

**July 2015**

**PREP Evaluation Report  
Interviews with Iowa PREP Facilitators**

***Meghan B. Francis***  
*Graduate Research Assistant*

***Natoshia M. Askelson, MPH, PhD***  
*Assistant Professor*

***Elizabeth H. Golembiewski, MPH***  
*Research Assistant*

## Background

The Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP) a federal program aimed at reducing teen pregnancies and sexual risk behaviors by educating young people on both abstinence and contraception to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS. In the state of Iowa, the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) is the administrator of the state's PREP funding. IDPH awards contracts to community-based organizations and agencies through a competitive grant process. Each site must demonstrate the need for PREP funding in their community and their capacity to deliver an evidence-based program to the adolescent population.

In the state of Iowa, the two following PREP curricula are offered: the Teen Outreach Program (TOP) and Wise Guys. TOP focuses on youth in at-risk communities between ages 12-18, while Wise Guys is a program for males between the ages of 11-17. TOP is a 9-month curriculum that seeks to reduce the risk of problem behavior, promote healthy behavior, and create a sense of purpose. The curriculum focuses on: values, relationships, communication and assertiveness, influence, goal-setting, decision-making, human development and sexuality, and community service learning. Wise Guys delivers messages to males focusing on teen pregnancy prevention. The program for Wise Guys is between 5-12 weeks with lessons dealing with human sexuality, self-esteem, values, healthy relationships, decision-making, and goal-setting.

Websites for more information:

<https://www.idph.state.ia.us/hpcdp/prep.asp>

<http://wymancenter.org/nationalnetwork/top/>

<http://www.wiseguysnc.org/Home.aspx>

## Purpose of Evaluation Activity: Phone Interviews with Facilitators

As part of a larger evaluation of PREP programming in the state of Iowa, the University of Iowa conducted telephone interviews with TOP and Wise Guys facilitators. The goal of this evaluation was to determine the different successes and challenges within TOP and Wise Guys and what additional support is needed in the future. The method of evaluating the program was using open-ended questions with facilitators during a phone interview.

## Methods

Between May and June 2015, eight phone interviews with PREP facilitators were conducted. Three TOP facilitators and five Wise Guys facilitators (at 3 sites) were interviewed. The questions were open-ended allowing the program facilitators to reveal the successes and challenges of the program. The interviews were approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. The following types of questions were addressed in the protocol by a trained interviewer:

Experience as a facilitator

Objectives/information meeting community needs

Participants' experience

Changes seen in participants because of program

Challenges of program implementation

Support needed

Continuing program implementation

Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

## Summary of Findings

Findings from the interviews are described below. This report first details the evaluation of the Wise Guys program then moves onto the evaluation of TOP. It describes participant successes, group successes, and community successes. The report then covers participant challenges, group challenges and community challenges. It also provides suggestions facilitators had for the Wise Guys program and TOP.

Several participant successes were reported as a result of the Wise Guys program. Facilitators described that students understood the importance of a condom, decided to stop bullying, and know the significance of safe sex. Additionally, facilitators noted that Wise Guys helped students mature and open-up and develop skills such as goal-setting and decision-making. Faculty at the schools have also noticed how much information the students are retaining from the Wise Guys program.

As a group, Wise Guys allowed the students to feel more comfortable asking difficult questions to facilitators in a male-only setting. The facilitators also developed trust with the students and served as role-models. Wise Guys has become popular in many of the communities and schools, and students are beginning to ask how to get involved. Incentives have been lucrative tools used for boosting attendance. Facilitators noted that students took interest in topics such as sex and sexuality, STDs, birth control, decision-making, values, signs of suicide (SOS), relationships, and consent. Facilitators reported that lessons with activities were more successful than lessons with worksheets.

In the community, facilitators stated that it is best when the community buys-in to support the Wise Guys program. Facilitators have also noted that it is helpful to be able to say they have implemented a male pregnancy prevention curriculum when they are applying for other types of funding. They reported that the students have a greater knowledge of the organizations that serve their community as well.

Wise Guys facilitators did have some challenges in the group and community. Some facilitators reported that they had difficulty getting counselors to understand the type of student they were recruiting to the program. Students did not enjoy goal-setting and decision making and "Myself". While attendance at the regular high schools was very consistent, it was more challenging at the alternative high schools because students can graduate throughout the year. Some facilitators mentioned that their groups were too large, making it difficult to control behavior. In the community, a couple groups wanted to identify a trustworthy staff member the boys could ask questions to when they were not there, but it was difficult to find the right person. Some school districts did not want to budge and let Wise Guys into the school system, even for an after-school program.

As for the TOP program, participant successes told by facilitators included some students continued volunteering on their own, students opened up more, and several students have been utilizing community resources. Facilitators reported that students loved going to service learning sites. They also felt more comfortable with each other and were able to build trust, confidence, patience, and relationships with other TOP members.

In the group, some TOP facilitators reported they had success with recruitment of students. Facilitators also mentioned the excellent behavior of the students this year. It was beneficial when students trusted the facilitator and felt like TOP was a safe place. The incentives also helped boost attendance and ensured the students would hear the lesson for the week. Additionally, facilitators mentioned that many students like TOP so much that they want to repeat the program next year. Facilitators also reported that students learned more about the resources in

the community. Students told facilitators about lessons they enjoyed such as values, contraception, and basic skills. For community successes, facilitators mentioned it was useful to have community buy-in and community partnerships.

Regarding participant challenges, only discomfort with puberty lesson with younger students and continuity between lessons were mentioned. For group challenges, facilitators stated that issues with the curriculum such as it was too lengthy, difficult to get students to attend consistently, the preference for a more lenient curriculum, and would like to see additional topics added to the curriculum. Additionally, the service learning component was fun for the students when they are on-site, but facilitators reported that many of the lessons were redundant. It was also difficult for group to accomplish service learning in the community because they had inadequate transportation and resorted to taking public transit. Facilitators said lessons on sexuality through lifespan, decision-making, and signs of suicide were not popular with the students. In the community, facilitators faced challenges dealing with community buy-in because it was difficult to get the schools to agree to a 9-month curriculum.

# Wise Guys Program

## Participant Successes

Facilitators were asked to describe individual successes they had noticed among the participants as a result of the Wise Guys program. The following topics were described as participant successes for Wise Guys: healthy behaviors, maturity, goal-setting & decision-making, confidence, enjoyment of Wise Guys, group involvement, feeling comfortable/outreach, retaining knowledge, respect, and being prepared.

### *Healthy behaviors*

One facilitator described how an alternative school student had stated to his peers that he did not like how condoms felt because they were not comfortable, and there was no point. After a few Wise Guys sessions, the student brought up condoms again, and the facilitator reminded him that he used to vocal about not using condoms. Mid-way through the course, the facilitator mentioned the student had told the class that he changed his mind about condoms, and he now understands their cause and importance.

Facilitators described changes in bullying behaviors reported among participants. One participant said that Wise Guys has made him realize that he was being a bully to other students, and once he went through the program, he has stopped bullying the other students. Another boy told a facilitator he used to be intolerant of others' opinions, but he learned from Wise Guys to be respectful of others' opinions.

Several students have told facilitators that they were going to be sexually active early, but after they went over the STD portion and talked about parenting, they changed their mind and decided to wait. It really helps them to be able to make better decisions in the future, even when they get out of high school. Additionally, a student said that if they were going to have sex, they are going to practice safe sex because they know the dangers.

*They tell us they haven't had sex, and if it wasn't for Wise Guys, they would have.*

### *Maturity*

Another facilitator described one student who was initially pessimistic about being in Wise Guys. He questioned why he had to be there, but by the second lesson, he had begun to warm up to the program. The facilitator described the following interaction with that student that took place at the end of the semester:

*"I don't want to leave this group. I love this group."*

*The facilitator said, "Remember how you were in the beginning?"*

*He said, "Yeah...I do. I wondered why I had to be here."*

### *Goal-setting & decision-making*

One facilitator described a situation where a student was struggling with classes and was not making good decisions. This situation was reported once the student went through the Wise Guys lesson on goal-setting and decision-making:

*Now he is a prospering student. He isn't a straight-A student, but he was on the verge of being sent to alternative school. I think those lessons and communications helped him see where he was going wrong. It didn't help he had a struggling family life too. The counselor at the school said Wise Guys helped him make better decisions.*

### *Confidence*

Facilitators reported the students seem more positive about themselves. When they are in Wise Guys, their self-esteem and confidence rises, especially from the quiet ones. Additionally, some students have never spoken to each other in school before, creating new friendships. The group also shares private things, and the group is reminded not to share the information outside of Wise Guys.

## *Enjoyment of Wise Guys*

Facilitators noted that the students enjoy Wise Guys because it is different from a normal school day. They enjoy coming to it and learning about things they do not get on a regular basis of school. They like learning about healthy relationships and dating violence, feeling supported, and learning about goals and decision-making. The students like the different topics that Wise Guys offers.

## *Group involvement*

Wise Guys has been a good program for introverted students. Even though they have a hard time initially connecting with students, they found a place in Wise Guys to be a part of a group. Facilitators also reported that there were some students in the group who were less than excited about being in Wise Guys in the beginning; however, towards the end, those were the ones who were the biggest participants and were answering more questions than their peers. Some students also made a point to quiet down their rowdy peers so the facilitator could tell them the information. They truly wanted to know what they were talking about for the week, and they developed a better rapport and more respect for her as a teacher. One facilitator reported the following situation:

*We have the counselors kind of do a rating of successful students or struggling students. The ones that are successful are usually the wise ones first. By lesson three, you have complete buy-in from the entire class. It's just pretty smooth sailing to the final lesson.*

## *Retaining knowledge*

Several facilitators have recalled the following instances of the boys retaining knowledge they have learned in Wise Guys:

*Our educator who did the high school groups and is dedicated to Council Bluffs, she did a lot of health education classes that were for the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade boys. We got to see some of our Wise Guys, and they were the ones that were participating. This was just in their regular 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade science classes that had sex ed components to them. They were the ones answering because they knew the information because of what we had taught them. That was definitely a major success. I think it's given us more credibility in the community as well. There are those little successes each week like when someone remembers something from a former class period we had, and using some of their critical thinking skills in order to come up with a good answer. Even little things like knowing abstinence is a possibility.*

*In the classroom, they knew information that other students didn't know. They even came back to me and told me, "Our teacher told us something like an STD and STI are two different things." They were curious as to why their teacher would tell them something that wasn't true. I had to address that she might have just had misinformation. It's not that she was trying to give you bad information. It's just that she doesn't have the right information. They knew it was incorrect. Their teacher wouldn't believe them, but then, we had to go in and debunk that teacher. We talked to her and said, "Yeah, I think you may have gotten that information confused." It can be confusing, and this is what we do all the time. This is just one little component that they maybe spend a half hour on for the entire school year. It was understandable, but it was kind of funny and cool to see the guys really taking pride that they knew more than their teacher.*

*When we see the sophomore students we had over two to three years ago still talking about it or you hear from the health teachers in the high school about students saying they learned that in Wise Guys. That's one of the successes and the desire of the school system.*

## *Respect*

Students have more of an understanding of different orientations, identities, and expressions of gender and sexuality. There has been a lot of diversity in the groups, which has made a huge difference. There has been an apparent attitude shift as a result of discussions around gender stereotypes and the ways females are viewed in terms of sex versus some of the ways males are.

