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New Orleans Based Non-Profit Selected to Rigorously Evaluate an 'Entertainment Education' Teen Pregnancy Prevention Intervention for Systems-Involved Youth

The Institute of Women & Ethnic Studies Selected to Receive Five-Year Funding from HHS to Evaluate Effectiveness of its Newest Media-Based Intervention

NEW ORLEANS, Louisiana: The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), through the Office of Population Affairs (OPA), has recently provided approximately \$23 million in grant funding to foster innovation, provide new research, and expand the evidence to support and advance equity in its Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) program. The TPP program is a national, competitive program that provides funding to replicate and scale evidence-based programs and develop and evaluate new and innovative approaches to prevent unintentional teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among adolescents, promote positive youth development, and advance equity in adolescent health.

The Institute of Women & Ethnic Studies (IWES) — a community-based non-profit organization headquartered in New Orleans, LA — in partnership with The Policy & Research Group (PRG) — a research and evaluation firm with offices in both New Orleans, LA and Seattle, WA — was selected as one of twelve organizations in the United States to implement and rigorously evaluate promising TPP interventions. PRG will serve as the independent evaluator for the rigorous evaluation study of IWES' original entertainment education intervention entitled *Are You Ready?* Since its founding, IWES has integrated storytelling and narrative change through film and other media products into community-centered public health initiatives to illuminate the stories, experiences, and perspectives of the communities served. Media has been the cornerstone of many of IWES' initiatives, which often involve the development of original curricula and/or interventions with a focus on health education and promotion, the prevention of adverse health outcomes, and stigma reduction.

IWES' Co-Executive Director, Lisa Richardson, shares that, "We are delighted to be one of the twelve TPP grantees for this project. IWES has created innovative sexual health

media to educate and engage adolescents for more than 15 years. This award will help us to better understand the impact of our work on young people who need information and guidance at a very important stage in their development. As a public health organization focused on supporting the mental and physical health of young people, this is a wonderful affirmation of our mission.”

In the Fall of 2021, IWES became one of five collaborating organizations in PRG’s OPA-funded Juvenile Justice Innovation & Impact Network (JJIIN). The JJIIN developed and tested TPP innovations using entertainment education to reduce sexual risk behavior and improve health for youth directly involved or at risk of becoming involved in the juvenile justice system. Over the 18-month project period, IWES developed and piloted a two-module film-based intervention by conducting formative research with the priority population and the adults and organizations that serve it; developing and refining multiple drafts of the script in consultation with two Youth Advisory Boards, one consisting of youth housed at the Juvenile Justice Innovation Center and one consisting of youth at risk for juvenile justice system involvement; engaging in film production and post-production; and developing, packaging, and piloting the trauma-informed pregnancy prevention curriculum at three sites in New Orleans and Baton Rouge. Analysis of the data collected from pilot-testing showed positive preliminary efficacy of the *Are You Ready?* intervention, and with the latest funding award, both IWES and PRG look forward to more in-depth evaluation of the intervention in Louisiana, Alabama, Georgia, and Michigan.

“The opportunity to evaluate the efficacy of an original trauma-informed TPP intervention is both exciting and timely for IWES,” says Jakevia Wheeler, IWES’ Director of Programs. “Since the inception of the federal TPP initiative, IWES has received multiple OPA awards to replicate evidence-based interventions. Even in replicating proven-effective programs, IWES has worked diligently to meet the complex needs and evolving interests of young people throughout Southeast Louisiana.”

PRG’s Director of Projects, Lynne Jenner, also shared that, “We are thrilled and proud to be partnering with IWES on this project as OPA’s Tier 2 TPP initiative is one of the most rigorous tiered-evidence programs in the country. *Are You Ready?* is an innovative entertainment-education intervention that was successfully developed as part of the JJIIN development stream and preliminary pilot testing showed early evidence of promise. Entertainment education has emerged as one of the more promising but under-evaluated strategies, so we look forward to working with IWES to bring this to the next level and empirically evaluate the impact of the program.”

The five-year project for the rigorous evaluation study began on September 15, 2023. For more information about the *Are You Ready?* intervention, please contact Dr. Lisa Richardson at Irish@iwesnola.org.

About the Institute of Women & Ethnic Studies (IWES):

Founded in 1993, IWES is a national, nonprofit health organization that creates initiatives to heal communities, especially those facing adversity. Through community-driven research programs, training, advocacy and partnerships, IWES helps to build emotional and physical well-being, resilience and capacity among women, their families and communities of color, especially those which are disadvantaged. IWES uses a Social Ecological Model (SEM), which recognizes that individual behavior is shaped by the intersection of multiple influences occurring at the interpersonal, community and societal levels. Through this in-depth, multi-dimensional approach, IWES creates culturally proficient programs, activities and research to address and advocate for the emotional and physical well-being, resilience, and capacity of women of color, their families and communities to heal and create sustainable change. IWES works in the following areas: Resilience, Well-Being, and Mental Health; Adolescent Health; Maternal and Child Health; and STI/HIV Prevention & Care.

About The Policy and Research Group (PRG):

Founded in 2004, PRG is an employee-owned research and evaluation firm. PRG aims to improve economic and social prospects for people through equitable public policy and improved practice and conducts research and evaluation in a variety of policy areas including public health, education, youth risk, workforce and income, child welfare, and housing. PRG supports clients with needs assessments, meta-analyses, survey development and administration, program implementation evaluations, data analyses, and impact studies. PRG has conducted over 75 federally funded evaluations, including 18 randomized controlled trials and 10 quasi-experimental design studies.