



Milwaukee Brighter Futures

Community effort needed to continue drop in teen pregnancy rate

While teen pregnancy rates have shown a downward trend recently, Milwaukee still ranks among the worst in the nation. What is needed is a continuing community effort, according to participants at the January Brighter Futures meeting.

The discussion was led by **Anna Benton**, director of Family and Community Health Services at the Milwaukee Health Dept., who returned to Wisconsin and the health department in 2006 after spending some ten years in international health programs, including such countries as Bangladesh.

Even though the teen pregnancy rate as been going down over the last 15 years, the interesting fact is that there is "slight up-tick," which is "extremely disturbing," she said. Milwaukee, however, has bucked the trend with the teen pregnancy rate from 2006 to 2007 decreasing by ten percent, she added. This is the lowest rate since 1979, when the rate began going up reaching its peak in 1990 when it is about double what it is today."

She suggested several possible reasons for the drop in teen

pregnancies, including the decrease, according to surveys, of teens having sex in Milwaukee, contrary to a national trend. This is confounded somewhat by reports of a decrease in the use of condoms,.

She also said the fact that Wisconsin initiated the Family Planning Waiver under Medicaid, on Jan. 1, 2003 may have helped decrease the rate. It covers women 15 to 44 and



Anna Benton

has been "fairly popular and successful," with some 5,500 women signing up for it every month last year. Wisconsin is pretty progressive with the program, since many states do not offer such a broad program of contraceptive coverage, she said.

Others suggested that federal and state programs in welfare reform in recent years have sought to remove the incentives for out-of-wedlock birth, thus promoting work and marriage, she said.

A fourth theory involves the activities of the community, particularly the treating of teen pregnancies as a public health crisis. She cited the Truth Be Told report created by United Way in 2006 that discussed teen pregnancy prevention. A citywide campaign was developed, headed by the president of the Journal Sentinel and the City Commissioner of Health. Part of the campaign included billboards, such as the one with the pregnant boy that made "quite a splash," she said.

A fifth theory is that there is a more widespread acceptance of the use of condoms and their availability in nontraditional settings.

Sixth, teen pregnancy has moved from being perceived as an issue that merely affects inner city teens to one that affects employment, taxes, business and education.

Seventh, there has been an increase in interest in the schools, noting that the new Human Growth and Develop-

Milwaukee Brighter Futures

Meeting Summary:
Jan. 27, 2009

February, 2009

New Agencies Welcomed

Joe Volk welcomed the participating agencies to the meeting. He particularly noted the work of those agencies that were funded in 2008, but failed to be refunded in 2009, urging their continued participation in the BF programs. "It tells me it's not all about the money, but that it goes to what is right to do about kids," he said.

He provided his cell phone number to the agencies. 414-333-7393. He reflected upon the economic crisis, indicating that such times increase the importance of the work of the Brighter Futures agencies.

The 21 funded agencies for 2009 were introduced Duncan Shroust said the Brighter Futures program offers an opportunity to link agencies together, particularly through such efforts as IMPACT's 211 line. The services helps link the programs of BF agencies, he said.

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Teen pregnancies pose many health problems

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ment Curriculum may be approved by the School Board soon.

Lastly, she said, there are a number of community programs working to address teen pregnancies, such as the BF-supported Pearls for Teen Girls.

In spite of the decrease, Milwaukee still ranks in the top ten cities in the rate of teen pregnancies and is still a public health crisis, requiring the attention of the community.

Why is it a problem? Benton outlined some of the issues:

- There are serious health risks for the teens who give birth, such as anemia, hypertension, weight gain and infections.
- The babies of teens face higher birth risks. The rate of low-birth-rate babies is 21% higher for teen moms, and low birth rate often results in blindness, respiratory problems and other concerns.
- The chance of infant death is higher.
- The sons of teen mothers are more likely to be incarcerated as adults.
- Teen moms are less likely to finish high school, the rate being nationally that 2 out of 3 teen moms do not finish.
- Teen moms are more likely to become pregnant again while teens.
- Daughters of teen moms are 83% more likely to be teen moms themselves, creating a longterm problem.
- Over half of teen mothers have been abused before their pregnancy.

She noted too that in 70% of the teen births, the fathers were over 20 years of age.

One of the reasons why Milwaukee has a hard time resolving this issue is its high rate of poverty: 7th highest in U.S., she



McHenry

among Hispanic girls.

