



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

September 2014

# Growing Pains: Lessons From *WAIT Training* in Florida

In 2011 and 2012, Live the Life Ministries (LtL), a faith-based organization that provides social services to youth and families in the Florida Panhandle, implemented an adapted version of *WAIT Training*—an abstinence program developed by the Center for Relationship Education. The program was implemented as part of the larger federal Evaluation of Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Approaches (PPA), a national evaluation funded by the Office of Adolescent Health (OAH) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to study the effectiveness of teen pregnancy prevention approaches in seven sites. For the evaluation, LtL recruited a total of 13 high schools in Florida and southern Georgia, about half of which were randomly assigned to receive *WAIT Training* and half of which were randomly assigned to receive a diet and exercise program called *LEAN* (developed by nutritionists in consultation with LtL).

In schools assigned to receive *WAIT Training*, an adapted version of the curriculum was delivered sequentially in two grade levels (7th and 8th grades). Students received 16 hours of program content, delivered across two years in eight hour-long sessions. LtL tailored the lesson plans to the expected student maturity level in each grade. The adapted 7th-grade curriculum broadly focused on setting future goals, having healthy relationships, and understanding the consequences of having sex as teenagers. The 8th-grade curriculum presented similar concepts, but at a more sophisticated level. In both grades, *WAIT Training* was delivered separately according to gender, and LtL documented program delivery both formally and systematically. This summary presents findings from implementation of the adapted *WAIT Training* curriculum.

## School Recruitment and Outreach

In trying to recruit schools for the evaluation, LtL faced an uphill battle in generating support for *WAIT Training*. School and district leadership often placed low priority on outside programs, particularly those, like *WAIT Training*, that did not cover subjects assessed as part of the state accountability measures. In addition, the constant shift in school leadership

## About this Summary

This executive summary provides a brief overview of the implementation study findings from the evaluation of *WAIT Training* in Florida. The full report on program implementation discusses these findings in more detail.

hindered LtL's ability to sustain district and school support before the first year of implementation and through the second year of implementation.

Because of these challenges, school recruitment took longer than expected and stretched over a full year, from spring 2011 to spring 2012. In addition, LtL had to sustain contact with schools to keep them involved between summer 2012 and spring 2013. LtL held many in-person meetings with district superintendents, principals, and teachers to obtain buy-in from key stakeholders, some of whom were newly hired and not involved in the schools' initial decisions to implement the program. Ultimately, LtL successfully recruited 13 schools, 7 of which implemented *WAIT Training*.

## Teacher Selection and Training

At all seven participating schools, one male and one female teacher were required since the classes were taught separately by gender. In six of the seven participating schools, the principals selected the teachers to deliver *WAIT Training* at the schools. LtL staff were not closely involved in the decisions, both because LtL felt that the school principals would have the best knowledge of available staff, and because LtL staff were busy recruiting and maintaining relationships with study schools. At one school, the principal did not want to supplant teachers from their regularly taught classes to deliver *WAIT Training* and asked LtL to select external facilitators; the facilitators LtL ultimately selected had previous relationships with LtL staff but

no formal training as teachers. In selecting teachers, principals did not always pay close attention to the mix of skills and interests that would be ideal for the program. Many teachers were selected simply because they had time in their schedules to deliver the class. Therefore, not all teachers who delivered the program had the appropriate skills.

LtL's role in shaping program delivery was limited to training teachers, and training did not occur near the start of the program. The demands of training 13 teachers across five school districts led to an imperfect training schedule. Ideally, training would occur as close to implementation as possible, so that the material would still be fresh in teachers' minds when they delivered the program content in the classroom. Program delivery was planned for late April to mid-May of 2012 and 2013 because participating schools wanted to implement the program after students had completed state standardized tests. However, the schedule for training was limited by existing teacher commitments. Teachers could not attend training in the weeks before program delivery because they were in charge of administering standardized tests to students during that time. Working around this schedule, training took place one to two months before program delivery in 2012 and two months before program delivery in 2013. This left a substantial interval after training before teachers could practice what they had learned. Some teachers even reported misplacing curriculum materials during this interval. After training was completed, teachers were expected to be able to deliver lessons on their own, without the active support of LtL staff.

## Program Delivery and Monitoring

In both years of implementation, teachers and external facilitators often could not complete the curriculum as planned in eight days. Disruptions to the regular school schedule caused by required statewide tests and end-of-course assessments eroded their time, and academics were given priority. In addition, class periods often were interrupted (for example, by schoolwide announcements), further reducing time available for program delivery. Even without such interruptions, the hour-long *WAIT Training* sessions did not easily fit into the schedules of implementing schools. Forty-minute periods, the predominant class length, often were inadequate for full lesson delivery. Some teachers and external facilitators abbreviated all activities in the lesson plan so they could try to cover all the material, whereas other teachers and external facilitators selected just a few activities that could be completed in the shortened class period.

