

No. 22

Pregnant and Parenting Youth

Cheryl R. Sturko Grossman

2006



Youthwork Information Briefs are sponsored by Ohio Department of Job and Family Services - ODJFS, Office of Workforce Development, Bureau of Workforce Services.

Pregnant and parenting youth have been identified as an important target population for Workforce Investment Act (WIA) youth programs. Serving this population is unusual because so many individuals are involved – the mother, the father, the child, and often the families of both parents.

The role of the WIA program is primarily to help youth successfully transition to adult roles by supporting their educational and employment aspirations and helping the young parents obtain needed services through other social services agencies and community organizations. WIA programs should emphasize a comprehensive approach that addresses:

- Health of mother and child
- Family formation
- Parenting education
- Transition to adulthood
 - o Education
 - o Employment

Health of Mother and Child

Mothers under age 17 have more medical complications than older mothers, including poor maternal weight gain, premature births, pregnancy-induced hypertension, anemia, and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Infants born to adolescent mothers are more likely to be premature, have a low birth weight, or die within 28 days of birth. In order to give mother and child the best chance for a healthy outcome, WIA youth staff should refer pregnant and parenting youth to:

- Affordable and timely family planning services that include pregnancy testing and counseling, adoption, abortion, emergency contraception, and birth control information.
- Prenatal care and counseling that addresses the medical, social, nutritional, and educational needs of mother, father, and child.
- Treatment for STDs and substance use, including drug, alcohol, and tobacco use.
- Information about the importance of nutrition and access to adequate healthy foods and supplements, especially folic acid.
- Treatment and counseling for mental health issues, especially when sexual abuse is involved.
- Public assistance programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC).
- Safe and healthy housing.
- Health care for delivery and postnatal care for mother and child.

TANF Eligibility for Minor Parents

To receive TANF cash assistance, parents who are minors must:

- *Live in adult-supervised housing.*
- *Participate in school or an approved training program beginning when the child is 12 weeks old.*
- *Meet other eligibility requirements.*

Family Formation

Stable, healthy, two-parent families tend to provide a good environment for raising children, so marriage has received a lot of recent emphasis. However, marriage is not always desirable, especially when violence, substance abuse, or infidelity make the relationship harmful. Helping parents, married or not, to be financially capable and responsible and to cooperate as much as possible in their child's development can help to create a successful family. To aid in this effort, WIA youth staff should link youth with programs that offer:

- Life skills education for both parents that includes planning for the future, dealing with conflict, and making decisions.
- Financial skills and knowledge that help youth use financial institutions to their benefit and plan for future education and retirement.
- Marriage and relationship education and support that address barriers and stressors that cause marriages to fail. Stressors include unemployment, mental health problems, drug or alcohol problems, and incarceration.

Parenting Education

Children born to adolescent mothers are at increased risk of developmental and academic problems, behavioral disorders, substance abuse, depression, early sexual activity, and early parenthood. Some studies also suggest that children of adolescent parents are more likely to be abused. Some of this increased risk can be attributed to poverty, mental health problems, substance abuse, and other stressful life circumstances, but young mothers and fathers may also lack parenting skills. Parenting education can help young parents to develop these skills. WIA youth staff should ensure that youth have access to parenting education programs that:

- Provide knowledge and skills about child development and positive parenting practices for both the mother and father.
- Involve grandparents and other family members as sources of support instead of misinformation.
- Meet the needs of young fathers, including:
 - Go beyond the classroom. Service learning programs have been effective.
 - Are culturally sensitive and reflect the values or customs of fathers' culture..
 - Are longer in duration – preferably at least two years.
 - Offer educational opportunities, skills training, employment assistance, family life education, and family planning services.
 - Are welcoming and engaging to boys and young men and engender trust.
 - Include male staff and volunteers.
- Plan or provide joint parent-child activities, such as art or fitness classes.
- Prevent unintended pregnancies by encouraging abstinence or delay of sexual activity and responsible sexuality, including use of contraception. Studies have found that sexuality education programs that provide information about contraception do not increase sexual activity of youth.

Transition to Adulthood

Young parents must complete their secondary education and secure adequate employment in order to complete their own transition from childhood to adulthood as well as supply a secure, healthy environment in which to raise a child. Youth who do not graduate from high school are at risk of persistent poverty, limited vocational options, and repeated early parenthood.

In a 2001 survey of youth employment program staff, over 70 percent believed that issues related to unplanned pregnancy, such as difficulties with child care and transportation and stress of parenting, led trainees to be absent frequently, drop out of training, or have trouble retaining a job.

