

# Strength in Action: Supporting Our Nation's Most Vulnerable Youth Podcast Series – Kafui Doe

## **Episode: Working Together**

[John Bollenbacher:] Welcome to Strength in Action: Supporting Our Nation's Most Vulnerable Youth, a podcast series by the Family and Youth Services Bureau within the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. This series is produced by FYSB's Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Program, as part of The Exchange.

I'm John Bollenbacher, a producer for The Exchange. Here in the podcast we talk with people implementing programs that prevent teen pregnancy and help prepare teens for adulthood. While overall teen birth rates are decreasing, we're not done yet. Teen births remain high among vulnerable youth.

Today we're joined by Kafui from D.C. and Kafui why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself and the work you're doing.

[Kafui Doe]: My name is Kafui Doe. I'm the Health Education Manager at the D.C. Office of the State Superintendent of Education. In regards to PREP, I serve as the Project Director, Principal Investigator. My role at OSE, which we call it, is to oversee Health and Physical Education programming, school health services. I oversee three federal grants: PREP, our CDC-1305 Grant, which is in partnership with our Department of Health, which focuses on obesity prevention, and our CDC-1308, which is our HIV STD.

[John Bollenbacher]: So tell us a little bit about the strategy that your programs take in battling unwanted teen pregnancies.

[Kafui Doe]: When we first started PREP, when we wanted to apply for the application, of course, we checked in with our various district agencies to see if anyone else was going to apply and we also wanted to make sure that whatever we did was collaborative in nature. And so when we did the initial application when we received notification that we can move forward with the state plan, we actually consulted with our CBOs to get their perspective on what the needs are around pregnancy prevention, even asking questions about what type of programs are out there, if they were to get funding, how would they like it structured, even down to the amount. So we took that information, did some research for best practices on evidence based promising programs, things of that sort, and then we worked with different organizations, district agencies actually, to see how they modeled working with other organizations since we knew we were going to give it to CBOs that worked in schools around the community. So from there, we submitted our grant and that's how it began. So when DC PREP came onboard we also had the previous CDC Cooperative Agreement, and with that structure it was more of program based, you know, just pushing out programs. But we wanted to make this one a little bit more structured. We knew that some of the organizations we were working with did not have some of the capacity that we needed in order to even report the numbers. So we try to be mindful, how do we alleviate the stress and the administrative burden on our CBOs and have them actually work towards implementing their evidence-based program or promising program. So the way we structured it is when we gave them the grants, we said we will enter your data for you. Just give us your pre- and post-session

forms, we will enter it. Even before we actually got the new entry and exit surveys, we created our questions so we looked at the youth risk behavior survey, looked at different tools, just to kind of develop that tool and pilot and we got feedback. We started with the big scope and narrowed them down. So we got that buy-in from our CBOs, of, you know, this work does, this doesn't work and as the years progressed through PREP they got excited because the questions started narrowing a little bit more and it was beneficial for them for other programs. With that, when we started securing additional funds and legislation started passing, we wanted to make sure that PREP was the example for those programs. So our CDC-1305 and CDC-1308 actually is modelled off how PREP is structured because it was working very well with our CBOs. And so one example I would use is the resource guide that we developed through PREP. We wanted to expand that for schools because we were just focusing with our CBOs. So from there we made it a little bit more youth friendly and we had youth come in and give their perspective and design and everything, and then we also developed a tracking system through our quick base system. And so we just did a soft launch in January, hoping we can spread it. But those are some of the things PREP was able to kind of facilitate more of the other programs and then also just be that anchor and that example for other similar health topics.

[John Bollenbacher]: And I know that we touched on this already a little bit, but can you talk about why you think PREP has been so successful and why you've modelled other programs using the PREP model?

[Kafui Doe]: It's the flexibility of how to run the program. It wasn't like a cookie cutter type of grant. It was just that flexibility and even having time in between applications, not trying to pull all the ideas at once. Having those two stages where you can do your initial application and then working with your partners or stakeholders to kind of design a little bit more thoughtful program was helpful.

[John Bollenbacher]: So you're based out of Washington D.C., it's pretty much a completely urban setting. Can you talk a little bit about some of the challenges of maybe running these kinds of programs in a very urban environment?

