

2011

A Report from the Prevention Research Center of Michigan

# Promoting Safe & Healthy Futures





## Dear Readers,

Youth are the future, but today's young people face many challenges to their health and well-being. This is particularly true in Michigan, which has been in a long and severe economic downturn. Distressed communities experience high rates of violence, incarceration, obesity and sexually transmitted infections. All of these issues have profound effects on children and young adults. This report from the Prevention Research Center of Michigan features four projects that build upon existing community-based programs that seek to enhance and promote safe and healthy futures for Michigan's youth. A common theme of these initiatives is their emphasis on an asset-based approach that both promotes the resiliency of young people and builds community capacity.

HOPE (HIV/STI Outreach Prevention and Education), which is the core research project of the PRC/MI, is based upon a program created and coordinated by YOUR Center, a community-based organization (CBO) in Flint, Michigan. YOUR Center has conducted HOPE parties to reduce health disparities in HIV and sexually transmitted infections for several years. Our partnership expands on the work that they are doing to explore the use of online social media to provide further opportunities to communicate about healthy sexuality among peer networks.

Motherly Intercession (MI), another CBO in Flint, has developed programs to support for caregivers and children of incarcerated mothers. The PRC/MI has partnered with MI to conduct an evaluation of a parenting program that has been tailored for this special population.

The Michigan Youth Violence Prevention Center (MI-YVPC) brings together six interventions and several community partners to address violence at the individual, family and community levels in a geographically defined area of the Flint community. The evaluation of MI-YVPC will explore the effects of these programs on police incidents, violent injuries, property maintenance, and community perceptions of safety and neighborliness.

And finally, we report on the evaluation of the Building Healthy Communities project, a statewide school-based program sponsored by the Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation to reduce obesity and increase physical activity in young children.

The goal of our research and evaluation efforts is to identify effective approaches to promote the health of children, adolescents and young adults. Concurrently, we strive to support the capacity of our community partners to sustain and expand those programs that prove successful. We hope you enjoy this report and invite you to visit our website or follow us on Facebook and Twitter to learn more about our partners and projects.

In good health,

Marc Zimmerman, PhD  
Principal Investigator and Director

Susan Morrel-Samuels, MA, MPH  
Managing Director

The Prevention Research Center of Michigan (PRC/MI), based at the University of Michigan School of Public Health, conducts community-based prevention research to improve health and prevent disease, especially focused on populations with a disproportionate share of poor health outcomes.

The PRC/MI is based on strong and committed partnerships among community-based organizations, health departments, health advocacy groups, health service providers, and academic institutions. These collaborations are guided by RESPECTFUL<sup>®</sup> research principles.

**R**espect each other's contributions;

**E**ncourage change and promote knowledge in ways that benefit communities;

**S**hare credit and responsibility for results;

**P**romote an emphasis on locally relevant health issues;

**E**xamine the social, economic and cultural influences on health;

**C**ollaborate on all major phases of the research process;

**T**reat research participants ethically;

**F**urnish results to the community in a useful manner;

**U**tilize community strengths and expertise; and

**L**ink research to action to enhance community capacity.



## HOPE:

### HIV/STI Prevention Education and Outreach

In 2008, the PRC/MI Community Board identified prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) as one of the highest health priorities in Genesee County and developed the HOPE project to explore ways to reduce infections among young adults. Social, cultural and economic barriers all contribute to large disparities in STI and HIV rates. Young adults, especially, face many unique challenges. They are still very interested in having fun, hanging with friends, dating, and sex. Nevertheless, as they enter into adulthood, they contend with increasing social responsibilities and financial obligations. Many have children and are supporting families. Some young adults are working, some are in school. Some are single, some are in relationships. STI prevention programs are often focused on a younger population, and may not address many of these unique concerns.

