

# Helping Greater High Point Teens Prevent Pregnancy and Foster Healthy Relationships

## Wise Guys Programs – Children’s Home Society of North Carolina

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### Summary

Since 2017, the Foundation for a Healthy High Point has funded Children’s Home Society to support the implementation of the Wise Guys healthy relationships and teen pregnancy prevention programs for Greater High Point area teens. Wise Guys program facilitators lead 8-12 weeks of interactive classes in High Point schools and community locations. The program is aligned with National Health Education Standards for grades 6-12 and supplements middle and high school health education courses.

### Highlights

- Wise Guys fills a gap in developmentally appropriate health and sex education for teen boys.
- Wise Guys increases knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to healthy masculinity and relationships through guided conversation and interactive activities.
- Nearly 1,500 High Point teens have participated in one of the Wise Guys programs since 2016.



### Funding

The Foundation for a Healthy High Point supported the Wise Guys programs from January of 2016 through July of 2021 with grants to Children’s Home Society totaling \$222,000. Funding from the Foundation enables CHS to leverage a matching grant from the Department of Public Health – NC DHHS Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiatives for services provided in High Point. Additional support for the program is provided by the Beacon Foundation and participating Greater High Point schools.



*The Foundation for a Healthy High Point encourages, supports, influences, and invests in efforts that improve the long-term health and wellness throughout Greater High Point. We accomplish this by examining health issues and identifying and investing in evidence-based practices.*

## Background

The Wise Guys program was developed in 1990 by Family Life Council, a small nonprofit organization in Guilford County. Family Life Council reviewed existing pregnancy



**Children's  
Home Society**  
*of North Carolina*

prevention programs and found few that targeted boys, despite teenage boys wanting a safe environment for talking about relationships and sexuality. The program has been refined over the last 30 years based on research on male teen development, including how teen boys process information and develop attitudes and behaviors, and best practices in pregnancy prevention.

In 2010, the Children's Home Society (CHS) of North Carolina merged with Family Life Council. CHS provides comprehensive child and family support programs statewide, including pregnancy prevention programs. Over time, CHS expanded Wise Guys beyond Guilford County. Wise Guys is now implemented in 27 communities in 10 states. The goal of the Wise Guys programs is to reduce the economic and health impacts of having a child as a teen. The programs provide comprehensive sex education and healthy relationship programs to middle school and high school students in classroom and community settings.

## Need

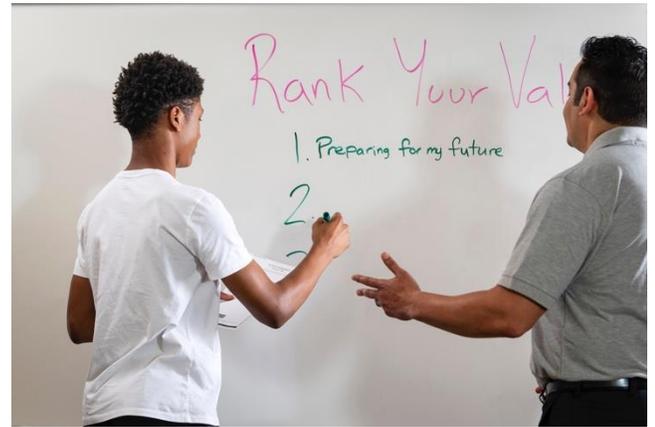
Comprehensive sex education is needed in Greater High Point, where teens have high pregnancy rates. Becoming a teen parent has a lasting impact on teens' educational and economic futures. According to CHS staff, while the overall teen pregnancy rate has decreased over time, racial disparities exist with teens in High Point's 27260 zip code having a very high rate of teen pregnancy along with increased rates of sexually transmitted infections. While 28 out of 1,000 Greater High Point teens became pregnant in 2017, there were 83 pregnancies per 1,000 teens in the 27260 zip code. Moreover, Black teens have a pregnancy rate 3.5 times higher than white teens.

Delaying pregnancy and parenthood until adulthood increases the likelihood of healthier babies, improved early developmental outcomes, and higher educational attainment for teens. Only 53% of teen mothers complete high school or a GED program, and children are nine times more likely to live in poverty if their mother does not graduate from high school. Interventions to change the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of teens to prevent pregnancy have long-lasting impacts on individuals and communities.

## Project Description

The Wise Guys set of programs provide teen pregnancy prevention classes to adolescents in Greater High Point. The Wise Guys programs serve middle school males, the HYPE program serves high school teens of all genders, and the Jovenes Sabios program provides Spanish-language content for males.

The Wise Guys program consists of 8 to 12 lessons taught in weekly group sessions in schools or community settings. The program addresses topics such as reproductive anatomy and pregnancy, contraception, abstinence, toxic masculinity, consent, healthy relationships, values, and decision-making. Wise Guys facilitators establish ground rules and create a climate of trust and respect among participants. Facilitators minimize lecturing and foster discussion by employing interactive instruction methods such as games and quizzes, role play, and small group activities.



