

A One-Stop Shop for Teen Wellness in High Point

JustTEENS Wellness Clinic – Guilford County Health Department

Summary

The Guilford County Department of Health established the JustTEENS Wellness Clinic in High Point in 2016 to meet the needs of teens at high risk of pregnancy. The clinic provides High Point teens with access to comprehensive healthcare services, including pregnancy prevention services and mental health counseling, in a private and welcoming setting in High Point.

Highlights

- Over the span of three years, teen clinic visits increased from 145 visits in 2017 to 360 visits per year by the end of 2019, for a total of 1,260 visits and 471 unique teens served between January 1, 2017, and June 30, 2021.
- 70% of female teens seen at the clinic chose a hormonal method, primarily Depo Provera, but about a quarter chose Long-Acting Reversible Contraception (LARC).
- By the fall of 2020, teen pregnancy rates in High Point dropped by 9%.

Funding

The Foundation for a Healthy High Point provided \$343,399 to the Guilford County Department of Health between January 1, 2017, and June 30, 2021, to fund a dedicated nurse at the JustTEENS Wellness clinic in High Point. The Department of Health contributes in-kind support for the clinic's facilities and other staff.

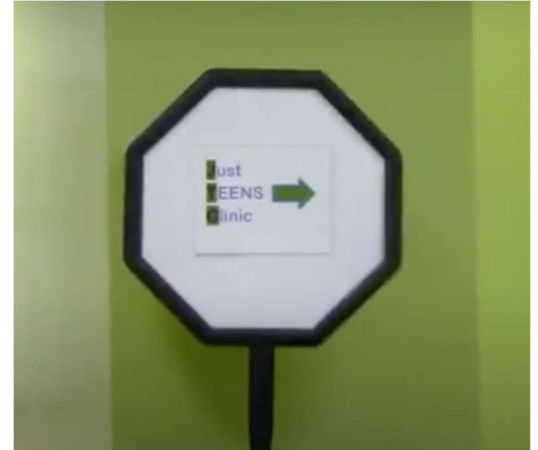


The Foundation for a Healthy High Point encourages, supports, influences, and invests in efforts that improve the long-term health and wellness throughout Greater High Point. We accomplish this by examining health issues and identifying and investing in evidence-based practices.

Background

The mission of the Guilford County Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health is “to protect, promote, and enhance the health and well-being of all people and the environment” in the County. The Department is committed to improving health at the population level, one component of which is pregnancy prevention services for both the adult and teen populations. The goal is to reduce high rates of teen pregnancy in the County through pregnancy prevention efforts, including access to Long-Acting Reversible Contraception.

One of the Department’s efforts to improve the health of teens was the establishment of the JustTEENS Wellness clinic in High Point in 2016. The clinic serves as a “one-stop-shop” for confidential services to people under the age of 20. Patients receive free or low-cost, same-day or next-day, confidential services at the clinic, including information about pregnancy prevention.



Need

The JustTEENS High Point clinic is located at the Guilford County Medical Center in High Point’s 27260 zip code, an area with higher teen pregnancy rates and poorer overall health than neighboring communities. According to the Health Department, the 27260 zip code has an average teen pregnancy rate nearly four times higher than surrounding areas at 88 pregnancies per 1,000 females compared to Greater High Point’s average pregnancy rate of 23 per 1,000 teens.

Teen pregnancy disproportionately affects teens of color. While white females ages 15-19 in Guilford County had a teen pregnancy rate of 10 per 1,000 in 2018, African American teens had a rate of 26 per 1,000, Hispanic/Latinas had a pregnancy rate of 28, and Asians had a pregnancy rate of 54 per 1,000.

Teen pregnancy creates and perpetuates cycles of poverty. Preventing teen pregnancy is related to positive changes in social determinants of health, including increasing high school graduation rates, reducing behavioral health issues, and increasing employment.



JustTEENS Wellness Clinic staff in the clinic.

Project Description

The JustTEENS Wellness Clinic was designed to meet the needs of teens seeking an accessible and confidential place to receive medical and behavioral health support. The clinic is a replication of the Duke Center’s evidence-based teen clinic model, as developed in Gaston County. The long-term goal of the clinic is to work with teens so they can take ownership of their health. The word “wellness” was added to the name of the clinic to reflect the clinic’s dedication to helping the whole person.

