# Making a little go a long way: The experience of Sasha Bruce Youthwork

Introduction

Organizations implementing teen pregnancy prevention programs with federal support are interested in understanding how to sustain their programs beyond the grant period. Federal funding can help identify and bolster evidence-based approaches, but these resources are limited and competitive. Therefore, grantees must begin planning early in the grant period, develop strategies to institutionalize services, and be able to adjust quickly to continue serving their communities when their funding environment changes. In 2015, the Office of Adolescent Health (OAH) launched a three-year effort to explore the key factors that affect program sustainability strategies that former OAH grantees have successfully employed to sustain their programs (see About OAH's Sustainability Study).

In 2010, Sasha Bruce Youthwork (SBY), a nonprofit organization located in Washington, D.C., received an OAH grant to implement an evidence-based intervention in four schools in the city. After their grant ended in early 2016, SBY secured funding from the DC Department of Health that enabled them to sustain by scaling back implementation of the program. This case study highlights the experiences of SBY and details the factors and strategies that made it possible for them to sustain their program despite funding constraints.
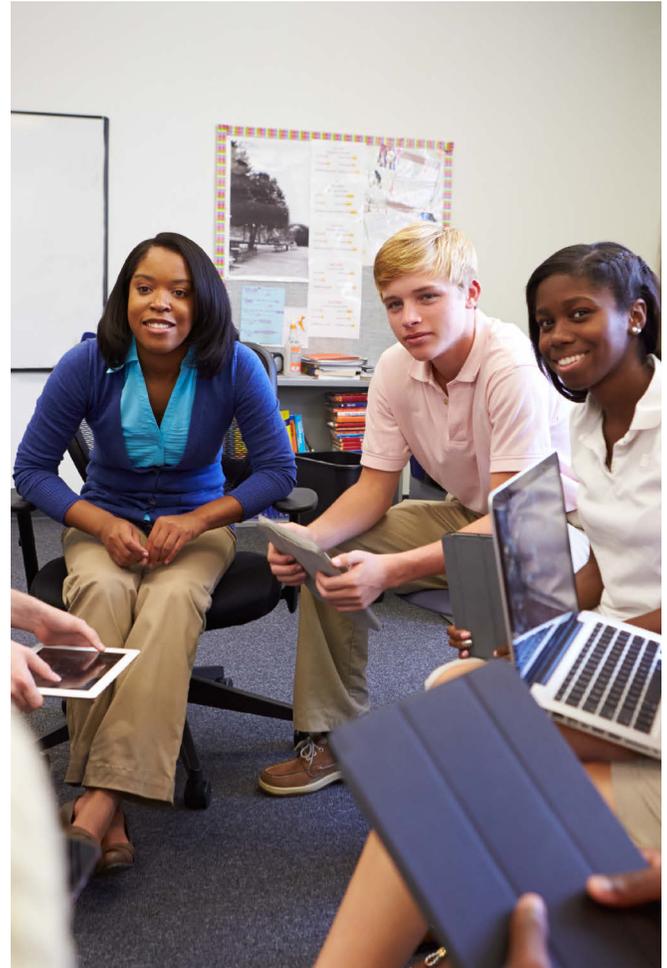
Engaging youth and starting small helped build program support

