Start Strong: Building Healthy Teen Relationships
An RWJF national program

*Start Strong: Building Healthy Teen Relationships (Start Strong)* sought to prevent teen dating violence by teaching “tweens” and early teens (ages 11–14) about healthy relationships. The largest program ever funded to prevent teen dating violence, *Start Strong* worked in 11 communities across the country to develop and implement a comprehensive prevention model.

From 2008 to mid-2013, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) invested $17.08 million in this national program. Blue Shield of California Foundation (San Francisco), which has extensive experience in funding initiatives addressing domestic violence. Futures Without Violence, based in San Francisco and one of the nation’s leading organizations working to prevent domestic and sexual violence in the home and community, served as the *Start Strong* national program office. RTI International (formerly Research Triangle Institute) evaluated the program.

**CONTEXT**

Teen dating violence is a major public health problem. It includes both physical (e.g., hitting, pushing, kicking) and psychological (e.g., criticizing, dominating, controlling) abuse in person or electronically, as well as unwanted sexual activity.

In 2007, before *Start Strong* began, 10.3 percent of students in grades 9–12 were hit, slapped, or physically hurt on purpose by a boyfriend or girlfriend, and 7.3 percent were forced to have sex when they did not want to, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).1 Independent studies report higher estimates of physical teen dating violence, ranging from 26 to 46 percent.

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1 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, which includes a national school-based survey of students in grades 9–12. Available online. The data highlight the rationale for this program, but more recent CDC statistics do not differ significantly on the extent of the problem.
Consequences of Teen Dating Violence

Dating violence can damage self-esteem, result in poor school performance, and put young people at risk for serious long-term health consequences.

Teens who are victims of dating violence are more likely than their peers to:

- Experience more serious abuse in later relationships
- Drink heavily, use drugs, and smoke
- Have depression, eating disorders, suicidal thoughts, and many chronic health problems

Why Middle School Matters

Many young people explore romantic relationships, and start dating, for the first time between the ages of 11 and 14. But conversations and education about healthy relationships often do not begin until much later.

“We knew we'd have to start much earlier to help younger people understand what it means to have a healthy relationship, and give them the tools and awareness to avoid the tragic and life-changing experience of relationship violence.”—Kristin B. Schubert, MPH, RWJF Director and Start Strong Program Officer

Educating middle school students and engaging them in conversations about healthy and safe relationships can stop teen dating violence before it starts. These “tweens” and early teens (ages 11–14) then take their healthy relationship habits into high school and beyond, and serve as role models for friends.

Science provides good reasons for focusing on this age group: their brains are developing the social and emotional skills that are important in healthy relationships. And their parents continue to be important and influential to the development and behavior of their children in this age group. Research findings clearly establish the importance to young adolescents of their parents’ parenting skills. While peer networks are a growing influence on tweens, indicators point to parental supervision, monitoring, and connectedness as significant factors influencing teen behavior and healthy development.²

² Elizabeth Miller, MD, PhD. Department of Pediatrics, University of California, Davis. Presentation slides to parent caregiver advisory group, November 5, 2009.
**RWJF’s Interest in This Area**

RWJF began supporting work to prevent intimate partner violence in 2007, with a focus on strategies to foster healthy relationships, healthy communities, and research that builds the evidence to effectively reduce violence.

**Targeting Teen Dating Violence**

RWJF believes that helping to promote healthy and safe relationships among adolescents can reduce the cycle of intimate partner violence. Two programs launched in 2008 focused on teen dating violence: *Start Strong: Building Healthy Teen Relationships*, covered in this report, and the *New Jersey Health Initiatives’ Safe Dates* program.

**New Jersey Health Initiatives’ Safe Dates**

Since 1987, RWJF’s *New Jersey Health Initiatives* has supported innovative community-based projects that improve the health and health care of residents in its home state. Read the Program Results Report for more information on the program.

From 2008 to 2011, eight projects implemented Safe Dates, a dating abuse prevention program, in middle and high schools through *New Jersey Health Initiatives*. Safe Dates includes a 10-session curriculum, coupled with a play and a poster contest that reinforce key points in the curriculum.

RWJF awarded grants totaling $2.8 million for Safe Dates projects. Grantees included organizations that specialize in prevention programs, school-based health centers, one staff training organization, and one school district. The nonschool-based grantees partnered with middle and high schools.

See the Special Report on Safe Dates.

**Preventing Intimate Partner Violence Among Adults**

RWJF has also supported work to prevent intimate partner violence in adults, including:

- The $3.185 million DELTA PREP project (2007 to 2012), in which the CDC Foundation, and the CDC itself, prepared 19 state-level domestic violence coalitions to address primary prevention of intimate partner violence. The project built upon the CDC’s experience with its Domestic Violence Prevention Enhancements and Leadership Through Alliances (DELTA) program. Read the Program Results Report.

- *Strengthening What Works: Preventing Partner Violence in Immigrant Communities* (2009 to 2013), a $4.5 million national program. It sought to enhance the evaluation capacity of community-based organizations that were using innovative or promising approaches to prevent intimate partner violence in immigrant and refugee communities in the United States. Read the Program Results Report for more information.
THE PROGRAM

Start Strong: Building Healthy Teen Relationships (Start Strong) sought to prevent teen dating violence before it could start—by teaching tweens and early teens (ages 11 to 14) about healthy relationships, engaging the people who influence them, using social marketing to deliver relevant messages, and changing school policies. The largest program ever funded to prevent teen dating violence, Start Strong worked in 11 communities across the country to develop and implement a comprehensive prevention model.

From 2008 to mid-2013, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) invested $17.08 million in this national program. Blue Shield of California Foundation (San Francisco) invested an additional $1.5 million, which funded one project in Los Angeles, and contributed to the evaluation and convenings.3

Although RWJF provided most of the funding for Start Strong, the two foundations were partners on the program. Blue Shield of California Foundation had extensive experience in domestic violence and shared lessons learned from its “Boss of Me” social media campaign to help inform Start Strong, according to Bess Bendet, who directs Blue Shield Against Violence at the foundation.

The National Program Office

Futures Without Violence (formerly the Family Violence Prevention Fund), located in San Francisco, served as the national program office of Start Strong. One of the nation’s leading organizations working to prevent domestic and sexual violence in the home and community, Futures Without Violence also conducted the early planning for the program.4

As the national program office, Futures Without Violence:

- Led ongoing program development and coordination
- Provided individual and initiative-wide technical assistance
- Monitored the sites

Futures Without Violence also had an RWJF grant to conduct focus groups with, and surveys of, parents and caregivers of 11- to 14-year-olds in 10 Start Strong communities to inform the program’s approach and messaging.5

3 Blue Shield of California Foundation, one of the largest health care grantmaking organizations in California, has committed more than $30 million to ending domestic violence in the state since 2002.

4 Grant ID 61685 ($147,350, May 15, 2007 to November 14, 2007).

5 Grant ID 66292 ($143,153, May 15, 2009 to November 14, 2009).
Key National Program Office Staff

Esta G. Soler, MSW, MA, president and founder of Futures Without Violence, and Laura J. Hogan, MA, MPA, a consultant at Futures Without Violence co-directed Start Strong. Soler helped RWJF design the program and provided strategic guidance. Hogan, a former vice president of programs at the California Endowment, has managed Start Strong since 2009.

Debbie Lee, senior vice president at Futures Without Violence, was the deputy director for most of the program, providing technical assistance and leading the development of the model school and school district policies to prevent teen dating violence. Lee was the initial co-director of Start Strong with Soler until Hogan joined the program.

Management Challenges

There were significant management challenges in the first year or so of the program. Turnover of program and evaluation officer at RWJF and staffing issues at Futures Without Violence contributed to these challenges.

Staff at RWJF who took over program management (Kristin Schubert, MPH) and evaluation management (Laura Leviton, PhD) devoted considerable resources and energy to address these issues, leading to personnel changes at the national program office, and also at RTI International, the independent evaluator, where Shari Miller, PhD, took over the evaluation. Read more about Evaluation Challenges in the Evaluation section.

National Advisory Committee

The national advisory committee provided guidance on the design of Start Strong and the selection of the sites. For a list of national advisory committee members, see Appendix 2.

A Related Grant

In a related grant funded by RWJF, OMG Center for Collaborative Learning in Philadelphia brought together 48 national experts from different disciplines, who discussed qualities and skills associated with healthy teen relationships and informed a process to create a definition of healthy teen relationships at the CDC (November 17–18, 2011).

The experts who participated in the meeting recommended defining healthy teen relationships through a collaborative process that would establish working groups

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6 RTI International, based in Research Triangle Park, N.C., is a research institute that works in health, pharmaceuticals, and many other areas.
7 Grant ID# 68451 ($149,440, December 1, 2010 to February 29, 2012).
consisting of young people, parents/caregivers, researchers, community practitioners, and funders. The working groups should:

- Allow youth to guide the description of healthy teen relationships.
- Include representatives from the National Institute of Justice and the CDC who can share knowledge from their adolescent health projects.

The experts also recommended conducting a literature review of research on adolescent dating relationships to summarize definitions of “healthy relationships” and “adolescence” across studies and synthesize information about how practitioners describe and promote healthy teen relationships, including engage youth participants and leaders in teen dating violence prevention programs. As a result, OMG commissioned papers by national experts summarizing the literature on adolescent development and healthy teen relationships.

**Start Strong Sites**

RWJF received 533 applications to become a Start Strong site. “Teen dating violence was getting growing notice from the field. A lot of organizations were beginning to work in it,” says Program Co-Director Hogan. In response, RJWF added funding for two additional sites, bringing the total to 10, rather than the original eight it had planned, and it expanded the evaluation. (As noted, Blue Shield of California Foundation funded the eleventh site, in Los Angeles.)

