

# CASE STUDY:

## SEXINFO: A SEXUAL HEALTH TEXT MESSAGING SERVICE

**OVERVIEW:** In 2006, the San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH) collaborated with the Internet Sexuality Information Services, Inc. (ISIS-Inc) to develop a sexual health text messaging service with the goal of decreasing STI rates among adolescents in San Francisco, CA.<sup>[56]</sup> The service was modeled after a similar service in the UK.

SEXINFO, which is targeted to urban African-American adolescents age 12 to 24, provides basic facts about sexual health and relationships, along with referrals to youth-oriented clinics and social services. In order to participate, youth text the word “SEXINFO” to a 5-digit number and receive a phone tree with different codes for different information. For example, teens can text B2 if they think they are pregnant to get information about where to find the nearest clinic. There is also a website where parents, participants, and others can see sample messages online [www.sextextsf.org](http://www.sextextsf.org).

Focus groups with youth were conducted to discuss the feasibility of the service and to help determine the most appropriate ways to market the service. Text scripts were developed by health educators at ISIS-Inc based on the focus group discussions. A group of community organizations also met regularly to provide guidance on the project. The organizations included clinic staff, high school health programs, juvenile probation departments, and clergy from a large African-American congregation.

In order to let youth know about the service, SFDPH and ISIS-Inc worked with the Youth



United Through Health Education program (run by SFDPH) to develop and test promotional materials. The materials included posters, palm cards, bus shelter ads, and banner ads on Yahoo!. A press release was also picked up by local newspapers, television, and radio.

The program, which costs about \$2,500 a month, aims for the text messaging process to take about 1 to 2 minutes, and most messages end with the distribution of a phone number that users can call for more information ([www.sexinfoSF.org](http://www.sexinfoSF.org)). The service is now being replicated in Washington, D.C. ([www.realtalkdc.org](http://www.realtalkdc.org)).

**FINDINGS:** A preliminary evaluation to determine the number of youth using the service and the most frequent requests through the service has been conducted. More than 4,500 inquiries were sent in the first 25 weeks of the service, and 2,500 of those inquiries led to information and referrals. The top three messages accessed were related to (1) information about what to do if the condom broke; (2) finding out about STIs; and (3) information about pregnancy.

An evaluation was also conducted to determine who was using the service. According to surveys based on a convenience sample, 11 percent of respondents reported awareness of the campaign. African-American youth were

more likely to report awareness of the campaign as were youth living in the target areas. Younger youth (ages 12 to 18) were more likely than older youth (ages 19 to 24) to report awareness of the campaign as were youth with the least expensive cell phone provider compared to those with the most expensive cell phone provider.

