

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

## **Episode: Teaching Real-Life Skills**

[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 and 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 Joshua Plantz. Joshua, tell us a little bit about your work that you're doing in down in Florida.

[Joshua Plantz:] Sure. My name is Joshua Plantz, and I'm a Manager of our Community Services Department of the South Broward Hospital District. And I oversee our C-PREP project, we're a grantee for C-PREP. So, right now we have three staff that we work, community-based prevention, pregnancy prevention, for that.

[John Bollenbacher:] So tell us a little bit more about the different sites, your programs, what the focus is.

[Joshua Plantz:] The thinking larger term, my organization is—we have six hospitals, we have 12,000 employees, and—but it's a tax-assisted health care system. So, our department is really focused on improving the overall health and well-being of our community. And, the way that our department in general looks at that is, how do we keep people, and keep them healthy, and actually keep them from the hospitals? How do we keep them away from using our hospital-based services? And it really fits nicely into what we do at our C-PREP program. When you talk about teenage pregnancy, when you talk about some of the things that are afflicting the youth of Broward County, teenage pregnancy is, and STDs, is right at the top of that list. So, it's nice that we're getting ahead of the game and trying to actually avoid hospital admissions by doing this. Broward County is a very diverse county, in terms of population. It's very much a melting pot. But the one thing that we also noticed is that there's a wide disparity in pregnancy among the three major ethnicities of Caucasian, Hispanic, and African-American. But along with that disparity of teen pregnancies comes a disparity of socioeconomic status. So what we notice is that usually low SES, African-Americans and Hispanics, tend to have higher frequencies of, we know this. So our project, what we did, is we incorporated in financial literacy, and we incorporated in soft skills, and job preparation, and insurance practices, and ways to go beyond just, "This is what happens if you get pregnant," you know, "This is why you shouldn't do X, Y, and Z." "This is why you have to be safe at relationship practices." What happens? How can we prepare you? How can we make you a healthier person? Not just in your protective sex habits, but healthy all around? Because we found that people that are more likely to complete high school, are more likely to not have a teenage

pregnancy, are more likely to have health insurance, are more likely to have healthy and successful relationships with all of their family members. So, that's how we approach it, when we want to partner with different schools or faith-based organizations, or community partners is, "How can we improve the health of the people that you are working with?" It's not just "Hey, here's pregnancy prevention, wear a condom, don't do it, whatever." It's how can we really dramatically improve the overall quality of life of the youth and the families that you're working with. And it's very fulfilling, it's very fulfilling for the people that we work with, it's very fulfilling for the staff that work in the program, because they're teaching kids actual real-life budgeting skills, they're teaching kids how to walk in and develop a resume, how to walk in, how to balance their checkbook, and really, skills that schools don't have the time to teach them for. And frankly some of the parents don't have the knowledge to do either. And we've noticed that kids that improve in financial literacy, also improved in their healthy relationships. So it's, it's a nice synergy.

[John Bollenbacher:] You clearly are working with an incredibly diverse set of youth, from all different kinds of backgrounds. Can you talk a little bit about some of the challenges of working with all those types of communities, and maybe some of the strategies you guys employ to attract all the different types of youth that you need to work with?

[Joshua Plantz:] The various ethnicities that reside in Broward County—the Caribbean, the South American, and the Hispanic cultures—every island has a different national pride, and has different interactions with other countries, and so you have to be very knowledgeable of how to approach that. Also, too, each one of the ethnicities and cultures has their own views of reproductive health and responsibilities that they want to give their kids. So, you have to be very sensitive when it comes to dealing with different nationalities, when you address that, especially when you're talking to the parents. We also are able to address that because we have a very diverse staff that we work with. We have staff that are from Haiti, from Trinidad, from Dominican Republic, from South America. We have a wide variety of staff that are culturally aware of the diverse needs that this county presents. I think it is also, too, about constant hypervigilance of, how is what the message of what we're trying to get across, how is it going to be portrayed and perceived with a multitude of different ears? Talking to youth, and talking to families, how do you make the message consistent, but varied enough so that it appeals to everybody.

[John Bollenbacher:] It sounds like you all are doing all different kinds of adult preparation skills, courses and topics with the youth, which is great. Can you talk a little more specifically about some of those courses, and maybe some of the unique offerings that you folks have?

