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2010 Innovations Awards Application

DEADLINE EXTENDED: MARCH 15, 2010

ID # (assigned by CSG): **10-S-11NC**

Please provide the following information, adding space as necessary:

State: North Carolina

Assign Program Category (applicant): Health Services – health education for teenagers

1. Program Name: BrdsNBz Text Message Warm Line
2. Administering Agency: *Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Campaign of North Carolina (APPCNC) - a statewide, non-profit organization serving North Carolina to prevent teen pregnancy and promote positive outcomes for youth through advocacy, collaboration, technical assistance, and training. APPCNC receives funding from the NC Department of Health and Human Services, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Division of Reproductive Health, other philanthropic organizations, and private donations.*
3. Contact Person: Director of Evaluation – Kennon E. Jackson, Jr.
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6. FAX Number: 919-226-1884
7. E-mail Address: kjackson@appcnc.org
8. Web site Address: <http://www.appcnc.org/brdsnbz-text-message-warm-line>
9. Please provide a two-sentence description of the program.
The BrdsNBz Text Message Warm Line is a new, innovative means of answering NC teens' questions about sexual health on their turf – via text message. North Carolina youth ages 14 to 19 can text their question anonymously to the BrdsNBz without cost, and an APPCNC staff member will provide a medically accurate, nonjudgmental, confidential answer with links to other resources and related to the topic within 24 hours.
10. How long has this program been operational (month and year)? Note: the program must be between 9 months and 5 years old on March 1, 2010 to be considered.
The BrdsNBz Text Message Warm Line began on February 1, 2009.
11. Why was the program created? What problem[s] or issue[s] was it designed to address?
The BrdsNBz Text Message Warm Line is directed primarily at teenagers ages 14-19 in the state of North Carolina who have questions regarding sexual health. In 2007, there were more than 20,000 adolescents ages 15-19 who were pregnant, 29% for whom this was not their first pregnancy. These primarily unintended pregnancies carry a multitude of other consequences including poverty, reduced workforce readiness, and decreased overall child well-being. Moreover, minorities are at an increased risk of unplanned teenage pregnancies, which cost North Carolina taxpayers more than \$807 million in 1997 (NC Department of Health and Human Services, 2009). Today it is estimated that unplanned teenage

pregnancies cost taxpayers \$312 million every year in North Carolina (The National Campaign to Prevent Teenage Pregnancy, 2006).

The state of North Carolina has recognized this problem and has set a goal to reduce pregnancies among 10-19-year-olds by 36% between 1998 and 2010 (NCDHHS, 2009). To achieve this goal, the pregnancy rate in the state of North Carolina would be 48.7 pregnancies per 1,000 teens ages 15-19. The pregnancy rate (for teens ages 15-19) across the state of North Carolina for 2008 was 58.6 pregnancies per 1,000, down from 76.1 pregnancies per 1,000 in 2000 (NC Division of Public Health, 2009). Nationally, there are 41.1 pregnancies per 1,000 teens age 15-19, and North Carolina ranks 37th in the United States in terms of the rate of teen pregnancies (The National Campaign to Prevent Teenage Pregnancy, 2006). While the state of North Carolina is making progress in reducing the number of teen pregnancies, more needs to be done.

In addition to unplanned pregnancies, North Carolina teenagers face the threat of developing sexually transmitted infections (STIs); 67% of all STIs in the state are found among individuals between the ages of 15-24 (NC Department of Health and Human Services, 2009). State officials have recognized that sexual education during early adolescence is necessary to promote safer sex practices among North Carolina teens (NC Department of Health and Human Services, 2009). However, since the state's standard of teaching only abstinence-until-marriage sexual education has been the norm until recently, teens suffer from a dearth of accurate sexual health information.

12. Describe the specific activities and operations of the program in chronological order.

The BrdsNBz Text Message Warm relies on a straightforward but innovative approach to reaching out to teens in North Carolina by text message. Unlike other comparable sexual health & STI information services, the BrdsNBz provides REAL contact – that is to say an APPCNC staff member answers teens' questions in real-time addressing exactly what youth want to know. APPCNC's staff are experienced professionals who have been working in the field of adolescent sexual health for many years – most of whom hold graduate degrees in public health, social work, or related fields. During the pilot phase of the project, sample text questions that were asked more frequently were paired with staff responses over a few months to assure consistency among answers. Using a protocol to categorize the types of questions asked, staff can then rely on their professional knowledge as well as other resources – electronic and those “on the ground” in teens' communities - to respond appropriately. Given the sensitive nature of the questions and the possible stressed nature of the questioners, some of the guidelines for responses included in the protocol were:

- *do not provide clinical, medical advice but urge questioners to consult a physician*
- *do not advocate abortion*
- *if necessary, refer questioners to local clinics, Web sites or emergency hot lines*
- *provide reasoned, kind advice, and do not use sarcasm*
- *read answers twice before sending*

Several staff members were trained to answer the texts and to document the data – both question and response – in a reporting system for analysis. A QWERTY-keyboard style cell phone was purchased and tested. Once preparations were complete and a rotation schedule established for staff to be “on call” for the service, BrdsNBz was advertised and launched on February 1, 2009.

