

Who We Are

Teen Sexual Health and Education Now in State Environments (Teen SENSE)

Teen SENSE is a multi-disciplinary initiative that works to secure the right of youth in state custody to comprehensive, LGBTQ-inclusive sexual health services and sexual health literacy programs. This includes ensuring that staff of foster care, detention, and other government-regulated youth facilities are equipped to understand and protect all youth in their care, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. We do this by working with local youth organizations to develop detailed recommendations to child welfare and juvenile justice agencies with the end goal of securing written policies and clinical guidelines to ensure the provision of these services and programs to all youth in care.

TEEN SENSE LEADS STATEWIDE POLICY ADVOCACY EFFORTS IN NEW JERSEY



CHLP Staff Attorney Adrian Guzman leading the Teen SENSE Sexual Health Advocacy 2014 New Jersey Convening in Hamilton Township, NJ

Teen SENSE is leading a coalition of youth and family community-based organizations across New Jersey working to improve sexual and reproductive health care for youth involved with the New Jersey **Department of Children and Families (DCF)**. Building on our past collaboration with the New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission, the coalition is working closely with DCF to develop written assurances that youth in care have access to comprehensive, LGBTQ-inclusive sexual health services, sexual health literacy programming, and related staff training.

On July 16, 2014, Teen SENSE and **New Jersey Alliance for Children, Youth, & Families (NJACYF)** co-hosted the [Teen SENSE Sexual Health Advocacy 2014 New Jersey Convening](#) at NJACYF in Hamilton Township, New Jersey. Over 30 organizations from across New Jersey attended, including groups serving youth in foster care, LGBTQ youth, youth of color, and youth with special needs. Kelli Puryear, Assistant Director of DCF's Office of Adolescent Services, participated by brainstorming with youth advocates about ways to address the needs of youth involved with DCF's Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCPP).

Other participants included sexual health educators, behavioral health providers, nurses, caseworkers, and staff from residential treatment facilities, as well as Rutgers – New Jersey Medical School's Dr. Paulette Stanford, Associate Director of the Division of Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine, and Dr. Dominga Padilla, Associate Director of the Cultural Competency Program.

The convening provided an opportunity for stakeholders to collaboratively develop recommendations to DCF regarding sexual and reproductive health services and programming for youth in care. A follow-up Convening will be scheduled for later this year.

Additionally, in New Jersey, DCF's LGBTQI Youth Committee is currently developing an agency-wide LGBTQI youth policy and training module. Using [*Model Standards: Staff Training Focusing on the Needs of Youth in State Custody*](#), we are ensuring that DCF staff at every level, including caseworkers, service providers, and foster parents, are trained on the rights of youth to sexual health care, autonomy, safety, and freedom from all forms of stigma and discrimination.

For more information or to join our Teen SENSE coalition contact Adrian Guzman at 212-430-6733 or aguzman@hivlawandpolicy.org.

Who We Are

Youth Advocacy Corps

is a youth advocacy and leadership development initiative focusing on sexual health advocacy on behalf of youth in out-of-home care. Youth participants learn about the connection between comprehensive, LGBTQ-inclusive sexual health care and improved health outcomes. Through advocacy skills training sessions, youth develop the competence and confidence necessary to approach community leaders, policymakers, and government officials and demand policy changes and implementation. The Youth Advocacy Corps provides participants with the opportunity to tell their own stories and the stories of other youth in out-of-home care to an audience of child welfare and juvenile justice agency officials.

Both Teen SENSE and the Youth Advocacy Corps operate in three jurisdictions: New Jersey, New York City, and Washington, DC.

YOUTH ADVOCACY CORPS IN EAST ORANGE, NEW JERSEY

In May, the Young Urban Leaders program at [*Tri-City Peoples Corporation*](#) in East Orange, New Jersey held a series of [*Youth Advocacy Corps*](#) training sessions. Tri-City's Young Urban Leaders program facilitates the social development of at-risk youth through socialization and life-skill training, group counseling, and social, cultural, and recreational activities for young men and women ages 13 to 18.



Young Urban Advocates session in East Orange, NJ, June 2014

Youth participants – all of them youth of color, most of whom have been directly involved with DCF – attended training sessions and workshops focused on policy advocacy for sexual health care.

“I definitely have a lot to say to [DCF],” said one young woman currently in foster care. “A lot of the time, my caseworker thinks that I don’t need any help just because I’m 18. They think that just because we’re older we can take care of ourselves, but I still need help with referrals. [DCF] needs to get better about scheduling my doctor’s

appointments and helping me get there.”

Although the trainings focused on sexual health care, youth can use these skills to interact with policy makers on a broad array of issues that affect their lives.

“I’m glad to learn all this because my caseworker doesn’t listen to me when I say my parents are doing good,” said one 15-year-old who was recently separated from his family and placed in foster care. “They pretend to know what you’re going through, but they really don’t. I want to learn how to speak my mind without sounding angry. I know they’ll listen to us if we keep at it.”

CHLP TESTIFIES IN THE NYC CITY COUNCIL ON THE SEXUAL HEALTH NEEDS OF YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

Last year, ACS invited our input on its *Sexual and Reproductive Health Care for Youth in Foster Care* draft policy. Our [comments](#) focused on the content and timing of health screenings, documentation of youth's sexual histories, STI and HIV counseling and testing, and LGBTQ-inclusive sexual and reproductive health training sessions for staff, foster parents, and youth. ACS's is still reviewing community input, and no date has been given for the release of the final policy.

