

# AMP! and Project U: Reaching Los Angeles Youth Through Innovative Arts and Social Media to Prevent HIV/AIDS

## Problem Overview:

In 2011, Los Angeles (LA) County reported 1,880 new HIV diagnoses—accounting for 38% of California’s 4,950 reported cases that year. According to the CDC, in 2011 LA County had the highest number of cases of chlamydia and the second highest number of gonorrhea cases among counties and independent cities in the United States.

## Program/Activity Description:



To help tackle LA’s HIV/AIDS epidemic, the Los Angeles Unified School District’s (LAUSD) HIV/AIDS Prevention Unit, funded in part by the CDC’s Division of Adolescent and School Health, helped launch innovative education projects that reach high school students—one, involving art-, dance-, and theatre-related elements; and another, incorporating contemporary social media technology.

**AMP!** — The **A**rts-based, **M**ultiple intervention, **P**eer-education program (AMP!) was developed collaboratively by the UCLA Art & Global Health Center staff and LAUSD’s HIV/AIDS Prevention Unit. AMP! is implemented primarily by UCLA staff as part of the LAUSD 9th-grade health education HIV/AIDS curriculum. The multi-component program, spanning 6 to 10 class periods, leads students through artistic processes and simultaneously educates them about important sexual health issues. **AMP!** includes

- hands-on art-making activities that prompt discussions with young people to increase their understanding about sexual health issues and learn negotiation skills;
- storytelling by individuals infected with, or affected by, HIV;
- peer-led information sessions on HIV;
- an original live performance delivered by undergraduate UCLA students;
- a travelling art exhibit called **Art Moves**; and
- a DVD series, “When the Situation Gets Slippery,” produced by a student performance troupe—presenting skits and testimonials on specific topics such as condoms, testing, social stigma, and sexual orientation. The DVD is accompanied by a discussion guide for classroom use.

**Project U** — Headed by the LAUSD HIV/AIDS Prevention Unit in partnership with the Beyond the Bell after-school program, community-based organizations, institutions of higher education, and the LA County Department of Public Health, Project U uses the latest technology to bring young people the information and services they need to make healthy choices for themselves and their relationships. This grass-roots, student-driven, social marketing campaign links LAUSD students, both on and off campus, to an on-demand text message information service and Web site for health information and services. Project U goals are to increase the percentage of LAUSD high school students who receive HIV/AIDS and STD prevention education, and—if they are sexually active—use condoms and access HIV/STD testing.

LAUSD provides the Web site and text messaging system for connecting youth to

- STD/HIV, reproductive health, and LGBTQ information and resources through weekly text messages or online forum chats.

- Mobile phone numbers or Web sites to request free condoms (10 condoms sent to the home in discreet packaging).
- Anonymous home test kits for STDs (free; sent to the home).
- A teen blog, written by LA teens.

The LAUSD also hosts leadership summits to provide schools with the tools and guidance for implementing Project U, and trains students on the technology.

### **Program/Activity Results:**

#### **AMP!**

After UCLA pilot-tested AMP! in one school in the LAUSD, the feedback demonstrated

- 21% increase in students who reported feeling compassion towards people living with HIV/AIDS.
- 38% increase in students who knew where to get a local HIV test.

Moreover, after the AMP! program, sexually active students were nearly four times more likely to get tested for HIV.

The AMP! model has been implemented and is being evaluated at more than 10 Los Angeles area school campuses. Further expansion throughout LAUSD is anticipated, along with replication of the AMP! model at universities and high schools across the United States, especially in the South where HIV rates are highest. In 2013, funding from the Ford Foundation will support pilot testing of AMP! in Atlanta, Georgia, and in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

#### **Project U**

- As of spring 2012, approximately 600 Los Angeles area students from more than 28 schools had participated in Project U leadership summits.
- In fall 2012, Project U was made available district-wide to more than 100 schools.
- Daily Web site visits (averaging 800 to 2,600) by youth to the Project U page further illustrate the value of using multiple approaches to link youth to critical health information.

*Note: This success story, including background data and outcomes, reflects information as reported by the participating program.*