HOPE or HIV/STI Outreach Prevention and Education, the core research project of the PRC/MI, takes a unique approach to preventing the transmission of HIV and STIs

among 18-24 year olds in urban communities. The project explores the use of online social media to enhance an existing comprehensive peer-mentoring model for sexual health and STI prevention. The project has two components: 1) HOPE Parties, and 2) HOPE online (<http://www.hopegenesee.org>)

#### What is a HOPE Party?

HOPE parties are gathering among friends where HIV/STI education is provided in a safe, comfortable and entertaining manner. Several years ago, YOUR Center, a community-based organization in Genesee County, developed the idea of using house parties for HIV/AIDS prevention after recognizing the need for reliable, trusted information about sexual health among community residents. The concept for HOPE Parties is simple. A host is recruited, and with the help of a sexual health educator, invites 8-10 friends (both male and female) to a HOPE Party.

## STI Facts

There are 9.1 million new cases of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) per year among young adults aged 15-24, in the U.S. and African Americans face the greatest burden. These disparities are also evident in Genesee and Saginaw Counties in Michigan where compared to European Americans, African Americans are 6-7 times more likely to contract Chlamydia and 10-12 times more likely to have Gonorrhea.

#### Sources:

*Sexually Transmitted Diseases in the United States, 2008 National Surveillance Data for Chlamydia, Gonorrhea, and Syphilis, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.* <http://www.cdc.gov/>

*Michigan Department of Community Quarterly HIV/AIDS Analysis 2009* [http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdch/GenJan09\\_267753\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdch/GenJan09_267753_7.pdf), [http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdch/SagJan09\\_267754\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdch/SagJan09_267754_7.pdf)



At the party, guests participate in a number of hands-on activities, assess their risk, practice communication and decision making skills, and develop a risk reduction/safer sex behavior plan.

Participants are also provided with

resources and referrals to testing and treatment. HOPE parties engage guests in role play activities to facilitate active learning and skill-building.

### What is HOPE online?

The second component of the HOPE Project is the online intervention, composed of the HOPE website, as well as HOPE pages in Twitter and Facebook. The online community is intended to expand educational opportunities, enhance peer mentoring, and establish a source for information and support. The website includes several interactive features including blogs, expert advice, polls, videos, and a discussion forum. Social networking sites help promote the website content and communicate positive sexual health messages. Participants who attend the HOPE

parties in Genesee County are invited to join the online community and share information with their friends.

### Research Design

The project uses a comparison group design to explore the effects of adding an online social networking component to an evidence-based peer education intervention. We are conducting HOPE Parties in two communities, Genesee County and Saginaw County. In Genesee County, HOPE parties are being led and coordinated by YOUR Center staff. In Saginaw County, HOPE Parties are being led and coordinated by staff at the Saginaw County Department of Public Health.

HOPE party participants in Genesee County are encouraged to join the online community and connect with each other online to continue the discussions, give each other support and ask follow up questions. Saginaw County participants take part in HOPE parties, but are not directed to the online intervention.

Our research goals include testing the: 1) efficacy of a technology enhanced, evidenced-based peer education

program compared to the evidence-based program alone; 2) effects of the intervention on behavioral and health outcomes in a design that follows young adults over a year post-intervention; and 3) relationships among network and psychosocial factors as mediators of the effects of the intervention on healthy sexuality.

Health outcomes being studied are: 1) drug and alcohol use before sex; 2) number of sex partners 3) HIV/STD testing and 4) condom use. We will also compare changes in the rates of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV in both counties over the duration of the study.

### Next steps

HOPE is a 5 year project ending in 2014. We are recruiting hosts in both Saginaw and Genesee Counties, and the HOPE website and social media sites for the project have been launched. We are also in the process of exploring new online communication tools, such as mobile applications and videos.

As technology changes, we plan to adapt our strategies and continue to explore innovative ways to extend the healthy sexuality message in the community.

The lead organizations for HOPE are the University of Michigan School of Public Health, YOUR Center, the Genesee County Health Department and the Saginaw Department of Public Health.