The role of the community is vital, she said, noting that the health department is involved in a number of coalitions, such as the Milwaukee Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Program (MAPPP). In addition, there are two programs within the department, such as Plain Talk that works with parents to assist the in communicating effectively with their children on abstinence, healthy relationships and sexuality and “No Condom, No Way,” a multifaceted campaign that encourages teens to abstain as well as to encourage effective use of condoms among teens who are sexually active. The program distributed its one millionth condom recently. The program has made good use of social marketing tools to meet the teens where they are, such as on Facebook, websites, public transit campaigns, and the recruitment of peer opinion leaders.

The Health Department recognizes, she said, that “we cannot do this alone,” and that it is but one piece of the solution. The department has a goal to reduce the teen birth rate by 46%, dropping it by 2015 from 50 per 1,000 to 30 per 1,000 births. To reach the goal will require sustained community support. She urged that community organizations support comprehensive sexual education in schools, provide meaningful activities in support for teens, improve job opportunities, and work to reduce crime and violence.

“Success is possible, but it is definitely a community-wide effort,” Benton said.

said. There’s a close correlation between poverty rates and teen pregnancy, she said.

There is also disparity by ethnicity, with teen pregnancy occurring at 7% among Caucasian girls, 57% among African-American and 70%

Anthony McHenry, chairperson for the Milwaukee Teen Pregnancy Prevention Network and assistant executive director of the Silver Spring Neighborhood Center, explained the Network is composed of community-based organizations trying to work on teen pregnancy prevention. Such prevention falls into two broad areas: policy creation and grassroots work, such as talking with kids, he said.

The group sees the need to educate parents on the issue, recognizing that parents are the best teachers of children. Part of this effort is in the **Family Unity Night** celebration which is held the second Thursday in October each year. It’s a way of encouraging parents to sit down with the family at dinnertime to develop conversations. The most important factor is not what occurs on that Thursday, but the educational process that leads up to it, he said.

McHenry said the Unity Day program involves giving the parents tools to make it easier for them to develop the conversation by providing them with questions to ask and topics to discuss. “It’s not an easy thing for many parents to do,” he acknowledged. “It’s a way of passing their values on to their children.”

The other piece is to get this discussion to those parents and children who will not participate in such activities, he said. The Network has developed “traveling team conferences” which will travel to alternative schools where such children may be located. The conferences being offered last a full day and involve teaching over many of these issues. The group employs as peer strategy, that is, “teens helping teens.”

Dr. Wendi Ehrman, the medical director of the Milwaukee Adolescent Health Program, said the program provides comprehensive health care for teenagers and teen age mothers and their siblings, primarily high risk teens. The program has also been involved with a number of community programs, including Brighter Fu-

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The role of father discussed

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tures. The health programs include a teen mom and baby clinic at the clinic at N.12th and W. State streets, a program at the juvenile detention center to prevent second pregnancies, and the providing of health services at a local high school.

"Each of the sites has a different set of problems for the girls that are there," she said. "Teen pregnancy is multi-faceted and has many issues." She said education has been a key in the decreasing rate of teen pregnancies, mainly through the work of many of the agencies in the community.

"I'm excited and I'm anxious," she said, "about the new [Obama] Administration in that we should get funding for more than 'abstinence only' so that we will have funding to continue to spread education." She said she was worried, however, that the economic crisis may make it difficult for the decreases to continue, since poverty may create more of the issues that foster teen pregnancy. Among the issues that cause problems is the continued impact of mental health on the teens, which if it goes untreated brings trouble, she said.

McHenry said the important thing is having "healthy young people." One of the common denominators in children who at age 17 have been abstinent is that they have a "healthy view" of themselves, he added. He said having access to condoms is important, but that if children do not have good views of themselves they're more likely to make a mistake that will complicate their lives.

The role of the fathers was discussed. It was suggested from the audience that fathers need to be more involved in this

educational process. The fact that so many adult men, well into their 20s, are having sex with teens is distressing. Since such sex with minors is against the law, it was suggested there be an effort to get the word out about the laws.

There are many barriers to getting the father involved in the newborns life, since some men leave the scene once the woman becomes pregnant; in other cases,



Dr. Erhman

the new mother doesn't want the man around. McHenry suggested that policy makers put some flexibility in the law involving sexual predators, so that younger men engaged on a loving relationship with a teen are not being

branded for life.

Norma Madison of the Urban League noted that many young men may have several partners with whom they become fathers. She noted that a barber shop had an open house and a young man brought 300 condoms to the shop, and they were all taken.

Dr. Ehrman said it is important to think "out of the box" and get out into the community to spread the word to those who don't show up for programs.

