



PEPFAR

U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief



Project AIM (Adult Identity Mentoring)

What is Project AIM?

Project AIM (Adult Identity Mentoring) is an evidence-based group-level youth development intervention designed to reduce HIV risk behaviors among adolescents ages 11-14. **Project AIM has specifically been shown to promote abstinence, delay the initiation of sex, and decrease the intention to engage in sex, without addressing controversial sex-related topics.** It is designed to reach young adolescents during the critical pre-risk window, before sexual risk behaviors are initiated and become engrained, and provide motivation for healthy decision-making throughout adolescence. Project AIM is included in CDC's Diffusing Effective Behavioral Interventions (DEBI) program as an intervention with demonstrated potential to reduce new HIV infections and can also be found on the U.S. Health and Human Services list of Evidence-Based Teen Pregnancy Prevention Programs.

Project AIM is different from other youth HIV prevention programs, in that it affects change in sexual behavior without focusing explicitly on sexual risk. **Project AIM's efficacy to change youth behaviors is due to a holistic approach of helping youth to explore their future adult identities and develop specific problem-solving and goal-setting skills to support them in conceptualizing, planning for, and achieving their future dreams.** Project AIM does not take the place of essential fact-based HIV prevention education but works alongside it to address deeper barriers to risk reduction, such as hopelessness and lack of motivation. Project AIM is especially well-suited for adolescents who have begun to feel saturated by repeated risk-reduction education.

As a key partner agency for the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), CDC works with selected PEPFAR-supported countries to provide technical expertise for the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of *Project AIM*.

Research Results

Project AIM was evaluated in the U.S. through a quasi-experimental trial with African American 7th graders (ages 12-14) in 20 middle-school classes.^{1,2} At the time of the program, the school was on academic probation, meaning that less than 50% of students were able to pass the Stanford Achievement Test.

Results showed that *Project AIM* was effective in reducing sexual intentions, increasing sexual abstinence, and improving school performance and behavior.

- At 12-weeks post-intervention, students who participated in *Project AIM* were significantly less likely to intend to have sex, more likely to be abstinent, and (for virgins) less likely to initiate sex.
- At 1-year follow-up, male students participating in the intervention were significantly less likely to report having had sexual intercourse.
- Students who participated in *Project AIM* experienced improved academic outcomes and decreased disciplinary actions across their 8th grade year.



Project AIM is based on the **Theory of Possible Selves**, which asserts that behavior change is motivated by both what youth hope to become (positive possible future self) and what they wish to avoid becoming (negative possible future self). The more clearly youth can envision and communicate their hopes and goals (positive future self), the more attainable they seem and the more motivated youth become to achieve them. The more youth imagine a negative future, the more they may believe it will come true, and the more hopeless they feel. Having a balance of positive and negative future images makes youth most likely to make healthier choices in the present and persevere toward achieving their goals.

"Project AIM taught me how to reach my goals in life and how to overcome challenges I may have...Nobody has spoken to me before about reaching my goals and becoming a successful adult. AIM must not stop in South Africa." Project AIM participant in South Africa

Overview

The 14-session curriculum is delivered twice a week over a period of seven weeks to groups of youth. It can be delivered in school classrooms or in community program settings. The program is facilitated by a team of two facilitators from backgrounds similar to the youth.

Project AIM includes four units, each of which contains engaging and interactive exercises and opportunities for discussion:

- **Part 1: Legacy, Role Models, and Peers** (Sessions 1-5)
Encourages youth to explore their role models, personal interests, social surroundings, and what they want to become as an adult. Local young adults who are on their road to success are invited to speak with youth.
- **Part 2: Exploring My Future** (Sessions 6-10)
Allows youth to envision themselves in a future career and connect current behavior with success as an adult.
- **Part 3: Express Yourself** (Sessions 11-12)
Engages youth in role-plays around communication and activities involving planning and decision-making.
- **Part 4: Choosing My Future** (Sessions 13-14)
Provides youth with the opportunity to think about their future in terms of milestones to accomplish goals and overcome potential obstacles they may encounter in life.

Expanding Project AIM to Africa

Botswana

Project AIM will be implemented in Botswana Junior Secondary Schools through a partnership with the Ministry of Education and Skills Development and will be delivered in classroom settings by local facilitators.

- Formative work and field-testing were conducted in 2011-2012 to inform cultural tailoring of the curriculum and to ensure that the program and methods were relevant and acceptable to local youth and school staff.
- Implementation is planned for 2014 as part of a large-scale longitudinal Public Health Evaluation, which will measure youth sexual behavior outcomes through self-report and biomarker testing.

South Africa

Project AIM has been included as part of a portfolio of youth HIV prevention efforts supported through CDC South Africa, which also includes family-based pre-risk HIV prevention. Project AIM will be delivered in after-school community-based settings in partnership with local organizations.

- The curriculum was culturally tailored and successfully field-tested in South Africa in 2012.
- Local facilitators at partner organizations have been trained and certified, with implementation beginning in two provinces. A small-scale outcome evaluation started in 2013 and is ongoing.

Selected Publications

1. Clark, L. F., Miller, K. S., Nagy, S. S., Avery, J., Roth, D. L., Liddon, N., & Mukherjee, S. (2005). Adult identity mentoring: Reducing sexual risk for African-American seventh grade students. *Journal of Adolescent Health: Official Publication of the Society for Adolescent Medicine*, 37(4), 337e1-337e10.
2. Clark, L.F. (2006). Project AIM: A positive youth development HIV intervention to reduce sexual risk and enhance school outcomes. Paper presented as part of a panel of Positive Youth development Interventions for HIV Prevention. the National Healthy Teen Network Meeting, October 2006, Albuquerque, New Mexico.