



REACHING TEENS WITH NUTRITION MESSAGES



Reaching teens with nutrition messages is an ongoing challenge. Successful campaigns incorporate particular aspects of teen life, for example, sports stars, musicians, and teen celebrities, that conform to a cultural identity. Since the early 1980's, hip-hop music has served as a powerful voice and form of expression for young audiences, especially African-American ones. Over the years, hip-hop has evolved into a culture with its own language, style of dress, and mindset. Despite the popularity and appeal of hip-hop, few nutrition and physical activity programs have used it as a medium for communicating health messages. Promoting Healthy Activities Together (P.H.A.T.), a hip-hop, nutrition, and physical activity campaign, is designed to use hip-hop culture to improve the health of African-American youth.

PROMOTING HEALTHY ACTIVITIES TOGETHER (P.H.A.T.)

In February 2002, the California Adolescent Nutrition and Fitness Program (CANFit) implemented a new campaign, Promoting Healthy Activities Together (P.H.A.T.), a hip-hop, nutrition, and physical activity campaign designed to address poor eating and physical activity habits among African-American youth, ages 10 to 14 years, in the San Francisco Bay Area. The goal of P.H.A.T. was to reverse the growing rate of overweight and obesity among area teens.

INNOVATION/CREATIVITY

P.H.A.T. incorporated hip-hop culture, including music, dance, emceeing, speech, language, and dress, into a health education program. CANFit invited over 500 organizations serving African-American youth in the Bay Area – community centers, athletic groups, and after-school programs – to participate in the P.H.A.T. program. Organizations were chosen based on

youth interest and the organization's commitment to P.H.A.T. and to improving eating and physical activity behaviors among their youth.

CANFit hired local talent to create original hip-hop music for the campaign and to work with the youth. Dancers, choreographers, a rap artist, and a popular hip-hop radio personality received training on how to reinforce healthy eating and activity behaviors through informal conversations, group discussions, and role modeling. The dancers and rap artist were encouraged to relate healthy habits to becoming a successful performer.

Area teens participating in P.H.A.T. completed a series of hands-on interactive activities. They worked with the talent to incorporate nutrition and fitness messages into raps, artwork, and hip-hop dance routines. Over a three-month period, participants met up to twice weekly to prepare for a P.H.A.T. Community Health and Hip-Hop Showcase. Prizes and incentives were offered for participation. The P.H.A.T. Showcase featured performances by participants, as well as local dance troupes, live dj's, and professional basketball players.

REPLICABILITY

The basic ideas and concepts from P.H.A.T. can be adapted to other settings. Playing hip-hop music may motivate youth to dance or participate in a physical activity. A hip-hop club, at which healthy snacks would be served, could encourage youth to create and perform their own dances. A local artist could be invited to speak about the art of emceeing and what it takes to have energy on stage or in the studio. Hip-hop culture is easy to access via the Internet, television, radio, magazines, and local youth. Information on the P.H.A.T. program, along with links to other resources, can be found at www.canfit.org.



THEORY BASE/ RATIONALE

Results from the CalTEENS study, released by the Public Health Institute in 2000, found that nearly one in three adolescents in California is either overweight or at risk for overweight. Rates are highest among African-American teens. The study also found that young African-Americans frequent fast food restaurants more than any other ethnic group, drink a lot of soda, lack nutrition education, and exercise infrequently. Since poor eating habits and lack of physical activity contribute to overweight and obesity, *P.H.A.T.* aimed to help African-American teens to make life-long behavior changes.

CANFit has been utilizing an intervention model for low-income, multi-ethnic communities since 1994. Interventions are designed to be culturally appropriate in terms of ethnicity, language and income. Youth are actively involved in planning and implementation; both nutrition and physical fitness are taught; emphasis is placed on skill building and community environments that support healthful behaviors.

P.H.A.T. utilized several theories and behavioral models. Hip-hop talent served as role models to initiate peer-to-peer dissemination and action (diffusion). Through social learning, the talent modeled behaviors and taught skills has empowered teens to change their behaviors. An oral communications culture was reinforced through discussion of issues in a high-energy, "tell it like it is" format that maintained consistency with African-American culture.

OUTCOMES/EVALUATION DATA

Over 80 youth from six after-school programs participated in *P.H.A.T.*; over 250 youth, parents, and community members participated in the Showcase. Pre- and post-evaluations demonstrated that 63 percent increased their after-school physical activity, 62 percent of youth increased their water consumption, and 54 percent of soda drinkers reduced their intake by at least eight ounces. The three top things youth reported that they liked about *P.H.A.T.* were that it was fun, they enjoyed learning about healthful eating, and they enjoyed dancing. Ninety-two percent said that they would participate in a similar program again.

LESSONS LEARNED

"By reaching out to youth in a format that they could relate to, *P.H.A.T.* helped local youth become more aware of their eating habits at school and at home. They even shared their new knowledge with their parents."

— *Arnell Hinkle, M.P.H. R.D., Executive Director
California Adolescent Nutrition & Fitness Program
Berkeley, CA
510/644-1533
ahinkle@canfit.org*



QUESTIONS

1. **Which of the following is most likely to be an effective vehicle for reaching teens with nutrition messages?**
 - a. Classical music
 - b. Sesame Street characters
 - c. Sports stars
 - d. Opera
2. **What was the *P.H.A.T.* campaign designed to address?**
 - a. Clothing styles chosen by teens
 - b. Overweight and obesity
 - c. Avoidance of smoking and alcohol
 - d. Poor eating and physical activity habits
3. **How were *P.H.A.T.* participating organizations chosen?**
 - a. Commitment
 - b. Money
 - c. Location
 - d. Attractiveness of available facilities
4. **Which of the following is not part of the CANFit intervention model for low-income, multi-ethnic communities?**
 - a. Emphasis is placed on skill building
 - b. The model is culturally appropriate in terms of ethnicity, language, income, and other factors
 - c. Location
 - d. Youth are actively involved in planning and implementation.

ANSWERS
1.c 2.b 3.a 4.d