LtL initially planned to conduct classroom monitoring and provide technical assistance to help the teachers to do the best job possible. However, it had trouble doing this because its

staff often were overcommitted to other tasks, such as conducting recruitment, monitoring, and technical assistance at the same time across many schools. Even during the limited monitoring sessions, LtL observers found that, in 2012, teachers had trouble with program delivery, and, in 2013, several teachers did not adhere to the implementation schedule and did not deliver *WAIT Training* at all on some scheduled days.

## Teacher and Student Comfort Level with the Material

Because many of the teachers were selected based on their class schedule as opposed to experience with delivering the curriculum content, many teachers were initially uncomfortable delivering *WAIT Training*, and students were apprehensive about the class. Teachers reported that the initial curriculum training left them feeling unprepared to teach the material and insecure about teaching abstinence. This insecurity might have rubbed off on students, whom teachers reported were unprepared to discuss sexual health and were uncomfortable with the interactive activities. Teachers reported that students became more comfortable over the course of the curriculum; however, because the program was delivered over only eight days, students did not have much time to grow accustomed to the discussion of sensitive topics.

Given LtL's limited classroom presence in 2012 and 2013, LtL staff were largely unavailable to help teachers implement the curriculum. Their inability to take an active role in program delivery might have exacerbated teachers' and students' discomfort; in other words, without targeted assistance from LtL, teachers took longer to work through their initial discomfort, and some never gained confidence in their ability to teach the material.

## Lessons for the Field and Funders

LtL's experience implementing *WAIT Training* in Florida presents considerations for organizations seeking to extend a program's reach to new service delivery contexts and for grantors seeking to fund organizations to implement school-based programming.

Small organizations typically lack the reserve staff capacity to take on the extra burden of expanding to new schools. In preparation for delivering a program on a larger scale, organizations must typically dedicate staff to the development of detailed implementation plans and school and teacher recruitment. During program delivery, organizations also must anticipate the additional staff resources needed to conduct expanded program oversight and technical assistance. Such oversight is needed to monitor program delivery to assess the quality of implementation and to provide feedback to teachers to help them improve their

delivery of the program. As was the case with LtL, small organizations might be understaffed and perhaps lack the necessary skills to carry out school recruitment and systematic monitoring of program delivery.

Organizations trying to implement school-based sex education programs are likely to have a better chance of success if they can draw on wide support from community- and school-level stakeholders. However, organizations can struggle when expanding into target areas in which they lack such relationships. It takes time to develop new relationships, especially as part of expansion to a greater number of implementation locations. When the relationships are formed, these stakeholders can help maintain stability in program planning and implementation. Additionally, organizations should dedicate staff time to re-engage district and school leaders in later years of implementation, as school district administrators and school staff often are in flux.

Sometimes, schools may view teaching sex education as a distraction to improving academics. Therefore, school administrators might be wary of complicating their already busy schedules with further programming demands, regardless of when in the year the program is implemented. To combat these concerns, outside organizations operating in schools must recognize the tight limitations on physical space and time for implementing nonacademic programming during the school day. They should identify and devise a plan to work within these constraints, and design their programming to be as unobtrusive as possible during the school day. In addition, outside organizations must have a clear message to present to school administrators about the program's value.

Lastly, organizations should anticipate that schools might not prioritize program delivery; therefore, it is important to address any barriers to teacher selection and training in advance of program implementation. An essential first step in preparing for implementation of a pregnancy prevention program is selecting facilitators who are open to the material and comfortable teaching students about sensitive topics. For example, program operators could hold meetings with school administrators that focus on the ideal characteristics of teachers implementing the program. In addition, program operators could observe the teachers in the classroom to see if their style, classroom management, and temperament meet the needs of the program. Moreover, organizations should offer teachers initial and continued training on classroom management (especially for those new to teaching), program content, and delivery. If trained this way, teachers are more likely to be both interested in the material and willing and able to adhere to the lesson plan.

LtL's experience emphasizes a common finding—that implementation of outside programming during the school day is challenging, and outside organizations face many hurdles in successfully delivering school-based programs. Successful implementation requires completing a defined sequence of stages, from assessing site readiness and fit through staff training, program piloting, and finally full-scale implementation. Especially for outside organizations implementing programming in schools, it is critical to complete each stage successfully before moving to the next.

## ***WAIT Training Implementation and Evaluation—A Snapshot***

- ▶ Part of the national multiyear Evaluation of Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Approaches:
  - Funded by the Office of Adolescent Health in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
  - Conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, with Child Trends and Twin Peaks Partners, LLC
  - Assessing effectiveness of seven programs, including *WAIT Training* and six others
- ▶ 13 schools recruited and randomly assigned—7 to a program group that received *WAIT Training* and 6 to a control group that received a diet and exercise program
- ▶ Eight one-hour sessions presented on consecutive days in April and May 2012 and again in 2013 by trained teachers to classes of youth, segregated by gender, in contrast to the original program, which offers more than 100 activities that can be implemented daily for nine weeks
- ▶ Topics covered: characteristics of a healthy relationship, cultural influences, differences between males and females, consequences of premarital sex, sexual refusal skills and conflict resolution, and the value of marriage
- ▶ Impact study suspended before the completion of survey data collection