficult.
- *Not all sites have access to the internet for posting projects:* As funding allows, youth can be provided with flash drives to copy their projects to their social networking sites.
- *It is the process, not the product:* Working closely with prevention information to create the projects leads to valuable skills-building even if the results might be grainy, out of focus, hard to hear, incomplete, etc.

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Facilitating the intervention:

- *Technology skills are not a requirement:* The facilitator does not have to be highly skilled in all software and/or hardware but should have a basic knowledge of the technology and software used.
- *Roles of Group Leader and Mentor:* These are incorporated into each session, are valued by the youth and enhance positive leadership skills and behavior in other settings (e.g. school, work, home, etc.).
- *Facilitators must have a lot of resources and referral information on hand:* This information is often needed to assist youth with multiple needs such as housing, food, employment, education, domestic/family violence, etc. One-on-one sessions are a frequent addition to the group intervention.

Overcoming challenges:

- *Recruitment and retention:* This is a challenge in community settings and where participation is voluntary. Word-of-mouth networking (both online and in person) amongst the youth is a successful mechanism for recruiting new participants. Also, consider the use of incentives and/or refreshments (as budgets allow) to enhance recruitment and retention.
- *High number of sessions:* Reducing the number of sessions is an acceptable adaptation, though efficacy has not been studied. Determining the sessions to delete and/or combine will depend on group dynamics, interests and needs.

### **Other information you should know, related to this intervention:**

Costs:

- Initial cost for starting a technology based program is high; upkeep is low and mostly involves updating antiviral software (the AIDS Council uses freeware as much as possible).
- The AIDS Council applies for grants whenever possible to fund larger, more polished projects.

Working with technology:

- As youth develop technology and prevention skills, the type and quality of the technology projects improves. Youth have created a billboard, bus wrap, and PSA ("The Price is Life") currently aired on local and cable TV); a teen website ([www.hivoutreach2teens.com](http://www.hivoutreach2teens.com)); and multiple music, games, and other projects of high quality.

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### The way forward:

The AIDS Council will continue and expand the project to include increased opportunities for youth leadership to impact community norms. Additionally, upcoming plans include:

- A community profile through photography;
- A viral text messaging initiative; and
- Several new web pages for and/or redesign of the Teen H.O.T. Spot website ([www.hivoutreach2teens.com](http://www.hivoutreach2teens.com)), including:
  - "Been There, Done That": Teen advice on domestic violence, gang involvement, substance use, etc. from youth who have experience in effectively addressing these issues;
  - "Teens in the News": Current events about teen issues with a community response chat board;
  - "Myth buster": Designed to debunk HIV, STD, and pregnancy myths prevalent among teens; and
  - A web-based radio station to "slide" prevention messages in via PSAs, ads, and music created by youth.

Many youth want to continue beyond the designated sessions. There has been no additional evaluation to identify benefits of extending the intervention. As additional funding opportunities allowed, the AIDS Council established a Peer Educator program for youth who were interested in expanding their leadership skills and providing both formal and informal peer education in their setting. The AIDS Council continues to look for funding to expand "post-graduate" opportunities.

### Additional resources:

To view some of the projects youth have created as a result of their A-Tech participation, visit the teen-created website: *Teen H.O.T. Spot* ([www.hivoutreach2teens.com](http://www.hivoutreach2teens.com))

For additional resources listed below, to purchase a curriculum and/or to schedule a training for A-Tech or P.E.E.R., contact T.J. Smith.

- WE nEd 2 tlk: Using the Language of Technology to Engage Youth in HIV/STD (STI)/ Pregnancy Prevention (PowerPoint presentation)
- A-Tech: See Us In Action! (Flash "Muvie" and PowerPoint)