### For more information, contact:

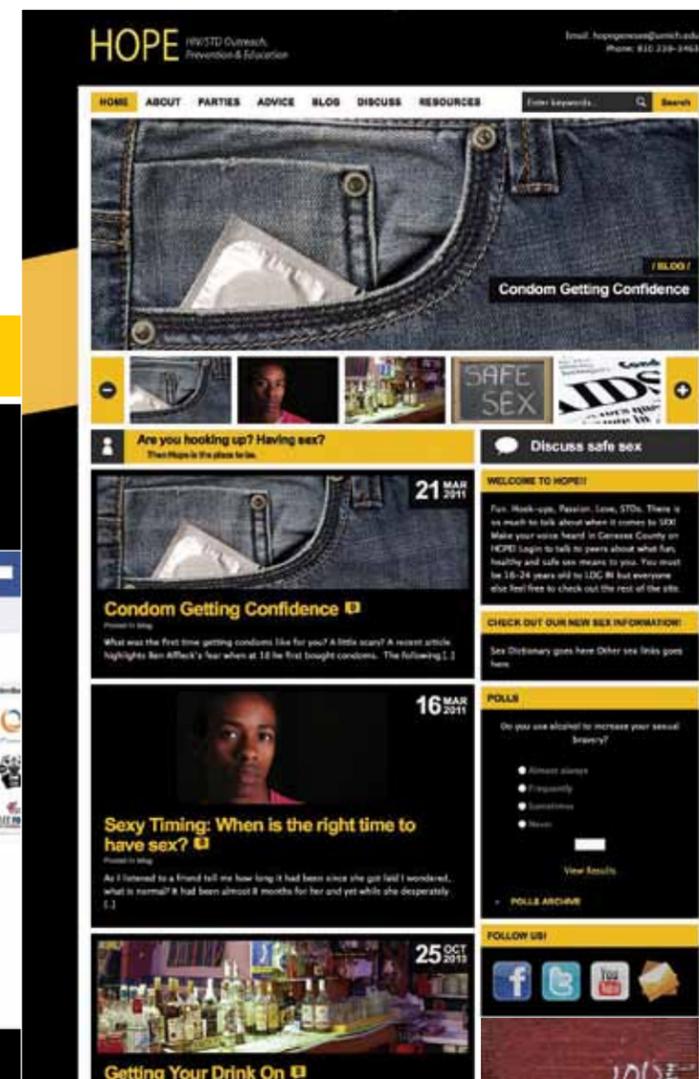
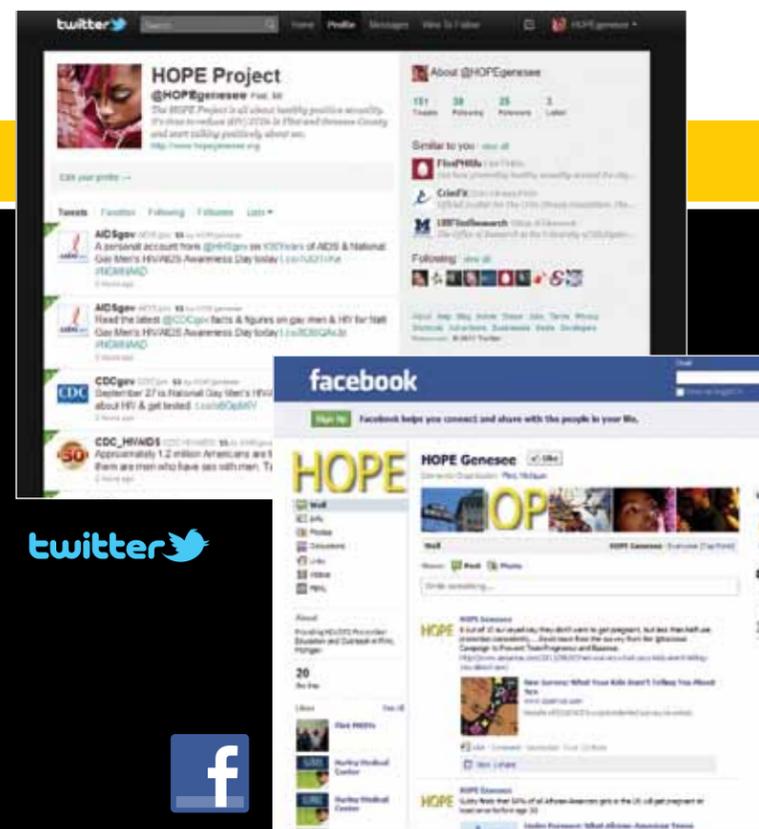
Bettina Campbell, MSW, YOUR Center, Email: info@yc4w.org  
Marc Zimmerman, PhD, UM SPH, Email: marczz@umich.edu