WIA youth programs can provide the support young parents need to complete high school or obtain a GED and complete training that will lead to jobs that pay a family-sustaining wage. Some ways to help include:

- Encourage parenting youth to return to school as soon as possible after giving birth.
- Find mentors who can provide the individualized support to keep a youth engaged with their school or workplace.
- Provide assistance in finding and paying for child care.
- Provide child care during adult classes and activities, (such as GED or parenting classes).
- Provide assistance with transportation issues.
- Offer tangible and intangible incentives (cash, gift cards; recognition, social support) to encourage participation and achievement.
- Provide support for emergencies such as child care or transportation arrangements that have fallen through.
- As necessary, refer parenting youth to the county child support enforcement agency (CSEA) for paternity establishment and child support establishment and enforcement. Parenting youth with a child born in wedlock can also be referred to the CSEA for enforcement of court-ordered child support.

Graduation Reality and Dual-Role Skills Program (GRADS)

GRADS is an in-school Family and Consumer Sciences program designed to promote personal growth, educational competence, and economic self-sufficiency in order for teen parents to meet their own developmental needs and grow into their parental role. In 1996, the dropout rate for teen parents nationwide was 60 percent; among GRADS teen parents, it was about 14 percent.

Youth who become parents face significant challenges. Providing support to young parents helps both the current and the next generation avoid the pitfalls of early parenthood and create successful families.

Sources

- Child Welfare League of America. (n.d.). *Best practices for teen pregnancy prevention and parenting programs*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved October 3, 2006, from <http://www.cwla.org/programs/pregprev/flocrittpractices.htm><http://www.cwla.org/programs/pregprev/flocrittpractices.htm>
- Child Welfare League of America. (1998). *CWLA standards of excellence for services for adolescent pregnancy, prevention, pregnant adolescents, and young parents*. (Revised edition.) Washington, DC: Author.
- Committee on Adolescence & Klein, J. (2005, July). Adolescent pregnancy: Current trends and issues. *Pediatrics*, 116, 281-286. Retrieved October 10, 2006, from <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/116/1/281>

- Enright, S., & Boggs, H. (1997). *Adolescent parent resource guide: An instructional resource for the Graduation Reality and Dual-Role Skills program and other programs serving pregnant and parenting teens*. Columbus, OH: Vocational Instructional Materials Laboratory, Ohio State University.
- Family Strengthening Policy Center. (2005, November). *Marriage and relationship education: Will it reduce poverty and strengthen families?* Policy Brief No. 12. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved December 27, 2006, from <http://www.nydic.org/fspc/practice/documents/Brief12.pdf>
- Family and Youth Services Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (n.d.). *YES! Youth empowerment strategies for all: Working with pregnant and parenting youth*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved October 3, 2006, from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/content/aboutfysb/yes_pregnant.htm
- Grisham, C. (2003, August 27). *Advice from the field: Youth employment programs and unintended pregnancy*. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy. Retrieved November 1, 2006, from <http://www.clasp.org/publications/Advice.pdf>
- Guttmacher Institute. (2006, December 1). *State policies in brief: An overview of minors' consent law*. New York, NY: Author. Retrieved December 28, 2006, from http://www.guttmacher.org/statecenter/spibs/spib_OMCL.pdf
- Institute for Educational Leadership. (1999, May). *School-based and school-linked programs for pregnant and parenting teens and their children. A synthesis of conference proceedings (November 5-6, 1997, Washington, DC)*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.
- Levin-Epstein, J., & Schwartz, A. (2005, July-August). Improving TANF for teens. *Clearinghouse REVIEW Journal of Poverty Law and Policy*, pp. 183-194. Retrieved December 29, 2006, from http://www.clasp.org/publications/tanf_for_teens.pdf
- Maynard, R. (Ed.). (1997). *Kids having kids: Economic costs and social consequences of teen pregnancy*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press.
- Schwartz, W. (1999). *Young fathers: New support strategies*. ERIC Digest, No. 141. New York, NY: ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education. Retrieved November 2, 2006, from <http://www.ericdigests.org/1999-4/fathers.htm>
- Terry-Humen, E., Manlove, J., & Moore, K. (2005, January). *Playing catch-up: How the children of teen mothers fare*. Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. Retrieved November 3, 2006, from <http://www.teenpregnancy.org/works/pdf/PlayingCatchup.pdf>
- Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. (2005, August 23). *Helping ensure the success of teen parents and their children*. Madison, WI: Author. Retrieved December 28, 2006, from <http://dpi.state.wi.us/sspw/success.html>

Inspiring great youth work

LEARNINGWORK CONNECTION

LearningWork Connection is an initiative of the
Center for Learning Excellence at The Ohio State University.

614/292-8665 | e-mail: learningwork@osu.edu
www.learningworkconnection.org

