

Empowering the Girls at Gwen's Girls



Lisa Ripper

University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health
Department of Behavioral and Community Health Sciences
Summer 2013 Practicum Experience

Bridging the Gaps

What is BTG?

- BTG is an interdisciplinary internship for health sciences graduate students at community based organizations that serve vulnerable populations.
- Each site has two community health interns who work together to create a project that benefits the site. Community and faculty mentors provide support.
- Weekly reflective sessions with all interns are held to discuss topics related to community health.



My BTG Team:

- Janelle Whitney
 - Partner
 - University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine
- Lynn Knezevich
 - Executive Director, Gwen's Girls
 - Community Mentor
- Denise McGill
 - Group Home Manager, Gwen's Girls
 - Community Mentor
- Dr. Elizabeth Miller
 - Chief of Adolescent Medicine, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center
 - Faculty Mentor

Community Site: Gwen's Girls

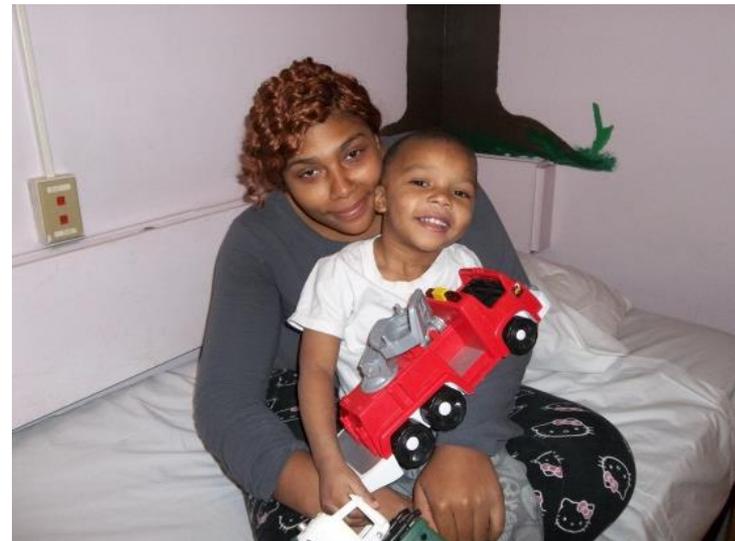


- Founded in 2002 by Gwendolyn J. Elliott
- Aims to empower girls and young women to have productive lives through holistic, gender-specific programs, education, and experiences
- Offers several services for girls ages 8 - 21, including:
 - Foster care
 - After-school
 - Summer camp
 - Prevention
 - Reunification
 - Group Home
- 10 Life Domains



The Group Home

- Beds for up to 15 girls, ages 13-21
- All court-ordered for placement
- Predominantly African American
- Only group home in Allegheny County that provides specific services for pregnant and parenting teens



Talking with the girls...

- Conversations about where they are from, why they are here, their definition of health, their goals for the future
- Health conversation touched on:
 - diet and nutrition
 - exercise
 - relationships w/ family and friends
 - stress
 - social support
 - school
 - self-esteem
 - mental health
 - pregnancy/parenting
 - visiting health professionals

Talking with the girls...

- Food

“There’s nothing to eat here. It’s all fried. I’m just getting fat.”

“[The group home] needs more fruits and vegetables and less fried food.”

- Activities

“I hate it here. There’s nothing to do around here. I like to do things, but I feel bored.”

“They tell us to go here, do this, do that. But when you’re stressed, you don’t want to do all that. You just want to do something fun.”



Talking with the staff...

- The girls have no interest or experience

“These girls don’t do nothing. They don’t like to read. You can’t get them to do anything.”

“They don’t know anything. They don’t know how to feed a baby, to dress a baby, they don’t...nothing. And you can’t tell them anything, either.”

“These are Gwen’s Girls, but they’re different.”

- Could benefit from additional training on mental health issues and trauma and defense mechanisms.

Our Projects

- Improve the quality of food at the site
- Incorporate activities into the routine
- Encourage an interest in learning about health
- Create a handbook for pregnant and parenting teens

The Food

- Cook lunch for the girls on Thursdays to introduce them to new foods
- Switch food orders from once a month to twice a month to allow for more fresh produce
- Create sample menu with simple changes that were healthier, cheaper*, and more “WIC friendly”

Sausage with roll

Pierogi (fried)

Fruit Cocktail

Sausage

Baked potato

Broccoli

*making changes on five dinners, we tripled the number of WIC foods in the menu and cut the cost from \$153.21 to \$89.38