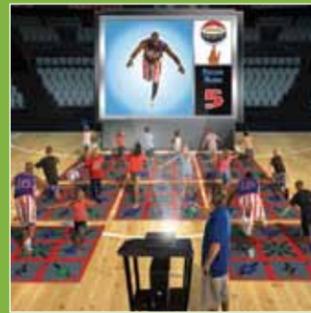
## HOPE Online

According to the latest reports from the Pew Internet and American Life survey, 78% adults use the internet, and there have been significant increases in the numbers of people watching videos online, reading blogs, and joining social networking sites. 65% of adult internet users now say they use a social networking site like MySpace, Facebook or LinkedIn. These technologies are being used not only to exchange information, but to build online communities for learning and support. As such, social media

has enormous potential to revolutionize ways in which we reach out to consumers with public health information.

The intent of the HOPE website is to supplement the HOPE parties and provide a unique source of information about healthy sexuality for young adults living in Flint and Genesee County. Social media tools allow us to build upon the successes of the traditional web-based interventions, and provide not only reliable source of information, but a place for peer support and expert advice. After the HOPE party, participants can monitor news and updates through Facebook and Twitter, and reconnect with their friends on the HOPE website.





## Building Healthy Communities Preventing Childhood Obesity

Rates of childhood obesity in the United States have been increasing at alarming rates. Before 1980 less than 5% of children were diagnosed as obese. The obesity rate for 6-11 year old children has more than tripled since the 1970s. This trend in childhood obesity follows a similar increase in adolescent and adult obesity during the same time period. In Michigan specifically, nearly 19% of children aged 6-11 years old are overweight or obese. In addition to increasing their likelihood of suffering conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, hypertension and arthritis, obesity also carries stigma and psychological distress that can lead to shame, self-blame, low self-esteem, and low achievement. Children that are obese are more likely to become obese adults, which leads to further long-term health consequences.

Despite these challenges, there are many communities throughout Michigan that are working hard to alleviate the childhood obesity epidemic. The *Building Healthy*

*Communities* (BHC) program, sponsored by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan, provides one-year grants to elementary schools in low-income neighborhoods to do just that. These grants, which range in funding depending upon the number of programs selected, the size of the school, and the number of children enrolled, support the implementation of an assortment of evidence-based healthy eating and physical activity programs. Each school is required to include four elements in their programs: a healthy school assessment, physical activity and education, a walking club, and a 5K run or walk. Participating schools also have the option of implementing programs promoting parent engagement and community partnerships to enhance the built environment.

In the 2009-2010 school year, 17 elementary schools were funded, and 22 schools were funded the following year. Each school adopted a different set of program tools to match their specific interests and needs. For example, a school in Flint used their BHC grant to implement the HOPSports program, which gives students an opportunity to learn new sports and activities like yoga and martial arts. With the funding, they were able to purchase new fitness equipment and professional development training for teachers. In another city in southeast Michigan, a school used BHC funding to install a stand-alone greenhouse which will be used to teach students, parents, and the community about the importance of growing and purchasing local food products.

Evaluation of the BHC programs was conducted by the Prevention Research Center of Michigan (PRC/MI). The primary components of the evaluation study included surveys of 4th and 5th grade students and their teachers at the start and the end of the school year, as well as program implementation reports by program administrators.

Based on survey findings, students who participated in the study reported statistically significant improvements including: healthier eating in the previous 24 hours, increased knowledge about healthy eating habits, healthy food, and how the digestive system works, more physical activity in the past week, stronger beliefs about the positive effects of physical activity and its effects on their bodies, stronger beliefs about the positive effects of healthy eating, and greater access to healthy food choices. Through the use of regular status reports, evaluation staff learned a great deal about the implementation challenges faced by schools.

Moving forward, the PRC/MI will perform additional analysis aimed at explaining the variation in program outcomes across the schools, including program approaches and implementation, and other school- and community-context variables. We hope to understand the significance of school-based and community-based partnerships for program success and obesity prevention. Lessons learned from this evaluation study are being used to improve the model and future repetitions of the program.

