



M.A.R.S.

Male Advocates for Responsible Sexuality

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Newsletter

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SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- MARS is now being implemented in **five Oregon counties**: Benton, Jackson, Deschutes, Marion and Multnomah
- MARS **gets females involved** with the Female Referral Program
- MARS has a **new comprehensive website**—a great resource for youth, parents and educators, askmars.org
- MARS **TV commercials** can be viewed on the MARS website, MySpace page, www.youtube.com and on various cable channels.
- **Free condoms** are available at over **30 locations** in Benton County (see website for listings).

WHAT IS THE MARS PROGRAM?

The MARS Program is an innovative community-based peer-to-peer health education program designed to reach young males with important sexual and reproductive health information through outreach, classroom, and clinic-based education and counseling services.

Ongoing, rigorous, and independent evaluation of MARS demonstrates significant impact of MARS on participants' sexual and reproductive health knowledge, attitudes, self-efficacy, behavioral intentions, and behaviors (see page 2).

MARS is recognized both regionally and nationally for its effectiveness in addressing the sexual and reproductive health needs of young men.

The **mission** of MARS is to support men in taking a responsible role in promoting

equality and cooperation in relationships, pregnancy and infection prevention, and overcoming stereotypical gender roles.

The **goals** of MARS are to increase involvement in responsible decision-making regarding sexual health and to increase utilization of clinical sexual health services among young males, ultimately reducing rates of unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections.

Three program components of MARS include:

- **Health Education Outreach**
MARS outreach workers conduct outreach and education in classroom settings.
- **Clinical Educational Sessions**
MARS outreach workers provide individual sexual



health counseling sessions to young males.

- **Broad-Based Outreach and Social Marketing** Outreach activities and a media campaign designed to raise awareness about the program and broadcast MARS messages.

Use of responsible male peer role models lends credibility to program messages. Outreach workers are carefully selected based on leadership skills and a strong belief in the mission of MARS. They receive extensive training in the field of sexuality and regular updates on current sexual health information.

WHO DOES THE MARS PROGRAM SERVE?

The target population of the MARS Program is **males ages 13-25**, specifically high school and college-age men in counties where the MARS Program is implemented.

Why young men? There are several compelling reasons: 1) Males don't know or believe sexual and reproductive health services are for them; 2) Men want the services; 3) Men have unique sexual health needs; and 4) Young people account for the largest portion of many new sexually transmitted infections.

MARS is not just for males! MARS is provided in co-ed classrooms and involves women through the **Female Referral Program** (for more information, visit askmars.org).

MARS has served **nearly 19,000** youth through classroom education, individual sexual health consultations and broad-based outreach since 2003.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS—WHAT'S NEW FOR MARS IN 2007-08



Now in its seventh year, the MARS Program reports many new successes!

- Originating in Benton County, MARS recently expanded into **Multnomah and Marion counties** in Fall 2007 (MARS expanded to Deschutes and Jackson counties in 2005). Multnomah and Marion counties will tailor program services to meet the needs of high-risk populations, including incarcerated youth, Latino and urban African American youth.
- MARS launched a comprehensive website, **askmars.org**, in October 2007. This site provides important sexual and reproductive health information for young people, parents and educators. Youth can learn how STIs are transmitted, birth control options, tips on how to communicate with a partner, and how to get free and confidential sexual health services at local health departments. Parents and educators can find tips on how to answer sensitive sex-related questions and preview the MARS curriculum. The website is also a great way to contact MARS for an appointment or ask confidential and anonymous questions. Young people are also encouraged to visit the MARS MySpace page: (www.myspace.com/askmars).
- In May 2007, the Benton County MARS Program hosted a **Poetry SEX Slam** in collaboration with the Corvallis poetry group, "Pints and Poetry." The event was held at Iovinos Ristorante in Corvallis. Over 100 audience members judged poets delivering messages on responsible sex, love and sexuality in the form of spoken word poetry. The second annual SEX Slam is scheduled for Spring 2008.
- Jackson County MARS outreach workers designed a MARS New Student Orientation attended by over 100 incoming Southern Oregon University freshman. The presentation entitled, "**Sex, Drugs and Campus Life**", contrasted the often over-exaggerated perceptions students have of behaviors on college campuses (drug and alcohol use, sexual activity, etc.) versus actual data reported by the American College Health Association. This program utilized "real-time" interactive polling technology which allowed students to register their pre-conceived notions using hand-held key pads.
- Jackson County MARS staff also developed a four-hour sexual health "Crash Course" for **freshman college athletes** at Southern Oregon University. This was tailored for males in an environment where stereotypical ideas of masculinity are important for keen athletic performance.
- Deschutes County's trendy **Downtown Health Center** in Bend houses the MARS Program. The clinic is designed to appeal and be accessible to young people 25 and under. Recent trends show a positive increase in clinic use by males for STI screenings and other health services.

