



Life-skills, Empowerment and Development Services (LEADS) | HEARTS-M PROGRAM UPDATE – May 2022

As we approach the end of year one for the Health Education and Relationship Training Services Project-Middle School (HEARTS-M), we want to report on our accomplishments and lessons learned.

About LEADS

Overview: Life-skills, Empowerment and Development Services, (LEADS), is a community-based non-profit based in St. Petersburg, Florida.

Our mission is to educate children, empower, families, enable equitable communities, and embrace diversity

Our vision: We envision a State of Florida with well-functioning families, thriving individuals, and strong communities.



As of April 30, 2022, our HEARTS-M Project implemented the Love Notes Sexual Risk Avoidance Evidence-based Program curriculum to over 700 middle school youth in six Florida counties with rates of HIV/STIs greater than the national average. LOVE NOTES builds skills and knowledge for healthy relationships with peers, co-workers, family, friends, and dating partners.

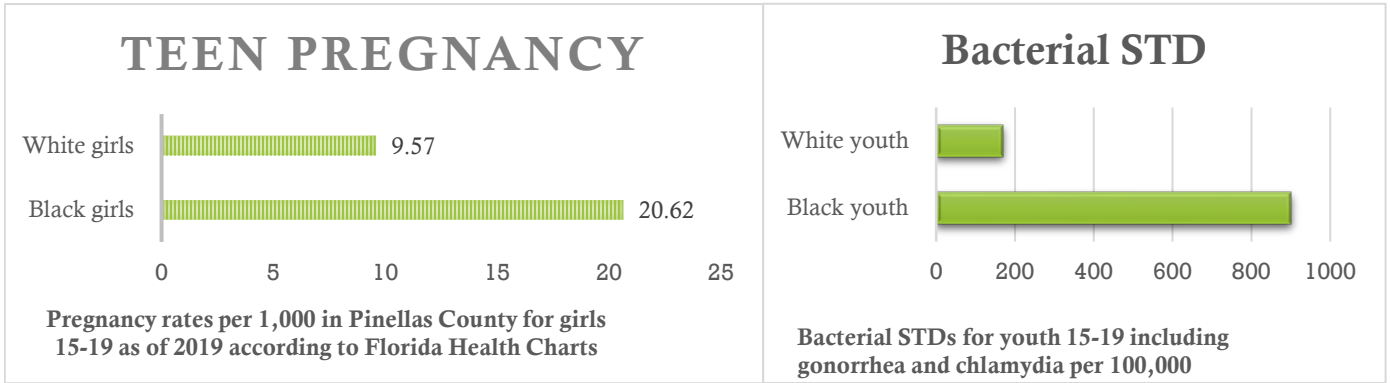


The program protects teens' hearts as well as their bodies. It is designed to help youth make wise relationships and sexual choices and to assist them in achieving their education, employment, relationship, and family goals. The program was implemented during two consecutive Saturdays at schools, churches, and recreation centers. At each of the free sessions, youth received breakfast, lunch, snacks, and a T-shirt. They also received the program journal (designed for youth to complete program activities), as well as craft materials for curriculum-related hands-on activities. Those who completed the 2-day program received an Amazon gift card.

