Almost 50% of pregnancies in the United States are unintended, according to a study by Finer and Zolna (2011). According to the Guttmacher Institute, unplanned pregnancies disproportionately affect low-income, minority women. PREKNOP is designed to educate low-income women, in Grand Rapids, about their bodies so they are able to plan their pregnancies, live healthier lifestyles, and share the knowledge with other women.

The PREKNOP program involves 120 female participants, ages 18-44. A participant is part of PREKNOP for two years and is visited by a community health worker and two Nursing students ten times throughout the program. The women are randomly assigned to either the intervention or control group. Both groups receive information on nutrition, exercise, alcohol, and smoking. The intervention group is taught additional material which consists of reproductive information. The women in this group are encouraged to track their menstrual cycles, ovulation, temperature, and other personal notes on monthly calendars. We hope to see that the women in the intervention group are able to plan their pregnancies because they will understand their bodies so well. Thus, the rate of unplanned pregnancies would hopefully go down.

As a research assistant in the PREKNOP program, I have learned from the variety of tasks and experiences involved in this position. I have learned to enter and organize data into databases and Excel spreadsheets. Currently, I am working on a literature review that looks at low-income women’s preconception health behaviors—specifically their behavior with alcohol. Through this literature review, my eyes are opened up as I learn about the many factors involved in unplanned pregnancies. Every week, I will go on several home visits. This is one of the most rewarding experiences in the PREKNOP program. It is incredible to see the women’s knowledge increasing over the many months we visit them. They are very engaged and ask good questions, some of them are hard to answer! Quite often, through teaching the women, I will learn something from them. Many of these women have amazing stories. At times, they will open up and share about difficult times they have gone through. Other moments are filled with laughter and smiles.

PREKNOP is more than just an educational program. It is an opportunity to build relationships with women in the community. It is a way to impart knowledge to them. It is the love of Jesus shared through kind words, listening ears, and open hearts. My hope and prayer is that God will continue to bless the program and help it prosper. Only through Him is it possible to begin restoring this broken world. It is a privilege to play a role in bringing shalom to earth, being a voice for those who are typically not heard. PREKNOP has opened my heart for the many beautiful, unique people God has created that live only miles down the road,
although it may seem like a world away. I continue to thank Him for this opportunity to share His unconditional love in a world that so desperately needs Him.