*They talk about females differently. Once we set a tone in the beginning, I think that is one of the benefits with me being a female and leading the group. We are going to talk about females in a certain way and we are going to refer to females in a certain way and not in other ways. In the beginning, they tend to have a harder time with that and towards the end of the*

*program, it becomes more second nature for them and be more respectful with the way they refer to females and talk about the opposite gender.*

*Participants also learned the importance of not judging others based on differences.*

*I think one of the things is that they've learned to listen to others and not judge. I think that's a major thing.*

*I think what works well is we let them know it's their program. We are here to help them move through this program. They are free to express their feelings without judgment.*

### *Lessons learned*

At the end of the program when facilitators ask the students what they will take with from the program, many of them report being kinder to others, not being as judgmental, and if the time comes when the students are going to have sex, they are going to use protection.

### **Group successes**

The facilitators of Wise Guys were asked about the successes of the program that could be reported for the group as a whole. The following themes were described as group successes for Wise Guys: safe place, trust in facilitators, facilitators as positive role models, male-only group, growth in popularity, incentives, attendance, classroom management, favorite topics (sex and sexuality, STDs, birth control, decision-making, values, signs of suicide (SOS), and relationships, consent), lesson structure and delivery, positive feedback from surveys, and group completion rate.

#### *Safe place*

Many students told the facilitators that they felt like Wise Guys was a safe place to talk openly about topics. They felt open to discuss things about sex in a way they could not anywhere else. Many times, they do not have adults in their life that are so frank and can be open about condoms and birth control usage. The facilitators told the groups that what was shared in Wise Guys does not leave Wise Guys, which really helped the students to open up and feel comfortable.

*Sometimes, they would test their limits, but you could really see a change in the fact that they were more comfortable about this stuff.*

*It was kind of a relief to them to be able to ask some of their questions.*

*The boys did feel comfortable talking about things like their parents' divorces and different things in their lives like people their parents date. All sorts of things that are happening in their day-to-day life that pertain to Wise Guys. Some of them like when we talk about dating violence, a lot of these boys probably have it in their lives pretty regularly like some sort of violence. I talked about that immediately, and told them it might be a hard subject for some of them because you might face this already, and please know that you can talk to me or your counselor. I made sure I made that disclaimer. The guys were really open about talking things in their own personal lives.*

*I think the other big thing for them is safety. They feel comfortable asking or saying what they think.*

#### *Trust in facilitators*

In order to make a difference in the group, the students must trust their facilitators. One facilitator suggested that students felt more comfortable with her because she is older and like an aunt or grandmother figure to them, not a young woman to whom they may show attraction. Several facilitators reported success stories:

*They feel safe in the group, and they trust [the other facilitator] and me.*

*I think that really helps. [The other facilitator] is a wonderful role model for the boys. I think that makes a major difference. The teachers at the school call him the Gentle Giant. He's tall and has a wonderful demeanor about him. I really think he makes a major impact on those young men. I think they would like to emulate him. He's soft-spoken, professional, and polite. He's so good with them, and they truly trust him. He talks about when he was in junior high and some of those same things they're going through.*

*They know if they have a question, they can ask it. There are not topics that I shy away from. Things that we talk about are topics parents might be uncomfortable with. We face them head on. We talked about STDs, birth control, what do you do in an uncomfortable situation and how to get out of it, what do you do if your friend is on drugs, and all the hard stuff no one else wants to talk about. They know that is what we talk about*

### *Facilitators also served as positive role models for participants:*

*He's African American. It's not only our African American males that relate to him. Today, we were at the high school, and we took them on a field trip two weeks ago. One of the things we observed is that they are high school kids with their friends, and there was a lot of swearing. We told them about it twice. There was a lot of using of the N-word. We really talked about that today, and we told them, "Quincy and I made some observations. We know people swear. I swear. You have to know the time and place and filters." We talked about filters and how they need to put those filters on. It made great conversation. Quincy said, "Okay, we are going to talk about the N-word." We had a great conversation about that. One boy told them he had heard that word since he was growing up. I told him, "If I said that, then it wouldn't be okay." It was just great conversation with them. That's the big thing is that they trust us.*

### *Male-only group*

The students really appreciate that Wise Guys is a male only group, and that sex education is primarily male focused because in a normal health class, it is typically female focused. They participants loved that they can open up about issues specific to males and say what they think. It was also very helpful for the facilitator to be able to tell other communities or after school programs that they have offered a male-only curriculum, meeting a need that may be typically lacking in a community.

### *Growth in popularity*

A couple facilitators reported how popular Wise Guys is becoming in the school system. The program has had great reception in the community and the schools. The counselors and students both thoroughly enjoy the program. When Wise Guys first started, there were not very many students, but once students saw how popular it was, more students started to join. Groups have gotten to a point where students are asking for the program by name.

*In one of the schools we do the program in, it has become really popular. Kids that aren't in it want to be in it.*

*In addition to Wise Guys classes, I do standard sex ed classes in most of the schools. In this one middle school, I was doing my regular sex ed class with the 8<sup>th</sup> graders. A couple boys knew a bunch of the answers. I asked them if they had been in Wise Guys, and they said yes. The other boys were saying, "I keep hearing about this, and I want to be in Wise Guys. How do we get in that? It sounds awesome." People are starting to recognize the name Wise Guys and understand what it means. It's considered a popular, cool thing to get to be a part of.*

### *Incentives*

All Wise Guys facilitators commented on how successful the incentives were for the program.

*I'll be honest, they also really like the food and the prizes. We give them food every week, and we give them prizes every week; that definitely helps. I have a feeling they would still like it even without that stuff. I just think they like being able to talk about this stuff and ask questions.*

### *Attendance*

Facilitators reported that students were very eager to come to Wise Guys. If the students could not make it, they would let the facilitator know ahead of time. Several students mentioned to the instructor that they came to school on a particular day of the week to be at Wise Guys.

## *Favorite topics*

The students really appreciated the topics covered in Wise Guys. The topics that facilitators reported students enjoyed the most were: sex and sexuality, contraception, STDs, values, decision-making, and relationships.

### **Sex and sexuality**

Facilitators reported that students really liked having the opportunity to talk about sex and sexuality in a group. They have a lot of success when they are given the chance to discuss things and share their opinions and thoughts. Participants learned the steps of how to put on a condom, an approach that was more effective for these lessons than worksheets. They were more interested in lessons that focused on real-life sexuality rather than textbook youth development. Participants are very interested in how they are growing into becoming sexual beings. They were also interested in the sexuality lessons because it described the use of a body clock, which talked about stages of sexuality through stages of life.

### **STDs**

Facilitators reported that students were very interested to learn about STDs. They also reported that having a Q&A session was popular, and it was always interesting to hear the myths the students had heard. The Wise Guys always found it interesting for some of the things they thought they knew or were surprised by the answer.

*I think one of the things is I would say they had very little knowledge about STDs.*

### **Birth control**

Facilitators reported that students always enjoyed learning about birth control. The biggest success was when facilitators brought in the different types of birth control because students had never seen many of the types before. However, facilitators noted that some of the students are not mature enough for this lesson.

*The maturity level always go out the window. Sometimes, they get a little obsessed like, "Oh my gosh, that female condom is the craziest looking thing I've seen." They are kind of fascinated by it, and it tends to be a little less memorable. We focus on condoms a lot, obviously, and they seem to grasp on the birth control part, but I don't think they end up remembering a bunch of the birth control methods for females. The other one I always love is we do a myth and fact about basic sexuality stuff like how you can get pregnant and different things about male and female body. They always love that one. I think partly in the fact because we make it a competition, and they always respond well to it. They always find it really interesting to learn more about this stuff.*

*They love the condom lesson with the steps of putting on a condom, and we make them put them in order.*

### **Decision-making**

The students have learned to make good decisions and feel those decisions are going to help them in the future. In the beginning of the program, one facilitator tells the students the lessons for the program, and the students are always interested to learn about decision-making, especially for the high school students.

### **Values**

Participants enjoyed the values lesson because it gets them in touch with their own values.

*Their favorite lessons are values because that's an agree/disagree statement. It puts them in test not only with their own values, but with everyone else in the class. The things they like about it are they are not judgmental with others. They are free to say what they thought. They realized in that lesson that everyone feels differently. What you value and someone else values may not be the same. That's one lesson they liked.*

## Signs of Suicide (SOS)

*I think we meet their emotional needs as an adolescent. I think with the SOS lesson, we talk a lot about depression, recognizing that, and helping your friends who are struggling. It's important for them to discern what is depression and what is just sadness. They like SOS and stress.*

## Relationships

Facilitators reported that the lesson on relationships was also a popular one. Participants talked a lot about these types of lessons, and expressed a desire that the lesson on relationships be longer. The group talked about goal-setting and making decisions to avoid unwanted pregnancies. They also talk about the responsibilities of fatherhood and how it can affect their life as a teen parent.

## Consent

Facilitators reported that students enjoyed learning about consent because it was a subject they had not thought about before. The lesson made them think of the sexual female's perspective and feelings. Students also liked an activity called Rape Trials.

*It can be different at different schools. For some reason, at the alternative school, we always end up spending a ton of time talking about consent. For whatever reason, it's a topic they don't quite understand, and they always want to go back for it. With that, there always seems to be an underlying topic of gender stereotypes. That always seems to become part of it like how females are treated and how males are treated when it comes to sex and sexual activity. That one tends to be a well-received lesson. It always is an interesting one with opinions, discussion, and back and forth debate. That usually is really good and positive. That tends to be a popular one. They like talking about STDs; for some reason, they really like that topic. We tend to spend a lot of time on that.*

*Chapter 5 deals with dating violence. A lot of my groups really like an activity called Rape Trials. It's when I read them true trials of people who have got themselves in a sticky situation. They have to decide if it's considered rape or not. I think they like that because they don't know much about that topics and the laws in Iowa, or what is rape or isn't, especially if alcohol is involved. That really gets their attention.*

## Other topics

Facilitators also noted that students enjoyed discussions on dating violence, goal-setting, healthy relationships, and ways to handle stress. With a diverse population each year and some being from seriously struggling homes, the program tries to teach to them to work towards bettering themselves. The program benefits them long-term.

Students have not heard about dating violence, the age of consent, alcohol, and being under the influence. Facilitators said that the students really wanted to learn about these topics because it would be helpful in the future.

### *Lessons structure and delivery*

Since the lessons have explicit information, it is very helpful for facilitators. They did report that some weeks, the activities are better than others. Facilitators mentioned:

*Some of the activities in regards to STIs and birth control (a lot of this is probably me bringing in some other components because this is what I do all the time). I think being really explicit and giving them the information that they've never heard before, and they've never heard it in such a sex-positive way. It makes it so that they are a lot more apt to participate in their science classes and say, "Hey, I know this!" Some of their classmates, from my understanding, were asking how they know all of this stuff. They would tell them, "We learned it in Wise Guys!"*

All facilitators mentioned that they skip lessons with worksheets. Luckily, there are several lessons to choose from, and if a lesson contained a worksheet, facilitators would adapt them. The students have been in school all

day, and they do not want to do a work sheet. Being interactive makes the lesson more memorable and relevant for them.

*We had one in parenthood. One of the things we do in parenthood is have them write an advertisement for a father. Whoever wins would get \$10,000. Before we do that, we have an activity called Toss of the Dice. I buy those big, furry dice. On each die, there are six categories: education, relationship, children, jobs, education, and transportation. They have to roll the die, and they write down the number they got. I have the sheet that tells them what they got. They might be living with their parent but they have a Master's Degree, riding a bike because they have a DUI, have 4 kids, and in an abusive relationship. They love that lesson because they could have a Master's Degree, and they are still working at McDonald's for twenty hours a week. We process that, and then we go onto the fatherhood lesson. They really like the rape trial as well.*

Facilitators reported that it is best that the boys receive medically sound information from them. The boys operate under many myths and misinformation. All of the schools have different requirements for health, so Wise Guys helps make it more succinct.

Wise Guys offer a broad range of topics depending on the different age groups. There are several options with each chapter, and the facilitator can cover the topic that works best for their group.

