

Brighter Futures

Meeting Summary • May 20, 2008

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Teens show views on violence, pregnancy in skit, video

**Brighter Futures
Meeting Report
May 20, 2008
Aurora Family Center**

A dramatic video on youth violence and a daring skit on teen pregnancy highlighted the the May Brighter Futures meeting held May 20 at Aurora Family Services.

Racquel Bell opened the meeting stating that that May is teen pregnancy prevention month and in recognition of that there will be a raw and gritty skit presented by Cities Project High School.

Jody Rhodes of NeuLife said students at Eastbrook Academy High School-Neu Life have been working on a project since last September; they chose the topic of youth violence in Milwaukee, she said and the result was a video, "A Time for Concern... A Reason for Hope." The students interviewed teachers and others in the Neu-Life program and the showing was a debut of the video, she said.

The video discusses the violence situation among youth in Milwaukee, and particularly the impact on the African-American family.

One of the students explained that the students chose violence as a topic that could be handled proactively and creatively. A second student said the video hopes to show some of the things that can be done in the community and to indicate there is hope. Another student said the project involved them in video making and the complexities that entails.

The video began with a commentary that violence begins with anger, maybe some verbal assaults, escalating to fists and finally to gun violence, which is seen on Milwaukee streets regularly. What followed was commentary by those interviewed on the video:

- Neu-Life Lead Teacher Odell Chambers noted the lack of parenting that creates violence in the community. "If they grew up in a household where the parents are involved, that is only way to resolve the situation," he said.
- Rev. Johnny Moyné: Without recreation, without being occupied, children may get into mischief.
- Sgt. Smith, a Milwaukee police officer, said: "I have them for eight hours, the streets have them for 16 hours. And there's a different education out there than there is with me." He noted that children may be with a program for years before changing more positively.
- Charlie Larson, senior director of communications of Milwaukee Admirals hockey team, talked about need for education.
- The importance of "getting parents involved with their kids, and getting parents tools and resources" was stressed by Jody Rhodes.
- "Starting thinking about what you want to do in the future," Chambers said.
"There is hope for Milwaukee, but it all starts with you." (The closing comment on the video)

"We had a lot of technical difficulties with software, and we had trouble figuring out what we wanted to say and how we wanted to say it," commented one of the students. It was



A skit dramatizing teen pregnancy issues was performed by students of Cities Project High School. In this enactment, the boy is enticing his girl friend with predictable consequences.

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Eastbrook Academy Students who produced and created the video, “A Time for Concern, A Reason for Hope,” pose with their teachers, from left: A.J. Wynn-Howard, Shaunna Baumhardt, Chanda Harris, Christine Malcolm, Joshua Beggs, P. J. Izard, and Jody Rhodes. Malcolm and Beggs are teachers and Rhodes is with Neu-Life Center.

New Agency Seeks Ideas . . . *(Continued from Page 1)*

noted that the group probably should have learned the technical process before delving into the project itself, thus being able to spend more time of the content.

In a discussion session afterward, the students made the following observations:

- “Don’t go picking fight. Forgive. Be understanding.”
- “We learned about our futures and that we have to plan our futures. We just can’t go out a do stuff.”
- “Most of the people we interviewed really emphasized education, and to work harder.”
- “And there were communication breakdowns” in the developing of the project.

The participants were praised for doing a “phenomenal job,” with suggestions of showing the video to other groups in the city.

Racquel Bell said: “These students are just an example of the work we are doing. All youth in city are not making bad choices, are not involved in violence, are not engaged in negative behaviors and I want to commend these youth for the strong maturity and the hope they projected through this video. A job well done.”

In noting the focus of the meeting was teen pregnancy prevention, Bell said such prevention involves both compre-

hensive sexual education and abstinence.

Sally Ladky of the Wisconsin Action Coalition outlined her organization’s strategies in promoting abstinence. She said the program involves relationship education to inform youth about the choices that they have. The curriculum, she said, begins with relationships between mother and child and moving directly into romantic relationships. At the very end there is discussion about marriage and parenting, she said.

Ladky said some 20 facilitators have been trained and that the program has been piloted in six settings, five at St. Charles Home and one at Concordia Lutheran Middle School. The programs are tailored for the particular audience, she said.

