

# Connect Spartanburg – A Case Study on Improving Adolescent Sexual Health in Spartanburg County, South Carolina

## Innovative pairing of the ACT for Sexual Health technology with the Community Health Worker model increases adolescent trust, engagement, honesty – reduces sexual health risks

*Connect Spartanburg* is an adolescent health initiative of the Mary Black Foundation, funded through the Office of Adolescent Health (OAH). Utilizing innovative, multicomponent, evidence-based and community wide initiatives, *Connect* is reducing rates of teen pregnancy and births in Spartanburg communities.



### Connecting the Community in Care:

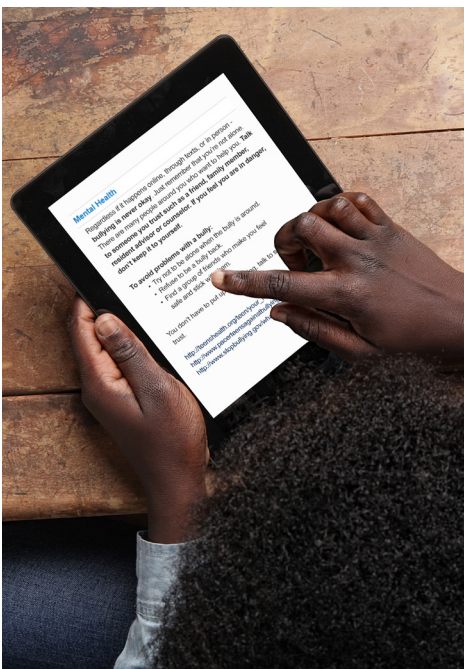
*Connect Spartanburg* collaborates with local adolescent-serving agencies to build capacity in providing adolescent friendly services and implementing evidence-based interventions. Partners include health care service providers, schools, faith communities, non-profit organizations, state agencies, law enforcement, employers, teen advocates, and trusted community members.



Together with this collaborative support, *Connect* provides more than 4,000 youth annually with services that meet their unique needs.

### Implementing a Social Determinants Framework:

Reducing teen pregnancies requires a multifaceted, long-term investment committed to social determinants of health using evidence-based strategies. Addressing social determinants of health and their role in teen pregnancy is central to the *Connect Spartanburg* model.



**Employing a Community Health Worker model and leveraging the ACT for Sexual Health technology is a natural extension of the social determinants framework.**

### A Social Determinants Approach:

The *Connect Spartanburg* Adolescent Health Initiative utilizes a framework proven effective in addressing social determinants of health for adolescents and young adults<sup>1</sup>.

1. Build broad-based multi-sector community coalitions
2. Use data driven approaches
3. Generate locally driven solutions
4. Advocate for policy changes
5. Utilize new and innovative technologies
6. Seek efforts to sustain and leverage each program component

<sup>1</sup><https://healthpolicy.ucsf.edu/sites/healthpolicy.ucsf.edu/files/wysiwyg/PDF/Health%20Equity%20Policy%20Brief%207-18v2.pdf>

## About the Community Health Worker Model used by Connect Spartanburg:

Community health workers (CHWs) are lay members of the Spartanburg community in collaboration with the local teen health centers and *share ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, and life experiences with the community members they serve.*

As part of the Spartanburg Community Health Worker Model funded by the Office of Adolescent Health (OAH), CHWs help to prevent teen pregnancy and improve contraceptive care by:

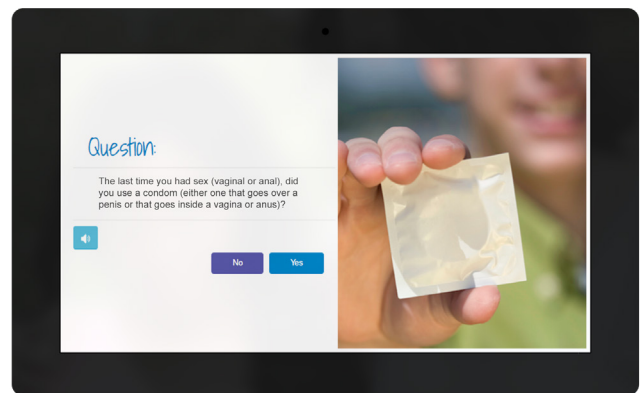
- Culturally appropriate health education and information
- Connecting youth to the care they need – including referrals to care, making appointments as well as providing appointment reminders, and assistance in finding transportation if needed
- Informal counseling and guidance on health behaviors

**ACT for Sexual Health, from Possibilities for Change, is a core component of the Spartanburg CHW model and supports CHWs in their health education and counseling outreach with adolescents.**

## About the Adolescent Counseling Technology (ACT) for Sexual Health (SH):

ACT-SH is an interactive, evidence based sexual health assessment & counseling system that uses innovative technology to overcome the barriers faced by today's youth.

