

MOAPPP Monitor

www.moapp.org

Fall 2008

MOAPPP's mission is to develop and strengthen policies and programs that promote adolescent sexual health, prevent adolescent pregnancy and support adolescent parents.

Connections: The Key to Supporting Healthy Adolescent Decision-making

Deborah Roffman
Human Sexuality Educator and Author

We in the field of teenage sexuality are often overwhelmed by the enormity of unmet need for education and services for young people in America. We are constantly searching for new and better ways to stretch limited resources.

Help may be more immediately available than we realize. It's right in the home.

PARENTS ARE THE KEY

For more than 30 years, quality research has shown that parents make the crucial difference in young peoples' capacity for making healthy sexual decisions. Teens who grow up in homes where sexuality is openly discussed are:

- more likely to postpone engaging in sexual intercourse until they are older and better equipped socially and emotionally;
- more likely to protect themselves against pregnancy and STIs; and
- more likely to have initial sexual experiences within the context of ongoing, caring relationships.

More recent prevention science research has confirmed that this powerful parent-child dynamic holds up across a wide range of risk behaviors. Whether the concern is teen pregnancy, alcohol or other drug use, truancy or delinquency, eating disorders or other kinds of self-harm, children raised in homes where there is quality communication and a strong sense of

connectedness—where parents monitor children's activities and provide clear and consistently enforced rules of conduct—are less at risk.

For more than 30 years, quality research has shown that parents make the crucial difference in young peoples' capacity for making healthy sexual decisions.

In other words, the popular public service slogan, "Parents: The Anti-Drug," doesn't go far enough. More accurate would be: "Parents: The Anti-Every-Behavior-You'd-Like-Your-Child-to-Postpone-or-Avoid-Altogogether."

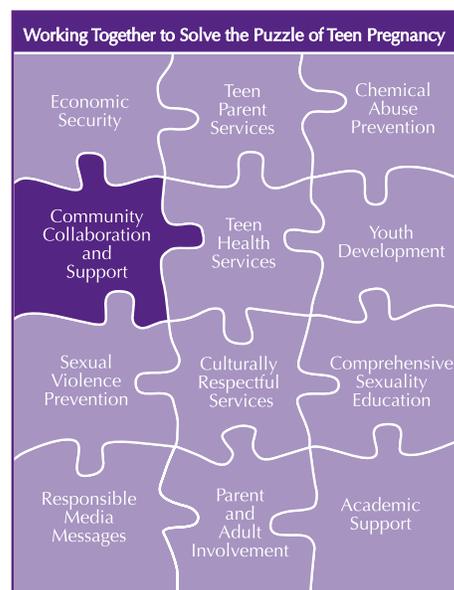
MAKE SURE YOUTH FEEL CONNECTED TO THEIR COMMUNITIES

Connectedness, in general, is critical. Young people who feel connected to organizations and other adults in the larger community also make healthier choices. Successful school performance, strong bonds with institutions such as school and religious groups, and positive adult role models are key.

Conversely, children who lack parent-child attachment and nurturing, come from chaotic home environments, receive ineffective parenting, and/or experience persistent, serious conflict between primary caregivers or between caregiver and child, are at significantly higher risk of engaging in unhealthy choices and behaviors.

Teachers and health professionals are certainly part of the puzzle, but we're the inside pieces. If the outside puzzle pieces that hold the puzzle together—effective parenting, positive role models, consistent messages from home and community, strong youth-oriented organizations—are not in place, the puzzle will simply fall apart.

As sexual health professionals, we must support the larger goal of engaging parents, other important adults, youth serving organizations, and community institutions in *helping youth become and stay connected*.



MOAPPP's Teen Pregnancy Puzzle illustrates the complexity of the issue and the need for comprehensive solutions based on research.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES



Dear Friends,

Another high profile teen pregnancy is making headlines as I write. It's been a long year of one "teachable moment" after another, hasn't it? Movies, television programs, news stories, cultural and now political touchpoints have created so many opportunities for candid conversations with our children about relationships, sex and teen parents.

So, it's some comfort to know, as **Deborah Roffman shares in the *Monitor's* cover article**, that children growing up in homes where sex is openly discussed are better equipped to handle the challenges of romantic relationships, and have healthier outcomes as a result.

It's also good to know there are whole communities mobilizing around youth to ensure they have caring adults in their lives—adults who are willing to have those important conversations. **Theresa Evans-Ross describes the REACH Collaborative's efforts** in North Minneapolis—a wonderful example of a community stepping up to the plate to support young people.

And as **Paul Masiarchin shares**, let's remember that teen mothers are only one part of the equation. Teen fathers, and fathers of children born to teen mothers, are often overlooked—before, during and after a pregnancy. He emphasizes the disconnect between our intention to include boys and men, and actually carrying that out. MOAPPP intends to partner with the **Minnesota Fathers & Families Network** in the coming year to develop ways to make that connection easier for all of us.