*One specific boy said that he really liked that it is interactive. The activities are really fun. It made them look forward to Wise Guys.*

One facilitator implemented an anonymous question box for her group. In the beginning, she said the questions were very farfetched, but towards the end, the questions asked were more focused like little details about birth control instead of broad things. One week, she forgot the box, and a student said:

*"Can you make sure you bring it back? I have a question." It was useful to have that because he wasn't going to ask the question straight out.*

Facilitators reported the technology has been helpful in delivering lessons. In particular, Youtube has helped facilitators to get the message across and stayed within the program parameters.

*I think that technology has been a big help. [The other facilitator] has been a big help. He's really good with technology. We might put something up on YouTube. They like that kind of stuff. I think the important thing is to stay abrupt to what's going on with the program but not interfere with the fidelity of the program.*

### **Positive feedback from surveys**

Surveys are given to the participants at the end of the year.

*Most say they wish they could have it throughout high school. It's one of the best classes I've ever had and is very helpful.*

### **Group completion rate**

One facilitator noted that the completion rate at the end of the program is a big sign of success for Wise Guys.

*I think the average completion rate that we get right now is 93-95%. If that number was lower, we would have to what was going on. When over 90% stay, there isn't much we can think of to keep them. It may be hard to get 100%. Some students are forced by their parents to come and then they don't want to be there. We measure that all the time (successful completion and participation). Anything over 70% is successful completion. We get a lot of perfect attendance.*

## **Community successes**

### **Community buy-in**

All of the facilitators agreed that community buy-in is the best way to have success in the Wise Guys program. Without community buy-in, it is very difficult to recruit students and use the program to its potential.

*The fact that we have it in every middle and high school in the district during school hours, that's a huge success. We've gotten great buy-in from the schools. We're able to reach a lot of students and have relatively consistent groups. The district actually mandated it with the counselors. A couple years ago, the counselors were told they need to do this, and now they are*

to the point where they okay with doing it. It doesn't even need to come from the school district. They are ready to do it on their own now.

Overall, in the community, I have seen a lot of support for the program. Some examples, I sit on a number of coalitions and attend a lot of meetings in Clinton County. I am able to talk about the program and keep other programs updated about the program. They are always interested in hearing about the program, and I always get great feedback from them on how it sounds like such a great program. One big partner that we have is kind of odd, but it is the local college baseball team, the Lumber Kings, every summer, they do a lot of advertising for me to market the program. There are Wise Guys signs up around the stadium. They always do radio announcements at the game. They let me come and set up booths to let me market the program. I am able to see some of the boys that I've had in previous Wise Guys classes. I get to talk to parents about it and educate about the program. Another partner agency is Bridgeview Community Health Center. They've actually come to guest speak at some of the Wise Guys sessions for some of the mental health sessions. That's been a great and positive experience. We've definitely built a partnership through that.

The counselors at every one of the schools work hard to get the boys to class. Sometimes you have to round them up because the boys forget. They are our greatest cheerleaders.

Buy-in from schools has also facilitated the process of recruiting new Wise Guys participants. One facilitator noted that the district does an assembly with the sixth grade boys to tell them about Wise Guys. The students from the current semester will share their experiences with the younger boys and tell them why they should join Wise Guys.

Facilitators report that the popularity of the program has grown. Since the program began, one facilitator reported that the district had over 1000 students go through Wise Guys. When the kids reach 6<sup>th</sup> grade, they look forward to joining Wise Guys. The program is very popular within the schools.

When the program is evidence-based, it is easier to get buy-in from the community because they know it will be a sound program.

Once I get the chance to explain that it is a pregnancy prevention program, but it is so much more than that. Once people realize that, they are way more on board. It helps that I can tell them that it is being implemented at other locations across Iowa. I think it helps that I am already in schools in the county, and I have already built that relationship.

In a couple schools, facilitators have found it useful to have a stable staff member recruited to helping the students if they have questions or concerns when the facilitator is not present.

One of the challenges at that school is that I usually try to find a counselor or grad coach through their AEA, the Area of Education Agency. I try to get one of them to work with me on the group, and they would be the point person in the school to work with. The goal being that the kids know there is someone at school that they can talk to in between groups. They feel like they have a regular resource instead of having just someone once a week to talk to and that's it. I've been trying to identify that person. The last few years, it hasn't worked out super well, but I think I might have identified someone for next year to work with that will be more consistent. She actually wants to come and be a part of the group. She generally has a really good relationship with the students, so I think that would be a positive thing. She has a better grasp on the type of students that we want for the group. She even came in to observe the group one time, and she was definitely surprised by who was in the group. She recognized right away that those weren't the type of students that we were looking for.

I feel like the schools where we have found a staff person, they are really on board and really want to see this group be successful. They want to be available for students to talk about this. I feel like there has been a little more success at those schools.

### *Organizational successes*

When a facilitator applies for a pregnancy prevention grant, it is very helpful if they are able to say that they are implementing pregnancy prevention curriculum. It helps them gain funding from other programs.

*If I go to another school, they'll say, what else can you do besides this? How about if we team up and we do a gender grant because they are having some transgender kids in the school. I told them we could do that. I think they know we're the go-to, and the Wise Guys program has reinforced that.*

Facilitators described how Wise Guys also resulted in greater awareness about their organization among students and in the community. Reaching out for help has become (or would be) easier for them since they know what organizations are available in their own community.

*It's interesting since we are working primarily with males. Our agency definitely encourages males to come in. We are sometimes known as a women's clinic. I've definitely seen an increase in younger students coming in to get condoms....I don't know if we've seen a huge increase in activity, but we have definitely created an awareness around the availability of services for our agency as well as another location in town that we talk to them about. I have had a couple students talk about bringing in their girlfriends for birth control. That's been a big one we talk to them about, and they can come in because we have good coverage. They don't necessarily have to have their parents' permission to come. We always encourage them, but they know they can come in without it. I know I've had a couple students tell me they've come in for that.*

*We talk about condoms a lot. They are incorporated the week we talk about contraception. I think making that a normal part of our discussion and reiterating that cost doesn't need to be a barrier when it comes to getting contraceptives or condoms. There are places you can get them for free. I feel like with my group, I make sure they know early on that it's a resource that is available to them. I feel like that is one they spread around to their friends pretty well too, especially the younger kids since it's almost a novelty as much as anything.*

*I like that it informs the boys what services are out in the community. I always try to make sure that I'm letting them know where I work and other agencies where they can go in the community. The program helps them connect to other things in the community.*

A couple facilitators noted that they have been able to form partnerships in the community because of Wise Guys.

*I do go to schools like Camanche sometimes. They are always making sure I am coming back each year and being able to do something with the girls at some point. The after school program, we have been doing Wise Guys there, and it is really great. The coalition I set on, Gateway Impact Coalition, that works to help prevent substance abuse in Clinton County. They also try to prevent youth substance abuse and drinking and driving. I'm always talking about Wise Guys at those meetings. We have partnered with community booths with those organizations.*

*Our partnership with the health department teaches lessons on safe sex and stuff like that. It has a community outreach that talks about giving back to the community, so it's pretty much generated.*

### *Male-oriented curriculum*

A male-only curriculum is very unique in a pregnancy prevention program. One facilitator mentioned that it has helped her be able to take the information to other programs in her community since she has gone through the material with Wise Guys.

*It has really helped me be able to speak more eloquently and be more of a resource to guys. I have done a lot of after school programming that was tailored to girls like Girls Inc. I had that girl focus, and now, I have that guy focus as well.*

Facilitators have reported that a male-only curriculum has been very useful in the community because it often distributes information that males really need and do not already know.

*I definitely feel like that objective of getting them the information they need to prevent unplanned pregnancies and the spread of STDs is being done very well through the program. I know from some feedback on the surveys that there are other areas where the program has been helpful. Decision-making tends to come up, and there seems to be a benefit to them in terms of making better decisions. That's something they ask for at the beginning, and it is accomplished fairly well through the program.*

### *Expansion of pregnancy prevention programs*

Since the start of Wise Guys, school districts have begun to add more pregnancy prevention programs.

*One of the things that has come out of us doing Wise Guys more consistently is that the school district has started doing groups for females in the schools. They have someone called the Pregnancy Navigator for the school district. A bunch of her time is spent with students who do get pregnant make it through school. She also has a portion of her time designated to prevention. She has actually been leading groups with other people in the community at the schools for females. Doing that kind of counterbalances what we are doing, but it's geared towards females instead of males. One great success is expanding the number of students who are receiving that type of information.*

## **Challenges**

Facilitators were asked to describe group challenges they had noticed during the Wise Guys program. The following challenges were reported: recruitment, lessons students did not enjoy (goal-setting, decision-making, and "Myself"), topics lacking from curriculum (unhealthy relationships, gender identity, drugs/alcohol, and masculinity), different learning levels, alternative school attendance, time constraints (not enough time for outside speakers, set-up time for activities, and length of lessons), group size, classroom management, heterocentricity of curriculum, and facilitator contact.

### *Recruitment*

At one Wise Guys location, the facilitators noticed that the students being recruited to the program had behavioral issues. The facilitators have tried to explain to the counselors the type of student they want to recruit to the Wise Guys program.

*One school in particular, we have had some challenges with them understanding our criteria. We've gotten some weird students who maybe aren't the best fit for the program.*

*Attendance wasn't super strong at the high school where we have the most challenge with recruiting the right students for the group. The counselor that I work with there doesn't quite get what we are looking for. Both years, we have ended up with bizarre groups of students. Last year, at the end of it, I found out that every single student in my group had some sort of behavioral issue. For some reason, that was what she thought would make them a good candidate for the group, which isn't what we are looking for. We talked a lot before this year to kind of figure out how we could look for a better group of students. We still just kind of ended up with a weird group of students.*

*It was like they picked the worst of the worst. They picked all jocks because they thought they needed this more than anybody.*

### *Lessons students did not enjoy*

## **Goal-setting & decision-making**

Goal-setting and decision-making do not seem to be popular lessons with most of the students. Facilitators are not sure that it is the age of the students or because some of them are in an alternative high school.

*They definitely hate goal-setting. Every year just to try to get it to be something they would like better, but for whatever reason, they just don't like it. There is a handful of boys who love doing it. They have an idea of what they want to do with their lives. That is definitely the minority. Part of it is that I think they don't know because they are 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and maybe 10<sup>th</sup> graders. If they are older and they are at an alternative school, their goal is to get out of high school. There is a chapter called fatherhood, and last year, it was terrible. This year, we did a different activity, and it has worked better. They enjoy that one. It kind of goes with the goal-setting, so we try to do them together and lessen the boringness of goal-setting.*

*Some of the ones where we have less success is probably the goal-setting. A lot of them say that because of the program, they are more likely to understand the importance of finishing school. We don't always get the best feedback in the program in those two lessons. I don't know if they meet the objective as strongly as some of the other lessons.*

*For some of the activities, even some of the decision-making and goal-setting, it wasn't horrible but it was a little hard for them in junior high to really think about those ideas. It feels so far off, and when you think about adolescent brain development, they are really thinking about right now instead of what their lives are going to look like in their 20s or even a few years from now. I think those are the sort of things that were hard.*

## “Myself”

One facilitator mentioned that the first chapter called “Myself” is difficult for the boys to grasp. The objectives are fairly clear, but since the boys do not really know each other yet, it is difficult for them to open-up. The right activity has not been found yet for the lesson.

### *Topics lacking from curriculum*

## Unhealthy relationships

Facilitators felt that while there were lessons on unhealthy relationships, the curriculum was lacking information about healthy relationships. They did not have the opportunity to talk about what a healthy relationship would look like.