PROGRAM RESULTS

MARS Classroom Sessions

Increase in:

- Sexual health knowledge (STIs and birth control)
- Knowledge of local free sexual health services
- Attitudes about healthy relationships
- Attitudes about benefits of abstinence
- Self-efficacy communicating about abstinence & safe sex
- Self-efficacy refusing sex
- Self-efficacy buying condoms
- Intentions to use condoms
- Intentions to make a MARS appointment (males only)

Classroom Sessions Results: Pre-post survey comparison shows statistically significant increases in the areas listed above. (males and females, n=351)

MARS Clinical Education Sessions

Increase in:

- Frequency and comfort talking with partner about relationships and reproductive health
- Sexual health knowledge (STIs and birth control)
- Attitudes toward birth control and condoms
- Attitudes that abstinence is normal and will protect against HIV/STIs
- Self-efficacy using condoms
- Self-efficacy buying condoms

Individual Sexual Health Education Appointments Results: Pre-post survey comparison shows statistically significant increases in the areas listed above. (males only, n=125)

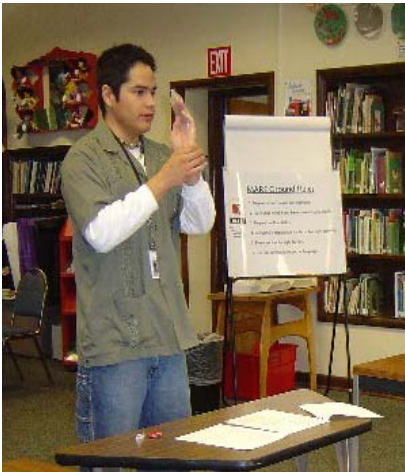
The MARS Program is evaluated by an independent evaluator from Oregon State University. Pre- and post-survey results show the MARS Program has a statistically significant positive impact on young people's knowledge, attitudes, intentions and skills related to creating healthy relationships, maintaining abstinence, and negotiating safer sex practices.

These results are meaningful because when young males and females have the knowledge, attitudes and skills needed to make healthy choices, as well as the self-confidence to use those skills, they are more likely to demonstrate safer sexual behaviors.

For more information regarding the MARS Program outcomes, please contact Jackie Cupples at 541-766-6629 or jacqueline.cupples@co.benton.or.us.

EDUCATORS—MARS IN THE CLASSROOM

The MARS Program implements a **comprehensive sexual health education curriculum** in high school classrooms and alternative youth settings, including residential treatment centers, juvenile departments, youth homeless shelters and faith-based youth groups. Select sessions may be modified for younger audiences. The MARS curriculum includes a total of 10 hours of material covering the topics of:



- **Stereotypes and gender roles**
- **Media and social influences on sexual behavior**
- **Communication**
- **Decision-making and reducing risk**
- **Sexually transmitted infections**
- **Abstinence and contraception**
- **Healthy relationships**
- **Consent**

The 6 -1/2, 90-minute sessions are based on the peer-education model and are facilitated by college-aged MARS Outreach Workers.



The curriculum is designed for both males and females and is offered free of charge to schools and other youth serving organizations. The MARS curriculum has been reviewed by the Oregon Department of Education and was found to use “a best-practice approach to reducing sexual risk behavior” and “can be considered an integral part of a comprehensive sexuality education program.” MARS addresses Oregon laws pertaining to sexuality education.

MARS also provides **one-time sessions** specific to the needs of young people ages 18-25. One-time sessions can be tailored to provide a variety of information including an overview of MARS services, healthy relationships and communication, STIs and contraception.

To schedule MARS in your classroom, contact your local MARS Program Coordinator (resources listed on page 5).