I hope you enjoy this issue of the *Monitor*. And I hope you will use any of this year's teachable moments to quiz the candidates who knock on your door this election season. Regardless of political party or persuasion, we need to educate our public servants about what young people really need in order to grow into sexually healthy adults.

In health,

Brigid Riley, MPH
Executive Director

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MOAPPP's mission is to develop and strengthen policies and programs that promote adolescent sexual health, prevent adolescent pregnancy and support adolescent parents.

Promoting Adolescent Sexual Health Through Broader Social Change

Research has identified as many as 500 different factors that can positively or negatively impact adolescent sexual behavior often called protective factors and risk factors.

Dr. Douglas Kirby, author of the publication *Emerging Answers 2007*, divides risk and protective factors into two categories:

- Environmental (e.g. community and family characteristics, peer norms, romantic partner), and
- Individual (e.g. teens’ knowledge, attitudes and beliefs about sex; previous sexual behavior; connection to school, religion, other community organizations)

This chart illustrates some examples of protective and risk factors in each category:

	Environmental	Individual
Protective Factor	High level of parental education	Able to discuss sexual risks with partner
Risk Factor	Household substance abuse	History of sexual abuse

While many of these factors can be accentuated (or improved) by clinic and education interventions (such as responsible sex education and access to confidential and affordable sexual health services), many more, such as living in poverty, are related to broader social issues typically beyond the influence of teen pregnancy prevention organizations.

MOAPPP has come to understand that our organization can and should participate in broader social policy change efforts that affect these issues. We do this by working together with organizations advocating for funding and services in areas outside sexual health, adolescent pregnancy prevention and young parent support.

HOW MOAPPP HAS INCREASED ITS REACH

A great deal of MOAPPP’s work focuses on supporting teen pregnancy prevention and adolescent parent programs in their efforts to address individual protective and risk factors. But in the area of environmental factors, we partner with other organizations that address these factors as part of their core mission. MOAPPP has chosen to engage in community partnerships and collaborations focused on public policy around the following environmental factors:

- **Protective Factor** – Quality childcare and early childhood development
- **Protective Factor** – Youth development programs
- **Risk Factor** – Poverty reduction

Many more environmental risk factors exist, but in these three identified areas, MOAPPP can 1) clearly draw the connection to teen pregnancy prevention and 2) join existing strong efforts to make a difference. Collaborative efforts such as these augment resources and increase the grassroots advocacy base that contributes to building public will—the ultimate force for social change.

MOAPPP participates in the following collaborative public policy efforts:

YOUTH COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS (YCC)

(www.youthcommunityconnections.org)
Minnesota’s Statewide Afterschool Alliance connects youth development programs statewide, helping them learn from one another, share resources and advocate for youth-strengthening public policy. MOAPPP’s role in YCC is to underscore the importance of “service-learning”—programs that provide meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility and strengthen communities. There is strong evidence that service-learning programs improve a variety of youth outcomes, including prevention of too-early pregnancy.

CHILD CARE WORKS (www.childcareworks.org)

Adolescent parents and their young children need access to high-quality childcare options that facilitate the parents’ completion of high school and promote parent-child attachment and strong parenting skills. MOAPPP brings the voice of adolescent parents to Child Care WORKS work in this arena.

AFFIRMATIVE OPTIONS (www.affirmativeoptions.org)

Poverty is both an antecedent and a consequence of adolescent pregnancy and childbearing. Affirmative Options advocates for a Minnesota economy that creates opportunities for women, men and children to move out of poverty. MOAPPP supports Affirmative Options’ efforts to improve MFIP (Minnesota Family Investment Program) policy.



This fall, you will have an opportunity to impact public policy through the election. Now is the time to educate yourself on where the candidates stand on issues that matter most to you.

Research the Candidates

www.mpr.org, go to Shortcuts, then Campaign 2008

Mark Your Calendars

State General Election—Tuesday, November 4, 2008

Register to Vote and Find Out Where you Vote

Call the Secretary of States Office at 651-215-1440 or Greater MN 1-877-600-VOTE(8683) or visit the office website at www.sos.state.mn.us.

Preventing Pregnancy Among African American Youth in North Minneapolis

Theresa Evans-Ross, REACH Programs Director,
The Annex Teen Clinic

The high rate of unintended pregnancies among African American teens in North Minneapolis has drawn critical attention, and has been addressed for the past six years through a unique multi-faceted community collaborative called **REACH: Restore and Empower African-American Adolescents to Create and Hope**.

REACH is firmly grounded within the North Minneapolis community. The people and organizations involved live and work in North Minneapolis and care deeply about the health and wellness of the community.

Every REACH partner—whether from the social work, faith, school, arts or medical community—shares a common vision and helped create the program's objectives and workplan. Concurrently, REACH's parent/child sexuality education is provided in many diverse settings in an effort to reach more youth, including churches, homes and community organizations.

Connecting youth with a caring adult is one highly recognized method for assuring strong youth development and preventing teen pregnancy. REACH takes that one step further by connecting youth with adults of all ages. Elders in the African American community are brought into the program and into participants' lives to share their wisdom and build guiding relationships with the youth.