She said the sessions involve discussing with children “the forming of relationships and hopefully in those they will choose marriage and that they will understand the whole relationship thing with love and commitment.”

The Milwaukee Teen Pregnancy Prevention Network, Bell said, is a group of agencies that have gotten together to share resources in the goal of preventing teen pregnancies as well as sexually transmitted diseases and infections. The group is looking for creative ways to dramatize the need to avoid sexual activity.

Anthony McHenry, of Silver Spring Neighborhood Center and a co-chair of the Network, said the Network has about 20 different agencies and meets at noon every second Thursday at SSNC, 5460 N. 64th St. He said the group looked at various national strategies that involved teen pregnancy prevention and after two years narrowed its focus to address the whole family and parenting as the primary place to develop change.

Last year the Network developed a Family Unity Night in which parents and children would share evening meal. He said the Network found that teen pregnancy prevention could begin to be attacked by strengthening the family connection and improving the communications between parents and their children. One way was to set up a process wherein families would share a meal together. The first such night was held Oct. 11, 2007, and Mayor Tom Barrett has proclaimed that the second Thursday of every October as Family Unity Night in years to come.

“What we’re trying to do is to have the family sit down together, share and laugh,” McHenry said. “The real message is to how to have the parents give this message to their children, encouraging them to find time with their children.”

He continued: “We’re engaged in social marketing of an educational message about the power of parents and to inform them if they talk with their children it will enhance those children to make positive decisions. If parents don’t

Teen pregnancy skit ... (continued)

give the message, the kids will get it from the streets”

We are trying to get our message about sexual health to those in Milwaukee who are most affected by poverty. The strategies include: Providing inter-generational dialogue; addressing media content, to provide more positive information into the mainstream media; and supporting traveling youth groups in supporting peer mediation groups and other ways to get message to hard-to-reach children.

Presentation: Joe O’Shea, one of the founders of Cities Project High School, a charter school, introduced several students who presented a skit on teen pregnancy and its impact on youth.

O’Shea described the high school as being “project-based,” meaning that it does not have traditional classes. The students, he said, are encouraged to

In the skit, Harmony tells TJ, her boy friend, that she is pregnant, and finds out he has other girl friends as well.



utilize their skills in developing a project which they have to research and produce for their grading and credit.

The school grew out of an initiative called “Public Achievement” which developed to address issues in the community. The students must develop a project in an attempt to resolve the identified problem, he said.

The Skit: Harmony, a 16 year old girl, becomes friendly with T.J., a

teen boy; eventually he talks her into having sex to show her love. She said that T.J. told her he had worn protection, but her girl friend suspects that T.J. did not use protection and probably gave her STDs or got her pregnant.

T.J. and his friend discuss his sexual liaisons and T.J. said he be-

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Brighter Futures Notes

MCAPS Report. Reported by Ken Germanson. The 2007 Report of the Child Welfare Ombudsman Program was presented at the May meeting of the Public Policy Committee of MCAPS. Lisa Drouin, executive director, said they agency had 147 contacts last year, and that already in 2008 there have been more than 100 contacts.

The committee also looked at the plans for the new Department of Children and Families and has made suggestions for the role of the department, scheduled to become active July 1. Brenda Bell-White, of DHFS, explained the progress of the development of the department, which will be more focused on families and children.

MCAPS has a second committee, the

Teen Parent Task Force, which concentrates on child care, to make it easier for teen mothers to remain in school.

The third group is the Family Resource Connection meets next on May 27 at 9 a.m. at Easter Seals. Trudy Ranallo of Parents Plus said there will be a speaker on homelessness. The group is beginning to plan for Child Abuse Prevention Month for next April and is hoping to have a community-wide event for the month. She said persons interested in participating may contact her at t.ranallo@parentspluswi.org.

Brighter Futures Policy Committee. Reported by Ken Germanson. The purpose of the committee is to put together an initiative that will have an impact on public policy. Brighter

Futures has a chance to make an impact on policy if it could mobilize its 25 funded agencies and the 40 other participating agencies into supporting a common issue that would require either administrative or legislative policy changes. The committee has decided the focus should be on parental involvement as it involves the development the children, largely pre-school and school-focused.