SBY has a long-standing history of working with Ballou High School in Washington, D.C., to address high rates of teen pregnancy. As part of its OAH TPP program grant, SBY leadership selected an evidence-based program model with life skills and community service components which they felt would align well with school requirements and the needs of the target population at Ballou High. To graduate high school, DC students are required to complete 100 hours of community service so 20 hours of community service was built into the program to help students meet that requirement.
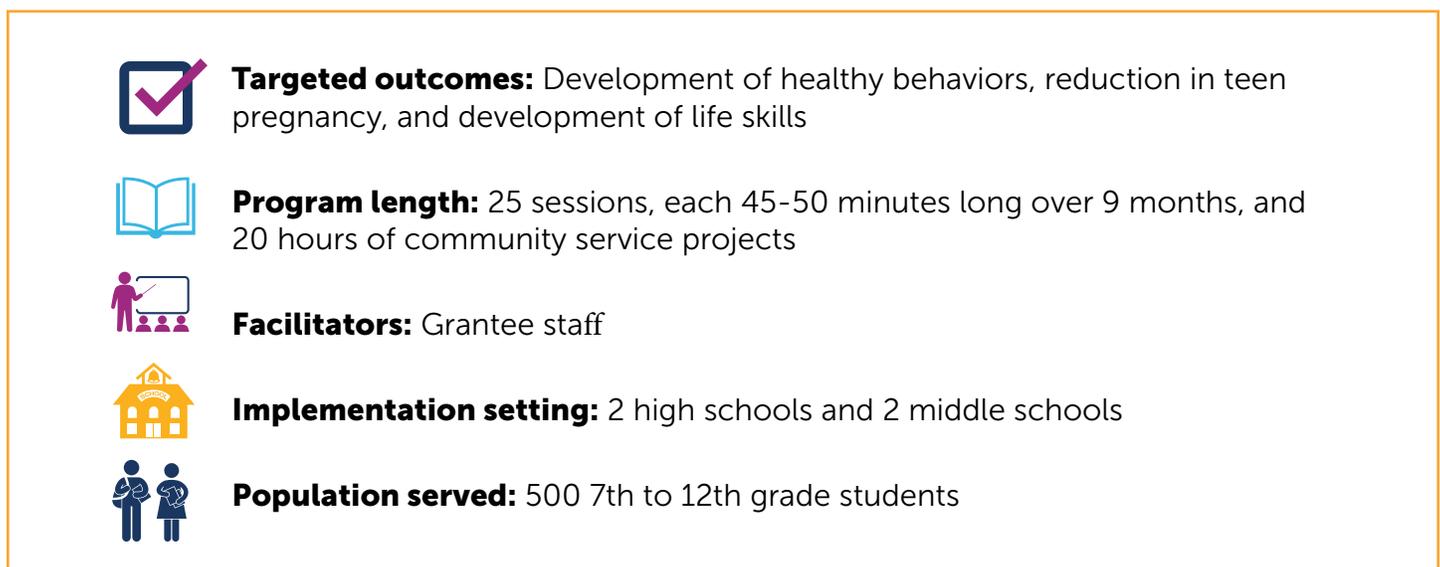
To build rapport and engage youth, SBY also added or adapted some of the program's components. For example, they conducted a community service retreat in which facilitators worked with students over a weekend on building civic engagement, connecting what they learned in class to the real world; and team-building activities like rock climbing and zip lining. SBY also planned field trips to local amusement parks when students attained their community service goals.

The evidence-based program model SBY selected is long and requires school commitment, such as space for facilitators when they are in the building, so it was important to gain buy-in from school staff early on. Early in the OAH grant period, SBY began developing support for the program by making presentations to school staff and leadership. Facilitators also conducted a 10- to 15-minute condensed sample session so school staff could better understand the program. This strategy was particularly helpful because, according to the grantee, "it's one thing to read a paper or show a slide show, but to actually see what the program looked like is good." Similarly, teachers who stayed in the classrooms during sessions became champions for the program. According to SBY staff, "they [teachers] really come through and advocate for us."

As the program rolled out in Ballou High School early in the grant period and started to receive positive feedback, word spread to other schools, who then expressed interest in participating. As a result of their outreach and positive engagement, SBY entered into agreements for program delivery in two middle schools and another high school. As they expanded, SBY implemented the recommended number of sessions at each of the four schools within a nine-month time frame. Students enrolled in the program in three ways. They could (1) receive the program as part of their regular class, (2) be selected to participate based on an assessment conducted by community coordinators on whether the student would benefit, or (3) volunteer to participate.

Figure 1: Program Implemented Under OAH Grant

Targeted outcomes: Development of healthy behaviors, reduction in teen pregnancy, and development of life skills

Program length: 25 sessions, each 45-50 minutes long over 9 months, and 20 hours of community service projects

Facilitators: Grantee staff

Implementation setting: 2 high schools and 2 middle schools

Population served: 500 7th to 12th grade students

Source: SBY grant application, final report, and discussions with grantee staff.

Even the best-laid plans require backup plans

To sustain the program at the same scale in all four schools after the OAH grant ended, SBY was hoping to receive new funding through an agreement with the program's developer. At the end of 2015, the developer was working on a contract with the DC State Superintendent of Education through which several implementation partners, including SBY, would deliver the program in DC public and charter schools. As part of this agreement, SBY expected that they could sustain the program at the same scale as they had during the OAH funding period. Because they were anticipating that the developer and the DC State Superintendent of Education would successfully execute the agreement, SBY did not actively search for other funding opportunities in the last year of the project. However, the agreement fell through, and SBY found themselves in need of new funding to continue providing the program after the OAH grant ended.

