Renee Sieving, PhD, MSN, RN, has always been drawn to work with teenagers. “Adolescence is a time of profound development and change,” says the SoN associate professor. As principal investigator of the Lead Peace demonstration study, Sieving is helping teens learn how to navigate these changes and develop the skills and perspectives they’ll need to meet challenges of work, civic engagement, and personal relationships in the 21st century.

Focus on the Five C’s
Lead Peace aims to reduce youth violence, a public health problem that affects victims, perpetrators, families, friends, and entire communities. The program focuses on helping students develop the “five C’s”:

- Social and emotional skills and competencies
- Confidence in themselves
- Capacity to care
- Positive connections with adults and peers in their schools, families and communities
- Meaningful contributions to their schools and communities

To understand the impacts of Lead Peace, Sieving and her team are surveying a group of students from four North Minneapolis schools during their sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade years. Students at Nellie Stone Johnson and Cityview Schools are actively involved in the Lead Peace program. The Hmong International Academy and Lucy Laney School serve as study comparison schools.

Sieving’s team will examine differences between program and comparison schools on student outcomes targeted for change by the program.

Lead Peace is a joint effort of the School of Nursing; the Healthy Youth Development-Prevention Research Center in the University’s Department of Pediatrics; the Village, a North Minneapolis branch of Hennepin County Social Services; the Minneapolis Public Schools; and Kwanzaa Community Church, a North Minneapolis congregation active in peace-building efforts.
ENGAGING YOUTH TO ADDRESS REAL NEEDS

Service learning is the foundation of the Lead Peace program. “This approach actively engages young people in service that addresses authentic community needs,” Sieving explains. Students work together in groups of six to eight students facilitated by members of a team of social workers, youth workers, and teachers.

In preparation for service, student groups complete needs assessments within their school and community, decide what needs to focus on, and determine how they will address them. One group of middle school students discovered that many children in the school’s preschool used towels as naptime blankets because parents had no extra blankets to send to school. These middle school students decided to address this situation, using funds budgeted for their project to buy fleece and make blankets for the preschoolers.

Identifying the importance of demonstrating compassion in their communities, another group of middle school students studied a local “compassion hero” who opened a homeless shelter in their neighborhood. This group decided to spend time at the shelter reading to the children there, playing with them and listening to their stories. “The middle school students experienced the power of providing social and emotional support to the younger children,” Sieving says. “And they’re using the lessons they’ve learned about the importance of showing compassion in interactions with peers, siblings, and adults in their everyday lives.”

EARLY RESULTS ARE ENCOURAGING

Although it is too early for Sieving and her colleagues to draw definitive conclusions about Lead Peace, they are encouraged by findings to date. “Early analyses with student survey data indicate that the five C’s that we’re targeting are important,” Sieving says. “We’re finding, for example, that positive connections to school and community buffer students from involvement in bullying, fighting, and other forms of violence.”

Students say that Lead Peace has allowed them to become leaders and problem-solvers. And working in small groups has helped them develop a sense of accountability to others. Principals at the two program schools have observed that since becoming involved with Lead Peace, students are less likely to act out, more likely to work together to solve problems, and less likely to be suspended.

Cityview and Nellie Stone Johnson Schools hope to continue Lead Peace after the demonstration study ends, and staff at Lucy Laney and the Hmong International Academy look forward to bringing this program to their schools.

A BROAD-BASED INITIATIVE

Lead Peace is the kind of community-based initiative that the Institute of Medicine endorsed in its 2009 report on adolescent health services. The program focuses on prevention and fosters the development of life skills and healthy behaviors. It engages public schools, social services, and youth-serving organizations in connecting with and mentoring young adolescents in developmentally appropriate ways.

For graduate students in the School of Nursing, Lead Peace has been a pathway into research that addresses priorities identified by the community. Masters and doctoral students are involved in surveying middle school students, helping with service learning groups, and outreach to parents. “Lead Peace gives them hands-on experience with both the tough challenges and the caring adults within urban schools,” Sieving says. “These future nurse leaders are developing research skills and learning how to work with community partners to address important public health issues.”
Research

Student Spotlight:
Molly Secor-Turner

Exploring the Context

By Nancy Giguere

As an undergraduate in the School of Nursing, Molly Secor-Turner, PhD, MS, RN, wasn’t interested in research. “I was more excited about the clinical aspects of nursing,” she says.

Then she spent two years as a labor and delivery nurse at North Memorial Hospital in Robbinsdale. “Many of my patients were young teen moms, and I became interested in exploring the social context of early childbearing,” she says. “I began to see how nursing research could make a difference in people’s lives.”

Secor-Turner returned to the U where she earned a master’s in public health nursing and a Ph.D. in nursing. While completing her doctorate, she participated in the Lead Peace program, an experience that helped shape her research on social messages and teen sexual health.

As a post-doctoral fellow in the Center for Adolescent Nursing, Secor-Turner has collaborated on projects with fellows in medicine, social work, nutrition, epidemiology, and psychology as well as nursing. She is currently working with Renee Sieving on the Prime Time intervention study, which focuses on preventing multiple risk behaviors that can lead to early pregnancy.

Secor-Turner has high praise for her faculty advisors. “They are true mentors who have supported me and guided me on the pathway to a career in nursing research.”

Molly Secor-Turner (center) with her faculty advisor Dr. Renee Sieving and Dr. Linda Bearinger, professor and director of the Center for Adolescent Nursing.