



## **Video Transcript: Ask Me Anything: Meaningful Youth Engagement**

**Holly (00:00):** What activities do you like to do to relax or take care of yourself?

**JJ (00:03):** I love to be outside. I like to play disc golf, baseball, softball, basketball, anything that can kind of get me sweating and moving. From Texas, so I love we have a lot of great opportunities to kind of go to the lake and all that good stuff, so some fun stuff I like to do.

**Holly (00:16):** Yeah, something that I like to do is I actually like to go try out in the restaurants to eat at, or just play with my dog, go along, walking along Town Lake, which is a really nice trail over in the city of Austin, and just spend time with family and friends.

**JJ (00:30):** Yeah. Ask Me Anything: Meaningful Youth Engagement. Hi, I'm JJ Sanchez...

**Holly (00:37):** And I'm Holly Bahamonde.

**JJ (00:39):** We are from the Austin Healthy Adolescent Program.

**Holly (00:42):** And today we're going to let the RHNTC ask us anything about meaningful youth engagement. What is the special something that your project offers youth that they might not get from other programs or services?

**JJ (00:54):** Some of the things that we offer are we have two different programs; we have the Peer Health Educator Program and Peer Advisory Committee Program. Both of these programs are offered to all of the region in the city of Austin, and one specific school district in the city of Austin. I work specifically in a charter school in District Four, which is an underserved community. Those are Peer Health Educators that teach the curriculum of Positive Prevention Plus. They teach that curriculum in hopes that they go back into their schools and to their communities and show those resources with their family members, community members, and school members. Our PAC program also shares those same resources, but within the community of the Greater Austin district. We also have a great work group that we, with Austin Healthy Adolescents, we have about 12 employees, and they come from all over Texas and all of United States. We offer a lot of great things, such as college internships right afterwards, a lot of youth after a program are able to come in and work with us still as they're going to college and we can still support them, still feed them, still kind of take them to what they need to do. So it's a lot of opportunities with our program that I think kind of separates us from the other programs.

**JJ (02:00):** How do you relate to young people you work with?

**Holly (02:02):** So the young people that we work with come from an underserved area in the Austin area. It's historically underserved. So that is a primarily Latino community. While I was not born and raised in Austin, Texas, I did grow up in the South. So over in Florida, and I am also a Latina as well. So there are a lot of laws that had to be navigated in order to get sex ed in front of students to make healthy choices, but then also to empower youth voice as well. So when I was younger, I did have a really fantastic opportunity to go to leadership conferences, but that wasn't something that was available to all students. It wasn't advertised to all students like our program does. It didn't have all the cool perks that our program does, like being able to really contribute to the decisions that adults make and help create plans that best serve youth, so youth serving youth. When I think about all of those deficiencies that happened in my own childhood, I think about all the ways that we can empower our youth today.

**Holly (03:00):** All right, JJ, how do you want young people to feel when they are working as a partner on your project?

**JJ (03:05):** I think the biggest thing is wanting them to feel respected and making sure that they have a safe place to come in and communicate, with us and their fellow peers. If we're not creating that safe space for them, I don't think we're able to ever built that rapport for our youth. We want to create a safe space by not just kind of letting them know it's a safe space but letting them create their own space. So, with the City of Austin, we were very fortunate to be able to have a space for youth, designed and made by the youth. So they told us, you know, they wanted beanbags and neon signs, posters, books, and they were able to gather that stuff to make it feel more like homey for them. We also have an open door policy, meaning that they can come in and talk to us whenever they'd like to. The youth are not numbers. We want to make sure that we're building that rapport with them, and that they can come talk to us about whatever that may be; sports, relationships, home life, school, whatever that may be. So just creating a safe spot and letting them know that they're heard and making them feel safe to communicate with us is very important.

**JJ (04:03):** How are youth involved and implementing project activities?

**Holly (04:07):** I am part of the team that helps bring health educators from the offices into the schools to teach, the sex ed curriculum. In addition, though, we also have something called Peer Health Educators. Peer Health Educators are students who were recruited by ourselves from schools who co-facilitate with our health educators. Research has shown that students take information much more seriously or take it more to heart, when a youth is teaching the information to another youth. So with the Peer Health Educators, they come into the classroom, they help co-facilitate, and they know what the culture is like in the school. They know what's happening in the hallways. They know what type of questions that maybe their classmates have that they feel uncomfortable asking. And so they can also be that voice too, to talk about some difficult topics and to create another safe space for youth to go to. It's really exciting to see youth join us in the classroom and then also join us in the planning phase of it as well.

**Holly (05:08):** How are youth involved in making decisions that affect your project?

**JJ (05:12):** We wouldn't be in this line of work if the youth weren't able to make decisions with the projects. We believe in youth voice. Youth voice means that if the youth say something, we're going to listen to them and take it to the same level as if it were another coworker or an adult, we're going to be listening, or come up with that idea. The way that affects our project is, when we work with youth, we do things that help out our community. We are not necessarily in those communities. The youth are in those communities. So the youth know what they want and what they need and within those communities. We have a CSNA(Community Strength and Needs Assessment Survey) that we do within the community. Our youth then go back and read that CSNA, and they come back and say like, hey, this is a food desert. The closest grocery store is about 25-minute walk, if not a 15-to-20-minute drive. A lot of times, transportation is not that great, so being able to say, like, hey, we're going to put together this farmer's market to create a sustainable event that's happening within our community to give people access to things that they didn't have access before. They know the community better than we know the community because they live in that community. This video was created by the Reproductive Health National Training Center, RHNTC.