*This research was supported by a grant from the Center for Healthcare Research and Transformation, a non-profit partnership between U-M and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan to test the best ideas for improving the effectiveness of efficiency of the health care system.*

### For more information, contact:

Tom Reischl, PhD, Evaluation Director, PRC/MI,  
Email: reischl@umich.edu



**In 2009 and 2010,**  
39 schools across the state  
received grants directly benefiting  
more than 14,000 children. They  
supported activities and events  
that included:

- An assessment tool to measure the overall health of the school's built environment and policies
- Physical activity and nutrition education using specific programs designated by Blue Cross
- Walking clubs for students and faculty
- Celebratory 5K runs and walk events



## Evaluation Findings

Students who participated in the study reported statistically significant improvements including:

- Healthier eating and increased physical activity
- Increased knowledge about healthy eating habits, healthy food and how the digestive system works
- Stronger beliefs about the positive effects of healthier eating and physical activity





## Motherly Intercession:

### Providing Support for Children of Incarcerated Parents

As the incidence of maternal incarceration has increased, a growing number of children have been affected by separation from their mothers and consequent disruptions to family life. High rates of maternal incarceration in Flint, Michigan mirror national incarceration trends. The national rate of female incarceration increased by 50% during the 1990's, and 75% of women in federal and state prisons are mothers. A disproportionate number of prisoners are minorities, and the number of African American children with an incarcerated parent has quadrupled in the past 25 years, to 1 in 9. Incarceration rates are particularly startling in places like Flint, which experience a disproportionately high burden of unemployment and poverty. In 2010, 2053 women were incarcerated in the Genesee County Jail, the majority of whom were mothers.

Children of incarcerated parents (CIP's) often experience high levels of stress, unstable home lives, exposure to parental drug use, and other issues associated with chronic poverty before their parents' arrest. Maternal incarceration places children at even greater risk

***"Young children are the hidden victims"***

**Young children's needs may change, likely increase, and can easily go unmet following a parent's incarceration.**

of challenges associated with an increased likelihood of future incarceration: academic problems; social-emotional issues; and attachment issues. Changes in care-taking roles and responsibilities, changes in schools and residence, and financial strains place additional stress upon families affected by incarceration.

In order to address these challenges, Motherly Intercession (MI), a community-based non-profit organization in Genesee County, was established in 1999. MI is the only organization in Genesee County that focuses solely on the needs of CIP's and their caregivers, and one of few organizations nationally that focuses on interventions involving kin caregivers rather than foster care. This is significant, as the majority of CIP's are placed with family caregivers, 53% of whom are grandparents. MI provides programming to support parenting while incarcerated, social-emotional support for children and their caregivers, and academic mentoring and tutoring.

Dr. Alison Miller, an assistant research professor at the PRC/MI, has been working with Motherly Intercession since 2006, and has collaborated on two of these interventions: Strengthening Families Program (SFP) and Parenting While Incarcerated (PWI).

#### **Strengthening Families Program (SFP)**

The Strengthening Families Program is an empirically-validated behavioral intervention program that seeks to promote children's social-emotional growth and family support. The 16-week program focuses on enhancing family communication skills, offering parenting support to

caregivers, and building child social skills. SFP also focuses on stress management, problem solving, and the dangers of substance abuse. Each session includes a communal meal designed to develop the bonds between caregivers and children, and group leaders from the community.

In addition to community-building, meals offer an important opportunity to practice manners, table conversation, and adaptive functioning skills such as using silverware, cleaning up, and trying new foods. Family sessions each week also allow caregivers and children to practice the skills they learned during the separate caregiver and child group sessions.

#### **Parenting While Incarcerated (PWI)**

Based on the Strengthening Families Program model, Parenting While Incarcerated was developed to provide parenting support for incarcerated mothers to enrich the lives of their children from afar. The program features an 8-week curriculum delivered in a group format in private visitation rooms at the jail by social work interns trained in the SFP model. The first cohort included 14 mothers and 36 children. The program seeks to give mothers a way to focus on their relationship with their children despite being behind bars, and to teach strategies to manage child behavior that may ease mothers' transitions into an active parenting role once released.

