The primary purpose of the PEARLS for Teen Girls High Risk Intervention Project is to create an effective and replicable community-based model for improving the health, wellness and safety of extremely high risk, low-income, African American teen girls within a school setting. The project focuses on building a strong base of self-efficacy skills and protective factors to help girls avoid teen pregnancy, sexual victimization, violence and a variety of negative behaviors that undermine health, wellness and safety, by coalescing the resources and expertise of the project partners around these outcomes. The need for this project is evident in the huge health and safety risks faced by the targeted population in Milwaukee including the second highest teen pregnancy rate in the nation, skyrocketing violence, sexual victimization, emotional stress and all of its attendant consequences.

The project addresses the Health Improvement Model by addressing major areas of health risk (violence, sexual victimization, non-sexual antecedents to teen pregnancy, and a variety of lifestyle issues that affect long-term health consequences for teens); a specific population (African American, urban, low-income, teen girls); focusing on prevention of causes of death and disability (developing healthy lifestyle habits and decision making skills for a lifetime); and Transforming Health Improvement efforts by creating a new approach for holistically addressing the health and well-being of youth within a school setting.

The project will be implemented at the Silver Spring Neighborhood Center (SSNC) Academy, an alternative middle school located with the Silver Spring Neighborhood Center. PEARLS for Teen Girls Inc., an experienced and respected local provider of leadership development services will provide the focal point for the project by implementing group programming that will be embedded into the school day curriculum. Through the program girls will begin to bond as they develop healthy relationship, leadership, communication and critical thinking skills. They will also set specific goals around education, health and wellness. The resources of the additional partners including the UW-Milwaukee (UWM) College of Nursing Silver Spring Community Nursing Center (SSCNC), Family Leadership Academy, the UWM Center for Urban Community Development (CUCD), and the MCW partner, Dr. Kevin Izard, will be coordinated by a PEARLS Program Coordinator dedicated to the project and will revolve around helping the girls achieve their goals, improve health and wellness knowledge, behavior and status, and succeed in school. Resources will include health screenings, a half-time dedicated mental health nurse, a parent leadership/involved project, and much more. The girls will be active participants in identifying, setting and achieving their goals, and in ongoing project development.

All partners bring particular expertise in serving the target population and intend to create a coordinated model for addressing girls' health. The partners also view achievement of the three elements of the Community-Academic Partnership Model as critical to success and as a demonstration of their shared commitment to girls in our community. A key innovative strategy in this project is the inclusion of an ongoing team-based inquiry into the effectiveness of the work, called an Action Research Team which will be lead by evaluation expert Dan Folkman, PhD, UW-Milwaukee. Project outcomes will be measured on two levels including evaluation of the effectiveness of the project model and the impact of the intervention on the individual participants. On the project level, partners will meet monthly to examine the dynamics of the partnership and to ensure effectiveness, communication and coordination. The Action Research Team will also coordinate an evaluation design with emphasis on a formative assessment of program implementation and a summative assessment of achieved outcomes. The project will also measure girls’ individual health outcomes and their ability to be proactive participants in creating a healthy lifestyle using PEARLS Goal Setting Model, the Personal Health Inventory and the Automated Community Health Information System. The team is committed to publication and dissemination of information on the implementation and results of this project, thereby creating a new model for addressing health and wellness of high-risk minority female teen populations throughout the state.