***CHWs excel at engaging youth – ACT for Sexual Health supports CHWs, augmenting their outreach with standardized, evidence-based approach to intervention, health education, and ongoing care coordination.***



## The secure, web-based ACT-SH system offers key benefits that uniquely complement a CHW model, including:

- Validated, short-format assessment and health counseling designed specifically for adolescents
- Accessible on all web enabled devices, including mobile devices (tablet, iPad, Kindle) means youth can participate in the program anywhere the CHW can go
- Identifies and provides education on sexual health risk behaviors and factors that contribute to unsafe sexual decision making
- Electronic referrals, referral tracking & notes documentation and comprehensive reporting (across demographics, payor, risks, outcomes, and more.)
- Audio and multi-lingual options to address health literacy
- Individualized, risk-specific health education incorporates behavior change methodologies and provides stage-based intervention directly to the adolescent
- Evidence-based counseling suggestions to support the CHW in risk-reduction conversations and standardize care
- Secure (yet immediately accessible) individual & population level data storage

## Connecting care across community settings with the CHW model:

**Polly Edwards Padgett, Adolescent Health Project Director at Mary Black Foundation**, spoke to the value of the CHW model within the *Connect* initiative. *“With a community health worker our partners can reach youth where they are in the community. Often, these are underserved youth living in areas of concentrated high poverty. A community health worker increases trust and engagement, which is especially important with disconnected, vulnerable youth. Chelle Jones, a CHW with BirthMatters, is a fantastic example of the community health worker model. She is a passionate champion for Spartanburg youth.”*

**Haley Denny, Adolescent Health Project Associate**, is in charge of tracking and reporting performance measures for *Connect Spartanburg*. She spoke to the role of technology in enhancing the CHW model. *“With ACT-SH a CHW can focus on his or her area of expertise – engaging adolescents as a trusted adult on these important risk topics. While at the same time ACT-SH ensures we are delivering standardized, evidence-based sexual health risk identification, counseling and referrals. And we’re able to track and highlight success, which simplifies the reporting process.”*

## By the Numbers, Reporting on Sexual Health Risk Identification and Counseling with ACT SH:



To date over 500 Spartanburg youth have been screened and counseled using ACT-SH.

## Data from the ACT-SH system’s reporting and tracking reveals an in-depth profile of the challenges for youth within this high-risk population:

- Over 25% of the population have bartered sex for a place to stay, substance use, money or something else
- One third (32.44%) have been pregnant or gotten someone pregnant
- Over 20% have had chlamydia or gonorrhea
- Nearly half (47.64%) used alcohol or drugs before the last time they had sex
- 43% have been kicked out of their home in the last year
- Three quarters (77%) have been suspended from school

Additionally, these youth and young adults also report significantly higher rates of depression and are more likely to have experienced physical or emotional abuse.

## A day in the life - Chelle Jones in ACTION for Sexual Health

### Chelle Jones, CHW, Connecting Youth to Services in Spartanburg County:



Chelle Jones is a Community Health Worker for BirthMatters, a community partner of Connect Spartanburg. Chelle engages youth 16+ years of age, providing services both in the community and at the local Detention Center. The *Connect Spartanburg* website describes the CHW role by letting teens know they can: *"Meet one-on-one with a trusted adult in the community to discuss love, sex and healthy relationships. The CHW will assist in helping you navigate health care and resources."* Chelle views this role of trusted adult as one of the most important aspects of her job.

#### ...at the Spartanburg Juvenile Justice Detention Center:

Chelle visits the detention center every week on Wednesday where she meets with youth (of both genders) incarcerated anywhere from two days to two weeks as they await the determination of their court cases.

Youth in the detention center face unique challenges.

Due to legislative restrictions, women are not allowed access to birth control while in the detention center. So one of Chelle's main priorities is to serve as both a reminder and a trusted resource to help these youth get re-established on a birth control method upon release. In addition, there is limited computer access at the detention center.

Chelle brings an internet-enabled tablet with her to the facility, which enables youth to take the ACT-SH assessment and receive tailored risk counseling while Chelle is onsite.

The ACT-SH system also helps to improve continuity of care – providing a record of care (including referrals and next steps) that bridges the gap between detention center and community resources.

#### ...in the Community:

As a community health worker, Chelle meets youth who are referred directly through Connect Spartanburg, as well as throughout the community – schools, churches, and youth she first engaged with at the detention center.

Chelle describes an average day in the community, *"I might help a teen get an HIV test, point them to a job or schooling, get them a bus pass for a clinic appointment or provide a referral for birth control. Sometimes young people just come in to sit and talk with someone they trust."*

**Chelle discussed the value of ACT-SH in focusing and deepening these conversations. *"The questions in the system are great. They are 'real' questions – you can tell youth were involved in developing the wording. Teens can relate."***

*And it's not just about sexual health – it also hits on key mental health issues. ACT-SH identifies risky behaviors and provides immediate feedback and counseling – but it also opens a door for me to have a meaningful follow-up conversation about the most important risks. It provides insight into their mind, and guides the conversation. Teens think 'maybe I can talk to her about this' and they open up."*

Learn more about the Mary Black Foundation and the Connect Initiative at: [www.ConnectSpartanburg.org](http://www.ConnectSpartanburg.org)

Learn more about BirthMatters and their adolescent initiative, IMatter at: [birth-matters.org/imatter/about-imatter/](http://birth-matters.org/imatter/about-imatter/)

To learn more about ACT-SH: [PossibilitiesForChange.com](http://PossibilitiesForChange.com) | [info@pos4chg.org](mailto:info@pos4chg.org) | 855-767-4244