

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

### **Episode: Healthy Relationships and Collaboration**

[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 Patrice Moss, who is the State PREP Coordinator for Georgia, and Patrice, can you tell us a little bit about your program?

[Patrice Moss:] In Georgia, we sit within the Division of Family and Children Services, which our overarching agency is the Department of Human Services, that is the child welfare agency for the state. With that being said, we're obviously tasked with making sure that we serve youth in care, and so one of our major target populations are youth in foster care. We also partner to serve youth in the juvenile justice system as well. And then obviously we serve the pregnant and parenting youth and then Latino and African American youth as well. We actually subcontract our work out, so we have 16 subawardees in 10 counties throughout the state. We focused on 10 target counties that have the highest teen birth rates and the highest STI rates. And so we are not state-wide with the amount of funding that we are receiving. We obviously can't serve everyone, but we are in those 10 counties that have those highest rates. We can say that we've seen progress with decreasing those rates, both in teen births and STIs as well.

[John Bollenbacher:] That was a great explanation of a lot of the stuff you have going on in Georgia, and it sounds like you have these 10 major sites. Can you take us through the process of finding the subgrantees? Were you looking for them to have a particular philosophy or strategy in place?

[Patrice Moss:] We do a Statement of Need process where we put out a Statement of Need, and anyone, any non-profit public agency within those 10 counties can apply. And so obviously, and we wanted to make sure that we have enough subawardees in each county to ensure that we are reaching the numbers as equal as possible throughout those 10 counties. But outside of that, we looked at subawardees or applicants that had the experience already in Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention work, and then also with the youth development, there's a major push within our agency to focus our work around positive youth development of adolescents, so we really were looking for those subawardees that had experience in both, so the Pregnancy Prevention and then the Positive Youth Development.

[John Bollenbacher:] Can you talk a little more in depth about positive youth development and how that looks in Georgia?

[Patrice Moss:] Currently through PREP, all of our subawardees have to do a curriculum called Relationship Smarts Plus. It's a curriculum that focuses on healthy relationships, adolescent development, and healthy life skills. And so through that curriculum, each of our youth that participate work on skill building within those three areas. So that's one way we're focusing on it. In addition to that, we require in our contracts that all of our subawardees do two community awareness events. The purpose of those events are to allow youth to plan events in their community where they can talk about some of the things they're learning in PREP, but then also, learn more about other arenas outside of sexual reproductive health. So, that has given our youth an opportunity to really focus on their own leadership development in planning an entire event, or, in actually working with other groups or coalitions that already have a teen health fair going on, where they can come and contribute their piece to it. So those are two of the ways that we're really trying to focus on building youth development outside of just the reproductive health, sexual health aspect of PREP.

[John Bollenbacher:] Why do you think it's so important to focus on these other areas, not just sex ed and pregnancy prevention? I think a lot of people out there don't understand the link.

[Patrice Moss:] I think initially when we were first writing the grant and figuring out what we wanted to do with PREP and how we wanted to incorporate that youth development piece, we didn't really know the impact that going through the actual curriculum would have on the youth. And we've actually found that in the end, the youth actually enjoy the Relationship Smarts curriculum more than the sex ed because they think they know the sex ed piece already, so as they're going through the Relationship Smarts curriculum, they're learning about how to have a healthy relationship, skill building as far as peer relationships, how to say "no," or how to address whether you see a peer being bullied or you feel like you're being bullied yourself. All those other little skill development areas where they have the opportunity to grow, they don't even realize that they need it until they actually go through it. So I've been able to see how going through that curriculum actually impacts their decision making and how ultimately it will help their behavioral change when it comes to their actual sexual behavior itself.

[John Bollenbacher:] So you have to run many different programs, diverse populations. Some are clearly going to be urban, some are going to be rural. Can you talk about the challenges of having to deal with all different kinds of populations around this topic?

[Patrice Moss:] They definitely come with different challenges, different barriers. For the most part, we've found buy-in to be easier in the metropolitan area. So, in the five counties that make up the Atlanta Metropolitan Area, as far as trying to get into schools, that's been a little bit easier. It's still hard, but we've had more success working within the urban areas. In the rural counties, we're going to have to find another way to make sure that we're reaching the most vulnerable youth. And so that's kind of been difficult from a manager's standpoint, coming up with strategies or making sure that we bring trainers and technical assistance providers on board that can actually assist with conveying strategies to our subawardees so that they can make sure that they're reaching those populations. But I think the biggest differences we've seen is in buy-in for the message of comprehensive sex ed, which, in the rural areas has really been "absolutely not."

[John Bollenbacher:] So have you come up with any specific strategies?

[Patrice Moss:] So, we've been partnering with, like, the Housing Authority, where they're really, really vulnerable, really at-risk, and the leaders within that Authority recognize the need for the programming.

