

## **OCO's Health Education -- Doing Good Things for the Community**

Oswego County Opportunities, Inc. Health Education staff are having a positive impact on Oswego County by providing the communities it serves with a variety of programs made possible through funding received from the NYS Department of Health.

A new Drop-In Center opened in October at Fulton Health Center and youth are currently planning educational/ promotional videos to eventually be posted on Health Ed's YouTube channel. According to Ellen Lazarek, Health Education Collaboration Manager, the Drop-In Center has been well received. "We have had groups of youth visiting the center almost every week since we opened. They seem to be excited about the opportunity to be there," said Lazarek.

At the Drop-In Center, youth ages 13 – 24 can connect with program staff and youth leaders for group activities and discussions, information on STIs, HIV and other adolescent sexual health topics, health and safety packets and referrals. A family planning provider is onsite for testing, treatment and other sexual health services. Drop-In is open for anyone to attend for information, referrals and services.

Another Health Education focus has been Youth 4 Youth – Fulton Youth for a Healthy Community. Youth 4 Youth, a partnership between OCO Health Education, OCO Health Centers, Fulton City School District, and the Fulton YMCA, focuses on STI/HIV education and promotion of services through youth engagement and youth leadership. Youth ages 13 - 24 in the Fulton community are welcome to participate. "The youth are really working hard to be a more cohesive group as they attend weekly coalition meetings and training sessions," said Health Educator Toni Ross.

Health Educators are also bringing sexual health education into the classroom and the community through the Comprehensive Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (CAPP) project. CAPP provides education sessions using an evidence-based intervention that is proven to be effective in preventing unintended pregnancies and STI/HIV transmission. One-on-one interventions are provided to connect young people and parents to desired services. CAPP provides parent education sessions on adolescent sexual health topics. "CAPP focuses on helping parents, and other supportive adults, obtain the tools they need in order to be the primary sexual health educator for their child," added Lazarek. CAPP is currently serving the Central Square, Hannibal, Mexico and Sandy Creek High Schools and will expand to serve other districts in the coming months. Peer Educators, trained youth who provide information to their peers, have been recruited in Hannibal and Central Square.

Health Educators work to connect individuals to the OCO health centers by removing barriers whenever possible. Health Educators can provide transportation to Family Planning appointments, advocacy, referrals, one-on-one education sessions, parent/child communication workshops, community education and deliver health/safety packets. Health Educators are available for support and referrals via phone, 315-342-0880 ext 1456 or 315-592-0810, and text messaging, Monday – Friday, 8:30 a.m. - 8:30 p.m. While Health Education is not an emergency service, Health Educators are diligent with meeting the needs of consumers as they arise.



Ellen Lazarek (standing), Health Educator and Collaboration Manager with Oswego County Opportunities' Crisis and Development Services, facilitates a training session for staff facilitators in OCO's Crisis and Development Services. Health educators play a major role in connecting OCO's consumers to the agency's many services.