Sites received grants of about $1 million, beginning in November 2008 and ending between November 2012 and September 2013.

The Start Strong sites and their lead agencies were:

- **Start Strong Atlanta**—Emory University
- **Start Strong Austin (Texas)**—Safe Place
- **Start Strong Boston**—Boston Public Health Commission
- **Start Strong Bridgeport (Conn.)**—Regional Youth Adult Social Action Partnership, known as RYASAP
- **Start Strong Bronx (N.Y.)**—Bronx Lebanon Hospital
- **Start Strong Idaho**—Idaho Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence
- **Start Strong Indianapolis**—Clarian Health
- **Start Strong Los Angeles**—Peace Over Violence
- **Start Strong Oakland (Calif.)**—Family Violence Law Center
- *Start Strong* Rhode Island—Sojourner House
- *Start Strong* Wichita (Kan.)—Catholic Charities

These lead agencies included several sexual and domestic violence-prevention organizations, several youth development or youth violence prevention organizations, a medical school, a hospital, a health system, and a public health agency.

“We didn’t just choose domestic violence organizations. A number of the groups selected to participate are leaders in their fields and their voices are very strong. We were able to integrate the dating violence issue into other core systems” in these organizations, says Program Co-Director Soler.

Community partners of the lead agencies included:
- Domestic and sexual violence prevention organizations
- Hospitals
- Legal centers
- Local and state public health agencies
- Schools, school districts, and state departments of education
- Theaters
- Universities
- Youth development organizations
- Youth and family advocacy resource centers

See Appendix 1 for a complete list of projects and their lead organizations and community partners.

**The Start Strong Model and Core Components**

Because of the newness of the field, the *Start Strong* initiative offered sites latitude in developing strategies for social marketing, engaging influencers, and conducting policy change efforts, and it allowed the projects to choose one of two options for the evidence-based in-school curriculum.

**Promoting Healthy Relationships**

Based on input from focus groups with parents of tweens and young teens, *Start Strong* made a strategic decision to emphasize healthy relationships in middle school, rather than focus primarily on preventing teen dating violence.
Parents tended not to believe that their children were actually dating, and the concept of teen dating violence scared them. “Teen dating violence seemed too dark and heavy to discuss with parents of children this young,” says Hogan. But parents did want help talking to their tweens and young teens about healthy relationships.

“Start Strong strategically worked with the community around middle school students—parents, teachers, coaches, mentors and teen leaders—to reinforce better norms around healthy relationships,” says Schubert, Start Strong’s principal program officer. The goal was still to prevent teen dating violence, but to do so in a way that was more palatable to parents and other participants.

**Using a Community-Based Approach**

All 11 sites used a community-based model, with schools as a focal point and teens informing and leading programs. Although Start Strong did not prioritize high-risk youth, and projects represented urban, rural, and suburban communities, many of them worked in African-American and Latino communities, where intimate partner violence is often more prevalent, according to a 2011 national survey of risky behavior among adolescent girls.8

The model had four core components:

1. Educate youth (in schools and in out-of-school settings)
2. Engage those who influence young teens
3. Social marketing
4. Policy change

**Educate Youth (In Schools and in Out-of-School Settings)**

Each site used an evidence-based curriculum in school to teach middle school students about healthy relationships. Seven sites used Safe Dates and four sites used the Fourth R. Some sites enhanced their work with after-school programming.

- Safe Dates is a 10-session program that focuses on understanding and identifying abusive relationships and gender stereotypes, helping friends in abusive relationships, and developing communication skills for relationships.9,10

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Fourth R is a universal prevention program that targets dating violence and related risk behaviors. The 21-session curriculum includes lessons on healthy relationships, substance abuse, and healthy sexuality, and is based on evidence that addressing risky behaviors in any area of a teen’s life increases skills in resisting all kinds of risky behavior. Sites were required to implement 17 sessions.

Staff members at the sites also engaged and educated youth in other after-school programs, in community-based organizations, clubs, and teams, using concepts in a variety of programs in the field, including Coaching Boy’s into Men; Green Dot; Expect Respect; SMART Girls; and other youth development, theatre, and arts programs.

**Engage Influencers**

Because middle school students learn behavior from people they trust, *Start Strong* educated older teens, parents, educators, and health care providers on talking to tweens and young teens early and often about the importance of healthy relationships.

Involving older teens was especially important. Middle school students look up to high school and college students and trust them to offer knowledge and advice without judging them.

“We wanted the ideas to be driven by youth and to have youth leading the way in every part of *Start Strong*,” says Hogan. “We also understood that youth would accomplish better work with some adult guidance and facilitation. It was a very iterative back and forth process, with youth leadership groups working with adults to come up with all kinds of approaches.”

**Social Marketing**

*Start Strong* sites used social marketing to deliver messages that resonate with tweens and young teens and influence behavior. The sites reached teens online and spread the message that relationship violence and abuse should never be tolerated. They also connected with teens through popular culture topics via TV, movies, music, videos, and video games, as well as traditional media such as theater, posters, and magazines.

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Changes in School Policies and Practices

Real and lasting impact requires changes in school policies and practices. Start Strong sites partnered with school administrators and community leaders to create and implement school policies and practices that cultivate positive school climates that value healthy relationships and promote violence prevention. They also helped schools implement new policies and practices.

EVALUATION

The Start Strong evaluation, conducted by RTI, is one of the few, and the largest, studies to take an in-depth look at healthy relationship development and teen dating violence prevention efforts involving middle school students. Shari Miller was the lead evaluator.

Evaluation Design

RTI assessed the overall impact of Start Strong by looking at the:

- Effectiveness of the initiative among students and teachers (outcome evaluation)
- Adoption, implementation, and sustainability of policy and practice changes supporting teen dating violence prevention Start Strong sites (policy evaluation)

RTI gathered data through surveys of students and teachers (for the outcome evaluation) and reviewed documents, interviewed people at the sites who knew about the policy work, and surveyed key stakeholders in schools (for the policy evaluation).

One part of the evaluation examined patterns of physical and psychological teen dating violence perpetration, victimization, and related behaviors and estimated the effects of Start Strong on these patterns.

For more information on the evaluation methodology, see Appendix 3.

Evaluation Challenges

The newness of the teen dating violence-prevention field led to a program design in which the sites were allowed to develop locally driven programs that took advantage of unique resources at each site. This ended up posing significant challenges to designing and implementing the evaluation.

The resulting diversity of site interventions meant that a randomized controlled study, as initially planned by RTI, was not an appropriate evaluation design. As a result, RTI redesigned the evaluation. Even then, the lack of consistency in the site interventions made any evaluation of the overall initiative more difficult, which became apparent when Leviton at RWJF and Miller at RTI—who both were newly engaged in the program and its evaluation—began rethinking the evaluation.
“We basically put together an evaluation design after considering many options,” says Miller. “Is it the evaluation I would have done if I’d had been involved from the beginning? Probably not. Was it a darn good evaluation given what we had to work with? Yes.”

Evaluation Findings

The evaluators reported the following findings in two articles in the Journal of Adolescent Health,13 Start Strong: Building Healthy Teen Relationships: Evaluation Summary, and a report, Creating a Window for Teen Dating Violence Prevention Policies Within the Start Strong Initiative.

Outcome Evaluation Findings

- **Most students were already dating and many were experiencing dating violence while in 7th grade.** Some 75 percent of the students surveyed reported having had a boyfriend or girlfriend at some point in their lives.

  Over the previous six months:

  - More than one in three (37%) had been a victim of psychological dating violence.
  - Nearly one in six (15%) had been a victim of physical dating violence.
  - Nearly one in three (31%) had been a victim of electronic dating aggression.

  (Source: Evaluation Summary)

- **Start Strong significantly increased both communication between middle school students and their parents and relationship satisfaction among boyfriends or girlfriends.** These were short-term findings (fall 2010 to spring 2011), with comparisons made to students in schools that did not offer the program (Source: “Evaluation of the Start Strong Initiative,” Journal of Adolescent Health)

- **Start Strong students reported less acceptance of teen dating violence and a decrease in negative gender stereotypes over the short-term** (fall 2010 to spring 2011). These findings continued for another year, to spring 2012, with comparisons made to students in schools that did not offer the program. (Source: “Evaluation of the Start Strong Initiative,” Journal of Adolescent Health)

- **Start Strong students who reported being victims or perpetrators of teen dating violence, or both, in fall 2010 showed more positive results on some outcomes**

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than students who had not experienced or been engaged in teen dating violence. These outcomes included a reduction in bullying behaviors, a more positive school climate, more positive attitudes towards gender equality, and increased parent-child communication. (Source: Evaluation Summary)

- No significant differences were detected between teachers at Start Strong schools and comparison schools. (Source: Evaluation Summary)

- Start Strong students were less likely to transition to the most problematic pattern of dating violence behavior (elevated perpetration and victimization) and more likely to transition to the least problematic pattern of behavior (experience of bully victimization). The findings were made one year after students had completed the program, with comparisons to students in schools that did not offer the program. (Source: “A Latent Transition Model of the Effects of a Teen Dating Violence Prevention Initiative,” Journal of Adolescent Health)

Conclusion

In the “Evaluation of the Start Strong Initiative,” published in the Journal of Adolescent Health, the authors concluded:

- “Results are promising and illustrate that a multicomponent, community-based initiative reduced risk factors predictive” of teen dating violence.

- The findings underscore the need for more study of middle school students.

Limitations

The outcome evaluation had some limitations, as reported in “Evaluation of the Start Strong Initiative,” Journal of Adolescent Health:

- As with other evaluations of multicomponent initiatives, the evaluation cannot discern which components of the program led to the key findings.

- The consent rates were somewhat low, although they were well within the range of similar school-based studies.

