

**POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT:**

Healthy Connections, Inc.

Choosing to Excel

Prevention Education Programs

Reality Check, Inc.

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT: Healthy Connections, Inc.; Choosing to Excel; Prevention Education Programs; Reality Check, Inc.

Risk Avoidance programs, a means of primary prevention in Arkansas, are not just working but are highly effective. This is evident by looking to four organizations in Arkansas that are providing Positive Youth Development and Risk Avoidance Sexual Health Education for youth, 5<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades. These organizations also provide education for parents, educators, professional development for schools, and programs for community leadership. They have a footprint in 28 counties in Arkansas including Northwest Arkansas to the River Valley, as well as Western, Central, South, and Eastern Arkansas. They are collectively the largest group of Risk Avoidance educators in Arkansas and have faithfully been providing medically and scientifically accurate and evaluated programs for schools and communities for 20+ years partnering with the State through the Arkansas Department of Health's SRAE (Sexual Risk Avoidance Education) grant funding. Healthy Connections, Inc. (Western Arkansas) formed a consortium in 2012 as a SRAE grantee with Choosing to Excel (Central Arkansas), Preventative Education Programs (Eastern Arkansas) and Reality Check, Inc. (Northwest Arkansas and the River Valley). They have developed a trusted bond with schools, parents, and communities.

In 2023 alone, this consortium served 13,563 5<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade students in classrooms, face-to-face, voice to heart for a collective 120,396 hours of service. They had a \$52 cost per student and a \$6 cost per service hour to our schools and communities.

ACHI (Arkansas Center for Health Improvement) May 2024 data shows that teen births in Arkansas, as also seen in the United States, have been declining since the early 1990s. Evidence suggests that this decline stems from teens being less sexually active and becoming more effective users of contraception. Arkansas has one of the highest rates of teen births, but 76% of teen births occur to teenage women ages 18-19, while 24% occur to females ages 15-17 with only 1% under age 15. Research from the Centers for Disease Control show a decline in Arkansas birth rates per 1000 from the years 2003 to 2020, coinciding with the years these four organizations have been providing Risk Avoidance programs. The data shows that all counties with programs experienced decline in teen birth rates. All but three declined at a rate greater than the Arkansas rate of 45%. Twelve counties declined equal to or greater than the National average of 50%. The top four counties declined at a rate of 59.6%, 65.3%, 68.2%, and 70%.

It is easy to see the impact of quality Positive Youth Development Risk Avoidance programming in helping our youth make wise decisions about their futures. It is also easy to see the millions of dollars these quality programs have saved our state, not just in Pregnancy related costs, but also in reducing sexually transmitted infections and mental health costs. The letters from schools who have requested their services for the past 20+ years speak for themselves, but the student feedback from those who have experienced these powerful programs speaks even louder.

“The teen birth rate is defined as births per 1,000 in the United States is 14 per 1,000.” “The teen birth rate in Arkansas has fallen from 51 to 25 per 1000 over the past decade- a 45% decrease, consistent with the 50% decline in the national birth rate from 2011-2022.

**Prevention Education Programs (PEP): Eastern Arkansas**

County	2003	2020	decrease %
Arkansas	55.5	47.5	14.5%
Monroe	63.2	55.2	12.6%
Prairie	41.9	34.1	18.6%

**Healthy Connections Inc. (HCI) Western Arkansas**

County	2003	2020	Decrease %
Polk	73.1	35.7	51.1%

**Choosing To Excel (CTE) Central Arkansas**

County	2003	2020	Decrease %
Faulkner	34.2	16.9	50.5%
White	48.9	24.1	50.7%
Pulaski	61.6	27.3	55.6%
Lonoke	50.65	20.9	58.7%

**Reality Check Inc. (RCI) Northwest and River Valley**

County	2003	2020	Decrease %
Johnson	81.8	26.0	68.2%
Benton	65.4	19.4	70%
Washington	52.8	21.3	59.6%
Carroll	71.8	35.9	50%
Crawford	62.3	28.0	55%
Logan	60.6	21	65.3%
Franklin	54	28.5	47.2%

[cdc.gov/nchs/data-visualization/county-teen-births./](https://cdc.gov/nchs/data-visualization/county-teen-births/)