## Gender identity

*I think gender identity is not spoken about in the way that we speak about it today. It was more just talking about you don't have to be a guy's guy if you don't want to, and that was pretty much.*

## Drugs/alcohol

Facilitators mentioned that there is not a particular lesson that deals with drugs and alcohol. However, it does come up a lot because they are teenage boys who want to ask questions. The facilitators agreed that it would be nice for someone from an outside program to come in for a lesson on alcohol and drugs because it is not their area of expertise.

*I do not see that as a group who has that focus at all. I do not necessarily have the expectation that they would come out of this with better knowledge around drugs and alcohol. I feel like some of the decision-making stuff that we talked about applies to those types of things. When we talk about consent, we definitely talk a ton about alcohol. Again, my focus and objective is not to teach them about drugs and alcohol. My focus is to teach them about consent. That involves discussing how drugs and alcohol play into the topic of consent. We don't focus specifically on drugs and alcohol.*

*The grant managers with the Iowa Department of Public Health have been collectively trying to find one lesson that can be done on drugs and alcohol. They tend to be broader focused. Most of the good curriculum for drugs and alcohol for teenagers is multi-session. We don't necessarily have enough time to incorporate it. We haven't found anything that can be done in one lesson that is good.*

*One thing I know that we have talked about in the past is it would be nice to have some more lessons with drinking and drugs. There isn't too much dealing that. I know that in Clinton County, the boys could use some lessons on that. Also, for some of my groups, especially for the after school program that is more at-risk students, and I do get some younger students like 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders, for the dating violence, it deals a lot with going right into rape. I feel like it needs to slow down a little bit. It could even talk about what a healthy relationship is first. They could benefit from that. Definitely stuff dealing with alcohol and the effects it has on the body overtime. Also, having a section on what could come from drinking and driving. I think stuff with marijuana would be good.*

## Masculinity

One instructor noted that it would be good for more masculinity lessons to be added to the curriculum. There should definitely be a broader definition of masculinity and what it really means.

### *Different learning levels*

Some of the students are at different learning levels, so it is difficult to adapt the lessons to meet the needs of everyone, especially with the at-risk students.

*I definitely had quite a few students with behavior issues or are a little behind in reading. That was probably the most difficult I've had, and it was hard to keep us all on the same page.*

One facilitator suggested that the curriculum should be different for middle school and high school males because some activities do not work as well with the different age groups.

*Things that work in one don't necessarily work in the other. Andi and I would try to plan some of the activities, but we also go to the point where we would say, this worked well in middle school in but it didn't work in high school. You should do it, but I'm not with the high schoolers. It seems like they don't understand where middle schoolers are or even high schoolers. That's just not what they are thinking about with their brain development. You really need to present the information and meet them where they are at in their life right now and not projecting so far ahead. How is becoming a father right now going to affect you? Not how it's going to affect you when you're 30. Nobody cares when you're a 16 year old and talking about being 30. They want to know about right this minute.*

### **Alternative school attendance**

Attendance at the alternative school can be a challenge because the students come and go a lot more than in a regular school. They can graduate every 6 weeks. From beginning to end of the program, there were 25 different students in the group. One week, there were 15 students, but normally, it would be 6-8 students each time. Some students would only come once then never come back. A few of them came regularly, but graduated. Some moved away or ended up in jail. From the 25 students, only 3 were able to attend every single lesson. Since there was a lot of variation, it made it difficult on the facilitator to keep consistency within the group. The dynamic of the group kept changing, so the facilitator had to change the way she taught the lesson based on weekly attendance.

### **Time Constraints**

#### **Not enough time for outside speakers**

There is not enough time for the groups to have outside speakers. Many groups only have 45 minutes with the students. There is not enough time in the schedule for an outside speaker because they would have to eliminate another module. It makes it difficult to stay true to fidelity.

#### **Set-up time for activities**

Additionally, some of the activities require a lot of set-up time. One lesson on healthy relationships, called In Their Shoes, would be great, but the set-up time is too long. Often times, the instructors cannot access the classroom before because it is being used. It makes it difficult to prepare.

#### **Length of lessons**

Facilitators reported that the students in Wise Guys keep asking if the curriculum could be longer. It would help if there was more time to explicitly cover the topics.

*I think that is probably the only negative thing we ever heard was that it should be longer.*

*They thought the relationship one should be longer, which is a big one. They wanted personal values to be longer too. A lot of them didn't have any idea what values were at first.*

#### **Too large of a group**

In one instance, a facilitator reported that one of her groups was too large. The group had 11 students compared to 8 from another group. The facilitators described how 11 personalities felt like 16 personalities because they were all so vocal. They knew each other from sports, so it was a lot worse than a group who previously did not know each other well.

Additionally, more students requested to join Wise Guys at one school; however, the facilitator did not let them join because she thought it might compromise the trust of the group that had already been established. She told the students to talk to their counselor. The group really bonded, and she felt like it would have been challenging to add someone else to the group.

## Classroom management

Another challenge facilitators discussed was classroom management. Since the facilitators are dealing with at-risk middle school and high school age students, this can be expected. Even though there are classroom management issues, the facilitators do not mind because those may be the students who need to hear the lessons the most.

*We have classroom management issues all the time. Some of the groups are harder than others, but some of it is the types of students that are recruited for these. We always try to clarify that the types of students we are looking for, they would still be classified as "at-risk", but in a much broader sense like they would be at-risk for getting someone pregnant, which would basically be any male in our schools. People tend to focus on the traditional at-risk for different reasons. We do tend to get groups of boys that have some different issues. Then again, it is a little different at each school. There are a couple of our schools where we have behavior classroom management issues. One school that was super easy last year was a lot more challenging this year. We've had some issues before with racism issues. It was really challenging with some of the students. This year, there were a couple sexual orientation issues that came up with some students making some super inappropriate comments to other students in the group. That's always a challenge on how to deal with that. When is it serious enough to ask someone to leave the group? When is it serious enough to deal with it in the context of the group and make it a learning moment? That's definitely been challenging particularly with one of the groups.*

*Early on, since they didn't know what to expect, they were quiet. They were definitely louder than the other two groups, but they were still laid back. Midway through, it was like, "Oh gosh." It was pretty rough. When Addie from IDPH came, she couldn't believe we even managed that group. She was shocked. Luckily, the good part was that even though they were trying, they really respected and trusted that I was giving them valuable information. She kept saying, "Kick them out, kick them out of there". As much as I would love to kick one of them out, that's probably the kid who needs it more than anybody.*

*I would say the biggest challenge for me was once I was implementing the classroom management with that one specific larger group at Wilson that was the hardest part. Otherwise, the schools made it a priority.*

*Sometimes we have to redirect for immature behavior, but it's not a problem. I think last semester, we did kick one kid out. It was for constant, constant interrupting and being inappropriate.*

## Heterocentricity of Curriculum

The Wise Guys curriculum is very heterocentric, and the curriculum should be more inclusive.

*I think even making sure that it is the norm and that's how we talk about things. Even if every boy in the room is straight, that they understand that not everyone else is. We definitely talk about things in a more inclusive way. We make sure that's how we present the material, but we have to adjust what's there. It's not currently written in a very inclusive way.*

*The curriculum is a little outdated. It's very heteronormative. It doesn't have as much sexual health component as I think it should. Being that I work for Planned Parenthood and have that expertise, it was easy to mesh that in there. Overall, my experience was great.*

## Facilitator contact

The facilitator only sees the boys during the classroom time. It is hard for the facilitator to gauge their improvement. Even after the program, the facilitator does not have a lot of contact with the boys.

*Sometimes, I might see them later on in the school year or a year later when I'm coming in for other presentations. I can ask them or tell how they're doing based on those one or two classes I have them in. Otherwise, it's hard to know. Sometimes I'll mention to the teacher, "Oh I had that student in Wise Guys." They might inform me how they are doing. The ones I do see and have contact with, they seem to be doing great in school.*

## Community challenges

Facilitators were asked to describe community challenges they had noticed during Wise Guys. The following topics were reported: identifying a trustworthy faculty member, community reception of program, continuing funding, communication with parents, and time management.

## *Identifying a trustworthy faculty member*

A couple facilitators in Wise Guys have been looking for trustworthy faculty members at the schools who would be invested enough to act as an on-site mentor when the facilitators are not there. However, they are having a difficult time someone to fill the role.

*The other challenge we had, I try to identify someone at the school who can be a regular part of the group. Initially, the goal was to have a male at the schools to counteract the fact that I'm a female leading the group. It would bring a male perspective to the group on occasion. That's been super successful at two of the schools where we have really identified a good person. The other three schools, it has not worked out quite as well.*

*At the other two schools, there is a male staff person who is a logical person to bring in. They are already working with the counselors. Neither of them has been really consistent. They help us with getting the groups set up and building the logistics of it, but neither is interested in being a regular part of the group. It has worked out fine for the most part. We've found that it's actually been better at two of the schools in particular. It's better for us to do the group without a staff person there. The students tend to respond better. I don't know if that's a huge problem.*

## *Community reception program*

Although services in the community may be available to women and men, sometimes the community gets confused about what a program may offer. The community could be more supportive of Wise Guys if they fully understood the program.

*Where I work, we are called Women's Health Services, I think we need to know how to market better. A lot of times, people get the impression that the program I do is only STD prevention and pregnancy prevention. It would be helpful if the community would know or realize that Wise Guys is a lot more than STD and pregnancy prevention. It is helping boys a lot more than that. It's about building personal values and building their self-esteem. Not that the community isn't interested in the program, because they are, but I think more people would support it even more if they knew more about everything Wise Guys has to offer.*

One facilitator had a rough time establishing a home for Wise Guys. When facilitators are unable to get into the school system, it makes it harder to implement the program in the community.

*This year and previous years, I've been trying to get into Clinton High School because it is the main high school in Clinton County. I haven't been able to get it implemented yet, and it's really frustrating. I have great relationships with some of the health teachers and nurses, and they are on board with getting the program in the school. It doesn't seem to matter much if the administration isn't on board. I've met with the at-risk coordinator and it's not that they don't like the program or think it's a good program. They always seem to say there is no room in the curriculum. It just isn't one of the top priorities. They always say, "Well, maybe next year." That's the big thing is that I want to get into that specific school, but I can't get the administration to work with me.*

Even when a facilitator suggested an after-school program with the local high school, the school district still would not let her implement the program.

*I mentioned maybe after school is out because they don't have time during school. They say that there are a lot of other events, so after school wouldn't work. I've tried to do it over lunch, and they say that there are 4 different periods for lunch, so I'd have to pick one period, and I wouldn't get all the boys that need to be in it.*

One facilitator explained that she could probably utilize more partnerships in her community but being involved with Planned Parenthood sometimes hinders those connections.

*Probably, we really haven't explored it so far. Partly out of ignorance, honestly, and not realizing that was something the grant was asking us or wanting us to do. We thought it was more that we were expected to implement the curriculum primarily ourselves. That was a little of an oversight and transition of different staff. I think we have a really strong connection with our communities. We have strong partners, but we have some people in the community who are not willing*

to work with us because we are Planned Parenthood. I feel like the majority are open and positive about the work we are doing.

Facilitators stressed the importance of funding and everything they are able to do in their communities with the funding.

*I think that we are going to continue with this program whether we get funding or not. Obviously, if we get it, we are going to be more successful. If we don't get it, we would have a hard time coming up with the incentives and food in order to drive them there each week. That would be the biggest barrier. I think we are so embedded and committed to the school district, we would continue without funding. Oh gosh, it would be much harder.*

### *Communication with parents*

If parents could be informed about Wise Guys using the school websites, it would be very helpful to be able to help parents understand the objectives of Wise Guys.

*The biggest challenge would probably be most parents looking at the information that we send out by Wise Guys. It's very informal, and a lot of parents, do not entertain them. I think if we could them to inform the students of Wise Guys, then we would have a bigger response.*

### *Time management*

One group described how difficult it is to meet with all of the groups in one week.