[Joshua Plantz:] Yeah, we actually partnered with the Junior Achievement, that's a national organization, to use two of their curriculums that they have developed. One is on financial literacy, one of the curriculums is Success Skills—let's develop a resume, let's talk about your career goals, let's talk about your educational goals, and where you want to go in life, and looking online and saying, all right these are the classes that you've taken, what schools could you go to, what's the median salary for that career? Really planning out what somebody wants to do. Now let's take it and let's put a twist on it and say that you have a kid. And let's look into how much it would feasibly cost for a child to be in your life. Now let's do a job interview where you have to have a three-month-old with you. Let's role-play what that would be like, to get kids aware of the challenges, the real-life challenges that come from being a teen with a child. We developed a leadership course and we partnered with Broward College. And we

talk about the skills needed to be a leader, the skills needed to face adversity, and what does that look like—today, and what does that look like five years from now, and how can you use those skills? So it's all about trying to take “how can we improve that piece”, to “fit it all together in this pregnancy prevention”, and really improve their life. And then the insurance piece is, let's say that we're working with an individual, we're working in a family or community where we know there's a high number of uninsured, how do we get those uninsured individuals connected with some level of coverage? Well, what we've also found is that we've also helped on the insurance piece of it is that explaining to older high school kids and their families, the cost of healthcare associated with pregnancy. Let's talk about the benefits of insurance, let's talk about what jobs, and how that's part of the salary of the job, so we really go into the nuts and bolts of career, and improving themselves in the future.

[John Bollenbacher:] It seems like you all have done a lot of work around showing teens the hard realities of having an unwanted pregnancy, and that that's really an effective and giving them focused on what they need to do to protect themselves. Are you also doing work that shows them some really positive spins on what their future could be like, and kind of having an aspire for a really positive future, and that's also effective in preventing teens from having unwanted pregnancies?

[Joshua Plantz:] We do also this, it's an entire lesson that we do with middle schoolers as well as high schoolers, and it's Planning for a Positive Future. And you have kids come up with a realistic goal of what they want to do, and then it's about empowering them to make the steps that they can see themselves doing. It never ends on this doom and gloom of "You shouldn't should do this because it's gonna cost you an arm and leg for a kid," and all that, it's about, "You have the power to make the choice in your life to where you want to see your future go. And if you are presented with that opportunity, what do you want to make out of your life? And how can you use this opportunity today to see a better future for yourself tomorrow?" Sometimes kids need that ability to have somebody that just believes in them, because they understand dollars and cents, they understand numbers, you saw we're talking about money, that's what when everybody starts paying attention, so that's how we nicely wrap everything together.

[John Bollenbacher:] And how are things going in Broward County? Give us a little more of an in-depth look.

[Joshua Plantz:] This is our third year of PREP funding, and speaking for the county itself, we're in the national norm of our pregnancy rates are actually declining, but we're still seeing a high number of STI's. We're still number one in the nation, Broward County is, in HIV cases, so there's still some work to go there, but I think that in regards to teen pregnancy, I think that we are seeing a decline, not to say that the work is done.

[John Bollenbacher:] Are there any specific success stories, whether it's with the youth or a program that really stands out in your mind?

[Joshua Plantz:] No, I just think that it's the overall package that's been very well received by the community and by schools. When you approach it with multiple different areas, that seems to be very well received. Because when you start going in and you start talking to schools and parents and churches and community members, when you lead with pregnancy prevention, it makes it a very difficult sell, but when you start talking about the wide range of everything else that you can offer and how you incorporate in pregnancy prevention as a piece of that, people are more receptive of that. And

then, people always have very positive feedback about the reception that they've gotten and the product they received. It goes to the skill and the quality of staff, we have a very skilled team working with us.

[John Bollenbacher:] And, so, what are your hopes for next steps in Broward County, or what do you see down the road, what do you aspire to have happened in your community with your work?

[Joshua Plantz:] Well, Broward County actually, the public schools actually just passed to have a comprehensive sex education piece as part of their public school teaching. So, I think that that just recognizes that we need to continue to have the message get across that there's a much larger population that we need to help serve. What I'd like to see is us not be complacent and pat ourselves on the back and say we get it to a certain level and now our job is done. I think that it always needs to be constantly revisited, and constantly taught to youth of all ages, that we don't just let it on the wayside.

[John Bollenbacher:] Okay Joshua, thanks so much for sharing all that and taking the time out to talk to us, and I want to thank our audience for listening to this Family and Youth Services podcast. 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 Joshua Plantz 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 and 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.