

Outreach (*owt-reech*): to reach further than, to surpass. Outreach program: a program run to help people in a community.

Have you wondered what exactly our Outreach Team does? Most of you may be aware that we have two part-time Outreach Educators on contract but may not know who they are or exactly what they do. And just this year the Citizens for Choice Board gained a new member whose background melded nicely with those of the already-established Outreach workers, and who agreed to become the Outreach Coordinator.

That Outreach Coordinator is Ilene Zolt whose healthcare experience includes working for community-based organizations in San Francisco and the Eastbay in HIV/AIDS outreach, and as a disease intervention specialist for the city and county, San Francisco Department of Public Health, in TB and STI control; and who is a California certified HIV/AIDS counselor and a Public Health trained phlebotomist. She works closely with Outreach Educators Sarah Molaro and Kristen Darling and is the interface between the team and the Citizens for Choice Board.



As for Sarah and Kristen, in only 16 hours a week they pack in a lot of work; a lot of indispensable work that helps our community, especially young women and men, in understanding reproduction, their bodies and their emotions. Their enthusiasm, experience, and education makes up their worth. Perhaps you heard their interview on June 20 on KVMR? Although short, they gave a good description of what they do. We hope to have more interviews on KVMR, including a call-in interview.

Although only in their 20s (Sarah is 28 and Kristen is 25), they have been involved in reproductive justice since they were in high school; they have been educated in STIs (sexually transmitted infections) and birth control methods; and are experienced in meeting and teaching the public. Both are graduates of Nevada Union High School where they first became involved in reproductive issues. They have always worked closely with teens, working at the Teen Clinic and also with TeenSMART (established through the state to reduce the risk of teen pregnancy and STIs), including some counseling and assessment around reproductive health and relationships.

Sarah has an AA in Liberal Studies with an emphasis in Health Education, and twelve years of experience in the field. Both she and Kristen were in the Peer Advocate program in high school (a team of students who have been trained to conduct reproductive health and outreach) that started the pilot program; today Sarah now runs that program through Nevada County's Health Department.

Besides being involved in the Peer Advocate pilot program as a Peer Advocate and HIV counselor, Kristen has had training with a nurse practitioner, and has a BA in Sociology from Mills College. During college she worked on the ACCESS reproductive health hotline in Oakland and is also a trained volunteer Crisis Counselor for DVSAC (Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Coalition), and does case management for people living with HIV/AIDS through Nevada County Public Health.

They help the community in a variety of ways, all of which are important:

Street Outreach: every weekend and some Thursdays they start in Grass Valley, then wend their way to Nevada City, visiting bars, parks, liquor stores, and youth hangouts, carrying informational baskets containing condoms, lubricants, and sexual educational materials. They answer questions – and gratefully accept donations for Citizens for Choice.

In their experience, the teens that they meet are fairly shy and are very impressionable so it is extremely important that the information the teens get is free from bias and is medically accurate. Outreach absolutely does not use scare tactics, they are very careful to give unbiased information. They have rarely been hassled but do occasionally hear sexual jokes (probably bravo!) and their reaction, either joking back or a quiet remark of "That's distasteful," depending on the situation, takes care of the problem. Mostly the kids are very responsive and very thankful, and some will pull them aside to ask private questions about birth control or STIs. And they're happy to hear about The Clinic! The Team considers this a bit of education, a little at a time.

They hope (as do we!) that, time and budget permitting, they can also reach out to people living in Washington (at one time, they did go there), North San Juan, and Penn Valley.

Informational baskets: Almost 25 local businesses display informational baskets that are filled with condoms and lubricants, STI facts, and general information on sex education. The baskets also contain Citizens for Choice brochures, and flyers about The Clinic! We urge you to support these businesses – a list of the businesses can be found on our website, <http://www.citizensforchoice.org/programs.html> and in our quarterly newsletter, *Voices for Choice*.

Tablings: Sarah and Kristen will often “table” events, that is, staff a table at a local event such as markets, street fairs, and special events in Grass Valley and Nevada City. At these events, they’ll have an informational basket (identical as those in the local business), Citizens for Choice brochures and booklets, and brochures about STIs, birth control, and abstinence. They are advocates of open communication and will have information for parents on ways to approach the subject of sex with their children so that education can start at home. They will be glad to answer questions that you have about Citizens for Choice, The Clinic!, birth control methods, and HIV and STIs.

Presentations: Sarah and Kristen, together or separately, are available for presentations about birth control methods (including abstinence), STI facts, HIV/AIDS, and self-image. As one example, they have presented at Common Goals, a substance abuse counseling service located in Nevada City, <http://www.commongoalsinc.org/>.

Future Work: Because the Teen Clinic is closing later this month, the gap left in the community has grown into an abyss. One that’s too great for Sarah and Kristen to fill without more hours and more Outreach workers, and one that Citizens for Choice would like to fill but can’t because of our own budget constraints. Miners Community Health Clinic will be taking some of the clients, but it’s unlikely that they will have an Outreach program.

We are working on implementing a Sexual Education Center one or two days a week at the Richardson Street site, on off-clinic days. Teens, adults, parents – anyone would be welcome to visit to obtain reproductive and sexual health information, have their questions answered, attend presentations, and join in open discussions.

In addition, Sarah and Kristen have a lot of ideas for the future:

- More presentations, to school groups and clubs, to seniors (yes, due in part to Viagra and Cialis, there has been a rise in the number of STIs in retirement homes), to private groups of parents or teens, etc.
- A greater emphasis placed on STI awareness such as more advertisements during April, the STI awareness month
- Radio interviews or perhaps a radio show
- Doubling the amount of informational baskets at local shops and businesses
- A thrift store

We at Citizens for Choice are lucky to have them working for us, and we’ll continue to strive to better utilize their talents and to reach further in helping the people in our community.