Addressing Youth Conflict Resolution Using Hip-Hop Culture: Responding to Community-Identified Health Concerns

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Presentation Overview

• Allied United for Health Project
• The problem of interpersonal violence
• A brief history of hip hop culture
• Using hip hop for positive messaging
• Project overview:
  – Educational in-service
  – Workshops on hip hop and spoken word poetry
  – Final concert and community celebration
• Barriers faced and lessons for the future
• Conclusion
The “Allied United for Health” Project

• Partnered with the Allied Wellness Center and the Boys & Girls Club of Dane County

• Year-long community health intervention in the Allied Drive community, an under-resourced neighborhood of Madison, WI plagued by violent incidents
Community – Identified Health Needs

- dental health
- physical activity
- nutrition
- conflict resolution
Interpersonal Violence

• Among 10 to 24 year-olds, **homicide is the leading cause of death for African Americans**, the second leading cause of death for Hispanics, and the third leading cause of death for American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Asian/ Pacific Islanders (**Youth Violence: Facts At A Glance** [www.cdc.gov/injury], 2007)

• About 50% of local residents reported that **violence gets in the way of their community being healthy**, twice the percentage listed due to economic reasons (Community Survey, 2006)

Appropriate conflict resolution skills can avert this epidemic of violence
A Brief History of Hip Hop Culture

• Started in the South Bronx of New York City in the 1970’s

• Youth cultural movement to restore hope to a disenfranchised population

• Four elements:
  – DJ-ing
  – Rapping (MC-ing)
  – Graffiti art
  – B-boy (break-dancing)

(From http://www.eocedutainment.com/)
Positive Messaging through Hip Hop

• Why hip hop for conflict resolution?
  – Engages youth
  – Builds skills of self-expression, public speaking skills, and sense of self-worth
  – Creates a positive sense of community ("Peace, Unity, Love, and Havin’ Fun,” Afrika Bambaataa)
  – Redirect focus from negative images produced by mass media to positive role models
Mission Statement

“. . . empowers youth between 8 and 18 by relevantly engaging them with principles of leadership, relationship, and citizenship.”

(http://www.eocedutainment.com/)
Phase I: Hip Hop In-Service

• All-day event held in the neighborhood at the local Boys & Girls Club
• Introduce neighborhood youth to “real” hip hop and its four elements
• Discuss the problem of violence and create positive messages using hip hop
Phase II: Workshops

- Members of Elements of Change LLC worked one-on-one with youth in the areas of hip hop and spoken word poetry
- Skill-building via exercises from the Elements of Change workbooks and CD’s
- Youth perfected personal pieces with the goal of performing these original creations at final concert
Phase III: Community Concert

- Invited entire local community to celebrate youths’ achievements
- Performances by local hip hop and spoken word artists with DJ
- Performances by neighborhood youth that participated in writing workshops
- Slam dunk contest
- Breakdancing demonstration by UW-Madison Break Dance Team and youth breakdancing competition
- Nutritious lunch provided
Barriers Faced and Lessons Learned

• Turn out
  – Word of mouth advertisement through key community members
  – Annual event

• Lack of funding
  – Co-funding and donation seeking
  – Outdoor event (block party style)

• Youth’s fear of performing
  – More practice
  – Positive role modeling

• Cost
Conclusion

• Violence, especially among youth, has a significant negative impact on individual, community, and public health

• Hip hop and spoken word poetry can be used as tools for appropriate conflict resolution, thereby decreasing violence
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