[Kafui Doe]: For community based organizations there's a lot of turnover, and so for our staff it's a lot of training. Retraining new people of how the program functions, and what are some things that were required, and things of that sort. But one of our concerns is the youth that they work with, building that rapport with them. And so a lot of community based organizations rely on, like, service learning type of organizations like AmeriCorps to come in and do that work, but the sustainability of that is some of the challenges we're seeing. And so, once we get someone on board and the kids are vibing with them then they're leaving at the end of the year. So those are some of the things I'm noticing. I would also say initiatives in the city is another thing. Priority, so like, if obesity is the priority for one year then, you know, sexual health or pregnancy prevention takes a few steps back or it'll shift to where pregnancy prevention is at a top of the game at one point. And so just trying to balance those priorities and making sure that the work is consistent and each fiscal year you're not questioning if a program is going to continue or not.

[John Bollenbacher]: And what are you doing to counteract some of those challenges?

[Kafui Doe]: That's where we're doing the cross collaborations, so modelling different programs kind of looks similar in coordinating those efforts. Even working with organizations that have an interest in it, so like, for example, the Department of Health, they have pregnancy prevention dollars. How do we collaborate with them to make sure that both programs are working in sync versus in silos, and so just

cross collaborating to make sure that one program is not in a silo but working together where one needs the other so then there's no discussion of eliminating one or the other.

[John Bollenbacher]: And what about turnover? Do you guys have strategies in place to deal with that challenge?

[Kafui Doe]: So the district, well, in terms of government, it's not as high, but in the CBO level there is, but because we have MOAs and MOUs, it's a little bit more tangible so even if we're re-orienting someone there's something in place where it's kind of like, no this has been here, so you just can't just change the game just because someone else has a different initiative or perspective.

[John Bollenbacher]: And I know from some of the other conversations we had that partnerships are so important when you're doing this kind of work and you clearly have a lot of partners. Can you talk a little bit about how and why maybe you've been so successful at attracting partners to do this kind of work?

[Kafui Doe]: So one of the things we try to do is, we know we can't do everything and so we try not to be Big Brother, since we are a government agency, it's more so how can we work together to kind of fill whatever capacity issues one organization may have or the other. Another thing is that everyone's an expert at the table so it doesn't really matter in terms of how much resources one organization has but it's just more so how can we fill in the gaps. And so, for example, Planned Parenthood is one of our subgrantees. We have about six staff on our team. Everyone has their expertise but the time is an issue, and so we did a reproductive model training. We know that we can get the rooms set up, all this other stuff, get the materials, but in terms of sitting down and actually developing a training is something that was a challenge during that time. So we reached out to Planned Parenthood and said "Hey, can you come partner with us? We'll work with you, we'll co-facilitate with you. Let's develop a training that we can give to our school teachers and also other CBOs that may not really focus on the tangible, how-to-use-a-condom type of thing." And they say "Sure." So they came and we had over 50 teachers come and it was just powerful to see that interaction where a government agency and a community based organization work together so well to provide a resource that was in need. And a lot of teachers kind of took that and was like "We want you at our schools. Can you provide more trainings?" And so Planned Parenthood had the opportunity to provide additional trainings for those teachers where before they didn't have that interaction directly with schools, and so just having something that small and show that there's an impact from that and then having a success record with that process kind of builds that trust that we have with each of our stakeholders. And so we're able to kind of identify, okay, "you have this, I have this, I may be missing this but I see that you can help me here and I can help you there." It's been one of our strengths and we don't come in as we're going to take over your programs. It's more we work as partners in identifying what those priorities are.

[John Bollenbacher]: So do you think that in the initial stages that it's because of your proven track record that attracts these partners or do you think that there's other strategies that you can use when you approach somebody to kind of get them on board and interested in working with you?

[Kafui Doe]: Yeah, so my team, we're a little more, we're more solution oriented so when we come in, we observe. We don't just come like "this is all we have, here it is." We're more so "let's sit back and see what's there," offer what we have and just kind of take a step back and then provide solutions of, because we don't just jump into a partnership. We try to test something out and if it becomes successful then we try to push the envelope a little bit more. One thing we noticed is that people don't put their

business out there of what doesn't work, and we did. We're like, look, we tried this, it didn't work. Have you all had success in that? And some organizations have and so they felt that they had a major role into providing that for us and so I think it's just more so the balance.

[John Bollenbacher]: And you folks also do a lot of mentoring, right?

