



SUCCESS STORY

Peer Educators Mentor Teens

Peer Educators work to empower teenagers, while involving parents



Photo: USAID/Melisa Schutte

Eridania Brito, back row, fifth from right with the teens she mentors at her family home in San Cristobal, Dominican Republic.

Many of the program's beneficiaries become peer educators themselves later on.

For three years, 25-year-old Eridania Brito, has been a peer educator for a teen reproductive health program sponsored by USAID, in Lavapies, a poor neighborhood in San Cristobal, capital of a south-central region in the Dominican Republic. Soon after joining the program, it was clear that Eridania had qualities that would make her a dynamic leader. After just three months, she was asked to take on the role of peer education leader. Her responsibilities include mentoring a group of teens as well as supervising, coaching and motivating other peer educators.

USAID's peer education program works to empower teenagers in impoverished communities. Teens explore topics like self-esteem, life planning, goals, gender roles, domestic violence, reproductive health, and family planning. As a testament to the program's success, many of the teens who participate in the program later become peer educators themselves.

Since joining the program, Eridania has noticed many teens have turned a new leaf with their parents — there is better communication on both sides, reducing the conflict and tension that are often present in teen-parent relationships. Teens also learn about subjects that parents have a hard time talking about, like reproductive health. This also helps parent-teen relations.

Many peer educators say the program's benefits extend beyond helping teens get through their grown pains — it is also helping young women like Eridania grow professionally. "I have grown personally and accomplished many goals, such as a being a better person, and improving my self-esteem," says Eridania. "I am less afraid to talk in public and to big groups of people, and I have accomplished my initial goal of graduating from high school."

Having learned that she could make a real difference in people's lives, Eridania is using her charisma and talent to tackle other tough issues like decreasing the stigma associated with people living with HIV/AIDS. In 2005, she won second place in a national HIV/AIDS song contest with a song she wrote and performed. Now a university student, Eridania expects to graduate by 2007 with a degree in linguistics. She is still a peer educator, and in a way will always be one, as she grows up to become a mentor and example for teens in her community.