- Only three of the 11 Start Strong sites were part of the outcome evaluation, making it impossible to generalize the results to all sites.

- Implementation varied for components other than the Safe Dates curriculum.

Noting that some of the positive changes reported early in Start Strong were not sustained, RWJF’s Leviton cautioned that those that had been sustained longer also might not continue.
The latent transition study also had some limitations, as reported in “A Latent Transition Model of the Effects of a Teen Dating Violence Prevention Initiative,” *Journal of Adolescent Health*:

- The model assumed that the group structure remained unchanged over time and across interventions, which may not be true if developmental processes altered the behavioral profiles over time.
- The model used binary indicators of teen dating violence and other behaviors that do not capture the severity of each behavior.
- Many of the results are somewhat descriptive and are not a statistical test of group differences.

**Policy Evaluation Findings**

**Baseline Policy Findings**

- Among the 11 sites, four had specific teen dating violence prevention policies, eight had policies addressing related behaviors (e.g., bullying or sexual harassment), and one had no teen dating violence or related policies. (Source: *Creating a Window for Teen Dating Violence Prevention Policies Within the Start Strong Initiative*)

- The existence of policies did not necessarily ensure desired practice. Practice was hampered by low levels of policy implementation and limited knowledge among staff tasked with implementing and enforcing the policies. (Source: *Creating a Window for Teen Dating Violence Prevention Policies Within the Start Strong Initiative*)

- Stakeholders in schools and school districts varied in their attitudes toward teen dating violence. School district staff members were more likely than in-school staff to view teen dating violence as a serious issue and to consider it a serious problem in the district. (Source: Evaluation Summary)

**Start Strong Policy Findings**

Evaluators reported these findings in *Creating a Window for Teen Dating Violence Prevention Policies Within the Start Strong Initiative*.

- Short-term outcomes that were likely to influence policy changes included:
  - Training for school staff and school district administrators that increased knowledge and commitment to preventing teen dating violence across multiple sectors
  - When *Start Strong* coordinators became the “trusted resource” for input on teen dating violence, and increased educators’ understanding of existing policies.
• Across all sites, school staff (such as prevention coordinators and health teachers) who responded to the stakeholder survey indicated they were significantly more knowledgeable about their districts’ teen dating violence policies at follow-up (60%) than at baseline (36%).

The school district administrators who were more knowledgeable about their districts’ policy at baseline became significantly less satisfied with the policies in their districts at follow-up (38%), compared to baseline (54%). This could suggest heightened recognition of the shortcomings of existing policies.

• Five of the 11 sites reported adopted new or enhanced existing policies.
  — At the state level, one grantee informed legislation designed to support the state education agency in preventing and responding to teen dating violence and sexual assault.
  — Four grantees contributed to adopting or enhancing policies within their local education agencies.
  — Three grantees strengthened policy by inserting language about electronic abuse to the bullying policy at the state or local level or both.

“The achievements are particularly impressive in light of the barriers to policy change, which included competing issues demanding leadership attention, staff turnover, and limited understanding of teen dating violence among key individuals,” said the evaluators.

For specific examples of policy changes, see Overall Program Results, Policy Change.

• Grantee efforts to build support and develop capacity for implementing teen dating violence prevention policies also contributed to the development of resources for short-term teen dating violence prevention. Resources included:
  — Teen dating violence prevention programs for all students
  — Prevention activities for students at risk of dating violence
  — Training for school personnel
  — Parent education.

• Factors contributing to grantees’ successes included focusing on site-specific goals and strategies, strengthening collaborative relationships within communities, and using technical assistance resources.
Evaluators reported the following findings in *Start Strong: Building Healthy Teen Relationships: Evaluation Summary*.

- **All 11 sites established at least one practice change that was still in place in the school year after Start Strong ended.**
  - Practice changes included providing teen dating violence prevention education for all students or targeting it to at-risk students, and providing school staff training and parent education on teen dating violence. In many sites, these resources had not previously been available.
  - All sites implemented core practice changes by the end of Start Strong, and most continued them afterward. Sites did not, however, implement all practice changes as widely as they did during the years the program was funded.

Practice changes are important, says evaluator Miller, because they lead to policy change, which takes longer (often years) and is more difficult.

- **Start Strong policy efforts raised support for teen dating violence prevention, elevated the work of grantees and led to other significant changes.** Among notable achievements, grantees reported:
  - Being asked to speak at local and state conferences, public forums and parent workshops
  - Expanding training on preventing teen dating violence
  - Providing expert input to a statewide commission on family violence
  - Developing a webinar on teen dating violence that can be accessed by teachers statewide
  - Creating a written response protocol to guide school staff who respond to teen dating violence incidents
  - Adding questions about teen dating violence to the school nurses’ electronic medical records questionnaire

- **Collaborations became more extensive and varied during Start Strong.**
  - Early school district collaborations expanded over time, often adding coalitions addressing domestic violence or youth development as well as state and local elected officials.

**Conclusion**

In *Creating a Window for Teen Dating Violence Prevention Policies Within the Start Strong Initiative*, the evaluators concluded that the 11 Start Strong sites had substantial
policy impacts related to teen dating violence prevention, despite the constraints of a two-year timeline and their differing contexts and resources.

Grantees enhanced policy by raising awareness of teen dating violence among policymakers, broadening the base of support for policy change, and acting as expert resources within the policy development process. The initiative’s funding terms did not allow grantees to directly promote specific legislation.

OVERALL PROGRAM RESULTS

The national program office compiled the following results on the activities of the Start Strong sites.

Educate Youth (In and Out of School)

- **Start Strong** implemented curricula in middle schools to educate students about teen dating violence, and bolstered this with education through clubs, community groups, and other extracurricular activities.

- In middle schools, **Start Strong** reached 23,198 students:
  - 14,880 students participated in Safe Dates at seven sites. For example, **Start Strong** Atlanta introduced Safe Dates to all 15 public middle schools. Forty-six 7th-grade health teachers completed training to deliver Safe Dates, and 2,156 students completed the program.
  - 8,318 students participated in Fourth R at four sites. For example, **Start Strong** Wichita introduced Fourth R to science classes in all 18 Wichita public middle schools. The Wichita school district planned to add “How to recognize unhealthy relationships” to the mandatory start-of-year training for all secondary school staff and all 22,000 students in middle and high school.

- Out-of-school programming involved Boys & Girls Clubs, after-school programs, and youth theater. Examples of out-of-school education:
  - Playing the video game “The Real Robots of Robot High” gave more than 400 young people in some Rhode Island after-school programs and middle school computer classes a fun way to learn healthy relationship skills. Developed by **Start Strong** Rhode Island in partnership with E-Line Media, the students helped design the game to reflect situations that are meaningful to them.

  Read more in the sidebar, “Developing a Video Game, ‘Real Robots of Robot High,’ to Promote Healthy Relationships for Tweens and Young Teens in Rhode Island.”
— *Start Strong Idaho* partnered with the Girl Scouts to run an online book club for girls. Encouraging girls to participate consistently was difficult until the Girl Scouts created a “healthy relationships” badge that girls could earn.

— Out-of-school art projects and contests on preventing teen dating violence drew students in *Start Strong* Wichita.

**Engage Influencers**

- *Start Strong* sites educated and empowered parents, older teens, health care providers, and others to help tweens and young teens build healthy relationship skills.

Examples of engaging parents:

— *Start Strong* Idaho offered free dinner workshops where parents and tweens and young teens met separately and then together to discuss building skills for healthy relationships. Staff provided child care for younger children.

— Interactive Passport 2 Social Media workshops organized by *Start Strong* Rhode Island helped parents understand digital communication and online social networks so they could help protect their tweens and young teens from digital abuse.

- Older teens served as mentors to their younger peers and contributed to *Start Strong* sites in other ways, including:

  — Informing programming and developing content that appealed to middle school youth
  
  — Serving as experts in social marketing and social media
  
  — Contributing to larger social norm change in communities.

  “I promised myself that if I ever had an opportunity to help someone who had experienced abuse as I have, I would help them.”—Youth Leader, *Start Strong* Bronx

Some of the best ideas in *Start Strong* came from older teens, says Hogan. Examples include:

— *Start Strong* Bronx implemented the Healthy Relationship Leadership Academy to train high school students. Teens who completed the academy led workshops for middle school students at schools, in after school programs, and at community events, such as the Bronx Museum Family Day.

— *Start Strong* Indianapolis and *Start Strong* Austin both produced original plays, working with local theatre companies, to bring teen dating issues to life.
“Students know what’s right or wrong but it doesn’t sink in. Through theater, you’re able to play out what’s going on every day in school and try out solutions.”—Barbara Ball, PhD, Project Director, Start Strong Austin

Read more in the sidebar, “Using Theatre to Promote Healthy Relationships for Tweens and Young Teens in Austin.”

- **With guidance from the Start Strong sites, health care providers served as trusted influencers.**
  - School nurses and health assistants in middle and high schools in the Austin Independent School District began screening students for dating abuse after receiving training from Start Strong Austin. Project staff trained 140 nurses and health assistants and gave them a toolkit and a screening instrument.

  “A school nurse is frequently the first person a teen will confide in on a school campus, so it is critical that they be prepared to recognize, respond to and prevent dating abuse.”—Laura Cotton, RN, Start Strong Austin

  - Start Strong Atlanta incorporated teen dating violence screening into the intake process at the Grady Teen Clinic and Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta Pediatric Hospital. Health care providers now use clinical guidelines to screen teenage patients and, if necessary, to counsel and refer them for services.

**Social Marketing**

- **Start Strong sites spread messages and knowledge about healthy relationships through online and offline social marketing.** The sites relied heavily on older teens to design, develop, and implement social marketing activities that engaged tweens and young teens in an ongoing dialogue. Older teens also served as credible messengers that helped programs appeal to tweens and young teens.