*Amongst the four of us, we have 58 groups to run. It's getting everything scheduled in a timely fashion. The schools are great. I will say that we can come on Tuesday. How does that work for you? Some schools have it at a set time, and we always go at 8:45 on Monday. Another school said, we need rotating times because teachers do not want that. My job is to do that with all of the 58 groups that we have.*

Another barrier to implementation mentioned by facilitators was scheduling conflicts, such as making up cancelled class sessions.

*The only problem with snow days the adjustment. This year, it was more for cold days than for snow days since it was a bitter winter. We couldn't have groups that week, so we had to add another week. It's usually okay second semester; first semester is push if we would have snow days because of the way with Thanksgiving and Christmas.*

## **Suggestions for Wise Guys program**

Several suggestions were made by facilitators on how to improve Wise Guys for next year including outside speakers, support sent to school district from IDPH, update curriculum, follow-up with groups, community buy-in, additional training, increase lessons with birth control, fixing scheduling conflicts, additional incentives funding, and parents being able to access information easily.

### *Outside speakers*

Facilitators mentioned that they would like to have outside speakers come in for lessons that are not in their areas of expertise. It would also promote involvement from outside organizations. Lessons facilitators mentioned they are less comfortable with are mental health, drugs, and alcohol.

### *Support sent to school district from IDPH*

Facilitators mentioned that it would be useful to have support sent to a school that is considering implementing Wise Guys. This would help demonstrate to the faculty the program's success in other locations, and it would help the facilitator get into the school system.

*I think we need to continue having a strong relationship with the school district. There have been some changes in staff at the district level, which I don't think will affect us, but we need to keep working and maintaining our relationship with each of the individual schools. I also think the support we have now from IDPH will be important and making sure we have access to the same level of resources and some things like that.*

*I feel like it would be helpful to have quotes from different school administrators who have implemented the program to show that it is a successful program, and it is going well in their school. I feel like having quotes from people who have already implemented it would help make our case to people who haven't implemented it.*

### *Update curriculum*

Facilitators have been waiting on an update to the curriculum. They think the curriculum needs updates in: relationships, alcohol, sex education, birth control, and drugs.

*I would love to see an update of the curriculum, which I keep hearing is coming. It hasn't been released, but I think it would be really helpful if they did update it.*

*I think since we added the healthy relationships component, it made a huge difference. Having some gender identity would be helpful. I don't know that many of them were struggling that were in my groups were struggling with gender identity. I know they were all hand-picked. Even that way, they can emphasize with other people who are struggling with gender identity. The curriculum lacked that as far as understanding that. We talked a little about it, and they seemed to grasp it really well. They seemed to grasp it even better than I thought because they are kind of jocky boys.*

*I don't think alcohol is addressed near enough. I think that it gets thrown in. There are times we are talking about it in regards to decision-making and things like that, but I don't think it's addressed enough.*

*I think sex ed and birth control should be addressed more. Negotiating would be useful for them too. There are no negotiating skills options in here like talking about how to your partner about using a condom and talking to them about birth control. They need those skills.*

*I would say the drug and alcohol component is definitely something that should be added. I would probably bring in someone from the community because it's not my area of expertise. I think that is something I would feel comfortable finding on my own as long as we made the space for that person to come in.*

### *Follow-up on groups*

A couple facilitators mentioned that it would be beneficial to implement a follow-up or reunion for students have taken Wise Guys in the past.

*I feel like doing more follow-up could be useful. If we do get the grant again, I want to explore that. It would be an interesting thing to have. I think following them through high school would be useful. There's a variety of different ways it could be done. I don't even know what it would look like. Having some sort of follow up incorporated into the program would definitely increase the success of the program. It would be nice to see if they are retaining the knowledge, changing behaviors, and things like that. Having some feedback would be nice. It would be nice for camaraderie's sake and having students who have been through it, new students who have been through it, and create a club.*

*I did a reunion this year because it had been so requested from the boys. I feel like that would be something where I feel like having more assistance and resources of the best way to do that follow-up would be super helpful. We've talked about doing a boys' conference and having some of the previous participants come together. I think that is something we wrote into the grant that we would like to do this coming year.*

### *Community buy-in*

Another facilitator mentioned that the school district must recognize the need and importance of a male-only program.

*I think again the buy-in from the school district and it's an integrated part of the schools at this point. It's a huge part to making it successful, and it's incorporated into the school day and the counselors are on board. I think the general design of the program being very focused on discussion, opinions, sharing, and talking pretty openly about topics of sex makes it successful. It's a need of male students since I am focused on them. I think it's a huge need for young men and young boys to have somewhere to do that. I think that's largely where the success comes from is we are filling that need.*

### *Additional training*

Additional training has been requested by the facilitators because it is an integral part in keeping the information up-to-date and continuing professional development.

*It would be good to have training on how to deal with schools or agencies that are showing some resistance to the program being implemented. Learning better techniques or getting the schools to implement the program. It would be useful. I don't know if there is a lot of training that exists, but it would be good to have some guidance on how to do that. I also feel like I could take the time and try to do this too, but having some statistics specifically for Iowa, and how the program is benefitting Iowa's youth would be useful. Having handouts in bulk that I could hand out at schools or coalition meetings would be useful.*

*Pretty much continue to help spread the word about Wise Guys and continue sending us to conferences and meetings to report not only on our program but also on theirs.*

### *Increase lessons with birth control*

Another facilitator mentioned that while their birth control needs were met, it should be talked about continuously in the program instead of a one-time class on birth control. It should be mentioned more than just the initial lesson.

### *Fixing scheduling conflicts*

In some school districts, scheduling Wise Guys during school is difficult. One facilitator said that it works well in her middle school because they switched back and forth between two different periods. The students are never missing the same class more than twice a month.

### *Additional incentives funding*

Facilitators said that more funding for incentives would be a great help to any program. Since students are motivated by things like food and prizes, attendance would be higher if those things would be offered. If a facilitator did not have funding, it would be very difficult to buy incentives.

### *Parents able to access information easily*

Facilitators also request that they have the ability to post information about Wise Guys on the school websites where parents could visit daily. If more information is available, then they could be more involved.

# TOP Program

## *Participant successes*

Facilitators were asked to describe individual successes they had noticed as a result of TOP. The following topics were reported: volunteering on their own, opening up more, using community resources, service learning, building trust and comfort, confidence, more patience, increasing knowledge, forming relationship.

### *Volunteering on their own*

TOP has inspired many of the students to volunteer on their own in the community. Facilitators reported that the students feel closer to their community with service learning, and it has allowed them to realize the resources that are available to them within their own community. These are individual instances of service learning that the students are performing on their own:

*Two of them have volunteered for the summer to do a few hours.*

*I do have two students who are going to continue to volunteer there now that TOP has ended, which is wonderful. It just shows that they are connecting to their community, and they feel more comfortable.*

*We did thank you cards for someone who has made a difference in their lives, then we mailed them to those people. We just got feedback from them like, "I sent that card to my grandma, and it made her cry."*

*Two of the kids in the class were having a competition on their own to see who could do the most service learning. One student just sits and listens without talking much. He volunteered at the Cancer Benefit, worked for Habitat for Humanity and worked on the house, and he did some cool things on his own that was pretty awesome.*

One group made a video during the service learning part as a synopsis of the year in the general. A video was taken at the animal shelter while they volunteered there. The facilitator said the student told the classmates:

*One girl said, "Oh! Did you know that cat got adopted? I was out there, and he's gone now."*

### *Opening up more*

One facilitator noted that she had a student who had been struggling because she had a learning disability, and the student confided in her that it was hard to make friends.

*Over the last 9 months, her personality came out. She reached out to new youth that came into the group. She helped me recruit new youth to the group. She really blossomed in the last year. That was amazing. She had come into my group last year, and she said she would go with me to some of the houses of some of the kids she knew, and she did. She and I went to door-to-door, knocking, introducing ourselves, and telling kids about the program.*

Another facilitator reported that family dynamics, which is a lesson that talks about changing things in your family, was a very good lesson for the students, and it was very emotional for her. Two students felt comfortable enough to share with the group their stories that really stood out to the facilitator. The facilitator noted that it is good for the students to have a safe place for them to share stories like that. Here are two stories:

*One girl opened up about some very odd things that happened to her in her life. When she was done, she said, "I've never told anyone about that. I'm not sure why I told you all about it." It was a liberating conversation for her to be able to tell somebody that this happened to her as a youth. It wasn't abuse or anything like that. It was just weird circumstances in her life. Her mother just kind of gave her up and gave her to someone else. She is with her mother now, again, but it was just an experience that she had never told anybody.*

*A student talked about how her cat always pooped in the living room and wouldn't poop in the cat box. It was her job to take care of the cat. One day, her dad, her, and the cat got in the car and went for a ride. The dad threw the cat out the window. They were out in the country somewhere, and she said that cat has never found its way home yet.*

## Using community resources

A facilitator reported that several students have been utilizing community resources because of TOP.

*I have students who I've had in previous years, and they come up to me before class. One girl came up to me and said, "Help, I missed my period. What am I going to do? Where do I go for a pregnancy test? Can you do one at public health?" We don't do them up here, but I told her where she could go to get one, and if she needed someone to go with her, let me know, and I would meet her there. A couple weeks later, she came back to me, and she said, she went to family planning and wasn't pregnant. While she was there, she found out that she could get her birth control much cheaper. She was able to get on a more economical form of birth control.*

## Service learning

When the students did service learning in the community, the school warned the facilitator of a behavior problem. However, the facilitator told this success story:

*It was really cute because when we went to the daycare, the school said, "We have been having behavior problems with him. When you're there, call us if you have any problems." I've never had a behavior problem with him. He was just fitting in with the kids and having a great time. The next week, when I asked how they liked the daycare, this kid looked at me and said, "Ain't gonna lie, straight up loved it."*

Another facilitator told the story of a student who did not have parental permission to be in a film for the service learning project. The facilitator gave the student her digital camera in attempt to get some footage, and it was the quite the success. This is the story:

*I thought what am I going to do with him? I gave him my digital camera, and I want you to get some random video that we can use for fill-in. I just thought, "Oh no, what am I going to get?" I watched the footage he got, and it was awesome. He was in the cat room with several other students, and he was filming them. They were saying, "Oh my goodness, look at this one. It's so cute." These are supposedly tough, alternative school boys. They were saying, "Oh I hope this one gets adopted!" They were thrilled when a girl told them the cat was going to be adopted.*

## Building trust and comfort

The students feel comfortable because it is their group, and they enjoy that they can talk about topics they are interested in. This allows them to open up more and become comfortable talking to each other and to the facilitator. Their personalities really come out when they open up to each other and to the facilitator. Several students have told facilitators that they did not have a safe place where they could talk to other youth. They liked that the group was safe. Some students reported being more comfortable talking to their families about being a healthy teen and all that it entails.

*Way more outgoing, open, comfortable with each other. Initially, they wouldn't hang out with each other, but now, they hang out with each other more. They trust each other more and trust people in general.*

*What I love about this program is that I am kind of a bystander. I just go there with a topic, and they discuss it themselves. That is one of the things I love about some of the lessons is that they are able to be the facilitators. They are the ones that lead the discussion and encourage others to say more. It is a really great aspect of the curriculum. They encourage each other to open up. Sometimes, I think that I don't even need to be here. Sometimes, I think if I wasn't there, they might say more. That is what the program can stem sometimes. Some of the lessons do allow for them to lead that discussion.*

*Their newly found ability to talk in front of a group. Before, since they are small, intimate groups that kind of meet with each other for such a long time. They have gained some self-confidence. The next time I meet with the STEPP Coalition is next Wednesday. I'm very excited to see how chatty they are with the adults. I think they will because they have gained the confidence that what they say is important and valued.*

## Feeling confident

Students told facilitators they feel more confident when the group is able to act out a lesson instead of only talking about it. It helps them prepare for a real-life situation.