PARENTS—TIPS FOR TALKING TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT SEX

Talking to youth about sensitive topics such as sexuality can be difficult and awkward. The following are general tips to make the conversation more successful.



1. Have a two-way conversation not a one-way lecture. People are much more responsive to advice when their current views are heard and accepted.

2. Be open, honest, and clear about your own attitudes and

opinions, and be accepting of theirs. Talk about your own experiences and decisions and how you felt about those decisions and how you feel about them now.

3. Discuss “hot topic” issues such as plans for sexually-charged, heat of the moment situations. (e.g. Are you ready to have sex? Will you use a condom?) In these sexually-charged moments, people tend to act on impulse. Having a well-rehearsed plan of action will reduce the risk of making a poor decision.

4. Use “teachable moments”, like televised depictions of sexuality, to start conversation. The sexuality issues that are most commonly misunderstood are those that are commonly misrepresented by the media. Ask what they saw, heard, and felt, then explain your thoughts and

feelings.

5. Know your facts. Do research so that you have the most up-to-date information to share with your child. Also, if you know what you’re talking about, you’ll feel more comfortable during conversations with your child. If you don’t have answers to your child’s questions, tell them you will look up the answer and tell them as soon as you know. Or better yet, look up the information together.

6. Be an “ask-able parent”. Reward your child when he or she asks you a question by responding, “I’m glad you came to me with that question.” This will show them that you welcome their questions and make them feel more comfortable asking questions in the future.

For additional tips, visit: askmars.org

Adapted from Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States. (www.seicus.org)

Benton County Health Department
530 NW 27th St.
P.O. Box 579
Corvallis, OR 97339-0579

Phone: 541-766-6629
Fax: 541-766-6186
E-mail: jacqueline.cupples@co.benton.or.us

askmars.org

RESPECT YOURSELF



M.A.R.S.

Male Advocates for Responsible Sexuality

MARS peer educators empower young men to challenge gender roles and prevent unintended pregnancies and infections.

Serving youth in Benton, Jackson, Deschutes, Marion and Multnomah Counties.

MARS funding provided by:

U. S. Office of Population Affairs, Region X Title X Male Involvement Special Projects, The Oregon Community Foundation, Planned Parenthood of Southwest Oregon, The Carpenter Foundation, and Multnomah County African American STD Disparities



The five-county MARS team at the Fall 2007 MARS Outreach Worker Training in Corvallis, Oregon.

RESOURCES

Benton County

Benton Co. MARS Program Coordinator
Jackie Cupples, 541-766-6629
jacqueline.cupples@co.benton.or.us

Benton County Health Department
541-766-6835

Monroe Family Medicine
541-847-5143

Lincoln Family Medicine
541-766-9546

Alsea Rural Health Care
541-487-7116

OSU Student Health Services
(OSU students only)
541-737-2775
Toll-Free: 877-824-9355

Deschutes County

Deschutes County MARS Program Coordinator
Rebeckah Berry, 541-322-7434
rebeckah_berry@co.deschutes.or.us

Downtown Health Center
541-322-7457

Jackson County

Jackson County MARS Program Coordinator
Jane Stevenson, 541-774-8021
stevensj@jacksoncounty.org

Jackson County Health & Human Services
541- 944-8001

SOU Student Health Services
(SOU students only)
541-552-6136

Marion County

Marion County MARS Program Coordinator
Karen Helikson, 503-361-2659
khelikson@co.marion.or.us

Multnomah County

Multnomah Co. MARS Program Coordinator
Charlene Addy McGee
503-988-3030 ext 25706

Websites for Sexual Health Info:

MARS (Comprehensive sexual health information for youth and adults)
askmars.org

Teenwire (Planned Parenthood's site for teen sexual health)
www.teenwire.com

Mens Health Network (Offers information about general male health)
www.menshealthnetwork.org

Sex, Etc. (This website is by teens for teens - a useful resource on topics you want to know!)
www.sxetc.org

National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy (An excellent resource for teens and parents)
www.teenpregnancy.org

Planned Parenthood (This website is a terrific resource for males and females!)

www.plannedparenthood.org

Advocates for Youth (Good for getting involved in advocating for comprehensive sexual health education for youth)

www.advocatesforyouth.org