More recently, in June 2014, CHLP Staff Attorney Adrian Guzman [testified](#) before the City Council in New York City at a joint hearing of the Committees on Juvenile Justice and Women's Issues that young people of color, youth from low-income backgrounds, LGBTQ youth, and survivors of sexual violence are significantly overrepresented in state custody settings. Guzman testified that increasing young people's sexual health knowledge and ensuring access to sexual health services and programming are critical prevention strategies that can help stop sexual violence before it is perpetrated.

In fact, a recent [United States Department of Justice \(DOJ\) report](#) found that nearly 10% of youth in juvenile facilities across the United States reported experiencing one or more incidents of sexual victimization by another youth or staff within the prior year, and LGBTQ youth were nearly seven times more likely to report youth-on-youth victimization than heterosexual youth.

At the hearing, Guzman urged ACS to better align its sexual and reproductive health care policy with current expert consensus on these issues, as reflected in our [comments](#) and recommendations to ACS.



UPDATE: YOUTH SEXUAL HEALTH POLICY ADVOCACY IN WASHINGTON, DC

Our sexual health advocacy coalition in Washington, DC, including **Advocates for Justice and Education, AIDS United, Campaign to End AIDS, Community Education Group, DC Lawyers for Youth, Housing Works, Metro TeenAIDS, Whitman-Walker Health, The Women's Collective, WORLD, and Youth Court**, submitted [recommendations](#) to DC's **Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA)** on their policies and clinical guidelines related to sexual health care for youth in foster care, in March 2014.

The recommendations focus on the content and timing of health screenings, documentation of youth's sexual histories, STI and HIV counseling and testing, streamlining and improving sexual health literacy programming and counseling, and sexual and reproductive health training sessions for staff. In June 2014, CFSA responded to our recommendations, stating that it will begin implementing comprehensive STI and HIV screening programs with guidelines for social workers in Summer 2014.

CFSA will also begin developing guidance on sexual assaults, including on reporting procedures and

accessing necessary support services. CFSA's Child Welfare Training Academy will implement in-service training on sexual health literacy for social workers, family support workers, nurse care managers, and resource parents.

Since June 2014, CHLP has also been working closely with the **Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS)**, DC's juvenile justice agency, to help draft a new sexual and reproductive health care policy for youth placed in detention facilities.



YOUTH ADVOCACY CORPS PARTNERS WITH NYC YOUTH GROUPS IN THE BRONX AND EAST HARLEM

This summer, the young women of **BOOM!Health's Go Girl!** program in the South Bronx [joined our Youth Advocacy Corps](#). Go Girl! participants – predominantly youth of color, many of whom have been directly involved with ACS – are graduates of BOOM!Health's sexual health peer education program. Go Girl! provides young women ages 12 to 17 with programming on HIV prevention, safer sex, substance abuse awareness, and team building and peer leadership.

The **Go Girl! Advocates**, as they dubbed themselves, are receiving advocacy skills training and will have the opportunity to share their stories and the stories of their peers involved with ACS.



Go Girl! Advocates session in the Bronx

Participants in BOOM!Health's young men's group joined our Youth Advocacy Corps in June 2014. The young men are participating in sexual health advocacy programming similar to that of the Go Girl! Advocates, but with an emphasis on the rights and needs of LGBTQ youth, particularly young gay, bisexual, and trans men of color.

Long-time partner **SMART Youth** also is part of the Youth Advocacy Corps. SMART Youth is an East Harlem-based youth development and leadership program for HIV-affected youth. They published a blog reflecting on our June 2014 event on HIV criminalization, featured below:



Young men's group session in the Bronx



HIV Criminalization and Advocacy

Published in <http://smartyouthnyc.blogspot.com/2014/06/>

This past Friday (June 20), SMART Youth followed up on a previous discussion we had about HIV and criminalization. Adrian Guzman from the Center for HIV Law & Policy returned to help us review what we learned from last time, which included an overview of HIV criminalization in New York and in the United States. We also discussed some examples on how these laws are unfair, discriminatory, and sometimes not even backed by science.

One of the scary facts we learned is that people living with HIV/AIDS have been charged with a crime regardless of if actual transmission of the virus happened; just the possibility of exposure or transmission without prior disclosure is considered against the law. These laws show that HIV stigma is everywhere, including our laws!

Many laws in the US regarding HIV transmission are based on old, inaccurate, or completely false information. Despite years of scientific research proving that it is **ABSOLUTELY IMPOSSIBLE** to transmit HIV through saliva, some states in the US have HIV-specific laws that include spitting or biting as a mode of transmitting the HIV virus. Although New York does not have any HIV-specific laws, those living with HIV are still unfairly targeted using laws like Reckless Endangerment or Aggravated Assault.

We were also provided with some resources and tips for next steps in our advocacy efforts. These included information about the [Positive Justice Project](#), which is a collection of organizations and individuals who are fighting to end HIV Criminalization in the US; endorsing the [National Consensus Statement on the Criminalization of HIV in the United States](#) (which SMART and SMART Youth have already done!); and links to toolkits/guides on advocacy strategies and how to write to our elected officials about this issue. The links to the toolkits and guides will be provided at the end of this post.

Together we can end HIV Criminalization in the US, and even the world!

Join Us!

Teen SENSE and the Youth Advocacy Corps include medical and public health practitioners, sexual health educators, attorneys, policy makers, child welfare and juvenile justice professionals, community organizers, and youth advocates. Youth are especially encouraged to join both initiatives.

Take Action!

- ❖ [Join Teen SENSE](#)
- ❖ [Sign-on to the Consensus Statement on HIV Criminalization!](#)
- ❖ [Donate to help us expand our work!](#)

Looking for HIV Resources?

We provide free, unlimited access to substantive [resources](#) to increase the advocacy power of attorney, community activists, service providers, and all people affected by HIV.