"When the program first started there were a lot of presentations and meetings, a lot of presenting to staff and administrators on what the program actually is. As we got more experience with the program and the leadership was able to see this was a really good program, we no longer had to do that."

—SBY staff

SBY received a six-month, no-cost extension from OAH, during which SBY was only able to serve Ballou High School, where they had permanent office space. The official program meetings ended and were replaced by informal lunchtime groups and some monthly workshops. At the lunch group meetings, facilitators would bring up topics to discuss with youth, such as relationships, social media, and world events or lead activities such as résumé writing. "It was structured as an informal conversation where we would say, 'we want to talk about this with you all, we want to see how you feel about this.' It was also a way to check in and stay connected with the young people." During this time SBY maintained some community service activities for the students, such as making care packages for homeless families.

"I think that's one thing that hurt us, we kind of put all of our eggs in one basket because everything was going so right."

—SBY staff

Near the end of the no-cost extension period, the DC Department of Health (DOH) circulated a request for proposal to fund community programming for youth. SBY applied for and was awarded a limited amount of funding to support the program at a reduced scale through the end of the school year in all four schools.

Sustaining the program required difficult compromises and creative thinking

To adjust for a lower level of funding, SBY scaled back their program in two ways: they had to (1) reduce staff and the extent of staff training and (2) adjust some service components (Table 1).

Under OAH funding, SBY had 4–5 facilitators leading approximately 28 program clubs and serving 500 youth. With the DOH funding, SBY was able to hire two facilitators and then used their community service coordinator as an extra facilitator to supplement staffing. Using this structure, SBY could facilitate 20 program clubs across the four schools, serving approximately 300 youth. The OAH grant had also supported travel for facilitator training with the developer in St. Louis. However, under the DOH grant, experienced SBY staff trained the new facilitators, rather than the developer. As a result, SBY staff felt that the new facilitators needed extra reinforcement to understand the program's approach.

About Sasha Bruce Youthwork

SBY serves runaway, homeless, abused and neglected, and at-risk youth and their families in the D.C. area. Founded in 1974, SBY runs 19 programs that aim to reduce high-risk behaviors and stabilize living situations. To that end, SBY provides services including counseling and life skills training, positive youth development programming, and shelter. As of March 2017, SBY employed roughly 140 people including full-time, part-time, and "occasional" workers. SBY receives a mix of federal and district funding, as well as some private funding and donations.

SBY has delivered pregnancy prevention services for over ten years through multiple funding streams. Since 2006, SBY has contracted with the D.C. Department of Human Services to provide pregnancy prevention services to youth and their family members, including delivery of the *Reducing the Risk* curriculum and providing education on risky sexual activities and drug use. Through the D.C.-based Summit Fund, SBY offers individual and group-level pregnancy prevention counseling services to teens in SBY programs who are at highest risk for initial and subsequent pregnancy. SBY also integrates HIV prevention education into their pregnancy prevention programming.

Despite the decrease in staff training support, SBY was able to use the new DOH funding to sustain their partnership with the developer, which included eight hours of technical assistance per year and a dedicated representative, who provided support around programming and community service. The representative offered suggestions and best practices for scaling down the program, including how to reengage schools and ideas for smaller-scale community service events. So, instead of large-scale or longer activities (for example, chartering several buses to go to a soup kitchen after school hours or on the weekend), SBY realized it may be more feasible to conduct similar activities on a smaller scale (for example, making care packages during school hours with fewer youth).

In addition to making changes to the staff and training structure, SBY made adjustments to the program's scope. Although they were able to continue covering the curriculum as originally designed, SBY reduced incentives and scaled back community service projects.

- **Reduced incentives.** Under OAH funding, SBY advertised the end-of-year trips and community service retreat as a way of motivating students to enroll in the program. As the DOH funding level did not support such trips, SBY advertised different incentives for enrollment—such as gift cards to restaurants, movie tickets, and program

paraphernalia, including sweatshirts, T-shirts, and water bottles—which could be earned based on a point system.

"The old staff had a connection with the program's developer. It enhanced the program. There are still some pieces [new staff] are missing that they would get if they went to the training with the developer.

—SBY staff

- **Scaled-back community service events.** With OAH funding, facilitators could identify large-scale community service projects to help youth meet their 20 hours of required community service activities. These events often included busing youth and providing food. However, with the lower funding level, SBY facilitators coordinated smaller community service activities that could be done in the school or were accessible by public transportation. Other community service activities were also scaled back. For example, with OAH funding, program participants could organize "service parties," a large-scale event where staff reserved the school's cafeteria and organized multiple service-oriented "stations," such as creating care packages for homeless families. However, with DOH funding, the parties were smaller, shorter, and organized with fewer resources.

