

UAMS News Bureau

Office of Communications & Marketing
4301 West Markham # 890
Little Rock, AR 72205-7199

uamshealth.com/news



**News Release
March 2, 2020**

Media Contacts:

Leslie W. Taylor, 501-686-8998
Wireless phone: 501-951-7260
leslie@uams.edu

David Wise, 479-713-8679
Wireless phone: 501-259-1628
dwise@uams.edu

UAMS Receives Grant to Address Teen Pregnancy and Other Youth Health Issues

FAYETTEVILLE – The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) recently received a three-year, \$960,000 grant to empower teens to make healthy decisions by providing tools and resources to prevent pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and risky behavior among youths in Washington County.

The Teen Outreach Program (TOP) grant is funded by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Administration on Children, Youth and Families – Family and Youth Services Bureau.

UAMS is the lead agency for the Northwest Arkansas Teen Outreach Program (NWA-TOP) and will partner with the Springdale School District and local non-profit youth agencies to recruit 1,200 ninth graders in the Springdale School District to participate in program. Parents will be recruited to participate in monthly family/caregiver events.

Arkansas has the highest teen pregnancy rate in the nation, along with STI rates substantially higher than national rates. Springdale has high rates of teen birth, STIs, health disparities and other youth risk factors.

NWA-TOP will use the Wyman Center’s TOP approach, which uses a medically accurate curriculum that is age appropriate, culturally and linguistically appropriate, and trauma informed. The Wyman TOP curriculum has been in existence for over 30 years and has piloted some of the nation’s most successful youth development solutions.

“We wanted to provide a positive youth development program designed to help teens build educational success, life and leadership skills, and healthy behaviors and relationships,” said Pearl McElfish, Ph.D., MBA, vice chancellor for the UAMS Northwest Regional Campus in Fayetteville and the principal investigator for the grant project. “The evidence-based TOP program has been proven to help teens better navigate challenges during the teenage years – a time when decisions matter.”

The curriculum focuses on three core content areas that work together to reduce the impact of risk and promote positive youth development. The content areas are: skill-building, developing a sense of self and making connections.

“Research shows that supporting teens in TOP’s three core content areas leads to a variety of positive outcomes, including increased pro-social behavior, lower levels of problem behaviors and emotional distress, and improved academic performance,” said Hershell West, assistant director of programs in UAMS Office of Community Health and Research.

West, along with Robert Ferguson, who leads the health curriculum instructors in the Springdale School District and is the TOP coordinator for the district, attended Wyman’s five-day TOP Training of Trainers event in St. Louis, Missouri, to become certified trainers.

West said that NWA-TOP program coordinators and researchers hope to see long-term outcomes for participants of a 53% reduction in teen pregnancy, a 52% reduction in school suspension and a 60% decrease in risk of academic failure. West said these outcomes are based on the proven performance of the Wyman TOP program in other sites.

“Teens learn to build and hone social and emotional skills, like managing emotions, problem solving, decision making and empathy, skills that are proven to help them be successful during the teenage years, and also later in life,” West said.

“Successful navigation of the transition to adulthood is strengthened when adolescents are able to manage their emotions, set goals, solve problems and make healthy decisions,” Ferguson said. “The TOP program provides the tools to do this.”

UAMS is the state’s only health sciences university, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; hospital; a main campus in Little Rock; a Northwest Arkansas regional campus in Fayetteville; a statewide network of regional campuses; and seven institutes: the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute, Psychiatric Research Institute, Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging, Translational Research Institute and Institute for Digital Health & Innovation. UAMS includes UAMS Health, a statewide health system that encompasses all of UAMS’ clinical enterprise including its hospital, regional clinics and clinics it operates or staffs in cooperation with other providers. UAMS is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. *U.S. News & World Report* named UAMS Medical Center the state’s Best Hospital; ranked its ear, nose and throat program among the top 50 nationwide; and named six areas as high performing — cancer, colon cancer surgery, heart failure, hip replacement, knee replacement and lung cancer surgery. UAMS has 2,727 students, 870 medical residents and five dental residents. It is the state’s largest public employer with more than 10,000 employees, including 1,200 physicians who provide care to patients at UAMS, its regional campuses, Arkansas Children’s Hospital, the VA Medical Center and Baptist Health.

The UAMS Northwest Regional Campus includes 250 medical, pharmacy, nursing and health professions students, 50 medical and pharmacy residents, and 1,000 community-based faculty. The campus has nine clinics including a student-led clinic and physical, occupational and speech therapy. Faculty conduct research to reduce health disparities.

Visit www.uams.edu or www.uamshealth.com. Find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).

Like us, we're social:    

###