Tactics for spreading messages and knowledge included the use of:

  - Social media sites, such as Facebook, Tumblr, and YouTube
  - Websites and blogs
  - Youth magazines
  - Educational workshops
  - Theater performances, poetry slams, and battles of the bands
— Flash mobs and chalk art

Examples of social marketing by *Start Strong* sites:

— *Start Strong* Idaho created Eclipse: Campaign for the Third Choice around *The Twilight Saga*, a film series featuring a teenage girl in love with a vampire. Youth developed the campaign, which urged their peers not to limit their relationship choices in the same unhealthy way that Twilight characters did. They also scheduled special screenings to promote discussions.

“We wanted to make people consciously think about why the Twilight relationships might be unhealthy,” says Laura Hampikian, one of the teen leaders. Hampikian had been in an abusive relationship when she was 14, which *Start Strong* Idaho helped her end.

Read the sidebar “From Toxic Teen Relationship to Advocate for Healthy Teen Relationships: A Profile of Laura Hampikian.”

Read more in the sidebar “Tapping into Popular Culture to Promote Healthy Relationships for Tweens and Young Teens in Idaho.”

— The Sound Relationships Nutritional Label and the TrueView Music Video Label, developed by *Start Strong* Boston, help tweens and young teens evaluate messages in music lyrics and videos. Boston youth use these labels to create an Annual Top 10 List of Healthy and Unhealthy Relationship Songs. The Boston Public Health Commission and many other organizations nationwide also used the Sound Relationships Nutritional Label.

**Policy Change**

- **The national program office developed model school and school district policies designed to prevent teen dating violence and abuse.** The core elements of the model school policies, available online, include:
  
  — Schoolwide prevention education for students, including an evidence-based curriculum on healthy relationships and teen dating violence prevention
  
  — A prevention coordinator to implement and monitor the policy
  
  — Training for school personnel
  
  — Involving parents in supporting a positive school environment
  
  — Strong partnerships with students, parents, staff, and community agencies
  
  — A policy response that identifies and addresses early warning signs
  
  — Intervention strategies to respond to teen dating abuse
Monitoring plans to assess and report data on school climate and teen dating abuse

- **All Start Strong sites informed policy and practice change in the schools.** Six sites made important changes to their teen dating violence-prevention policies.

  “Policy must highlight the behaviors we wish to promote, not simply focus on those to be avoided.”—Kelly Miller, Start Strong Idaho

Examples of policy changes:

- When the Georgia Commission on Family Violence was developing the Georgia State Plan to End Family Violence, Start Strong Atlanta was a key informant. The plan, adopted in December 2012, reflects the goals of Start Strong, such as expanding the use of evidence-based teen dating violence curricula in middle schools, and partnering with the State Department of Education to integrate teen dating violence information into existing bullying, health curriculum, and school climate initiatives.

- Program staff at Start Strong Idaho informed a State Board of Education policy to promote healthy relationships and respond to adolescent relationship abuse, which was adopted in 2012. The Idaho Legislature approved the rule change in 2013.

  Read more in the sidebar “Tapping into Popular Culture to Promote Healthy Relationships for Tweens and Young Teens in Idaho.”

- Start Strong Los Angeles informed the development of a teen dating violence policy by the Los Angeles Unified School District, which passed in 2011. The policy provides for training of school faculty and staff, students and parents, as well as districtwide coordination of school policies and ongoing monitoring of teen violent incident reports.

- Start Strong Indianapolis informed “Heather’s Law,” passed in 2010 to mandate the State Department of Education to develop dating violence prevention educational materials and policies for schools statewide. The law made work with middle school students a priority. After the law was signed, Start Strong Indianapolis partnered with the Indiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence to provide model policies and resources to the State Department of Education.

### Increasing Capacity and Spreading the Model

- **The CDC and others are building on Start Strong’s focus or model.**

  CDC used lessons learned from Start Strong when it planned Dating Matters®, its comprehensive teen dating violence prevention initiative focused on 11- to 14-year-olds. Launched in 2011, Dating Matters® includes preventive strategies for
individuals, peers, families, middle schools, and neighborhoods and has funding for five years in four high-risk urban areas (Baltimore; Chicago; Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.; and Oakland, Calif.).

Diane M. Hall, PhD, acting branch chief at the CDC’s Prevention Practice and Translation Branch, served on Start Strong’s national advisory committee. The national program office also made presentations about Start Strong at the CDC and brought in staff members from some of the sites to discuss their work.

“Our relationship with RWJF was really beneficial to our thinking and our planning. It’s a collaboration that we really value.”—Diane M. Hall, CDC

With the input of Start Strong site staff members and others in the field, the CDC added a question on sexual violence within peer dating relationships to its annual Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

- **In 2011, Futures Without Violence became the national technical assistance provider for the sites participating in U.S. Department of Justice’s Defending Childhood Initiative.** Under the initiative, three cities, three counties, and two tribal communities\(^{14}\) received grants in 2010 and 2011 to integrate prevention, intervention, treatment, and community organizing strategies to provide comprehensive care to children and teens and break the cycle of violence.

- **The Start Strong model helped to strengthen the focus and funding of prevention in the federal Violence Against Women Act 2013 reauthorization.** “The comprehensive school and community-based model, with its focus on prevention, was largely included in separate legislation called SMART and subsequently adopted as part of the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act,” says Hogan.

**Communications Results**

The Start Strong website has information about the program, tips, things to try, resources, and case studies from some sites.

Project staff also briefed policymakers, including at a Capitol Hill briefing, “Teen Dating Violence Prevention: Why Middle School Matters” to congressional staff and nonprofit and advocacy organizations, and they held another briefing for a federal interagency work group on teen dating violence.

Staff also made many presentations, including at meetings hosted by federal agencies such as the U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Justice, and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and professional associations.

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\(^{14}\) Boston, Cuyahoga County, Ohio; Grand Forks, N.D.; Multnomah County, Ore.; Portland, Maine; Rocky Boy Reservation, Mont.; Rosebud Sioux Tribe, S.D.; and Shelby County, Tenn.
See the Bibliography for more information, including citations and links to reports with evaluation findings.

**SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROGRAM**

Most of the key players in *Start Strong* at RWJF, Futures Without Violence, and RTI International believe the program had a strong impact on the field of teen dating violence prevention.

**Raising Awareness**

As a large, national program with the RWJF “brand” behind it, *Start Strong* raised awareness of the issue of teen dating violence. “The number of middle school kids affected by relationship abuse, as shown in the *Start Strong* evaluation, is astounding,” says Blue Shield of California Foundation’s Bendet. “This issue is not just a niche issue. It’s a public health issue that affects all of us.”

> “*Start Strong* not only identified best practices and applied the rigor of RWJF thinking, but also elevated the visibility of this important issue.”—Bess Bendet, Blue Shield of California Foundation

“A major health issue in adolescent lives was put more on the map,” adds RWJF’s Kristin Schubert. “Because of *Start Strong* and other work happening across the country, February is teen dating violence awareness month; there’s an understanding that you can talk to your kids about this and have an impact; and there are resources on the Web.”

“RWJF gave an extraordinary gift to the field and the movement through *Start Strong*,” says Kelly Miller, JD, executive director of the Idaho Coalition Against Sexual & Domestic Violence, and project director of *Start Strong* Idaho. For the Idaho coalition, *Start Strong* “was a catalyst in accelerating and improving our youth engagement work. It helped us refocus our teen dating violence prevention resources, time, and energy on middle school.”

**Shifting the Field Toward Prevention**

*Start Strong* also helped shift the field toward prevention by demonstrating that parents and schools will accept programs to prevent teen dating violence and by emphasizing the need to focus on middle school students and healthy relationships. “The conversation around the prevention of violence is deeper and stronger in the United States than it was before the initiative,” says Esta Soler, program co-director.
More decision-makers now “talk about the need to start in middle school and figure out how to do this in terms of prevention and not just intervention and services,” says Soler. 
Start Strong also raised awareness of the benefits of social marketing as a tool to prevent teen dating violence.

The evaluation, despite challenges in its design, showed that Start Strong “contributed to pushing the field forward. There wasn’t much out there,” says Shari Miller, lead evaluator. She notes that including evaluation measures of the quality of dating relationships, and relationships with parents, raised awareness of the need for additional measures of healthy relationships.

The positive impact of Start Strong on tweens and young teens who had experienced violence or been violent towards others was especially important. “We can have a significant impact on youth who are most at risk,” says Laura Hogan, program co-director. From a funder’s perspective, Blue Shield’s Bendet adds, “If you’re looking for a way to be effective in investing prevention dollars, you can make a real difference by focusing on youth already exposed to violence.”