*We can draw out what peer pressure looks like, and we can talk about what a real-life situation will look like, how I handled it, and how I will handle it the next time. Having all this time to focus on different ways to deal with pressure. It really made it a success. I feel like TOP is a fabulous curriculum because we have time to focus on all these lessons whether it's healthy human growth and development, healthy relationships, pressure, pregnancy prevention. We have all this time to focus. It sticks in the kids' heads. That's what makes it a success. That's why they feel more confident. We have talked about it so much.*

*Just in their self-esteem in general, it has grown through the year. They come in at the beginning of the year, and they don't say a lot. Some of them are introverted. You have the ones who will talk all the time and about anything. As the year progresses, they start asking questions. They open up as a group. One kid was trying to decide if he should move out or stay at home when he turned 18. We all talked about pros and cons of the decision he would make.*

A couple students in the groups reported they were more confident saying no to pressure after being involved in TOP.

*I did have one of my students tell me he had been pressured by his girlfriend to do something he wasn't comfortable with and because of the group, he told her he wasn't ready. That was really great, and I told him, "Thank you for sharing that. It's probably hard to talk about, but it's awesome that you shared it with us."*

*I know my two young ladies in the group said they would feel more comfortable saying no to any type of sexual pressure in the future with relationships. They both expressed that to me, and I told them it was a great decision.*

### *More patience*

As a result of TOP, the facilitators noted that the students develop more patience with other students.

*Initially, they might roll their eyes at someone who is being odd. Towards the end, they just accept it and listen to someone who isn't walking to the same beat. They have more acceptance and patience with people who are different than them. I think they realize that this girl will tell a long story now, and we will all sit quietly until she is through. In the beginning there was lots of eye rolling, but towards the end, they accepted that's how she is.*

### *Form relationships*

Facilitators mentioned that many students were not friends before TOP, but as a result, they formed friendships with other students who have similarities with them. The facilitators reported it was nice to see them grow over the year.

## **Facilitator success**

One facilitator reported that the grant manager at IDPH is very helpful because she has always helped her be honest and make sure she doing what she is supposed to be doing.

*Those fidelity logs help me; if I didn't have to fill out those fidelity logs, I might not be as faithful as I should. The accountability for me is a huge, important part of the program. It doesn't allow me to slack. If I wasn't accountable, I easily could. I think that makes it successful because I know I have to do this in order to keep this funding going.*

## **Group successes**

The facilitators of TOP were asked about the successes of the TOP that could be reported for the group as a whole. The successes are recruitment, TOP is a safe place, group behavior, trusting facilitator, incentives, want to participate in program in next year, learning about community agencies, service learning, curriculum focused on multiple topics, and topics students enjoyed (values, family, contraception, and basic skills).

### *Recruitment*

In order to recruit students, the facilitator may meet with the advisors or school counselors. The principal may also meet with the advisor at the beginning of the year, and together, they will decide what students will benefit the most from TOP. After that, if there are any openings, then they offer it to students who have taken it in the

past if they want to take it again. The majority of the time, it is new students; one facilitator reported she had 2 or 3 students who had taken it in the past. It is a popular program.

### *Safe place*

The longevity of the program offers the chance for the same facilitator to build a relationship with the students. If the program was shorter or if the facilitator kept changing, the relationship may be compromised. The facilitator connects with the students, and they bond with them. The students feel very invested because they spend so much time there. In the beginning, there are several lessons that allow the students to get to know each other. They talk a lot about their background, and if the students had the same type of background, then they really bond and feel comfortable.

*The fact that TOP is the kids established the group. It's their group from Day 1. That's why it's so successful, and my kids came back every week after school. They didn't have to come. They were there every Monday because they buy into it. It's their group. It's me helping to guide, but it's really them deciding what we need to talk about and what we need to do. They love that. They want to create a safe place, and once you do that, it's wonderful. It's really having the kids and letting them know it's their group, not mine. It's all about them. We should do that more.*

*I also really like watching them grow as a group from being a very quiet group and not opening up to some sessions where they blow my mind that they share those things with us. I know that at the beginning, they would have never shared that with us. There are some days when no one says anything. There are those topics that they really connect with. It's been a really great experience.*

### *Group behavior*

Facilitators noted that behavior in the TOP groups was great this year, and they did not have many behavior challenges with the participants.

*Getting the kids to do service learning on their own has always been a challenge. This year was probably the least challenging out of all the years I've done. The kids showed up for class, and I did not have behavior issues this year. I had one student I did have to ask to leave because he was not being productive in class. He was being counterproductive to the rest of them. If you don't want to be here, and I'm not going to make you be here and don't ruin it for the rest of them. I did ask him to leave. Other than that, we really had a great year.*

### *Trusting facilitator*

The facilitators mentioned that building the relationship between facilitator and students is very important. The students are grateful the facilitator is there and able to talk about teen issues. They are happy the facilitator is there each week because the facilitator said he or she was going to be there.

*A lot of my kids came from inner-city Chicago. There were after school programs with Boys and Girls Clubs there, and almost all of the kids that came from Chicago had mentioned that they had never had someone there with them for that long, an adult, and someone who didn't steal. I would give out gift cards and incentives. They had all said that in the past, other adults had taken their things. I had four of the kids tell me you're so nice because you give us the things for us and you don't keep them. I was shocked. That's the difference between small, rural Iowa compared to inner-city Chicago. They thanked me for that, which was crazy. They thanked me for always being there when I said I was going to because that's a really big deal to the kids. Even though, to us, it's like, of course we will be there. That was a big deal, I never dreamed that.*

*I love getting to meet with the kids every year for an entire school year. I feel very lucky and fortunate that I have the job of getting to know them and have a relationship for them. It's really fun for me to develop that relationship.*

*The other day, I ran into a student I had in class the very first year I had PREP in the schools. I ran into her in a store, and she said, "Do you remember me?" I remembered her name, and she was really impressed I remembered her name. She had questions and asked, "Do you mind if I ask you stuff?" I said, "No, go ahead." She had some questions about health care related things. My students know that once they're my students, they are always my students.*

## Incentives

Facilitators reported that incentives were very helpful to get the students to come to TOP.

*"I feel bad for saying this, but I only come here for the food." I thought to myself, "Yeah right, the food isn't that good." If you think you're coming for the food, that's fine, but that's not the reason you are coming. I don't know why she's saying that, but I think that's okay, at least you're coming. I told her that's okay, that's why I have the food because I want you to come.*

## Want to participate in program next year

One facilitator has previously allowed students to participate in the program back-to-back years. However, this year, the program is gaining popularity, and she is worried she will not have enough spots for former students because they still want to do TOP for another year. None of the current students are graduating, so she is not sure if the students will be able to participate in TOP again. She considers it a success because even the students have completed TOP want to do it over because they enjoy it that much.

*I don't know what I'm going to do with one of my groups. I don't have any seniors, and they all have said they want to be in it next year. I don't even know if that's an option if they can do it, but the fact that they were with it for an entire year, and they still want to come back, that is a pretty big success. I consider it a success every time they come back to class. It's a little victory. One of my groups is just coming back because they want to. That's pretty cool.*

## Learning about community agencies

From TOP, participants are able to learn more about resources available in their community. One facilitator even printed off pictures of the community agencies and had the students use post-its to label which building they were and their purposes. It embedded the building, its purpose, and the name of the building into the students' mind.

*Most people really don't know where Public Health and what all we can do or what we can do for them. We had a program for the students, and they don't know where to get access to a lot of services. I'm trying to figure out where students can know where to go when they need whatever. I printed out pictures of different buildings in a community. I posted them on the wall, and I partnered up the students. I gave them some Post-its with lists of services. They had to put the Post-it on where they could get that service. We then went through and talked about things like, "This is the Mohawk Square Building. Public Health is there. You can get this, this, and this at Public Health. Not only is Public Health there, but child support recovery is there. They were able to connect the buildings because they have been by the buildings a million times, but they didn't know what you could get there.*

## Service learning

Overall, all of the groups liked the on-site service learning component of TOP.

*I let them start picking topics they wanted to hit on like what things are you passionate about: elderly, animals, kids, environment? What is important to you? That's how the kids picked their topics.*

*They absolutely loved the service learning component as far as the hands-on. They loved being able to go and go together to the site and hands-on work with the staff and the animals. They loved walking the dogs. We made homemade dog treats and cat treats. That was their favorite part.*

*They loved the hands-on part when we finally got to go to the site. We talk about it for so long, and they finally get to go, they are really excited.*

*It's just to get the excitement, and letting the kids pick the activity. Giving the kids the power because it's their group, and once you tell them it's your decision, they get excited about it since they get to pick who they help. That definitely helps it be successful because it's what they want to do, not what I want to do.*

*I think that a lot of them are seeing the importance of community service. I think that they didn't realize that before. A couple of them said, "I get a lot of the community service...more than the agency we are helping." I think they are realizing community service isn't just for the organization but it's also to help them.*

*I think the kids really had a good time doing different things this year. The stuff that they did, we talked about types of things they did this year. They did a lot of fun things on their own like bake cookies for neighbors, snow shoveling for neighbors. They did a lot of good stuff. This year was probably the year the kids worked the hardest on service learning. They did a lot more on their own this year than they did in the past, which was great.*

### **Curriculum focused on multiple topics**

Facilitators were pleased that the program is not only focused on pregnancy prevention, but it also focuses on topics such as community buy-in. If a facilitator feels like a group would benefit from a lesson that is not in the curriculum, they can add the lesson for the group. Having the curriculum be flexible is useful because it allows the facilitators to change the curriculum depending on the group.

*I'll say there are more good ones than bad ones. There are a couple that are role plays, and the youth say how realistic the role plays are. The curriculum gives me a chance to cater my needs to that group. I really like that freedom.*

### **Topics students enjoyed**

#### **Values**

Younger participants in one facilitators group loved the values auction activity.

*They are given \$5000 and a list of values that they want to buy. One of them would be to live my religion, to stay a virgin until I get married or until I'm older, to not get in trouble with the law, to be successful, to be popular. I will say who wants to start the bidding at \$100 on who wants to be popular? They will start the bidding at yes, I want to be popular, which by the way, no one ever bids on that one. Nobody wants that one. One time, we were doing it, and it was who wants to stay out of trouble with the law? Someone said, "I'll give you \$100 for it." One kid said, "I'll give you \$5000 on being out of trouble with the law." He put all of his money on that. They really like that because it is so interactive, and it gives us all a chance to see what is important. They love that one. Another one that they really like is that they have been selected to go to a new world, and they have to figure out the 5 people that they want to take with them and the 5 things they want to take with them to create it. It was really fun because the younger kids came up with things like I want to take One Direction, Justin Bieber, and my mom. The seniors and said very realistic things like I want to take seeds to plant trees, a fresh water supply, and Stephen Hawking. They really thought about it. That's a great highlight. I wish the curriculum had more fun activities like that.*

#### **Contraception**

Facilitators noted that students enjoyed lessons on contraception and STDs, especially when the contraception brought into the class for the students to see what it looked like. They also talked about how and where to get contraception. One student noted:

*A lot of adults have not seen all the different kinds.*

*They liked the contraception. It felt like it was important, and the guys need to know. The guys think they don't need to know that stuff because it's mostly females that do. However, we talked about how if you are with a girl and she is on something, you need to know how effective it is and what she is on.*

#### **Basic skills**

One facilitator noted that her students do not have a lot of parental support. She spent time teaching her students basic life skills. She also told them they come to her if they have a question about leading a successful life.