Julie Bock, of Milwaukee LGBT, also noted that same-sex relationships are developing earlier in life as youngsters make a determination about their sexual orientation at younger ages. She said there also are more teen girls who identify themselves as lesbians deciding to have children in their teen years. "This is a problem the problem in our culture over how are kids are valued," she said. "Project Q staff is stymied when talking with a young woman who is lesbian and wants to have a baby." She said it may be a sign of low self-worth or other problems.

In summing up, it was noted there were many issues identified that should be in-

vestigated further by Brighter Futures, the participating agencies and the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Network.

McHenry noted the reality that the age between the father and teen mom is seven years; the ones who should be prosecuted are the 20-somethings who are abusing a young girl because she feels she has no power to say no; thus, he said such men are going untouched and go one to father other children, sometimes as many as five.

He urged focusing on the broader issue of have building love for children, something that can be accomplished even in poverty.

Ehrman said the government must release its money into programs beyond the 'abstinence only' programs; secondly she suggested the need to carry the education to where the children are, such as having a broad program in MPS.

Benton said the ideal scenario would be to educate all children early in life, meaning even in grade school. "The empowerment factor is so important," she said.

It was also important to tailor the strategies with an eye to different cultural and ethnic groups, it was suggested.

MCAPS Reports

Jan Buchler reported on the Milwaukee Child Abuse Prevention Services (MCAPS) coalition and its Public Policy Committee which meets at 3 p.m. on the second Monday of each month at United Way; the MCAPS Teen Parent Task Force also meets the same day and at same location at 1:30 p.m. Both meetings are open to all interested persons. Buchler said both groups have been providing information to the State's new Department of Children and Families.



Meeting Attendance January 27, 2009

Aurora Family Service

Please send any corrections to
keng@communityadvocates.net

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

**A Better
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Through
Prevention**

Connie	Schulze	%Sen.. Darling's Office
Terri	Strodthoff	Alma Center Inc
Stephanie	Jung	BEAM
Christina	Treiber	Big Brothers Big Sisters
Lesley	Salas	Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Milw.
Stephen	Adams	CDMP
Virginia	Zerpa	Center for Urban Population
Denise	Crumble	City of Milwaukee
Kari	Nervig	COA YFC - Riverwest Ctr
Andrea	Kurth	COA Youth and Family Centers
Aricka	Evans	Community Advocates
Kenneth	Germanson	Community Advocates
Joe	Volk	Community Advocates
Christina	Morris	Counseling Center of Milwaukee
Alicia	Ivory	CSSW/Voice Magazine
Wendy	Mc Carty	Dept. of Children and Families
Duncan	Shrout	IMPACT Inc.
Maria	Kolda	IMPACT, Inc.
Clarence	Rice	Innerworks
Reyna	Gengler	La Causa
Betsy	Heinen	La Causa FRC
Laura	Wojciuk	Lad Lake Inc.
Cristina	Ledezma	Latino Community Center
Jackie	Arroyo	Latino Community Center
Sandy	Dotson	Managed Health Services
Jennifer	Carrasco	Marquette University
Natalie	Fleury	Marquette University
Deborah	Bryant	Milwaukee Adolescent Health
Emilio	Lopez	Milwaukee Christian Center
Tina	Grace	Milwaukee Health Dept.
Shirley	Senaya	Milwaukee Health Dept.
Julie	Bock	Milwaukee LGBT
Sgt. Risa	Cain	Milwaukee Police Dept. Comm. Serv. Div.
Norma	Madison	Milwaukee Urban League
Cynthia	Jasper	New Concept Self Dev. Ctr.
Debbie	Wilhelms	New Concept Self Development
Brendan	Gants	Parents Plus
Patrice	Knox	Parents Plus, Inc.
Katie	Ames	Pathfinders
Lisa	Gumm	Pathfinders
Michelle	Brock	Pearls for Teen Girls
Yvette	Dotson	Pearls for Teen Girls, Inc.
Gerry	Howze	Pearls for Teen Girls, Inc.
Marge	Kreuser	Perez-Pena, LTD
Tiffany	Stark	Rep. Tamara Grigsby
Anthony	Mc Henry	Silver Spring Neighborhood Center
Brenda	Bell-White	State of Wis MPSIO
Theresa	Post	Task Force on Family Violence
Jan	Buchler	The Parenting Network
Georgann	Moore	United Health Care
Shaunte	James	Urban League
Marsha	Canser	Vincent Family Center
Marissa	Lopez	Walker's Point Youth and Family Ctr.
Mark	Torinus	Wis Foundation of Independent Colleges
Tom	Spellman	

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