**LESSONS LEARNED**

**Lessons for the Field from the National Program Office**

1. **Use a multifaceted approach to prevent teen dating violence.** There is no silver bullet, no single message, intervention, or campaign that has been demonstrated to prevent teen dating violence. A multifaceted approach that includes the four components of Start Strong and evaluation of the work, with revisions in program components in response to findings, is necessary. (National Program Office report to RWJF)

2. **Focus teen dating violence prevention programs on middle school.** As the transition from childhood to adulthood begins, new peer and social influences come into play, and jealousy, anger, and pressure to conform increase. Often, this is the first time tweens and young teens copy the relationship behaviors they see in their families, peers, and popular culture. (National Program Office report to RWJF)

3. **Involve youth in informing program design and implementation.** Youth are well positioned to inform and lead efforts to prevent teen dating violence and abuse. Creating opportunities for them can turn youth into effective activists who have an enduring commitment to this work and become credible messengers for younger teens. (National Program Office report to RWJF)

4. **Identify and use influencers.** Alerting parents, mentors, teachers, coaches, older teens, young adults, and others—to the power they hold to influence teens, and arming them with effective messages and prevention tools, is very important in stopping teen dating violence and abuse. (National Program Office report to RWJF)
4. **Focus on schools and other community-based approaches.** School-based components must engage educators, administrators, coaches, parents, older youth, mentors, after-school program staff and others. The broader community must also be engaged so messages offered at school are reinforced at community centers, youth clubs, movie theaters, sporting events, and other places where young people congregate. (National Program Office report to RWJF)

5. **Use social media and mobile technologies to reach tweens and teens with prevention messages.** Tweens and young teens communicate in very different ways than their parents and even their older siblings. Online and mobile communication is an integral part of their lives, and a focal point of their social engagement. Highly publicized incidents of electronic dating abuse, cyberbullying, sexting, and other forms of online abuse have frightened many parents and caught the attention of various authorities, as well as the public. The same technologies, however, can be used responsibly to disseminate powerful prevention messages. (National Program Office report to RWJF)

6. **Consider using bullying behavior interventions as an entry point.** Evidence is emerging that bullying may be an indicator of future victimization or perpetration. Thus, interventions used to stop bullying and protect victims may also provide an opportunity to send abuse prevention messages, build empathy and skills to help stop dating abuse and violence, and promote responsible positive behavior. (National Program Office report to RWJF)

**Evaluation Lessons**

7. **Consider the benefits and challenges of giving the sites freedom to implement different components of the program differently.** When you give the community more autonomy, “you get more buy-in and therefore more sustainability,” says RTI evaluator Shari Miller. “When you do it from the top down, you get resentment from the community. To what extent pieces of a program are community-driven versus from the top down is a real challenge in the field and a challenge for any evaluation.”

8. **Consider an evaluability assessment when working in a new field.** Since teen dating violence was a new field when *Start Strong* started, an evaluability assessment to learn more about the field would have been useful before launching a full evaluation. (Evaluator/Miller)

9. **Choose an evaluation design that works for the program being evaluated.** The original choice of a randomized controlled trial for *Start Strong* was not feasible, given the nature of the program and the newness of the field. (Evaluator/Miller)

For lessons about the four program elements—educating youth, engaging influencers, social marketing, and policy change—as well as lessons from the sites, see Appendix 4.
AFTERWARD

Six of the 11 Start Strong sites—Austin, Texas; Boston; Bridgeport, Conn.; Idaho; Los Angeles; and Rhode Island—sustained significant parts of the program efforts. In many cases, the Start Strong approach has become a core element of the lead organization’s work (e.g., in Boston and Idaho). As one of the sites in the CDC’s Dating Matters program, Oakland, Calif., has also sustained some of the work.

“I truly believe in empowerment and a world where dating violence does not exist.”—Amber Johnson, Youth Leader, Start Strong Rhode Island

In a few other sites, partners such as schools have sustained individual elements of the program. The other sites did not continue the work after Start Strong ended.

Futures Without Violence

Futures Without Violence continues to work in teen dating violence prevention, including as the national technical assistance provider for the U.S. Department of Justice’s Defending Childhood Initiative. Because of Start Strong, Futures Without Violence has expanded its work with school systems and developed new partnerships with teacher associations and organizations working to improve the school climate. It also continues to maintain the Start Strong website.

RWJF

While RWJF is no longer working in teen dating violence prevention, Start Strong will be informing the Foundation’s future work in violence and trauma.

“We are not siloing out teen dating violence. We are interested in how dating violence co-occurs with other forms of violence like bullying, street violence, and child maltreatment.”—Kristin Schubert, RWJF

Blue Shield of California Foundation

Blue Shield of California Foundation is funding two projects that build on Start Strong through 2013 grants to the two lead organizations in Los Angeles and Oakland:

- Peace Over Violence (Los Angeles) is working to institutionalize and implement the teen dating violence prevention policy in the Los Angeles Unified School District, under a $750,000 grant.
Family Violence Law Center (Oakland) is working to enhance and expand the work of Start Strong Oakland by focusing on engaging other youth organizations under a $500,000 grant.

Sidebars

DEVELOPING A VIDEO GAME, “REAL ROBOTS OF ROBOT HIGH,” TO PROMOTE HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS FOR TWEENS AND YOUNG TEENS IN RHODE ISLAND

A Video Game as a Learning Tool

Middle school students don’t like to talk about relationships, but they do like to play video games. So, when Start Strong Rhode Island wanted to teach them about healthy dating relationships and preventing dating violence, staff worked with students and a game developer to create the “Real Robots of Robot High,” a video game and curriculum that provides a fun way to learn.

“Our base value in Start Strong was meeting young people where they’re at and video games and social media are where they are at,” says Christina Garcia, project director at Start Strong Rhode Island. Garcia is manager of prevention and a youth advocate at Sojourner House, Inc., a nonprofit organization in Providence, R.I., that provides comprehensive services to victims of domestic violence, which led Start Strong Rhode Island.

Involving Young People

To ensure that “Real Robots of Robot High” truly reflected the interests of tweens and young teens, Start Strong Rhode Island involved them throughout the development process.

The idea of using robots came from early focus groups. Students from one middle school, Highlander Charter School, worked with E-Line Media, an educational video game publisher, to develop the game. “The students made drawings of what they wanted the characters to look like. E-Line Media showed them demos, saw students play the game, and got feedback,” says Garcia. That feedback included input on social situations and stories that are meaningful to tweens and young teens.

High school students from Young Voices also helped develop the video game. Young Voices is a local, youth-run advocacy organization that partnered with Sojourner House and the Rhode Island Department of Education on Start Strong Rhode Island.
The Web-based “Real Robots of Robot High” starts with games about problem relationships. The player must edit what is happening and build a healthy relationship to win. Players who win enough games can enter “game alley” and create their own games. Players can “talk” to other players and leave messages about what they did and did not like in the game.

More than 400 students used “Real Robots of Robot High” in after-school programs and middle school computer classes in Rhode Island during Start Strong. The video game is available online without cost, and it meets the CDC’s National Health Educational Standards. It can be used with or without a six-lesson curriculum.

**Introducing Formal Education on Preventing Dating Violence**

*Start Strong* Rhode Island also worked with five middle schools, reaching 2,129 students, to implement the evidence-based Fourth R curriculum, a universal prevention program that targets dating violence and related risk behaviors.

*Start Strong* Rhode Island persuaded principals and superintendents that the Fourth R would help them improve the overall school climate. This provided an entry into the schools, but implementing the curriculum proved challenging.

“It’s 17 lessons. In our schools, not much time is dedicated to health. A lot of the health teachers were physical education teachers first. They didn’t get why we had to spend so much time teaching students about social and emotional learning,” says Garcia. While the majority of the Fourth R was taught in health classes, some of the program was also taught in English classes or during less structured periods (called “advisories”) that give students opportunities to meet with counselors or other professionals.

**Engaging Parents and Older Teens**

*Start Strong* Rhode Island also worked to engage parents and older teens, two groups with a lot of influence over tweens and young teens. Through one-hour interactive Passport 2 Social Media workshops, parents learned about digital communication and online social networks as potential sources of abuse.

“Some parents had never been on a computer before. Even tech-savvy folks knew Facebook but didn’t understand why Facebook is so important to young people,” says Garcia.
Initially, Start Strong Rhode Island had problems attracting parents to the workshops. Then staff partnered with organizations that were already providing training to adults, such as adult learning facilities, public housing, and public libraries, and integrated the workshops into these programs.

In Passport 2 Social Media workshops, parents learned how to access and manage social media and empower their tweens and young teens to be respectful in both the digital and real worlds. Start Strong Rhode Island delivered 55 workshops to 647 parents.

For older teens (ages 15–18), Start Strong Rhode Island developed Hook Up with Respect, with help from Young Voices. The interactive website allows teens to share relationship stories, rate one another’s stories, and help one another define the line between healthy and unhealthy behavior.

Teens submitted more than 200 stories to Hook Up with Respect during Start Strong. The website also featured more than a dozen videos from street interviews with teens about digital abuse, gender roles, and dating violence. Adults from Start Strong Rhode Island moderated the website, which is no longer active.

**Continuing Some of the Work**

The Web-based “Real Robots of Robot High” and Hook Up with Respect enabled the RWJF grantee Sojourner House, which is a small organization, to do far more than it would have been able to do with in-person interventions. Since Start Strong ended in 2013, Sojourner House has sustained the video game and the Passport 2 Social Media workshop series, which is one of its most requested services.

Funding for other work, such as maintaining the Hook Up with Respect website, was not available. Some teachers are still using parts of the Fourth R curriculum.

**USING THEATER TO PROMOTE HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS FOR TWEENS AND YOUNG TEENS IN AUSTIN, TEXAS**

Tweens and teens are bombarded with messages from parents and teachers about what they should and should not do. So when Start Strong Austin wanted to promote healthy relationships and prevent dating violence, the project engaged middle school students through theater, hoping to send the same messages in a different way.

“Students know what’s right or wrong but it doesn’t sink in. Through theater, you’re able to play out what’s going on every day in school and try out solutions,” said Barbara Ball, PhD, project director of Start Strong Austin.
Raising Awareness and Increasing Positive Behaviors

*Start Strong* Austin worked with the Changing Lives Youth Theatre Ensemble, which addresses teen dating/domestic violence, cyberbullying, sexism, and more; together, they produced three original plays between 2010 and 2012. High school students wrote and performed each play. “Perhaps Tomorrow,” for example, focused on friendship, rumors, and sexting and encouraged audience members to find the courage to make a difference. The two other plays covered cyberbullying and how labels create havoc in relationships. About 6,500 middle school students saw these plays.