Parental involvement involves much of the work being done by agencies of Brighter Futures. Both the Parents as Teachers and the HIPPY programs were outlined at the last meeting. Future meetings will discuss the policies of Milwaukee Public Schools and the State Department of Public Instruction.

The success of the HIP program involving COA and six MPS schools was discussed, since the program involves a specified parental coordinator who is an employee of COA.



Members of the cast of students from Cities Project High School gather with their teacher, Joe O’Shea (center, front)

Teen issues dramatized . . .

(Continued)

lieved Harmony would not get pregnant, because “everyone knows a girl can’t get pregnant if she hasn’t had sex before.” His friend tells him that’s a myth.

It soon is revealed that Harmony is pregnant and must tell her father, which she does in a painful episode. Eventually the father becomes more sympathetic and urges her to tell T.J. about the pregnancy.

She is also convinced by her friend to tell T.J. about her pregnancy, and confronts T.J. while he is wooing another girl; both girls become angry with each other. Soon, another girl arrives on the scene, and informing them that she had been made pregnant by T.J. and had a child. As the skit nears an end, Harmony laments: “It was just five minutes. He’s not going to be there for my baby. I’m so stupid.”

The cast was applauded loudly.

Racquel Bell recounted an experience with a young woman who had sex before marriage, to the dismay of her parents, only to have a miscarriage. She said it prompted the girl’s father to ask her to write down on a poster board the “pros” and “cons” of having sex before marriage; the girl did that, filling the sheet with the “cons” and leaving the “pros” side blank. “Whatever we feel, we can’t live for our children,” since the children will live their own lives, she said. “The experience and wisdom we as adults can bring will really enrich their lives.”

May 2008 Brighter Futures Meeting Attendance (Listed by Last Name)

Please send any corrections to general@communityadvocates.net

NOTE: All Brighter Futures funded agencies are expected to attend monthly MYFDA meetings, according

Tanya	Torres	Abri Health Plan
Janeen	Boone	Agape Community Center
Kasandra	Tarkington	AGAPE Community Center
Makisha	Biles	Big Brothers Big Sisters
Joe	O’Shea	Cities Project High School
Danielle	Luer	COA YFC - Goldin Center
Kari	Nervig	COA YFC - Riverwest Ctr
Andi	Elliott	Community Advocates
Aricka	Evans	Community Advocates
Kenneth	Germanson	Community Advocates
Racquel	Bell	Community Advocates
Karen	Kolberg	IMPACT
Maria	Kolda	IMPACT, Inc.
Clarence	Rice	Innerworks
Michael	Bersch	Journey House
Reyna	Gengler	La Causa
Yolanda	Espino	Latino Community Center
Sandy	Dotson	Managed Health Services
Sandra	Malone	Mary Ryan Boys and Girls Club
Deborah	Bryant	Milwaukee Adolescent Health
Emilio	Lopez	Milwaukee Christian Center
Shirley	Senaya	Milwaukee Health Dept.
Norma	Madison	Milwaukee Urban League
Terry	Grazer	Milwaukee Youth Theater
Lyn	Hildenbrand	Neighborhood House
Michelle	Kosalka	Neighborhood House
Jody	Rhodes	Neu-Life Community Resource Ctr
Kayla	Murphy	New Concept Self Dev. Ctr.
Kenyatta	Sinclair	Next Door Foundation
Trudy	Ranallo	Parents Plus, Inc.
Marge	Kreuser	Perez-Pena, LTD
Lisa	Drouin	Planning Council
Joseph	Kubisiak	Safe & Sound
Debbie	Donovan	Sexual Assault Treatment Ctr
Anthony	Mc Henry	Silver Spring Neighborhood Center
Tony	Phillips	St Ann Center
Theresa	Post	Task Force on Family Violence
Lisa	Gumm	The Counseling Center
Christy	Barden	The Parenting Network
Georgann	Moore	United Health Care
Shaunte	James	Urban League
David	Bowen	Urban Underground
Mary Pat	O’Hara	Walkers Point Youth & Family Ctr.
Lt. Edward	Benish	West Allis Police Department
Sally	Ladky	WI Abstinence Coalition
Aimee	Gironimi	