These programs have been in place for over two years, and have been well received by participants and within the community. In order to assess the overall effectiveness of the programs, and provide further evidence that the



***"It's a hard job, but I wouldn't give it up – that child needs to know he's loved regardless of the situation... you have to overwork the love."***

programs work with this population, Dr. Miller and Ms. Cochran, founder of Motherly Intercession, worked together to develop a comprehensive evaluation.

Results show that children and families in the program are eager to participate in additional Motherly Intercession programming, demonstrating that these families are actively seeking support, and tend to participate enthusiastically when help is delivered by a trusting organization such as MI.

#### **For more information, contact:**

Shirley Cochran, Executive Director, Motherly Intercession, Email: mi.scochran@att.net

Alison Miller, PhD, University of Michigan School of Public Health, Email: alimill@umich.edu



## Selected Publications

# Michigan Youth Violence Prevention Center (MI-YVPC)

### Background:

The transition from a manufacturing to service economy has had a profound effect on the life-circumstances of young people in Flint. At one time, Flint and surrounding Genesee County was one of the most prosperous metropolitan areas in the US due to many high-paying manufacturing jobs. Since losing over 70,000 auto industry jobs, it now faces some extreme economic and health challenges, one of which is persistently high rates of violent crime.

Reversing these trends can be challenging, but there are many people and organizations in the community that focus on building a positive foundation for community change. Results of the 2009 Speak to Your Health! Community Survey indicate that 35% of Flint residents were involved in beautification projects, 23% were involved in neighborhood

crime watch programs, and 41% took actions with neighbors to address neighborhood problems.



Michigan Youth Violence Prevention Center

Building on these strengths, the Michigan Youth Violence Prevention Center (MI-YVPC) seeks to reduce violence and create supportive and healthy environments for youth, ages 10-24. The Center was developed in partnership with the Genesee County Health Department, health systems, community organizations, law enforcement, Michigan State University, the University of Michigan School of Public Health, and University of Michigan-Flint Campus.

Based on the theory of youth empowerment and enhancing positive connections to others in their community, the MI-YVPC worked with community partners to integrate six programs designed to promote intergenerational interactions and engagement for promoting positive youth development through community development. The programs are being implemented in a geographically-defined intervention area.

### MI-YVPC programs include:

**Youth Empowerment Solutions (YES):** A curriculum-based program to prevent youth violence by empowering youth to create community change and connecting them with adult advocates. *Lead organization: Church Without Walls*

**Fathers and Sons:** Aims to prevent youth risky behaviors by building stronger relationships between African American fathers and their adolescent sons. *Lead organization: Flint Odyssey House Health Awareness Center*

**Emergency Department Brief Intervention:** Provides counseling to youth treated at the emergency department. *Lead organization: Hurley Medical Center*

**Clean and Green/Adopt a Lot:** Partners with local organizations to improve and maintain vacant properties. *Lead organization: Genesee County Land Bank*

**Targeted Outreach Mentoring:** Pairs adult role models with youth who have been referred by Family Court or Teen Jury. *Lead community organization: Boys and Girls Club of Greater Flint.*

**Community Policing:** Assists residents, community organizations and police officers to work together. *Lead organization: Michigan State University*

### Evaluation:

In order to assess the progress of MI-YVPC programming and continue to improve our partnerships and Center functions, the MI-YVPC research team will conduct process and outcome evaluation studies. These will be both qualitative and quantitative in nature and will track each program individually as well as the overall success of the Center. Using police incident data, hospital emergency department data, PRC/MI Speak to Your Health! Community Survey data, and property assessment data, rates of crime and injury in the intervention area will be compared with a similar area in Flint. Through the Community Survey, residents will also be asked about their perceptions of neighborhood safety and friendliness.

In the first year of the project, the MI-YVPC collected base-line property assessment data, conducted staff training for the various interventions, and launched the MI-YVPC website and youth violence prevention blog. The website is an online resource for community members, public health practitioners, and researchers interested in youth violence prevention in Michigan and around the U.S.

To learn more about the MI-YVPC, email: michiganyvpc@umich.edu, visit our website <http://yvpc.sph.umich.edu> or follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

### For more information, contact:

Susan Morrel-Samuels, MA, MPH, Email: [sumosa@umich.edu](mailto:sumosa@umich.edu)  
Mark Valacek, MPH, Genesee County Health Department, Email: [mvalacek@gchd.us](mailto:mvalacek@gchd.us)

### Youth Empowerment Solutions for Peaceful Communities: Combining Theory and Practice In a Community-Level Violence Prevention Curriculum.

