



WOMEN'S HEART FOUNDATION

For Immediate Release.

Bonnie Arkus 609-771-9600

## **THREE-YEAR HEALTH STUDY OF TEENAGE GIRLS IS UNDERWAY AT TRENTON CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL**

*Voluntary school-based program directed by the Women's Heart Foundation hopes to clarify the role of intervention from a range of health and lifestyle measures*

**Trenton, New Jersey, November 17, 2004** —A novel program that measures the effect of intervention on the synergistic relationship between exercise, nutrition, cardiovascular health and self-esteem in adolescent girls is the foundation of a new three-year health study called Teen Esteem that has been introduced at Trenton Central High School by the Women's Heart Foundation.

It is the first study of its kind in the state to measure the long-term effect of an intervention on reducing risk factors for cardiovascular disease while tracking other measures such as the early onset of Type 2 diabetes as well as self-esteem and its possible role in weight management. It is meant to be a replacement for traditional gymnastics and health classes.

Operating from a \$75,000 grant from the New Jersey Department of Health & Senior Services Office on Women's Health and the New Jersey Department of Human Services, and from smaller grants of \$2,000 from the Pi Chapter, Sigma Theta Tau International, \$1,000 from the New Jersey Institute for Nursing, and \$500 from Theta Sigma Chapter, Sigma Theta Tau of Maryland University. The Teen Esteem program also has support from ShapesUSA, Roma Bank, Griffith Electric, Century Kitchens and Bath, Trenton Farmers Market and Home Depot.

According to Kathleen C. Ashton, PhD, APRN, BC, Clinical Associate Professor of Nursing at Rutgers University Camden and the study's principal investigator, the curriculum is focused on healthy eating beginning with where each girl is now and modifying according to food preferences.

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“There is a focus on understanding food labels, making healthy choices and involving the family and community. Teen Esteem differs from other health programs offered at the school in that it complements and extends the current curriculum while teaching principles to be used over a lifetime. It is especially geared to adolescent girls and focuses on the issues confronting them,” says Dr. Ashton, who is being supported by Ellamarie Russo-DeMara, D.O. of ShapesUSA, and Melda Grant and Constance Kelly of Trenton Central High School.

Dr. Ashton said that each of the 130 sophomores who are participating were given a physical exam at the onset of the program in September. They completed a series of questionnaires, and each girl had her body mass index (BMI), blood pressure, glucose, lipids and waist circumference recorded. The girls workout on an exercise circuit using equipment three times each week. The other two days, there are nutrition and health classes and ten minutes of hip-hop dancing. A test kitchen is in place for food demos and “hands-on” learning. Dr. Ashton said the students will be evaluated on all measures at three months and six months from the start of the program. Self-esteem, physical activity and nutrition levels will then be assessed once annually until graduation from high school to measure stability of changes. All participants will be tracked and evaluated once annually until graduation from high school.

“We are very fortunate to have received these grants,” says Bonnie Arkus, Executive Director of the Women’s Heart Foundation, “because it’s time for women to be aware of heart disease risk factors, even at the tender age of adolescence,” she said. “During the teen years is when health habits are formed that carry us through our lifetime”.

Teen Esteem is a program of the Women’s Heart Foundation that is being implemented with the health study in partnership with the Rutgers University Department of Nursing, and the Youth Services Program and Health and Physical Education Departments at Trenton Central High School.

The Women’s Heart Foundation is a public-supported charity dedicated to improving survival and quality of life for women with heart disease. For more information about the Teen Esteem program, go to [www.womensheart.org](http://www.womensheart.org). You may contact WHF by email: [barkus@womensheart.org](mailto:barkus@womensheart.org) or write to WHF, P.O. Box 7827, West Trenton, NJ 08628.