The goals, says Ball, are to raise awareness of the issues and the need for people to take responsibility for their actions, and to increase positive behaviors. While the plays engage the emotions of the young theaergoers, the post-performance discussion, led by the high school ensemble that makes up Changing Lives, stimulates critical thinking about the issues raised.

Changing Lives is a collaboration between SafePlace, the lead organization for *Start Strong* Austin, and Creative Action. SafePlace provides emergency shelter, counseling, education and prevention services to survivors of sexual and domestic violence in Austin/Travis County. Creative Action is a youth development organization offering interactive classroom performances, after-school arts residencies, and community-based programs.

Using high school students to engage tweens and young teens was one of *Start Strong’s* core strategies. “Middle school students really look up to high school students. To change how they interact with each other, and the culture and climate in a school, we need to empower older teens to be leaders,” says Ball.

Being a member of Changing Lives helped one high school student recognize abusive relationships and do something about them:

“I’ve had a few friends who would always tell me ‘I’m fine,’ but sometimes I would see them crying because of something their boyfriend did or said, and sometimes I even saw a bruise somewhere,” she said. “I would now say, ‘You know, why are you in this relationship? You are not getting anything good out of it, you’re getting abused. You should separate for a while and get straightened out emotionally.’”—A High School Student
**Bringing Policy to Life**

*Start Strong* Austin also focused on bringing the Austin Independent School District’s dating violence policy to life. The district, a key partner in *Start Strong* Austin, developed the policy in 2007. But having good policy was not enough. “It is really important that everyone in a community knows the policy exists and how to apply it,” said Ball.

To make the most of the policy, *Start Strong* Austin staff trained about 3,140 administrators, teachers, counselors, school nurses, health assistants, and other professionals, tailoring the training to each audience. For example, training for school nurses focused on signs to look for during general health screenings.

*Start Strong* Austin also helped the school district develop *Respect for All*, a user-friendly website with information about policies that address bullying, cyberbullying, harassment and violence, and resources for parents, students, and educators. Project staff also trained students, with a focus on making sure they knew how to file complaints.

**Teaching Middle School Students About Healthy Relationships**

Implementing *Safe Dates*, a 10-session evidence-based curriculum to teach middle school students about healthy relationships, was the greatest challenge for *Start Strong* Austin.

“Texas does not require health classes. We had to bring the curriculum into core classes, social studies, or science. We were competing with other content that needed to be taught,” said Ball.

In the end, social studies and science teachers in five middle schools implemented *Safe Dates*, reaching 1,955 7th-graders. While the schools are no longer using *Safe Dates*, they have incorporated teen dating violence prevention and promoting healthy relationships, including elements of *Safe Dates*, in other classes.

**Emphasizing Healthy Relationships**

*Start Strong* Austin has increased its focus on the positive message of promoting healthy teen relationships among both its own partners and in the larger community. Along with Creative Action and the Austin Independent School District, SafePlace partnered on *Start Strong* Austin with the Seton Family of Hospitals/Dell Children’s Medical Center; Boys & and Girls Club of Austin; the Austin Project; the Cipher-Austin’s Hip Hop Project; Theater Action Project; Artists in Hospitals; Austin Voices; and Hahn, Texas.

“Healthy relationships are critical to anyone’s well-being. Many stakeholders have become engaged and taken this on in their own ways. People have made it part of their vocabulary and work,” said Ball, the project director.
Through *Start Strong*, SafePlace has expanded its teen dating violence prevention program, *Expect Respect*, to focus more on school policy, working with community partners, and youth leadership. Using *Start Strong* Austin’s communications work as a model, SafePlace now has an *Expect Respect* website and a strong social media presence and has incorporated a lot of the content from the *Start Strong* Austin website, which is no longer active.

**FROM TOXIC TEEN RELATIONSHIP TO ADVOCATE FOR HEALTHY TEEN RELATIONSHIPS: A PROFILE OF LAURA HAMPIKIAN**

A 14-year-old girl shouldn’t be responsible for saving her boyfriend’s life. But that’s exactly how Laura Hampikian felt after she started dating a boy she met through MySpace. “One of the first nights we got together, I stayed up with him on the phone until 4:00 in the morning on a school night trying to stop him from putting a rope around his neck,” says Hampikian. Soon, the Boise, Idaho, teen was spending most nights trying to talk her boyfriend out of killing or cutting himself.

Hampikian’s boyfriend made her feel guilty about wanting to spend time with her friends, so she stopped seeing them. “At the beginning of the relationship, I had a very stable, supportive group of friends,” she says. “Over time, my friends dropped off because I wasn’t being a very good friend.”

**Is This Normal?**

At 14, Hampikian didn’t know that what she was going through wasn’t part of a normal relationship. Her parents were getting divorced and their relationship had been bad for some time. Her friends “had no idea what was going on in this relationship thing.” Hampikian turned to music and movies for guidance, but the messages there were about tumultuous love. “I had no idea what a relationship was supposed to look like,” she says.

While many people, including Hampikian, think that teen dating violence means physical abuse and unwanted sexual activity, it also includes psychological abuse, such as controlling or manipulating someone else. Hampikian stayed with the boy for a year. “I wish an adult had seen it or stepped in. Not just for me, but for this poor boy, who was hurting and turned to me for support.”

Through *Start Strong* Idaho, Hampikian saw an abusive relationship checklist and found herself checking everything on it, except physical abuse. “That’s when I started realizing that maybe this wasn’t a good relationship,” says Hampikian. “It was toxic.”
Getting Involved in Start Strong Idaho

Hampikian left the relationship and soon became a Start Strong Idaho activist and a spokesperson for healthy teen relationships.

“Start Strong recognized teens as leaders and had them spread the message. It was teens who said, ‘we don’t like abusive relationships. We don’t like what we see in schools.’” —Laura Hampikan

She also began dating another boy, who showed that “you can love someone and be happy. The bad feelings aren’t necessary for the good ones, which is what I’d come to believe.”

For Start Strong Idaho, Hampikian participated in a social marketing campaign called Eclipse: Campaign for the Third Choice, designed to promote discussion about the unhealthy relationships portrayed in The Twilight Saga, a film series featuring a teenage girl in love with a vampire. She also staffed a booth to promote healthy teen relationships at a music festival and helped train parents of middle school students.

Hampikian shared her experience about what she learned from being in an abusive relationship as a contestant in the Miss Idaho pageants (she was Miss Nampa 2011, Miss Capitol City 2012, and Miss Tri-Counties 2013) and as a spokesperson for non-profit organizations, including the Idaho Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence (the lead organization for Start Strong Idaho).

She also made presentations on preventing teen dating violence to inform legislators in the U.S. Congress and in Idaho. This included being the keynote speaker for Idaho Senator Mike Crapo’s SAFE Teen Act Conference in 2011.

Discovering Her Passion

Hampikian, who turned 22 in 2014, plans to spend her career helping nonprofit organizations working in the field of sexual abuse and domestic violence. “Start Strong set me on a trajectory of what I wanted to do in my life,” she says.

Armed with a degree in operations management and marketing from the University of Idaho, Hampikian plans to study for a doctorate in sociology or social psychology with a focus on relationships. She hopes to conduct research related to healthy relationships that will help nonprofit organizations working in this field.

On a personal level, Hampikian has been in a healthy, happy relationship for four years. She hopes that tweens and teens can learn from her earlier experience. “It’s never too
early to leave an abusive relationship,” she says. “Relationships shouldn’t be devious or gross, or weird.”

**TAPPING INTO POPULAR CULTURE TO PROMOTE HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS FOR TWEENS AND YOUNG TEENS IN IDAHO**

Nearly 15 percent of teens in Idaho reported being hit, slapped, or hurt by a dating partner in 2007, well above the national average of 10 percent, according to the CDC.

Efforts to prevent teen dating violence in Idaho had not been very effective. “We weren’t focused on giving teens positive social norms, and we focused on high school students,” says Kelly Miller, JD, executive director of the Idaho Coalition Against Sexual & Domestic Violence and project director of *Start Strong* Idaho, based in Boise.

**The Power of Older Teens to Create Change**

Through *Start Strong*, the Idaho coalition and its community partners learned that they needed to focus efforts to prevent teen dating violence in middle school. They set out early to involve high school students in the work, recognizing that older teens can have a positive influence over middle school students. Project staff recruited about 20 high school students as teen activists, employing them as paid interns after school. Coalition staff members adjusted their schedules to work with the teen activists until 6:30 p.m.

“We were immediately impressed by how dedicated our high school students were and how relevant their ideas were. We began to bring them into our creative and planning processes much earlier than we had in the past, and put them at the center of the decision-making,” says Miller.

**Using Twilight to Promote Healthy Relationships**

The teen activists developed a social marketing campaign called Eclipse: Campaign for the Third Choice, which took aim at *The Twilight Saga*, the film series featuring a teenage girl in love with a vampire. The campaign urged tweens and young teens not to limit their relationship choices in the same unhealthy way as the Twilight characters did.

The activists marketed special screenings of the movies through a Third Choice campaign page on Facebook, t-shirts, posters, and signs. During these screenings, they encouraged their peers to make good relationship choices, facilitated discussions about relationship choices, and gave away prizes they had selected.

“We wanted to make people consciously think about why the *Twilight* relationships might be unhealthy. They told me they never realized the relationships were so
unhealthy,” says Laura Hampikian, one of the teen activists involved with the Third Choice.

“The teen activists successfully engaged thousands of middle school-age students in meaningful and critical conversations about the relationship issues those films raised. Without that campaign, all of those young people would have still gone to see the movies, but few would have had a forum to reflect critically and constructively on them,” says Miller.

“Watching the teen activists work, I learned firsthand that young people truly do have the power to create change—especially among their peers.”—Kelly Miller, Start Strong Idaho

To teach students about healthy relationships in a more formal, classroom setting, Start Strong Idaho also worked with 18 schools to implement the evidence-based Fourth R program for 3,913 7th- and 8th-graders. Fourth R is a universal prevention program that targets dating violence and related risk behaviors.

