

“Ignorance is not Innocence”: The Social Health Association of Indiana and Adolescent Sex Education, 1907-2007

Angela Bowen Potter¹, Philip V. Scarpino¹

¹Department of History, IUPUI School of Liberal Arts

“Ignorance is not innocence,” thundered John Hurty Secretary of the Indiana Board of Health in 1913 attempting to persuade his colleagues that only “sex knowledge” could prevent the problem of adolescent venereal disease. Throughout the twentieth century, Hurty and other Indiana reformers took the lead in national efforts to raise public awareness of the dangers of sexually transmitted diseases as part of larger debates on how to educate adolescents on the dangers of sexual activity prior to marriage. This project, funded in part by the IUPUI Solution Center and Social Health Association of Indiana (SHA), seeks to use various public history methodologies to illustrate the important role Indiana played in the history of adolescent sexuality education. The history of the Social Health Association of Indiana (SHA) reflects changes not only in the sexuality education movement, but also in the broader context of adolescent sexuality, educational reform and public health movements. This project is an example of the IUPUI’s Public History Master’s program training that blends theory and hands-on experience specific to public history, often in partnership with community organizations. Today, the SHA continues their 100 year tradition of “foster successful lives by empowering youth to make responsible choices and adopt healthy behaviors.”

Mentors: Philip V. Scarpino, Department of History, School of Liberal Arts IUPUI; William H. Schneider Department of History and Medical Humanities, School of Liberal Arts IUPUI; Michael Howe, Social Health Association of Indiana, Indianapolis, Indiana.

building awareness of the interplay of the changes in ideas about education, sexual mores and public health for shaping curriculum.