And so, we've been able to partner better in the rural counties with the Housing Authority to reach some of the populations. So I think looking at other target populations outside of in-school during the school day has really benefitted us as far as us forming partnerships to ensure that we're still reaching those youth in the rural counties. Outside of that, a lot of our webinars throughout the year, what we've found is that our subawardees appreciate having other subawardees talk to them about what they're doing and sharing best practices as far as how they're partnering, how they're doing their surveys, what's actually helped them to do this work well. And so we've found that just sharing between the urban and the rural counties, sharing of information for how to do the work, has really helped with forming those partnerships at each level.

[John Bollenbacher:] Clearly, you have a diverse group of subgrantees as well. Do you have any specific methods to bring them together and get them to share information?

[Patrice Moss:] So the good thing about Georgia PREP is that we have a training calendar for the year, and we ensure that we offer at least two in-person professional development trainings for our, we call them contractors or subawardees. And so that's the time when they actually come together from across the state, and we make sure that at least one of those sessions is more of a sharing session where we're using the news print, and we're throwing out questions, and they're able to share what they're doing in their county so that, at the end, we can all come together and say, "this is what PREP looks like, this is what works well." One thing we want to look into doing is, we already have in Georgia a Community of Practice through one of our other state partners, which really is going to be used for sharing all types of information, and it's fairly new, but we haven't really jumped on board and started using that. But it's really going to be a good opportunity, no matter where you are in the state, if you're working on pregnancy prevention, non-profit, state agency, local government, regardless of where you sit, to share all types of information, or get any resources that you need. So that's something going into this next fiscal year that we want to really focus on ensuring our grantees know about it and actually utilize it as a tool.

[John Bollenbacher:] So throughout all these meetings, and you bring people together, you must get some really interesting stories around this work.

[Patrice Moss:] Well, here's an interesting one. Every year we have a subawardee wrap-up meeting. So at the end of the year, we celebrate our contractors, we give out awards, and they love it, it's like the highlight of the year. And so this year we decided to do a youth panel. So, we had a group that was from a group home, so some foster youth, and they were able to sit on the panel and kind of share, and we wanted them to open up. We thought we were going to have a group that just sat there and didn't say anything, so it was a good thing that they were so vocal. So yeah, but we also, we had an opportunity for them to really come back at our subawardee and share success stories, things that, really, they feel like they can really improve on for next year, so it was really a great opportunity for us to come up with a strategy as a state team for how we want to move forward with trainings for the next year, what are the areas of need that they've identified, and then what are the successes, so what's going well for all of them.

[John Bollenbacher:] So this is really interesting, and I'm thinking that a lot of your subawardees and subgrantees are just, you know, on the front lines, in the trenches, and it must be nice when they get together to be able to kind of share some of these experiences and get support from one another.

[Patrice Moss:] Yeah, and our hope is that we won't have folks working in silos, and that they will, if they're at a meeting, and they find that one person there they're like, "wow, I have a liking to you, you're doing the same thing I'm doing, I'm going to reach out to you next time I have a question about this, or I need some support or some motivation around this. I have someone to reach out to." So that is our hope, that through those meetings we try to make sure we mix it up so people aren't sitting with the people they already know and all of that, and they're actually getting something out of it to where, when they're in need, when they're back in their county, and they need someone to talk to or some support around anything, whether it's PREP related or not PREP related, they have someone to make that connection with.

[John Bollenbacher:] So I'd like to go back big picture a little bit. You talked about being willing to work with everybody, whether it's schools, churches, non-profits, and I'm wondering if you think there's a common thread that brings all of these parties to this kind of work.

[Patrice Moss:] One thing most recently that we've been highlighted for is our work with colleges and universities. But what was interesting to me about working with that population was that these are 18- and 19-year-old freshmen who we think already have already gotten this information at some point throughout their life, whether it's in school, or from a family member, but really are getting the same message that our high schoolers and even some of our middle schools are getting around comprehensive sex ed and are in need of the information, like, most of them say, "I had no idea that this was out there," or "I had no idea that I could do this to help protect myself." So I think the common ground is, especially in our state, with it being an abstinence state, we are an abstinence state, that is the Governor's message, is that we cannot get this information out there enough. There's always going to be a need for this type of programming, this type of implementations, and then, especially with us incorporating the youth development aspect, I think the common ground is that among all the agencies they see the value in it at times with all of the politics that might be involved with the actual message that PREP carries. It's difficult to want to back it, but I think at the end of the day, the common ground is that we all see the value in the programming. And we, thus far, have seen how it can work. So yeah, my hope is that as a state, as a state-wide initiative, and with the backing of, obviously, our Division Director and our upper leadership, our executive leadership, that we can continue to have this message, and it can be alongside the abstinence message as well, but that this doesn't disappear throughout our state.

[John Bollenbacher:] Right, and the adult preparation skills, like you said, is kind of a way to make it palatable to many different kinds of organizations.

[Patrice Moss:] And kind of leveraging the importance of both of them together and maybe even highlighting the healthy relationship component versus the comprehensive sex ed component, but just showing how both of them play off of each other, but in the end, are a benefit to our youth.

[John Bollenbacher:] Well, thank you, Patrice for taking the time to share all that great information about the state of Georgia and the PREP programs there. 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 Patrice Moss 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.