Implementing Robust Policy Statewide

Start Strong Idaho and its teen activists also worked with the State Board of Education to inform a rule change requiring all secondary schools to have a policy on preventing and responding to adolescent relationship abuse and sexual assault. In 2013, the Idaho legislature approved the rule change and the Idaho coalition developed a model policy to facilitate statewide implementation.

“The policy change is enormously significant. It gives us a strong foundation to go back into schools to help them implement a robust policy,” says Miller. Through grants from the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Violence Against Women and the CDC, the Idaho coalition is doing just that.

Building on Start Strong

The Center for Healthy Teen Relationships at the Idaho Coalition Against Sexual & Domestic Violence evolved from the coalition’s participation in Start Strong. Established in 2013, the center engages and educate young people, parents, caregivers, and other adult influencers, promoting positive social norms to prevent adolescent relationship abuse and sexual assault, and the policies that will sustain these norms.

The coalition is expanding the work done under Start Strong Idaho to promote healthy relationships through a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Project Connect, a federal public health initiative focused on changing how adolescent
health, reproductive health, and Native American health services respond to sexual and domestic violence. The coalition is also promoting the use of the Fourth R curriculum and continuing to engage and educate parents.

The Idaho coalition had many community partners in Start Strong Idaho:

- Academy of American Pediatrics—Idaho Chapter
- Boys & Girls Club of Ada County
- Boys & Girls Club of Nampa
- Central District Health Department
- Family Advocacy Center and Education Services
- Idaho Department of Education
- Idaho Department of Health & Welfare
- Idaho Legal Aid Services
- Nampa Family Justice Center
- Silver Sage Girl Scout Council
- St. Luke’s Medical Regional Center
- Treasure Valley YMCA

Many of these partners have incorporated the Start Strong curricula into classes they offer. For example, St. Luke’s Medical Regional Center has included healthy relationships in community education classes for middle school students and their parents, and the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare has incorporated healthy relationships into an eight-week class that covers a variety of topics.

Idaho coalition staff members see Start Strong as transformational. “Start Strong was a catalyst for us in accelerating and improving our youth engagement work and refocusing us on working with the middle school population,” says Miller.

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APPENDIX 1

Project List for Start Strong

Atlanta

Emory University School of Medicine (Atlanta)
ID# 65407 (November 2008 to May 2013) $1 million

Project Director
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(404) 712-8737
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Community Partners
- Atlanta Public Schools
- Ben Marion Institute for Social Justice
- Fulton Family Care Network
- Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice
- Grady Health System/Teen Services Program
- Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change
- Metropolitan Atlanta Violence Prevention Partnership
- Rock of Escape

Austin, Texas

Safe Place (Austin, Texas)
ID# 65411 (November 2008 to December 2012) $1 million

Project Director
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Project Director
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Community Partners
- Austin Independent School District
- Austin Project
- Boys & Girls Club of Austin
- Cipher - Austin's Hip Hop Project
- Seton Family of Hospitals/Dell Children’s Medical Center
- Theatre Action Project
- Artists in Hospitals
- Austin Voices
- Hahn, Texas.

**Boston**

**Boston Public Health Commission (Boston)**
ID# 65409 (November 2008 to November 2012) $1 million

**Project Director**
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**Community Partners**
- Boston Centers for Youth and Families
- Center on Media and Child Health at Children’s Hospital Health Resources in Action
- Close to Home
- Emerson College
- Massachusetts State Department of Health

**Bridgeport, Conn.**

**Regional Youth Adult Social Action Partnership (Bridgeport, Conn.)**
ID# 65472 (November 2008 to May 2013) $1 million

**Project Director**
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**Community Partners**
- Greater Bridgeport Adolescent Pregnancy Program
- Playhouse on the Green
**Bronx, N.Y.**

**Bronx-Lebanon Hospital Center (Bronx, N.Y.)**
ID# 65414 (November 2008 to September 2013) $1 million

**Project Director**
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**Community Partners**
- Bronx Borough President’s Office
- Bronx Clergy Task Force
- Men Can Stop Rape
- New York City Department of Education
- Pregones Theater
- Sanctuary for Families
- Violence Intervention Program

**Idaho**

**Idaho Coalition against Sexual and Domestic Violence (Boise, Idaho)**
ID# 65408 (November 2008 to December 2012) $1 million

**Project Director**
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**Community Partners**
- Academy of American Pediatrics—Idaho Chapter
- Boys & Girls Club of Ada County
- Boys & Girls Club of Nampa
- Central District Health Department
- Family Advocacy Center and Education Services
- Idaho Department of Education
- Idaho Department of Health & Welfare
- Idaho Legal Aid Services
- Nampa Family Justice Center
- Silver Sage Girl Scout Council
- St. Luke’s Medical Regional Center
- Treasure Valley YMCA

**Indianapolis**

Indiana University Health, Inc. (Indianapolis)
ID# 65406 (November 2008 to November 2012) $995,962

**Project Director**
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**Community Partners**
- Domestic Violence Network of Greater Indianapolis
- Metropolitan School District of Wayne Township
- Ruth Lily Health Education Center

**Los Angeles**

Peace Over Violence (Los Angeles)
(Funded by Blue Shield Foundation of California)

**Project Director**
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**Community Partners**
- Berendo Family Resource Center
- Los Angeles Unified School District
- Young Oak Kim Academy

**Oakland, Calif.**

Family Violence Law Center (Oakland, Calif.)
ID# 65472 (November 2008 to May 2013) $1 million

**Project Director**
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**Community Partners**
- Oakland Unified School District
- Youth ALIVE!
- Youth Radio

**Rhode Island**

Sojourner House, Inc. (Providence, R.I.)
ID# 65405 (November 2008 to May 2013) $1 million

**Project Director**
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**Community Partners**
- Rhode Island Department of Education
- Young Voices

**Wichita, Kan.**

Catholic Charities, Inc. (Wichita, Kan.)
ID# 65403 (November 2008 to November 2012) $1 million

**Project Director**
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**Community Partners**
- Boys & Girls Clubs of South Central Kansas
- Wichita Area Sexual Assault Center
- Wichita Public Schools
- Wichita State University
- YMCA
APPENDIX 2

National Advisory Committee

(Current as of the time of the grant; provided by the grantee organization; not verified by RWJF.)

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allgo
Austin, Texas

Lupita Reyes
National Program Director
Domestic Violence & Health Care
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Joyce M. Roche, PhD
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APPENDIX 3

Evaluation Methodology

Outcome Evaluation

The main outcome evaluation compared four Start Strong schools in three sites (Indianapolis; Idaho; Los Angeles; and Bridgeport, Conn.) with four comparison schools (in Indianapolis; San Diego; and Saginaw, Mich.) that did not have teen dating violence prevention or healthy relationships programs.

The Start Strong sites represented mid-sized and large urban areas and reflected racial/ethnic and regional diversity. The comparison schools were matched on school features (size, percent of students on free or reduced-cost lunch, race/ethnicity, and characteristics of the metropolitan area). Evaluators gathered data at the eight schools through:

- Four surveys of 7th- and 8th-grade students (1,517 students; 48% to 71% across schools):
- Two surveys of 7th- and 8th-grade teachers (185 teachers at the first survey)

The outcome evaluation assessed change in key factors targeted by Start Strong. Student measures included:

- Teen dating violence perpetration and victimization
- Student attitudes related to teen dating violence
- Having friends involved in teen dating violence
- Sexual harassment
- Bullying
- Perceived satisfaction in boyfriend/girlfriend relationships
- Parent-child communication about healthy relationships.

Teacher measures included:

- Student-teacher relationships
- Student acceptance of teen dating violence
- Teacher awareness of teen dating violence
- Teen dating violence reporting
The Estimates of Patterns of Behavior

Evaluators used latent class analysis to estimate patterns of behaviors from a single time point. The analyses suggested four classes best captured these interrelated behavior patterns:

- Elevated perpetration and victimization on most behaviors (the multi-problem class)
- Bullying perpetration/victimization and sexual harassment victimization (the bully–harassment victimization class)
- Bullying perpetration/victimization and psychological teen dating violence victimization (bully–psychological victimization)
- Experience of bully victimization (bully victimization).

Evaluators used a latent transition analysis to estimate this behavior over time in terms of the likelihood of:

- Each behavior being present in each class or profile of behaviors and
- Transitioning from one class at the first wave to another class (or remaining stable) at the subsequent wave.

Policy Evaluation

All 11 Start Strong sites participated in the policy evaluation, which assessed the adoption, implementation, and sustainability of formal and informal policies related to preventing teen dating violence and promoting healthy relationships. The evaluation examined policies at baseline (fall 2010) and follow-up (spring 2012) in 10 states (two sites were located within a single state) and 11 school districts, as well as the sites’ experiences with policy change.

Evaluators gathered data through:

- Document review: A content analysis of state and local policy materials
- Three rounds of structured telephone interviews with individuals in each site knowledgeable about policy provisions and efforts
- Two surveys of key stakeholders in schools and school administration

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15 Latent class analysis is a statistical method for identifying unmeasured class membership among subjects.
APPENDIX 4

These are additional lessons about the four program components, which were identified as key by program staff and posted on the *Start Strong* website (except where another source is identified). For more details and tips, visit the links provided at the end of each section. Lessons from the sites are also included here.

Lessons About Educating Youth

**Getting Started in Schools**

1. **Weigh decisions about new curricula.** Carving out time for curricula (especially the 17-session Fourth R) was challenging, especially in school districts without a health class requirement. For example, *Start Strong* Austin had to convince school district administrators to carve out time from core classes, such as social studies and science.