#### **Community successes**

The facilitators of TOP were asked about the successes of the TOP that could be reported for the group as a whole. The successes are community buy-in, community partnership, and media coverage for TOP.

## Community buy-in

One TOP facilitator described the alternative school as the best community partner she has.

*I can't complain about the alternative school at all. I don't have a community partner that has been anywhere close to the school with what they have given to me. I think that is why I like going there so much. They are an awesome partner. I will give my implementation plan to the principal every year, and he just tells me to do whatever I want to do. I'll tell him we'd like to do this for service learning, and he just tells me to let him know when I need him to drive. I can't express how great that is. I'm not complaining at all. If I need to take the students for service learning, the alternative school principal is very good at letting me take them during school time and making sure transportation is available.*

Service learning has also allowed the community to understand more about the children at the alternative school. The community has really opened up to the alternative school students and has seen that they are not just troubled students but also have good hearts.

*The community kitchen has always been wonderful about welcoming us in. The humane society, we have worked with them before, but this year, we have really had a great year. The students this year really impressed them. We have not been to the daycare before, and it's not too far from the schools. It's a great place to get in and do more service learning. The big kids and the little kids loved it. I got a nice response from the owner of the daycare that they were really happy with the outcome and partnering together. The principal is hoping that eventually he can partner with the daycare more to provide some hands-on experience with babies for students who are pregnant or parenting. I think this was maybe a way to open that door. I think that sometimes alternative school children get a bad rep. There is a preconceived notion about who they are. I think that getting them into the community and letting the community see they are an awesome group of kids.*

## Community partnerships

One TOP coordinator had to extend her search for a location beyond the school district and ultimately implemented her program in a low-income housing development. This is her story:

*I've just been implementing at a low-income housing facility called Stone Garden for the last year....They always offered information about the Teen Outreach Program in their newsletters that they would send to all the families. They did a great job working with me, partnering with me, and providing services to their families....They were very open, and I didn't have any issues. They provided me with a nice, big space, and a day that would work. There were no issues with them, and partly, it was because I had worked with the management team in the past with other prevention programs I had done in the last 10 years. They knew me, and they told me I was welcome to come in and implement my program.*

*I know that my relationship with the senior management in the past definitely helped to get me into Stone Garden to do TOP. I was lucky enough to meet with the owners of all of the low income housing units in Burlington. They have a giant meeting every summer, and because I had these fabulous relationships with the management at Stone Garden, they invited me to these meetings. I got to meet the head honchos who own all of these buildings. I got to talk them about what a different TOP has made for the youth. They definitely bought into that, and I was lucky enough to be part of these meetings, phone calls, and conversations, which led them down the road to think about why don't we have other providers come in and work with our families? Transportation is a giant barrier for low-income families, so let's create a safe place for the families to come here. It's really ideal. I got super lucky. I wish every community was like that.*

Since TOP was such a wonderful program, the Stone Garden management team has agreed to let the facilitator and other providers come in and do other prevention programs. They are now open to other prevention programs whether it be drug and alcohol, parenting, or nutrition.

Other facilitators noted that they have been able to build successful relationships within the community because of TOP.

*I would say in the last 7-8 months, I've had more opportunity to work with more students than I have in the past. That was a new partnership. I work with pretty much everyone in my community, and we all have the same goal of healthy youth and*

healthy communities. I don't feel like I have any gaps as far as partnering with folks in my community. We do the best we can. Some people are more willing to work with you than others.

Yes, we have created a coalition. It's brand new. It's called STEPP Sioux Land Teens Empowered Against Pregnancy Prevention. We have been meeting since October, and we just got our name a couple weeks ago. We said we had to call ourselves something, so we came up with this great name. Because of TOP, we have established this coalition where we meet every month. We talk about how we can help prevent teen pregnancy prevention. During the summer months, the youth from TOP will be participating. Ideally, we'd love to have them participate all year long, but it doesn't work for us to meet at night when the teens are available. The only time we can really meet is during the day. We are going to utilize the teens from TOP to figure out what teens need and how we can help them and offer more services to teens. We have done a couple fundraisers for local animal shelters. They have benefited from us. We are working very closely with a couple of organizations from our service learning. They have told us that our hours are invaluable to them. We are making impacts with those opportunities.

### *Media coverage for TOP*

One way the community is learning more about TOP in Sioux City is through media coverage that the group received. It is helpful for the community to learn about prevention programs being implemented in the area.

We did get some media coverage, so that was pretty cool. They interviewed me and a teen from TOP who is a teen parent. That was really exciting that they were able to talk about TOP on the media. Unfortunately, they never mentioned Planned Parenthood in the entire interview, but as our staff and media relations person said, pretty much everyone in Sioux City knows where I work, and it was still good publicity for us. They did talk about the teen outreach program, so that was pretty good. Other than that, I think it's really good for our funders to hear about TOP and to hear about educational programs. When we share about that, it probably enhances their donation. It's good for us to be able to tell success stories and get more funding.

### **Participant challenges**

Facilitators were asked to describe individual challenges they had noticed as a result of TOP. The participant challenges were discomfort with some topics and continuity between lessons.

#### *Discomfort with some topics*

One facilitator noted that she had some younger kids, and as a result, they were embarrassed by the lessons on puberty. It was difficult for the students to feel comfortable.

We had young ladies and young men in the group too, so it was important to make everyone feel comfortable. They really didn't enjoy those [puberty] lessons a lot. It was a tip of the iceberg; you can only do so much with that age group.

#### *Continuity between lessons*

Some of the kids have difficulty remembering the lessons from week to week without prompting from the facilitator. Revisiting lessons and reminding the students of the main points would not be a bad idea.

I know they tell me that they love this particular lesson. This one was really fun or this one was really boring. We don't really have a lot of time to sit down and talk about the topics areas, unfortunately. I know that most of them like it because they keep coming back. I don't really know their personal comments on it. The very last session has us talk about what they learned in TOP and some of the more memorable days and what they really liked about it. As hard as it is for me to say this, they have trouble remembering what they did in the past 9 months. I'll have to say, "Remember when we did the auction?" Then, they'll say, "Oh yeah, that was so much fun." They really have a hard time coming up with things they did on their own. It's happened every year in all my groups. The first couple of times, I thought, "Wow, is this not having an impact? What's going on?" However, since it has consistently happened, I just think it must be the nature of the teen brain because they learn something and kind of forget about it until someone brings it up. I think the last lesson is almost a bit tainted because I am coaching them. They talk about the topic or activity once I remind them what it was.

## Group challenges

Facilitators were asked to describe group challenges they had noticed during TOP. Group challenges included: issues with curriculum (curriculum was too lengthy), group composition, service learning, topics participants did not enjoy (sexuality through lifespan, decision-making, signs of suicide), and recruitment.

### *Issues with curriculum*

One facilitator noted that the TOP curriculum was too lengthy.

*Of course, with any curriculum, you have to do your best to fit fidelity to your group. There were sometimes a struggle and try to keep the kids' attention for 9 months.*

When a program is 9 months long, it is tough to get the students to come to the program consistently every week. It is especially challenging in Youth Build, an alternative high school program, because they graduate throughout the year.

*I think the biggest barrier is with the longevity of the program. It's hard to get them to come every single week. A lot of them want to come, but a lot of them have different activities after school throughout the year. It's a long, long program. There are lots of conflicts that come up during that year. In order for the kids to fully go through with it, they have to be at 80% of the sessions that are offered. It's hard because of all the other life conflicts that come up. My other conflict is that at Youth Build, they graduate, and that's a bummer. We are going along with the program really well, then they graduate and I never see them again. Next, there's a whole other group that has started. That was a big challenge too.*

With TOP, many instructors wish the curriculum was more lenient. However, they have to stay true to fidelity, which makes it difficult. One suggestion is that fewer service learning lessons could be used for other lessons the facilitator thinks the group needs instead. Since the facilitator only has room to add a couple lessons into the program, it makes it difficult to truly address the needs of the group. Suggestions on lessons that TOP needs to cover are: mental health, crisis prevention, and suicide prevention.

*We do get to add those adult preparation classes with TOP, and you can add healthy relationships and suicide prevention, but I feel like we need to focus more on mental health issues with youth. Maybe a crisis prevention with youth. It's very service learning heavy, and I don't feel like we need that much time with service learning when we could be focusing on some of those mental health issues we're seeing in youth. Maybe the ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) program, with youth that have had a parent arrested or in jail, a parent or family member struggling with drugs, homelessness, abuse in the family. I think that should be incorporated because these kids are coming from high-risk backgrounds. Not service learning, service learning, service learning. That's not on the kids' minds; it's not a forefront. Buy-in to the community is great, but that's not their immediate need.*

*Don't put us in a tiny box and tell us we have to do everything in the tiny box and not do anything outside of it. You're going to hear that from anyone implanting the curriculum. Fidelity is a word, and it is a bad word to me. It is so hard to teach what we need to teach inside the tight little box of fidelity. Each kid, group, and community is different, so the curriculum isn't going to work the same in my area as it is in someone else's. Give us some more breathing room within the curriculum.*

Even if a facilitator has a gut feeling that the lesson for the week will not go over well with the students, they still must stay true to the fidelity of the curriculum. It may be better for them to try a different activity with the lesson.

*For the most part, it's a very rigid and pretentious curriculum. It's so rigid and you have to follow the rules. Even though I know this isn't going to work, I still have to do it. I need to remind myself not to do that lesson next time. I am really bad about not going back to my notes from the previous year to see what my notes were. It's not very easy for me to do that because I have to go through pages and pages of these logs. It's just easy not to do that. I have put a couple red stars in my curriculum to know that this is not one to do.*

Additionally, facilitators also mentioned other topics are lacking in TOP, and it is difficult for them to prioritize which ones would be the most useful with their extra lessons. Facilitators mentioned the following sections

would be useful: STIs, sexual decision-making, LGBT issues, alcohol, drugs, exercise, eating disorders, and self-harm.

*It is lacking in sexuality I think. It's lacking in STIs and sexual decision-making. I think it could focus more on sexuality than what it does. I would love to see a lesson on LGBT issues, lessons on alcohol and drugs. Those are things that I have added because we allowed 20% of what we do can be not TOP things. Those are things teens deal with it, and it should be included in the curriculum. There are two great lessons on dating violence, which I love. We need to be talking to them about drugs and alcohol. They want to talk about it, but I don't have the time because I have to get in all these other lessons. It's lacking in that. A lesson on cutting and eating disorders.*

*Health issues for teens would be good, even lessons on exercise. Those are things that affect their overall health. Another thing is that we can add that, but I only have 3-4 sessions where I can put that in. No other changes besides those came to mind.*

Some of the students also want to know about basic life skills such as financial management.

*I would have loved to gone into more depth with them, especially when we talked at the end of the year about balancing a checkbook and that they wanted to see somebody who was a recovering addict. There are lots more things I could have done with them, It is a matter of only having so much time during the school year. I think we did okay.*

One facilitator noted that it is important to change the approach to her lessons with each group. The facilitator needs to know the audience to get the best response.

*Another interesting thing is that it depends on the group. I already mentioned the family values one. One of my groups is with younger girls, another is with normal high school kids, and my other group is with kids at an alternative high school and they have been through the juvenile detention center. I've done this lesson, which is about family values and what works/doesn't work in my family. It went really well with the high school group and the younger group. With the alternative school, they didn't say anything. They didn't want any part of it.*

Some of the youth in TOP are so at-risk that the prevention curriculum does not even apply to them because they have already experienced some of traumatic events in their lives.

