

Media Aware helps Fact Forward educate South Carolina college students

SUCCESS STORY

The Challenge

Although South Carolina's teen pregnancy rates have fallen in the past decades, STI transmission among young people remains unfortunately high. In order to provide high-quality reproductive health education to South Carolina college students, Fact Forward, a South Carolina-based, nonprofit organization dedicated to improving reproductive health, needed an interactive sexual education program to implement with their partner colleges. The program needed to be:

- 1. Evidence-based.** Fact Forward and their partners at South Carolina colleges and universities wanted to know there was empirical research supporting any programs provided to their students.
- 2. Scalable.** Fact Forward works with all sizes of colleges, and so any program the organization worked with needed to function for both small- and large-scale settings.
- 3. Engaging.** No matter how high-quality the information in the program, it wouldn't matter if students weren't motivated to finish it.

Fact Forward's goal of working with several South Carolina colleges hinged on finding a program capable of fulfilling all three of their requirements. Without a good fit, they would fall short of reaching their target student population.

The Context

Project RHEA, Fact Forward's recent South Carolina college-focused initiative for reproductive health education and access, aimed to increase student knowledge and usage of sexual health resources among young adults, increase their use of reproductive health centers, reduce STI rates, and improve student health.

After reviewing the available resources, Fact Forward quickly decided that using *Media Aware*, an asynchronous, online sexual health education program for college students, would be instrumental in their fight for improving college sexual health.

Media Aware stood out from other sexual health interventions. It is evidence-based, proven effective in a clinical trial with young adults. It can be taken online and on demand - even on a smartphone!

Uniquely, *Media Aware* teaches sexual health using a media literacy education approach, meaning it engages young adults in the program by including contemporary examples of TV, music, and other types of media. The program challenges students to think critically about implicit messages found in media.



"I advocated for Media Aware; its interactivity and style made it engaging for college students."

– **Denise Marciano**
College Health
Education Coordinator
Fact Forward

The Results

Over the 3.5 years of Project RHEA, Fact Forward successfully worked with many different colleges in South Carolina. No matter if they had a few hundred students or several thousand, *Media Aware* proved an invaluable educational resource for colleges. Fact Forward especially appreciated *Media Aware's* relevancy for their target population of college students, because it was unlike other programs. Other programs would try to talk to a broad range of ages of students at once, whereas *Media Aware* was specifically designed for college students. The focus on reaching college students can be seen by the inclusion of young adult-appropriate examples and situations. The program also provides a breadth of information that the specialists at Fact Forward appreciated. With sections on topics such as healthy relationship communication, substance use, and bystander intervention for sexual assault, *Media Aware* goes well beyond the typical "birds and bees" discussion included in many sex ed programs.

Importantly, students also reported that they found *Media Aware* informative and enjoyable. Many students reported learning things they had never heard before. Some even reported that they wished *Media Aware* had been available to them when they were younger, because it filled in gaps in knowledge and provided information that was not addressed in sex ed classes.

Although Project RHEA successfully concluded this year, Fact Forward intends to keep using *Media Aware* in the future with more colleges. The program has become another tool in the organization's toolbox, continuing Fact Forward's mission to improve the sexual health of adolescents in South Carolina.



"We were very fond of Media Aware because of the audience we're trying to reach. With all the media messages out there... we just thought it was the best program for young people."

– Mallory Gibson
Research & Evaluation Specialist
Fact Forward



For more information about Fact Forward:
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Fact Forward was formerly known as "The South Carolina Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy," Fact Forward rebranded in 2019 to better reflect its commitment to all aspects of sexual health, including STI prevention, HPV vaccination, and healthy sexual communication.