13. Why is the program a new and creative approach or method?

The program is the first to use the text line technology to directly communicate person-to-person between a trained professional in adolescent health and youth on such a large scale. Other services that promote sexual health information via text message are automated and menu-driven – providing helpful, but impersonal responses. In addition to announcing the program to health educators working with teens throughout the state, the program uses Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace to reach out to teens as well. An article in the New York Times in March 2009 first brought national media attention to the program and

describes the new approach and some of the obstacles it faced. This article can be viewed at: http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/03/fashion/03sexed.html?_r=3&scp=1&sq=pregnancy%20prevention&st=cse.

Several other print and electronic media have written stories about the service including the February/March 2010 of 'Bust Magazine.' The BrdsNBz has also been featured as a topic of discussion on television on Fox News national media outlet and "The View."

14. What were the program's start-up costs? (Provide details about specific purchases for this program, staffing needs and other financial expenditures, as well as existing materials, technology and staff already in place.)

APPCNC is well established and trusted source for technical assistance, training, and advocacy related to the prevention of teen pregnancy, and STI's to promote positive outcomes for teens. Because the program used existing staff expertise and available partner resources to develop the BrdsNBz protocol, the initial cost for the service was less than \$5,000 and to date, remains extremely cost-effective. The initial start-up of BrdsNBz required funding to establish a cell phone plan with a national wireless provider, purchase a text-capable cell phone, develop/launch banner advertisements on MySpace, and establish an online text data management program for analysis and evaluation. The most sizeable of these costs was advertising, though support for all aspects was provided through NC Department of Health and Human Services.

15. What are the program's annual operational costs?

Current direct costs to operate the BrdsNBz in the first year have been relatively low and include approximately \$100 per month for wireless phone service, \$45 per month for online text data management program, and quarterly advertising on MySpace for \$600. Staff time to review and respond to the BrdsNBz has been an indirect cost of the project and has varied upon the staff member 'on call' for the service.

Because of the overwhelming positive response by both youth and service providers and because of the potential to engage teens in a safe, anonymous, and personal fashion, the service is undergoing expansion. The operational costs as a result of this growth will increase. As an example of how APPCNC is responding to youths' needs in the state, the organization has created a research-to-practice partnership with the Injury Prevention Research Center (IPRC) and the UNC Chapel Hill School of Medicine. Recently, APPCNC and IPRC were awarded a grant from the North Carolina Translational and Clinical Sciences Institute to implement a randomized control design study to address risk factors associated with child abuse among teen mothers in the triad region of the state. The research project entitled "Social Support for Pregnant and Parenting Teens Using Internet and Cell Technology" is a pilot study that will allow teen mothers to engage one another and receive relevant and helpful information about parenting, child health, etc. via social networking websites developed by the project and using text messaging through the BrdsNBz.

16. How is the program funded?

North Carolina's General Assembly earmarks approximately \$250,000 each year for APPCNC, and has earmarked funds for them since 1986. This funding is administered via contract through the NC Department of Health and Human Services and thus includes a scope of work detailing how the allocation is used by APPCNC. The \$5,000 used to start-up, advertise, and operate the BrdsNBz was included as part of this scope of work. Donations are being solicited to continue to help offset the ongoing program costs. Initially, APPCNC did not received funding for the indirect costs related to staff time to monitor the service, however, the recent expansion with the UNC IPRC will include some of these expenditures. APPCNC is also currently collaborating with a Texas-based social venture capital investment organization to developing an additional expansion of the service to target GLBTQ youth. The Campaign has two proposals in development to philanthropic organizations that would expand the marketing and advertising components of the BrdsNBz – as well subsidize some cost related to staff time.

17. Did this program require the passage of legislation, executive order or regulations? *NO*

18. What equipment, technology and software are used to operate and administer this program?

Mobile telephone with QWERTY keyboard, Excel text logs to track incoming questions, outgoing responses, date/time, topic identifies, etc. <pilot phase>, ZukuWeb online text data management program <after pilot period>, and a PDF protocol including operational guidelines and a resource list.

19. To the best of your knowledge, did this program originate in your state? If YES, please indicate the innovator's name, present address, telephone number and e-mail address.

Yes, it was designed by APPCNC and launched as a result of the agencies strategic planning process to utilize technology to engage teens in North Carolina 'on their turf.' Initial funding was approved by the Executive Director – Kay Phillips. We see all our staff who rotate 'on call' for the service as the innovators for this project as it could not have been successful without their input. The overall management, research, and growth/expansion of the BrdsNBz is conducted by APPCNC's Director of Evaluation – Kennon Jackson, Jr.

20. Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If YES, which ones and how does this program differ?

Similar programs have been offered in metropolitan areas, usually associated with websites, but not offered with one-to-one communication and individualized responses via text message. To our knowledge, APPCNC is the ONLY organization of its kind using SMS/text messaging to engage youth in an entire state anonymously to answer their sexual health questions within 24 hours.

21. Has the program been fully implemented? If NO, what actions remain to be taken?

The BrdsNBz was fully implemented in February 2009 with a pilot phase of data collection occurring through the Fall of 2009. This allowed for quality improvement, evaluation, and led to the subsequent need for expansion.

22. Briefly evaluate (pro and con) the program's effectiveness in addressing the defined problem[s] or issue[s]. Provide tangible examples.

Con: The program has been conceptually objected to by those who believe that only parents should provide sexual health information to teens. APPCNC had an advantage in this area because of its long standing reputation as a strong provider of teen sexual health information aimed at preventing teen pregnancy in North Carolina. Also, APPCNC chose not to conduct outcome evaluation of the program initially so as to maintain the confidential and anonymous question-answer relationship between teens and the agency.

Pro: The anonymous, confidential nature of the text message service allows the teen privacy and freedom to ask questions on a more personalized level. Also, APPCNC has been able to collect – without compromising anonymity, data related to frequency of use among teens, geographic location of texters, text health topic domain, and marketability to youth in North Carolina. The BrdsNBz allows APPCNC to learn more about the issues currently impacting youth in North Carolina and creates an opportunity to translate this into useful technical assistance and training for service providers as well.

23. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?

APPCNC has established three new collaborative partnerships with the UNC School of Journalism, the UNC School of Medicine, and One Seventeen Media, Inc. to continue to expand the BrdsNBz and promote the agency's mission of positive outcomes for teens. These partners have been invaluable and have offered the opportunity to combine research and practice.

In the Fall of 2009, the School of Journalism undertook an analysis of the marketing and outreach plan for the BrdsNBz to assure that the service was best serving and meeting NC teens 'on their turf.' As a case study for the Integrated Health Communications seminar, APPCNC worked with several public health graduate students to create promotional marketing concepts to target areas of NC in which the BrdsNBz is underutilized. APPCNC is currently seeking funding for these marketing plans.

The Injury Prevention Research Center at the UNC School of Medicine has partnered with APPCNC to pilot a research project that will address risk factors associated with child abuse among teen mothers. The study uses text messaging and social networking as one component of a multi-phase intervention developed by a UNC Family Medicine faculty member that will eventually seek funding from the NIH. One Seventeen

Media, Inc. is currently collaborating with APPCNC to develop a BrdsNBz-like text message service to target questions from LGBTQ youth.

In the coming months, APPCNC will develop an additional expansion of the BrdsNBz to target the large Hispanic/Latino population in North Carolina.

24. What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter if they attempt to adopt this program?

Successful adoption of a similar program in another state would require that the provider of information be a well respected and authoritative source of sexual health education for teens, without objection from the legislature or the state health department. As with any information service, availability of sufficiently trained and experienced staff for timely response to inquiries would be critical to success. Given the nature of the subject matter, situations could arise where inexperienced staff would create more harm than good in the education of teens.

Other factors to consider include: prevalence of text messaging among youth in the state, language barrier among youth and how it is reflected in text message questions, organizational capacity to manage the monitoring and ability to respond to text messages in a timely manner, modes of advertising and marketing used to reach teens in the state, and collaboration with other agencies and organizations working in adolescent health in the state.

APPCNC is in a unique position to assist those organizations and states who would like to replicate the BrdsNBz. As part of its long-term strategic plan, APPCNC is in the process of developing an organizational fee-for-service model to expand the agency's ability to provide advocacy, training, and technical assistance. One offering on this menu of services will include consultation, training, and development of text message services to address specific needs of different target populations in other regions and states, as well as in North Carolina.

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2010 Innovations Awards Application Program Categories and Subcategories

Use these as guidelines to determine the appropriate Program Category for your state's submission and list that program category on page one of this application. Choose only one.

Infrastructure and Economic Development

- Business/Commerce
- Economic Development
- Transportation

Government Operations and Technology

- Administration
- Elections
- Information Systems
- Public Information
- Revenue
- Telecommunications

Health & Human Services

- Aging
- Children & Families
- Health Services
- Housing
- Human Services

Human Resources/Education

- Education
- Labor
- Management
- Personnel
- Training and Development
- Workforce Development

Natural Resources

- Agriculture
- Energy
- Environment
- Environmental Protection
- Natural Resources
- Parks & Recreation
- Water Resources

Public Safety/Corrections

- Corrections
- Courts
- Criminal Justice
- Drugs
- Emergency Management
- Public Safety

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This application is also available at www.csg.org.