*The group of youth that I worked with, they were so at-risk that some of these lessons were silly to them. They had already been in super high-risk situations in their past. They were way more developed than youth their age should have been. I had to address some things that had nothing to do with the lessons that they brought up like adult situations. One youth witnessed his brother getting shot in front of him. We talked a lot that day about what that was like, how he felt. That was what he wanted to talk about, and the kids wanted to talk about, so we talked about it that day. That's not something youth are used to seeing. These kids came from super high-risk situations, and some of the lessons weren't a big deal to them because of their background. For some, you know it would be like my mom's in jail for selling drugs. That's a big deal. I don't know if it really fit with my group at Stone Garden if that makes any sense.*

*You don't know that at first when your group gets established then these stories come out. Honestly, I'm seeing that more and more with youth that I work with. They have come from such horrible backgrounds. They have been through experiences that some adults haven't even been through. It's really finding those needs and addressing the immediate needs right now.*

### *Service learning*

The service learning component of TOP is very intensive. Instructors noted that sometimes it is repetitive, and it can be hard to get the students excited for the lesson.

*It's really service learning heavy. Luckily, we are able to move them around as long as you're still providing the lesson so it wasn't back-to-back-to-back. It's still a lot of the curriculum. I feel like it doesn't need to be focused on that much because they get it.*

*It's like the difference between volunteering and service learning, and then the next lesson is the difference between volunteering and service learning and what do you think? It repeats itself and gets a little stale. It's hard to spice that up.*

*When we talk about service learning, it's not a word kids like. It's like service learning or volunteering, they aren't super into it.*

In one group, the service learning requirement was hard to accomplish because there was not sufficient transportation provided to get the students to the service learning site. Since this group was not at a school setting, they had to use public transportation to get to the site.

*We have to do so many hours. We could have visited the shelter every week, and they would've loved to have us; however, it just wasn't feasible. We had to take a city bus; we needed permission from mom and dad. I had to get consent forms, and that took forever to get that back. I had to go to some of the kids' houses and ask their parents if it was okay. It was really difficult to get to the site. I think we went three times in the 9 months, and that was a big accomplishment. I had to find bus tokens. I ended up getting bus tokens because some of the kids didn't have a pass or the money to pay for it. I had to figure that out. It was a struggle. It's different in an actual school setting. We fulfilled a lot of our hours during class.*

### *Topics teens do not enjoy*

The topics do not always work well for every group. Sometimes, the facilitator needs to evaluate their group and decide which lesson or activity will be the best suited for their group.

## **Sexuality through lifespan**

*One lesson talks about sexuality through the lifespan and how we are all sexual beings from birth to death. They don't get it. They don't like it at all. I've also done that one for two years with two different groups, and all four times, they just think it's dumb.*

## **Decision-making**

*In Chapters 8 and 9, that is goal-setting and decision-making. Those don't seem to be their favorite. I think it's because they hear a lot like it's important to set goals and make healthy decisions. I think the activities need more variety. Not a lot of those grab their attention.*

*They were less responsive about decision-making. They just weren't into it. I had them to think of a decision they were trying to make and pro/cons. What can you live with or without? They were just not into it.*

## **Signs of suicide**

*This group was not as fond of it. They said it was kind of depressing. A couple of the kids said, "Yeah, it's probably stuff we need to know about, but it was depressing and didn't want to hear about it."*

## **Recruitment**

One facilitator is worried about recruitment for next year because she is not allowed in the school system. She thinks it may be difficult to get new students to join without the help of previous participants, but it is a double-edged sword because in order to keep the group small, she cannot have the entire group back next year.

*I am very nervous about how am I going to find new youth who haven't been in it before? How can I tell these kids, "Tell your friends to be in it, but you can't be in it again because you've already done it." I don't know that we can have help on it because the people who would help us don't know our community. It's kind of a Catch 22. That is the hardest thing, finding an agency willing to give you those 9 months. We need more help on how to recruit teens. If you're lucky enough to be in the school, you don't have to recruit them. Trying to get the teens to realize it's going to be a fun program is hard, especially when it's 9 months. A lot of teens get excited until they hear it's 9 months because it's a big commitment.*

## **Community challenges**

Facilitators were asked to describe community challenges they had noticed during TOP.

### *Community buy-in*

Facilitators of TOP had a more difficult time finding a location for their programs than the Wise Guys facilitators. They described finding the location as their biggest hurdle.

*I would say it's been difficult. Mainly, in Des Moines County, we had a difficult time finding a home for TOP.*

*I think my biggest barrier was finding a home for TOP program just to fulfill the requirements of the grant itself. It was really difficult to get that community buy-in, and I thought when I was first trained in TOP that was a few places that would be really open to TOP. Unfortunately, I didn't get that community buy-in. I know myself and several other people tried very hard to get that community buy-in, but we never could do it. When youth treatment program ended, that was our downfall because we could never find another home. We had struggled with other youth serving organizations because it was a conflict of their contract to have another provider come in for that long. That was a huge barrier as well. Reaching out to several different schools in my county, all of them, I spoke with school principals, nurses, superintendents, the answer was always we just don't have the time. It was the 9 months that was a big barrier; it's a great and wonderful thing, and it's not a great and wonderful thing.*

While many facilitators had a difficult time finding a home for TOP, it was especially hard to get schools to buy-in to the program because it was so long.

*I reached out to all the schools, and none of them had time for a 9-month curriculum. I did the best that I could.*

*Principals and superintendent told me the teachers are swamped with what they have to provide legally for the kids. We just don't have even an hour a week because there's just no room for you.*

*They have an after school program, and I reached out because there's an after school alliance. I told them we have a wonderful program called TOP, and they said they already had other providers in for their after school program, and they said no.*

*I don't think we'll ever be able to get into the after school program that they do in Des Moines County. That doesn't mean that I don't think TOP can't happen within a school setting, especially the alternative high school.*

When the facilitator's community is not on-board with TOP, then it makes it extremely difficult for the facilitator to achieve the program's objectives. It is frustrating for facilitators when they know the program is wonderful, and they cannot find a home for TOP.

*I think about Planned Parenthood, and we are a big affiliate. All of the educators are health educators for Planned Parenthood. I can only speak for this world, and we all know our communities very well. We really know what is best because we are here. Maybe just having the higher-ups be more open to hearing yes, this curriculum will work in my community or no, it's really not. I feel like I did voice that when I was first offered the ability to get PREP funding. I really had concerns the first day, and I wish at that time, I would have had more support for them to say, "Well, you know your community, and maybe we should focus on a different curriculum." Then, I wouldn't be here struggling this last year and praying I didn't lose funding. We didn't want to give up prevention funding because that's our worst nightmare. I feel like I was set up to fail, not on purpose by any means. However, if they would have said, "Ok, well, Mary knows her community, and if she says this isn't going to work right now, then we need to listen to her." I wouldn't have struggled so much.*

## Suggestions for TOP

### *Support from IDPH*

Several facilitators reported that it would be useful for the IDPH to send letters of support for TOP to schools and communities.

*I think the state needs to help be our voice for the facilitators for TOP. If they could say, "Hey, we've heard this message and we need to focus more on trauma in youth and crisis and not focus so much on service learning. If they could say, this is what our facilitators are saying we need, and we need to add more of these adult prep classes for mental health, health relationships, and suicide prevention." That would be wonderful to have more flexibility to be able to provide that based on our group. I think Kirsten's group in Sioux City is going to be different than mine in Burlington in the low-income housing. I think that is what we want in the long-run is to provide those immediate needs to for our kids.*

Letters of support or saying that, "Mary has a wonderful prevention program and this is where it came from and these are the results we saw in the other parts of the state of Iowa, and this is why we think it's great in Des Moines County." Sure, having that support and backup is really great, and sometimes, we don't get that.

I would need for Sioux City schools to let me come into all of their health classes or something. I would need the health department and other agencies to say, "This is a great program, and it needs to be in the schools throughout the city." I would need support from city council, and we need this for our teens.

### *Pre- and post-surveys*

Facilitators also request that the federal government redo the pre- and post-surveys. If the federal government could come to a PREP session, it would be wonderful. The students have many questions when they have to fill out the surveys. The facilitators also suggested that it would be useful to see the evaluations and understand how the students' opinions changed throughout the year.

### *Financial information*

Another facilitator noted that her students are curious about financial information. Adding a session on financial responsibility could be very helpful. In her group, she told her students about what documents are important and what documents that need to be saved for tax purposes.

### *Adding curriculum*

Facilitators mentioned it would be useful to have access to information from other curricula such as SiHLE and Wise Guys.

*Iowa has Wise Guys and TOP. Maybe adding some curriculum to that under the PREP program. They took away SiHLE. I didn't use SiHLE anyway. Having different curriculum to choose from might be helpful. The TOP program isn't geared to one population as much since Wise Guys is geared toward middle school boys. TOP is pretty much all-inclusive. We struggled this year when we wrote the grant for this coming year. We wanted to offer it to another site, but the TOP program wasn't going to the site we were going to. We ended up saying we are going to offer Wise Guys to them if we get the grant. Having a different curriculum to choose from would be nice. The PREP program was too long for their population. They wanted us to double up and do it in so many weeks. We don't have the staff capacity to offer the class multiple times a week to make it shorter overall. Having more variety of curriculum to choose from would be helpful.*

### *Have a partnership established before committing*

Current facilitators suggested that future facilitators have a partnership lined up before committing to TOP.

*That community buy-in, letters of support or commitment from schools or somewhere. It's hard to answer because it didn't work for us, unfortunately. If I had to tell someone who was beginning to do TOP next year, I would say, make sure you have the partners established. Make sure you have a letter of commitment that you're going to work together, and they'll provide you with the amount of youth you need. Just start having those conversations before you implement like 2-3 months before like this is what TOP will look like, this is what service learning will look like. Have it be feasible so you know it will work, and you won't risk losing your funding or the program. I've learned a lot from this, and I think we all have learned a lot from TOP. I think the IDPH has learned what works and what doesn't. It's just a learning experience.*

## Challenges for Wise Guys & TOP Facilitators

Two comments were made about challenges dealing directly with being a facilitator for Wise Guys and TOP.

*We'd like to get another Wise Guys staff person. The interesting thing is that I could have retired, but since I love this work, I am not retiring. XXXX's degree is in Business Management. I think we would like to have another staff person, but we would like to make sure the other person will carry on the work that we have set the ground work for. It's putting someone with the same mission and passion to do this work.*

*The community really doesn't know a lot about TOP. We've tried to put it on our Facebook page. We tried a newsletter. We did one at the semester and another at the end of the semester with things that TOP has done. We don't advertise it, so people really don't know what it is.*

## Recommendations

Nearly all the Wise Guys facilitators agreed was the curriculum needs an overhaul. Wise Guys facilitators mentioned that the curriculum is lacking the following topics: unhealthy relationships, gender identity, drugs, alcohol, and masculinity. Facilitators reported that there was not enough time in the curriculum for outside speakers to visit the Wise Guys program, especially if the topic is not the facilitator's expertise; additionally, some of the lessons could be longer for certain topics, even students are asking for the program to be longer. Facilitators would like to see the curriculum become more inclusive of other sexual orientations. Another suggestion facilitators had was for IDPH to send the school district information on the successes of Wise Guys in other communities; this would help the facilitators get into the school system more easily. Facilitators also suggested having follow-ups for students who have completed the Wise Guys program. Facilitators agreed training has helped them succeed as leaders to the students. It would also be useful for Wise Guys to have a section on the school's webpage to keep parents informed.

With the TOP program, all facilitators would like the curriculum to become more flexible in order for them to best address the needs of their group in the 9 months. Facilitators mentioned it was difficult to implement the program in the community and schools because it was so long. Facilitators think it would be useful for IDPH to send letters of support for TOP to schools and communities. Topics facilitators would like to see added to the curriculum are: STIs, sexual decision-making, LGBT issues, alcohol, drugs, exercise, eating disorders, financial information, and self-harm.