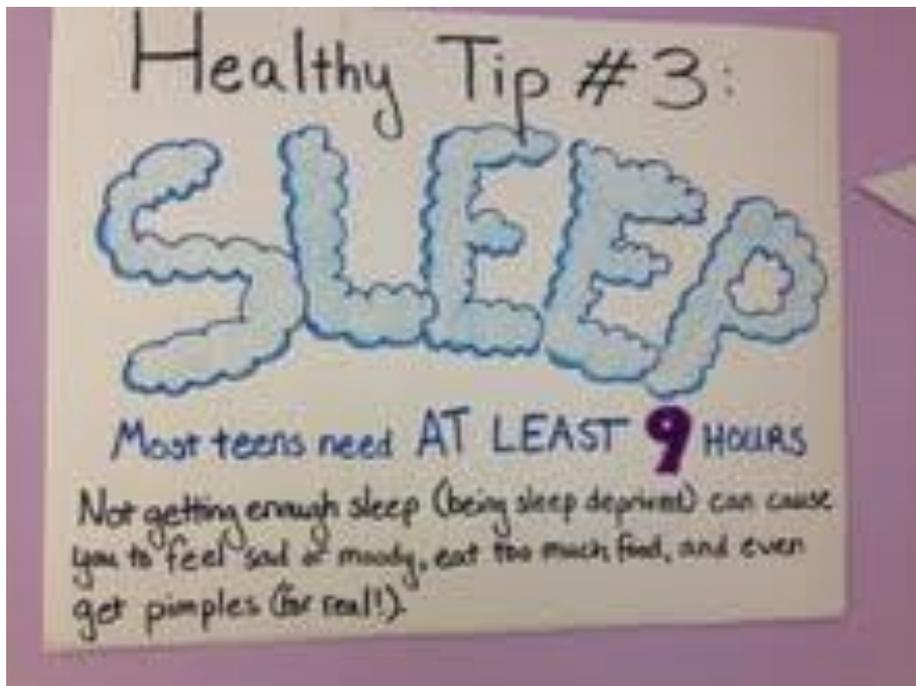
Activities

- Craft time on Mondays
- Outside time on Tuesdays
- Wii on Thursdays



Health Education

- Informal conversations with the girls
- Healthy Tip of the Week



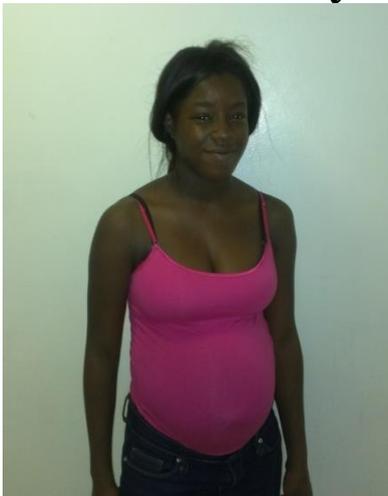
Parenting Handbook

- Asked staff for recommendations on content
- Content based on best practices
- Edited by staff and girls
- Includes sections on:

Pregnancy

Labor and Delivery

You After Baby



Baby Care

Safety

Growth and Play



Parenting Handbook

- Currently no standard of care for pregnant and parenting girls (mother's wit instead of best practice)
- Handbook will serve as resource guide for both girls and staff
- Will be incorporated into larger parenting program

While you are pregnant

Prenatal exams Call your doctor or clinic and make an appointment. The doctor will check your weight and make sure that you are healthy. She will ask you questions about your health and your family's health. Your doctor will also tell you to start taking a prenatal vitamin, which will help your baby grow. Don't be afraid to ask your doctor questions if you don't understand something she is saying. She is here to help you!



Second Trimester

Your baby is growing more and more each day. He has eyebrows, eyelashes, and fingernails. He can wiggle his fingers and toes, cry, and hiccup.



Your body is still changing. By now you probably won't be able to fit into your jeans and will need to start wearing maternity clothes. Wearing tight clothes won't hurt your baby, but it can give you itchy skin, swollen feet, and yeast infections. Loose clothes will fit better and feel better.



Dress like a Beyoncé.
Not a Britney!



Caring for your Baby

Feeding.



Babies drink milk because they need to gain weight and eat things that will be good for their growing bodies. Babies under 6 months should not be drinking water because it doesn't provide anything good for them.

Your baby's tummy is a lot smaller than yours, so he won't eat as much as you. Your baby's tummy grows from the size of an almond (day 1) to a ping pong ball (day 3) to a medium chicken egg (day 7). Look at the picture below to see how tiny that is!



The amount of milk your baby can eat will increase as his stomach gets bigger. So, don't feed your baby too much too soon! His little stomach can't hold it.

If you feed your baby formula, make sure you mix the right amount of water and powder by following the instructions on the can. If you accidentally make too much formula, you can store it in the refrigerator but use it by the next day. Your baby can get sick if you leave leftover formula out.



When should I feed my baby?
Your baby will let you know he is ready to eat by giving you clues that he's hungry. Crying is one clue, but there are some that come before crying!

- opening and closing mouth
- sucking on fingers and clothes
- squirming
- fussing
- breathing fast
- rooting (turning to your chest and looking for a nipple)

Healthy People 2020 Goals Met:

- ✓ Promote health and reduce chronic disease risk through the consumption of healthful diets and achievement and maintenance of healthy body weights.
- ✓ Improve the healthy development, health, safety, and well-being of adolescents and young adults
- ✓ Improve the health and well-being of women, infants, children, and families.
- ✓ Increase the quality, availability, and effectiveness of educational and community-based programs designed to prevent disease and injury, improve health, and enhance quality of life.



Our Recommendations

- Hire a cook to prepare healthier meals that follow a menu using “WIC standards”
- Have a designated Activities Coordinator, and include a weekly “Gwen’s Girls’ Night” to be organized by the girls
- Create a model of care for pregnant and parenting girls
- Evaluation of pregnancy and parenting handbook
- Educate the staff on trauma-informed care.

Thank you, thank you, thank you...

- To my BTG partner Janelle
- To our mentors: Ms. Lynn, Ms. Denise, and Dr. Miller
- To the Bridging the Gaps crew, especially Thistle and Jessie
- To all the staff of Gwen's Girls, especially Ms. C, Ms. Chantal, Ms. Eunice, Ms. TaShay, Ms. Tiffany, Mr. Will, Ms. Crystalline and Ms. Shelly
- And most especially to the beautiful girls of Gwen's Girls