Table 1: Program implementation under OAH and DOH grants (Teen Outreach Program or TOP)

	OAH grant program model	DOH grant program model
Staff/staff training	• Four to five facilitators. • Facilitators attended training with the developer.	• Two to three facilitators. • Facilitators trained by SBY staff who attended developer training.
Recruitment strategy	• Advertised availability of end-of-year trips, community service retreats, and overnight college tours.	• Advertised promotional items and gift cards that could be earned through a point system.
Program components	• All program lessons delivered in 25 sessions over nine months.*	• All program lessons delivered in 25 sessions over nine months.
Community service events	• Two to three large-scale events that required transportation and meals.	• More-frequent, smaller-scale activities that could be completed during club sessions.
Participation incentives	• Completion of 20 hours of community service rewarded by trip to local amusement park. • Participation in other enrichment trips such as overnight college tours and a community service retreat.	• Completion of 20 hours of community service rewarded by pizza party or ice cream social during program session. • Earn points for on-time arrival to program session, improvements in grades, good behavior in class, etc. With enough points, participants could earn materials such as sweatshirts, T-shirts, and water bottles as well as gift cards to restaurants and movie tickets.

Source: SBY grant application, final report, and discussions with grantee staff
OAH = Office of Adolescent Health; DOH = DC Department of Health; SBY = Sasha Bruce Youthwork.
*Immediately following the end of the OAH grant, structured sessions were replaced with informal lunchtime groups.

Changing incentives may have affected some youth's participation

The grantee reported that scaling back program components had mixed effects on program engagement and participation. Most youth served under the DOH funding were new to the program and had not experienced the previous version. Their participation likely was not affected by the changes in incentives and trips. However, staff indicated that youth who had been enrolled in the program prior to the funding shift noticed the differences in incentives and their participation decreased. SBY continued to celebrate end-of-year successes through pizza parties and ice cream socials.

Engagement in community service activities seemed unaffected by the reduced scale of activities, though this may be a result of the D.C. graduation requirements. Even with the scaled-back community service events, participants were still able to meet their 20-hour community service target. Rather than participating in a few large events, youth completed these hours through more-frequent, smaller events. Overall, the grantee reported that youth interest and enthusiasm for community service activities were unchanged.

Nonetheless, SBY plans to apply for additional funding from DOH for the next grant year so that they can reinstate the enrichment activities and larger community service projects.

"[Having less funding] challenged us to be more creative and intentional in how we engage young people to really make sure that when we are engaging them, we are having positive interactions at all times...if we still have the same rapport, the same positive attitude, the young people will still want to come to the program."

—SBY staff

Key lessons learned

SBY had to quickly adapt to implement an evidence-based program under new funding constraints while maintaining fidelity and participant engagement. Based on their experience, SBY highlighted the following strategies to successfully sustain programs after federal funding ends:

✓ **Choose a model that can adjust and adapt if funding decreases or implementation needs change.** The grantee emphasized that it is important to select a program that meets community needs but that can be scaled up or down as needed. It also helped that the grantee collaborated with the developer and found creative ways to adjust the program.

✓ **Start slow and build support.** For SBY, it was important to develop strong relationships with facilitators and schools from the beginning. When teachers and staff championed the program, it was more likely to get integrated into the school and be sustained in the long term.

✓ **Stay engaged with youth.** Despite scaling back activities, the support and interest from youth was critical in sustaining the program. Even with scaled down participation incentives, it was possible to continue delivering the core content to the target population.

About OAH's Sustainability Study

Since its inception in 2010, the Office of Adolescent Health has funded organizations across the country to deliver programs to prevent teen pregnancy. OAH's Teen Pregnancy Prevention program provides funding for the implementation, development, and evaluation of evidence-based, as well as new and innovative approaches to prevent teen pregnancy.

In 2010, OAH funded 94 grantees to either replicate evidence-based programs with new populations or in new settings, or evaluate new and innovative programs. Grantees were expected not only to implement their programming but also to sustain their program over time. Over 60 percent of 2010 grantees did not receive renewed funding.

In September 2015, OAH launched a three-year study to help understand whether and how programs were sustained after federal funding ended. Interviews were conducted with 37 of the 64 former grantees who did not receive renewed funding. Twenty-eight of these former grantees sustained their programs in some form once OAH grants ended, whereas 10 programs are no longer operating.