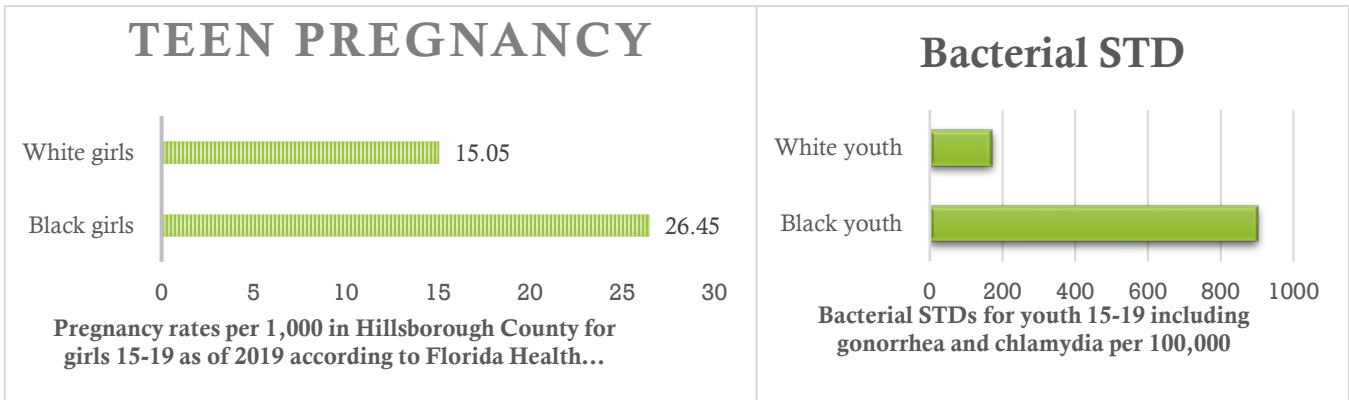


The HEARTS-M Project was implemented in the following counties with the following demographics:

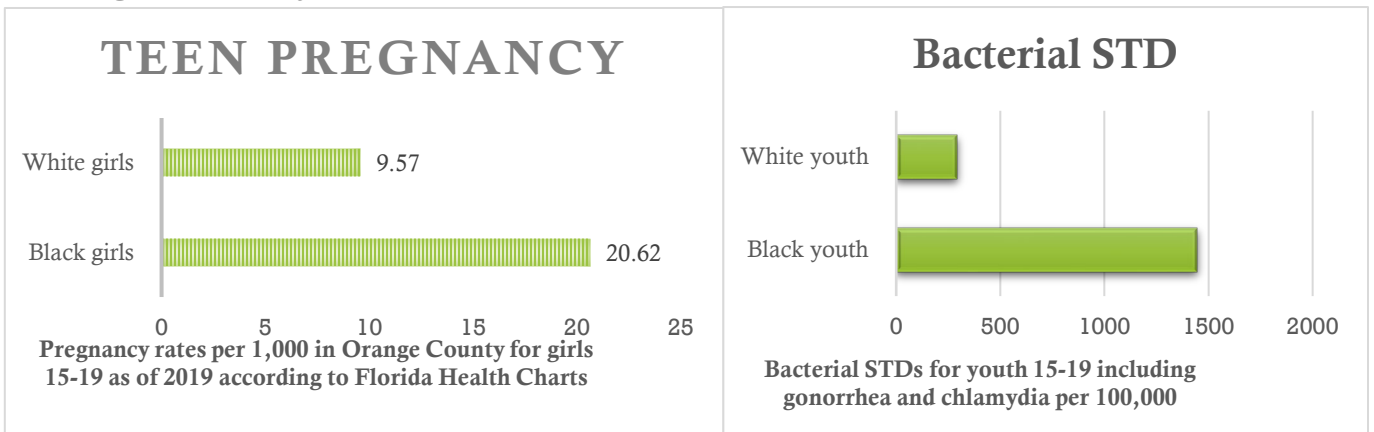
Pinellas County



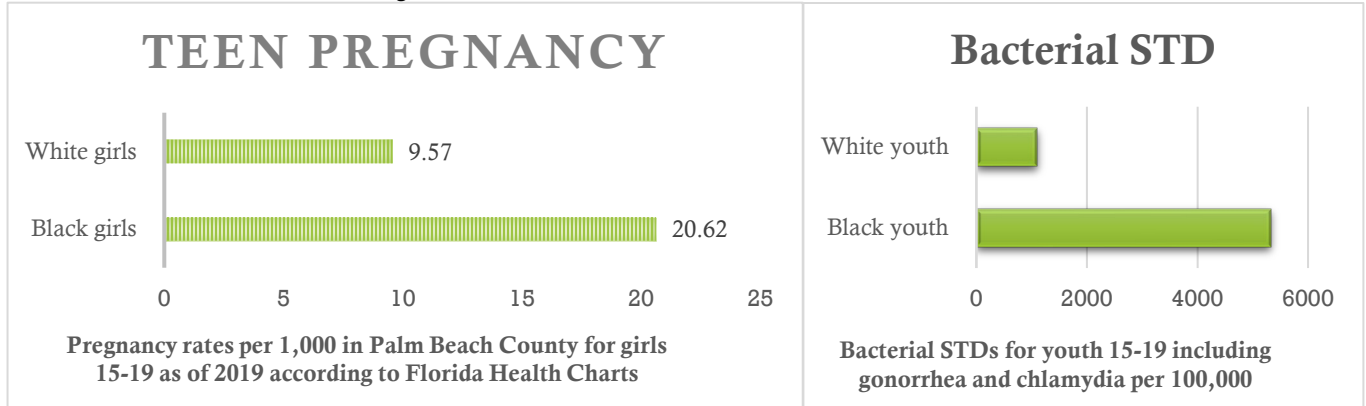
Hillsborough County



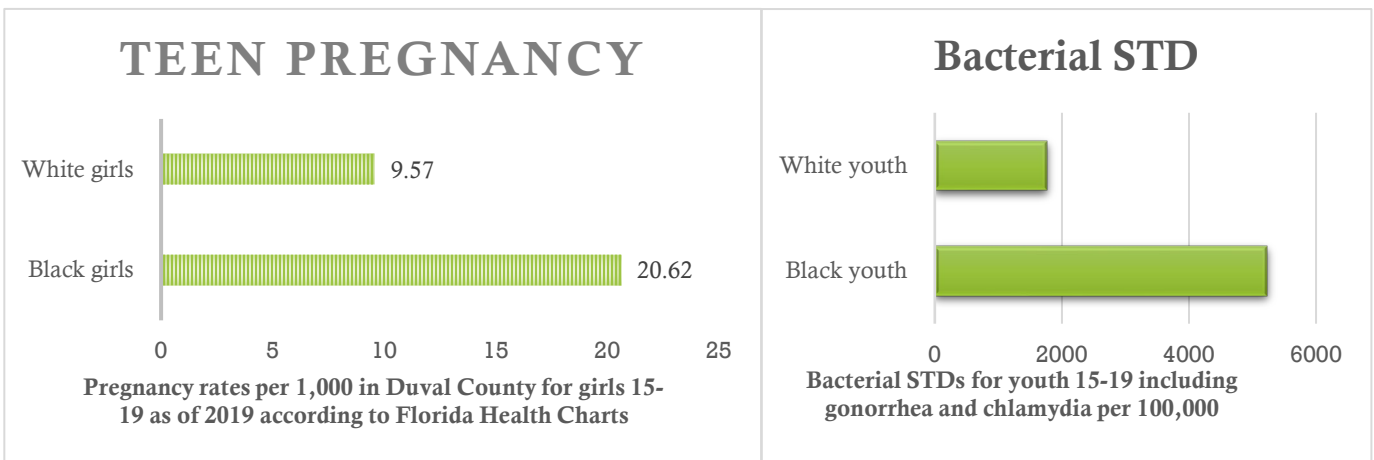
Orange County



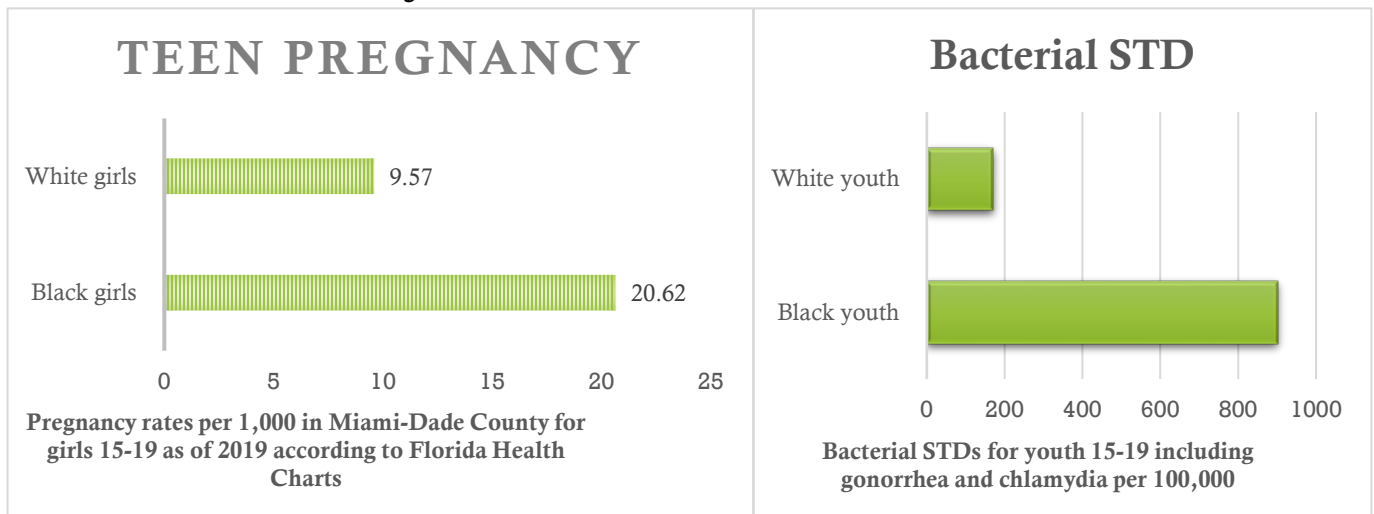
Palm Beach County



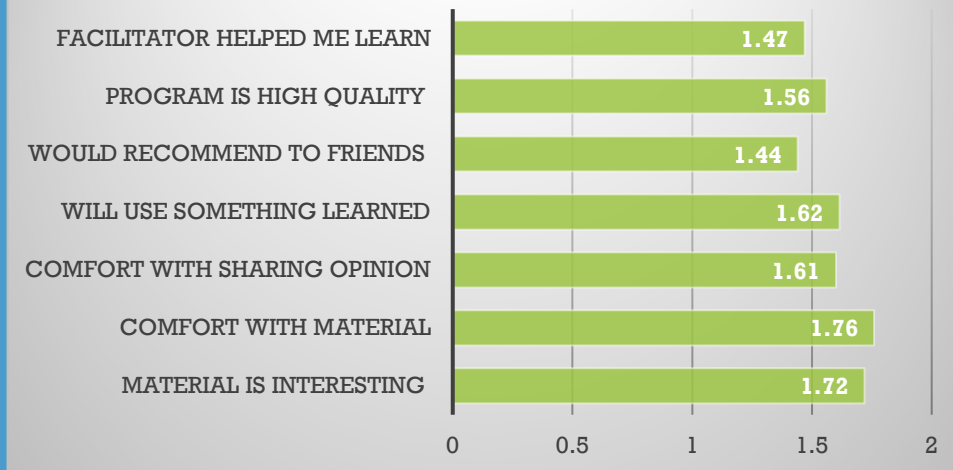
Duval County



Miami-Dade County



Youth Satisfaction



Youth satisfaction results based on current HEARTS-M program. Scores range from 1-5 with lower scores indicating higher agreement.

Suicide for African American Youth Nationally



Credit: Svetlana Larshina Getty Images

The following is from an article in Scientific American by Melinda Wenner Moyer on September 29, 2021:

A 2018 study found that Black children between the ages of five and 12 are about twice as likely to die by suicide as white children of the same age. The urgency to deal with the issue has only grown more acute. A new study found that suicide rates among Black children and adolescents have recently been worsening: between 2003 and 2017, suicides rose in this group, especially among Black girls, whose rate of increase was more than twice as high as that of Black boys.

Many LEADS facilitators are trained in Mental Health First Aid to help them recognize signs of distress and to make appropriate referrals.

Effective Black Parenting Program Available

LEADS recognizes that parenting adolescents is a challenge. Middle school youth face many challenges today. They must deal with social pressures, which are exacerbated by the media, texting, snapchat, twitter, Instagram, or Facebook. Most kids today are carrying a phone, camera, and computer in their pocket! This has several positives, but it can also lead to big trouble.

Peer pressure is another pitfall for youth. Choosing friends wisely and learning to recognize a healthy relationship is vital in helping youth avoid risk-taking behaviors associated with adolescence. Furthermore, early romantic relationships may begin in middle school. Some kids will dive right into boy-girl relationships in middle school. Others will stay on the sidelines, while some may not seem interested at all. Helping youth set boundaries, demand respect, recognize healthy relationships, and know how to keep their eyes on their goals, is important for their success in school and in life.



- ▶ The HEART-M project offers parents the opportunity to attend the Effective Black Parenting Program, (EBPP) designed to help them support their youth through this sometimes-difficult period of development. It is open to parents with children of any age. To date, LEADS has provided EBPP to approximately 120 parents and we are looking forward to serving more. The classes may be in person, at one of our Parent/Youth Summits, or virtually.



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