Zimmerman, M. A., Stewart, S. E., Morrel-Samuels, S., Franzen, S., & Reischl, T. M. (2011). *Health Promotion Practice*, 12(3), 425-439.

This article describes the development and evaluation of the YES curriculum, an after-school curriculum designed to prepare youth, in partnership with adults, to promote peace and prevent violence through community change.

### Association of interpersonal violence with self-reported history of head injury.

Stoddard, S. A. & Zimmerman, M. A. (2011). *Pediatrics*. Jun; 127(6): 1074-9.

This article reports the results of a study that explores the relationship between head injury and perpetration of interpersonal violence. The study finds that youth who had experienced a head injury before young adulthood reported more interpersonal violence in young adulthood than participants who had never had a head injury.

### Community-Based Participatory Research: A New Approach to Engaging Community Members to Rapidly Call 911 for Stroke.

Skolarus, L. E., Zimmerman, M. A., Murphy, J., Brown, D. L., Kerber, K. A., Bailey, S., Fowkes, S., et al. (2011). *Stroke*.

This survey conducted in three Flint churches, explored residents knowledge of stroke signs and symptoms, as well as barriers to calling 911 in case of stroke emergencies. The authors concluded that a community-based research approach may be effective in reducing stroke disparities.

### Facilitating the Development of a County Health Coverage Plan With Data From a Community-Based Health Survey, (2010).

Kruger, D.J., Hamacher, L., Strugar-Fritsch, D., Shirey, L., Renda, E., & Zimmerman, M.A. (2010). *Journal of Public Health Policy* 31, 199-211.

This article describes how the results from the Speak to Your Health! Community Survey were used to help develop the Genesee County Health Plan (GHP), which provides primary care, prescription drugs, and specialty care to uninsured, low-income adults. As a result of the health plan, Genesee County has become one of the first counties in the United States to make basic health care available to nearly all of its uninsured, low-income adults.

## Partners

- 7th Judicial Circuit of Michigan
- The Boys and Girls Club of Greater Flint
- Church Without Walls
- City of Flint Police Department
- Durant Turri Mott Elementary
- Emergency Department, Hurley Medical Center
- Flint Area Reinvestment Office
- Flint City Police Department
- Flint Odyssey House Health Awareness Center
- Genesee County Community Action Resource Department
- Genesee County Community Mental Health
- Genesee County Health Department
- Genesee County Land Bank
- Greater Flint Health Coalition
- Kettering University
- Mayor's Office, City of Flint
- McLaren Regional Medical Center
- Michigan State University, School of Criminal Justice
- Mott Children's Health Center



Improving Health in Partnership  
with Families and Communities

### STATE BOARD ORGANIZATIONS

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan  
Detroit Community Academic Urban Research Center  
Michigan Association of Health Plans  
Michigan Association for Local Public Health  
Michigan Council for Maternal Child Health  
Michigan Department of Community Health  
Michigan League for Human Services  
Michigan Osteopathic Association  
Michigan Primary Care Association  
Michigan Public Health Association  
Michigan Public Health Institute  
Michigan State Medical Society  
Registered Nurses Association of Michigan  
University of Michigan School of Public Health

### GENESEE COUNTY COMMUNITY BOARD ORGANIZATIONS

Dort-Oak Park Neighborhood House  
Faith Access to Community Economic Development  
Flint/Genesee County Neighborhood Roundtable  
Flint Odyssey House Health Awareness Center  
Genesee County Community Action Resource Department  
Genesee County Health Department  
Greater Flint Health Coalition  
University of Michigan – Flint  
University of Michigan School of Public Health  
YOUR Center

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Susan Morrel-Samuels, MA, MPH  
Managing Director  
Prevention Research Center of Michigan  
UM School of Public Health  
1415 Washington Heights  
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-2029  
Phone (734) 647-0219  
[www.sph.umich.edu/prc](http://www.sph.umich.edu/prc)  
[contactprc@umich.edu](mailto:contactprc@umich.edu)

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