   On the other hand, the comprehensive nature of Fourth R allowed some schools to complement or replace existing programming. *Start Strong* Idaho, for example, convinced schools to meet the state requirement for the health curriculum by adopting Fourth R.

2. **Decide who will deliver the curricula.** Fourth R has to be taught by teachers, but willingness to do this differed greatly among the sites. Safe Dates can be taught either by teachers or trained outside educators. Outside educators delivered the lessons more consistently across classrooms, and teacher turnover or administration turmoil did not impact the program’s delivery. The AmeriCorps volunteers used by *Start Strong* Bridgeport “established a youthful, trusted presence in the schools, and quickly built rapport with students,” says Laura Hogan, program co-director. “In this instance, they were the perfect messengers.” However, some sites noted that outside educators had difficulty connecting with students because they did not have prior relationships with them.

3. **Be aware that working in schools is challenging.** In *Start Strong*’s experience, in-school programming required intensive preparation and troubleshooting. School staffing, and administration changes, testing, and budget issues can all disrupt curriculum delivery. Snow days, testing, or a teacher’s midsemester departure may also prevent lessons from being delivered.

   “In the schools where it worked really well, there was great buy-in. It got the conversation going,” says Barbara Ball, *Start Strong* Austin project director.

**Out-of-School Curricula**

4. **Include Physical Activity.** In out-of-school settings, kids want and need to be physically active. Think about how to weave activity into programs through dance, games, sports, acting, and more.
5. **Work with existing programs.** Partnering with an existing organization, such as Boys & Girls Clubs of America or the YMCA, provides access to existing facilities, infrastructure, and standing within the community. With training, staff at these organizations can gain the expertise to have an ongoing impact, changing the environment of their program to promote healthy relationships.

6. **Recognize limitations.** Out-of-school programs have the flexibility to devote time to priorities raised by tweens and young teens, but it is difficult to consistently implement a formal curriculum in those settings. Attendance can vary widely and groups change and evolve quickly. Freestanding activities and sessions that do not need to be implemented in a specific order are ideal for the out-of-school setting.

For more information, including tips, things to try, and resources, see the educate youth section of the program’s website.

**Lessons About Engaging Influencers**

**Parents**

7. **Choose a comprehensive approach to working with parents.** Parents are much more likely to focus on preventing teen dating violence when they understand that it is often associated with failing grades, dropping out of school, substance abuse, risky sexual behavior, and self-destructive thoughts and behavior.

8. **Build parental confidence.** Parents are key influencers but many parents were uncomfortable discussing teen dating violence or healthy relationships with their tweens and young teens, and skeptical of the need to do so. *Start Strong* sites offered tools to parents to help start conversations about relationships and dating violence with their children, including what words to use and how to recognize warning signs. For example, *Start Strong Austin* made it personal, asking parents to remember how old they were when they first started thinking about a relationship.

9. **Team up.** Partnering with school resource centers, parent-teacher organizations, and student performance groups increased event attendance and reduced costs and planning time. Some sites piggybacked on other events parents were attending. For example, *Start Strong Bronx* hosted a parenting program at school at times when parents were scheduled to pick up report cards.

**Older Teens**

10. **Leverage resources:** To get older teens involved, partner with other programs that are already connecting with potential youth leaders, such as those involved in the arts, community outreach, or at-risk interventions. For example:

    — *Start Strong Rhode Island* partnered with Young Voices, a nonprofit advocacy organization for urban youth, and helped them incorporate healthy relationships content into their programming.
11. **Build a great team:** Older teens who reflect the diversity of voices in the community are strong, effective influencers, especially if they have firsthand knowledge of dating violence. However, they lack experience and may accept unhealthy behaviors around them.

Every *Start Strong* site provided training and education to older teens participating in their programs, such as skill-building opportunities in public speaking, developing creative campaigns, managing projects, and professionalism. For example:

— *Start Strong Boston* developed a summer program in partnership with Youth Employment that provided paid work for teens.

— At *Start Strong Idaho*, a teen mom who experienced dating abuse was a committed advocate, teaching others and helping build support for the program within the community.

— *Start Strong Wichita* created student leadership teams at middle and high schools and sustained the approach by creating a committee of district and community adults as advisors.

12. **Give older teens a seat at the table:** Give teen leaders a real role in decisionmaking, allow them to participate in meaningful ways, and incorporate their leadership and vision. Teens need to know that they are much more than token participants.

13. **Recognize teens’ needs:** Schedule teen leadership programs and trainings during after-school hours and be cognizant of barriers—homework loads, transportation needs, babysitting for younger siblings, etc. Consider offering stipends to older teens and college students who might otherwise have paying jobs.

**Health Care Providers**

14. **Engaging the health provider community requires guidance and time.** Without guidance, many health care professionals find it difficult to include conversations about relationships in routine appointments with teens.

15. **Training needs vary greatly.** School nurses and other professionals who have regular personal interactions with teens may be very familiar with teen dating violence, but other health care professionals may not be as attuned to the issue. Most doctors and nurses still do not screen for relationship abuse unless they suspect a problem.

To counteract this, for example, *Start Strong Bronx* developed a pediatric residency training program to prepare physicians to discuss healthy relationship development with parents and youth. The training focused on “Dating Violence 101” and offered real-life scenarios and training on how to ask questions.

For more information, including tips, things to try, and resources, see the engage influencers section of the program’s website.
Lessons about Social Marketing

16. Keep it fresh and shareable. Cultural events can be a great context for drawing youth into a conversation. As Start Strong communities became better at social marketing, they developed key-word searches to identify local and national news of interest to tweens and teens, including popular culture stories. For example,

— Start Strong Boston surveyed local youth about the well-publicized dating violence between celebrities Chris Brown and Rihanna and used social media to share the results. This created a youth-relevant dialog and engaged many youth online.

17. Use youth talents. Youth are experts in social media—make the most of their skills. Using social media well requires involving creative people, taking risks, and being prepared to move as fast as youth.

18. Layer the strategy. Combine social media and other online tools with offline strategies for more impact. Sites layered strategies by hosting events, workshops, and poetry slams or contests that typically included an online component where teens could vote, enter a drawing, watch a video or read a blog. For example:

— Start Strong Wichita created a battle of the bands event, challenging youth to create original musical content on healthy relationships. The project website let tweens and young teens vote on the winners and shared downloadable music. The competing bands promoted the event through social media and staff used traditional marketing, such as posters, announcements at school, t-shirts, and handouts, to direct participants to the website.

For more information, including tips, things to try, and resources, see the social marketing section of the program’s website.

Lessons about Policy Change

19. Connect to other issues. Start Strong worked to leverage work already being done on policies or issues related to teen dating violence prevention. For example:

— Start Strong Bronx pushed to have teen dating violence prevention and intervention integrated into an existing sexual harassment policy that the school district was revising.

— Start Strong Indianapolis connected the issues of bullying and dating violence to build on momentum for a new bullying initiative within the district.


20. Build capacity and tell a good story. Through training, peer support, and hands-on technical assistance, program coordinators and participants learned how to develop stories and case examples to propose and support school policy change.
Policymakers respond to authentic voices, whether they come from a youth, staff person, or parent of a teen affected by violence. Parents and youth can be especially effective allies and champions, particularly when they are willing to tell their personal stories.

21. **Be agile; timing is everything.** Have a strategy, but be ready to change it. Policy change can leap forward based on current events or unanticipated opportunities. It can also stall because of the loss of a champion, new priorities, or a budget crisis.

22. **Support the implementation of new policies.** Just having a school district, state, or federal policy or law in place is often not enough. Prevention programs can support implementation and ensure that people in the community know about the policy or law. For example:

   — *Start Strong Austin* helped the Austin Independent School District increase awareness of its teen dating violence policy through a Respect for All website and trained school staff and students about the policy.

23. **Collect data.** Collecting data and monitoring trends over time help demonstrate whether policies are working or should be changed.

   For more information, including tips, things to try, and resources, see the policy change section of the program’s website.

**Lessons from the Sites**

24. **Integrate teen dating abuse prevention with existing school initiatives and with programs targeting other adolescent risk behaviors.** *Start Strong Austin* developed sustainable programming and avoided duplication of effort and financial strain on limited school resources by integrating its work with other school initiatives. (Report from *Start Strong Austin* to RWJF)

25. **Be sensitive to the needs of youth who have already experienced violence.** Many youth experience violence in multiple contexts (at home, in the community, in their peer group, in their dating relationships). *Start Strong Austin* used its lead agency’s Expect Respect program to provide more intensive, trauma-informed services, including support groups and counseling, to youth exposed to violence and abuse. (Report from *Start Strong Austin* to RWJF)

26. **Look for opportunities to expand prevention programming.** *Start Strong Austin* identified a need for a school district website on bullying, harassment and dating abuse and led the effort to develop the Austin Independent School District’s Respect for All website. (Report from *Start Strong Austin* to RWJF)

27. **Allocate sufficient resources to engage teen mentors and engage with them regularly.** “We learned that to engage youth across such a broad area, we would need more resources, and that we were most effective with teens we could engage with regularly,” said a report to RWJF from *Start Strong Idaho*. The site worked with
youth in 18 counties, including some as many as four hours away from the lead agency; the distance made it more difficult to mentor them, according to Kelly Miller, JD, project director, Start Strong, Idaho.

**PROGRAM BIBLIOGRAPHY**

(Current as of date of the report; as provided by the grantee organization; not verified by RWJF; items not available from RWJF.)

**Reports**


**Toolkits**


**Communications or Promotions**


**EVALUATION BIBLIOGRAPHY**

(Current as of date of the report; as provided by the grantee organization; not verified by RWJF; items not available from RWJF.)

**Articles**


**Reports**