The clinic renovated the office area based on feedback provided by youth leaders. The clinic is designed to be an attractive place for teens, with brightly painted walls and decorations, neon furniture, flat-screen TVs, charging stations, and a “giving tree” with small gifts like socks, water bottles, and nail polish. Additionally, its design ensures patient privacy through a separate waiting area for the clinic’s patients. To add convenience, there is an onsite pharmacy to access birth control and other prescriptions.

Funding from the Foundation supported a designated Registered Nurse at the clinic. Clinic nurses were carefully chosen to ensure they were teen-friendly and committed to working with teens. JustTEENS staff receive training specific to meeting the overall health needs of teens, including how to provide inclusive care for LGBTQ teens. The clinic provides free or low-cost medical care, including physicals, immunizations, contraception, pregnancy tests, STI tests and treatment, and sexual health counseling. The clinic offers Long-Acting Reversible Contraceptives, such as long-

acting hormonal injections and IUDs, which significantly reduce the risk of teen pregnancy over other forms of birth control. Additionally, individual and group mental health counseling is offered.

The COVID-19 pandemic reduced the number of teens visiting the clinic in person, although the clinic did provide limited services by phone. The Health Department's goal was to keep the clinic open, as they were aware that kids were struggling due to the isolation and lack of support typically provided in school. The program suspects more risky behaviors during this time, as many teens were out of school without structure and supervision. They see the 2021 school year as a rebuilding year and are grateful that pandemic-related funding allows them to purchase three mobile health units to allow for the provision of health care services, including birth control, to community members.



Photo courtesy Guilford County Department of Health and Human Services.

Results

The goal of the JustTEENS clinic is to reduce teen pregnancy rates in High Point, particularly the 27260 zip code, by 10% by 2023. According to data shared by the Department of Health from August of 2020, JustTEENS Clinic High Point nearly met the goal as teen pregnancy rates dropped by 9%. Program staff stress that reducing teen pregnancies “required persistent efforts on the part of nursing staff, health educators, and everyone who made contact with teens in the public health department.”

Over the span of three years, the teen clinic visits increased from 145 visits in 2017 to 360 visits per year by the end of 2019, for a total of 1,260 visits and 471 unique teens served between January 1, 2017, and June 30, 2021. Clinic visits dropped starting in March 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted teens' lives and clinic services were reduced. But overall, the program met its goal of increasing visits by greater than 70% over the course of the grant.

Another goal of the program was for 90% of female teen patients to choose hormonal contraception if sexually active when the grant ended in 2021. Program reports shared that 70% of females seen did choose a hormonal method, although the majority of teens chose Depo Provera, and less than a quarter chose LARCs.

Lessons Learned

In reports submitted to the Foundation and interviews for this report, JustTEENS Clinic staff shared that:

- **Presenting the clinic as a wellness opportunity for teens helped overcome community concerns about teens and sexuality.** While the goal of the clinic was to reduce teen pregnancy rates, community norms made discussing the sexual activity of teens difficult. Making the clinic a “one-stop-shop” for teens – including providing school and sports physicals, counseling services, and other services – made the community more receptive.
- **Marketing the clinic has been challenging.** The clinic was initially marketed with billboards, tv, and radio spots, but switched to geofencing and giving away business cards at teen events, including Friday night football games and outreach to area pediatricians. These have proven more effective in raising awareness of the clinic among area teens, although word of mouth proves to be the most effective way to raise awareness of the clinic. Unfortunately, due to community hesitation about messaging about birth control, the clinic remains unable to advertise in local schools.
- **Clinic staff have received extensive training to provide sensitive services to teens.** JustTEENS staff members have been through multiple trainings to ensure they can effectively build trust and relationships with teens, including training provided by SHIFT NC. They’ve learned that little things such as facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice make a big difference in interacting with teens.
- **The clinic is addressing the High Point community’s lack of access to health care by helping teens learn health care navigation skills.** The clinic strives to provide comprehensive services that teens need to teach them how to access healthcare throughout their lives. As LaTanya Pender, the County’s Public Health Program Manager stated, “If [clinic staff] can instill in them good healthcare habits, then hopefully as they grow, that will stick with them.” While many of the teens’ parents have not been able to access healthcare due to the stress of living in poverty, which can act as a barrier to being proactive about their own health, the teens are learning these skills. This helps break through the cycle of poverty and improve overall community health in the long term.