[Kafui Doe]: Yeah. So we have a Youth Advisory Committee and that's also, so we have two YAC coordinators, YAC is Youth Advisory Committee, and we had this program, it's going into their 6<sup>th</sup> year. And so we have one PREP coordinator, whose YAC coordinator, and we have a CDC-1308. Even though, the way the program's structured, the kids come in every single week, Wednesdays from 5 til 7. And there they get trained in different topics, we have different CBOs, we have district agencies, we even have our staff come in and work with the kids. Because it's a stable environment, having two consistent coordinators there, has built the momentum so we have students who've been in the program since 8<sup>th</sup> grade and graduated from high school in the program. And the way we structure is more youth development. We don't say "this is what you all are going to focus for the year." It's, at the orientation, identify the issues in DC, how do you want to solve them, if you had all the resources, what would you do to conquer those, and then we take that information and we built the program for that year based off the information we get from that youth. The kids select the incoming students, they interview them, they read their applications, and we take the names off so there no biases around that, and then we just try to make it as youth friendly as possible where they are the decision makers and also inform our work. So if we're trying a new project that is youth focused, we bring it to them and then they give us our feedback. We also provide our youth to other district agencies that may not have youth programs and so they come to us and they'll do focus groups with our youth on some new initiatives that they're working on. And so, for example, the Department of Health wanted to do a campaign so they came and asked them about key messages and things of that sort that will resonate with them and then they provide them feedback. Large LEAs also came to them from different central offices to come and ask them for their input. So we try to maximize the kids and we also want them to see the result of their work. So whoever we partner with, we don't want them just to come, get what they need, and then just leave, but then actually give us the finished product so we can show the kids this is what you contributed to the District.

[John Bollenbacher]: It's very interesting because a lot of the programs that we've talked about aren't necessarily directly linked to teen pregnancy, but at the same time they're effective in bringing down unplanned pregnancies. Can you talk a little bit about that feedback loop and why it's so effective?

[Kafui Doe]: Well, I know for our youth, when we train them, it is sexual health, pregnancy prevention, everything. We have six different stations, and they all focus on different aspects of sexual health. And we have our past YAC members come and facilitate those sessions. And seeing the interactions where they're gaining their knowledge, it also creates behavior change for them. So it's kind of like they see the "a-ha moment" with their peers and it's like they have that role, like, okay "I'm a facilitator, I'm teaching someone this so then I have to practice what I preach." Another thing is in D.C. we have a condom distribution program so they're comfortable with using terminology, teaching, or distributing condoms, and things of that sort. Even with their personal lives, if they're seeing friends or anything like that, they know that they have an adult figure or an organization that will support them without any shame or anything like that. So they're comfortable to talk about sex or anything like that, and so because we keep that open environment, give them that responsibility to educate others, I think it lets them think

about the choices they make and knowing, okay, "if I do engage in something that may result to pregnancy or anything, I know what options I have." And so just making a more conscious decision, I think, contributes to that.

[John Bollenbacher]: Can you talk really briefly about PREP grants and why you think they're unique opportunities and also why you think people who haven't gone for PREP money, but are thinking about it, really should make that attempt?

[Kafui Doe]: PREP I would say opened that door where it's not a traditional grant. A lot of grants focus either on a specific method of delivering pregnancy prevention or just in sexual health. Another component that I like about PREP is the adulthood preparation topics, that it steps outside of that and looks after national literacy, healthy relationships, things of that sort, where it challenges the person whose implementing it or the organizations that implement it to kind of step out of that traditional, you know, reproductive health type of training that, there's some association with that. With PREP, encouraging other states, or, you know, organizations to apply is that it gives you that opportunity to do something that is not traditional, that it actually addresses the needs not, more so an initiative. It gives you that opportunity to open the door for collaborations. Working with others, learning from others, and then also knowing that there's stability there because it's a multi-year grant and so it's not like something that you're chasing each year to sustain but you know that, okay, I have these solid years to do something sustainable over time and that I can actually make an impact and make it more sustainable by partnering with other organizations. So if the funds do run out, that there's something in place, whether that be facilitating trainer of trainers, with programs staff so that if the dollars run out for doing multiple trainings for facilitators, you have master trainers there. If it's partnering with other grants to build their capacity in order to continue, that's another option. So I just think it's more the opportunity to do something that's not traditional, not cookie cutter, but actually tailoring your programs or your needs.

[John Bollenbacher]: Thanks so much Kafui for sitting down with us and giving us some insight into how you do things out there in D.C. And I want to thank our audience for listening to this Family and Youth Services broadcast. Please check out all of our other videos and podcasts on our website.

Thank you for tuning in. As you heard, our work isn't done, and it will take more leaders like Kafui Doe to prep teens for the future.

Be encouraged, and get connected, at The Exchange. Go to [teenpregnancy.acf.hhs.gov](https://teenpregnancy.acf.hhs.gov).

This podcast series is produced by the Family and Youth Services Bureau within the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. FYSB is committed to a future in which all our nation's youth, individuals, and families can live healthy, productive, and violence-free lives.