The Foundation for a Healthy High Point's funding, and the state funding it leverages, supports staff to provide the program in Greater High Point. The Wise Guys curriculum is aligned with state and national standards satisfying 70% of the National Health Standard performance indicators for grades 6 to 12. This complements and supplements concepts taught in school health education classes. In addition to providing the program in High Point schools, the program is also offered at Boys and Girls Clubs and through parks and rec during the summer.

In the spring of 2020, High Point area schools moved to virtual instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic. CHS staff adapted the Wise Guys curriculum to a virtual format and began offering online groups for teen males in the spring and summer of 2020. The program purchased premium Zoom and Vimeo subscriptions to create and share animations and host group meetings, both of which staff reported were well-received by participating teens. CHS plans to continue providing the Wise Guys programs virtually or in a hybrid format, even as classes resume in person, as online programming provides flexibility and accessibility during this challenging time.

## Results

Through funding from the Foundation for a Healthy High Point, the program has been provided to 1,444 High Point students between 2016 and 2021. The goals of Wise Guys programs are to prevent teen pregnancy, reduce sexually transmitted infections, and promote healthy masculinity and positive relationships among teen males.

Program evaluation data find:

- 88% of young men report increasing or maintaining positive male attitudes of responsibility and respect for women.
- 83% of young men increased communication with their parents about sex and relationships.
- 82% of young men increased their knowledge of sexuality and sexually transmitted infections.
- 80% of young men already sexually active at program entry increased or maintained condom use the last time they had sex.

Wise Guys staff shared this quote from a student who participated in the program recently:

“It was different from health class or any other sex ed thing you can take. Like it was generalized around the guy, but it wasn’t necessarily about sex. It was just about the guy as a whole. And when I was talking to my girlfriend about it, I told her I was coming here to do a talk, and I was like yeah, Wise Guys as a whole is really cool. Like definitely if there was something after school, like if you do a hangout, I’d definitely come and hang out and just talk because it’s real. It’s genuine. It’s really cool.”



A 7<sup>th</sup>-grade student shared that life for his family was tough. His mother worked two jobs to make ends meet, and he had not seen his father for a few years. He took care of his little brother each evening, as his mom would make dinner and then head out to work at her second job, leaving him in charge of making sure his little brother was fed and did his homework. "Wise Guys has helped me focus on the things that I can control, like doing well in school and planning for my future. I love my mom, and I want to get a good job so I can make money and help her when I get older. I'm not ready for sex, and I don't want to become a teen dad who is always broke."

Another 9<sup>th</sup>-grade student said, “Wise Guys was the best class that I’d ever been in. I had so many questions answered, and I felt like I could be myself. The class really helped reassure me that it was okay to wait to have sex. I’d felt pressure to ‘man up.’ Hearing how other guys have to deal with this pressure to be a man and have sex really helped me see that I was not alone. I feel more confident now. It’s more manly to wait until I am ready and when she is ready too.”

## Lessons Learned

In reports submitted to the Foundation and interviews for this report, Wise Guys staff shared that they learned that:

- **Teens need trusted sources of information about relationships and sexuality.** Wise Guys staff describe how teens today are exposed to a flood of messages about relationships and sexuality, many of them false, misleading, or dangerous. This leads to doubts, misunderstandings, and confusion among teens, despite access to more information than any previous generation. Wise Guys addresses this problem by providing facts and positive messages about caring, committed, and respectful relationships.



- **Parents highly support the program.** When the program started 30 years ago, some parents didn't think their sons needed the information in the program. But this has changed. Parents today know that they don't control what their kids are exposed to and now actively support their teens participating in the program. The Wise Guys curriculum includes activities to encourage open conversation between parents and teens. Parents report being able to talk about decision-making more candidly with their teens as Wise Guys has provided the catalyst.
- **Teachers and administrators welcome Wise Guys facilitators taking the lead on teaching about relationships and sexuality.** Teachers are nervous about broaching topics of sexuality and relationships with their students. The program has heard from many administrators that state they are skipping teaching sexual health or having the nurses talk with classes. Wise Guys facilitators are trusted experts in these topics and encourage teachers to be in the classrooms to help build rapport.
- **Wise Guys addresses mental health issues exacerbated by the pandemic.** Many teens suffered from being isolated from school and friends during the pandemic. This has led to an increase in teen mental health issues and behavior problems like fighting. Wise Guys talks about healthy masculinity – talking about how it's okay to feel sad or upset when things get hard. As Ted Sikes, Wise Guys instructor, stated, "Wise Guys is a safe space to talk about emotions. To talk about anything." This is increasingly needed during this challenging period.
- **Healthy relationships are a core element for teens -- and for community health.** Wise Guys staff stress that healthy relationships are key to building a healthy community. However, some schools are hesitant to bring in the program. Wise Guys encourages the Foundation for a Healthy High Point to use their weight of influence to open doors for Wise Guys to increase the reach of their programs into the Greater High Point community. One new idea is to approach the faith-based community to engage teens at their houses of worship. The Foundation may be able to help build these connections to expand program reach.