"REACH is composed of many more people than its paid staff," explains Brian Russ, Executive Director at the Annex Teen Clinic, one of REACH's partner programs. "Community members are engaged and invested on so many levels as families, churches, mentors, peer educators, media, volunteer facilitators and more. We could not have the impact we've had without working together."

Other REACH partners besides the Annex Teen Clinic include:

- Nia-Imani Youth and Family Development Center of Kwanzaa Presbyterian Church
- Two sites of the Minneapolis Beacons Project and Network
- Nellie Stone Johnson School programs administered by the YWCA
- Cityview Performing Arts Magnet School programs administered by the North Community YMCA
- Healthy Youth Development-Prevention Research Center (Division of Pediatrics and Adolescent Health at the University of Minnesota) serves as a consultant and technical advisor to the project

The group has secured funding from a ten-year Eliminating Health Disparities Initiative grant through the Office of Minority and Multicultural Health at the Minnesota Department of Health.

To learn more about the REACH Collaborative, contact Theresa Evans-Ross at theresa@annexteenclinic.org or 763-533-1316.



MOAPPP provides technical assistance to the REACH collaborative through its work with the Annex Teen Clinic, a partner in its Centers for Disease Control and Prevention-funded project to promote science-based approaches to teen pregnancy, HIV and STIs.

← REACH Partner Program participants at Nia-Imani Youth and Family Development Center

ANNOUNCEMENTS

MOAPPP Enters Curriculum Development Arena

A recent grant to MOAPPP from the Otto Bremer Foundation will allow the continued development of a "parents-as-sexuality-educators" curriculum that MOAPPP hopes will lead to greater sustainability.

Over the last three years, MOAPPP has worked with a group of key community partners to develop *It's That Easy*, a curriculum designed for use by educators to equip parents with the knowledge and skills to talk with their children about healthy sexuality development. The grant from the Otto Bremer Foundation for two years will allow MOAPPP to:

- pilot the new curriculum using a "train-the-trainer" model in two Minnesota locations;

- equip a cadre of trainers with the ability to deliver future trainings,
- develop a system for tracking the curriculum's use, and
- share the curriculum and training model with national audiences.

Taking the curriculum first to state and then to national audiences presents MOAPPP with opportunities for increased income generation. Thanks to the Bremer Foundation for this support.



MOAPPP leads the charge in promoting October as *Let's Talk Month* in Minnesota, but we are not alone. Nationally, October is recognized as *Let's Talk Month* by organizations such as Advocates for Youth, www.advocatesforyouth.org, and the National Campaign to Prevent Teen & Unplanned Pregnancy, www.thenationalcampaign.org.

What is *Let's Talk Month*? It's a formal recognition of the need for parents to talk to their children about sex, and an opportunity for community-based organizations, faith communities, schools and the media to work together to help them. As we collectively start a new LTM season, let's seize the opportunity to encourage families to begin the conversations around puberty, healthy relationships, sex and any number of other topics included under the sexual health umbrella.

Visit the *Let's Talk Month* section of the **MOAPPP website** for other ideas and resources to support your participation this October, and for

information about LTM events for parents and professionals. Don't forget to let us know what your group/organization is doing to recognize this effort.

Also available on the *Let's Talk* webpage are:

- ideas to support families in starting the conversation,
- LTM calendar events, and
- information on how your organization can become a LTM Partner.

For more information, contact Jocelyn Broyles at 651-644-1447 x19 or jocelyn@moappp.org.

Events are co-sponsored by Hennepin County Public Health Promotion, Planned Parenthood and MOAPPP.



ADOLESCENT
parent
NETWORK

Bringing Young Fathers to the Forefront

Paul Masiarchin, Executive Director,
Minnesota Fathers & Families Network

Parents' impact on their children's mental health and well-being is well-researched and understood. Until recently, however, a father's unique contribution has been less well recognized.

Current research on father involvement and its relationship to positive mental health outcomes for children is leading to a sea change in the way social and family service systems define and support a father's role in the nurturing of healthy children.

With the advent of this new father-focus, however, there is a visible mismatch between the high *intent* of including fathers and the low *implementation* of effective policies and practices that support healthy father-child relationships. This is especially evident in work with adolescent parents across Minnesota. In a survey conducted at the 2008 MOAPPP conference, only 28% of the respondents who work with adolescent parents indicated that they work with young fathers.

Yes, involving young fathers is complex. But the rewards for both the young dad and his child are enormous. In fact, preparing youth and adults to be caring, competent parents may be the single most effective way to increase mental health, advance school preparedness, prevent child abuse and other violence, and achieve academic success for future generations.

As one thinks about ways to engage young men, consider the following:

- **THERE IS A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE PERCEPTION AND THE REALITY OF THE DESIRES OF YOUNG FATHERS.** People often assume that young men do not want to be involved in their children's lives. The reality is that most young fathers *do* want to be involved and are concerned about their child's future. However, they need to be given the chance and the skills to grow in the role as a father.

According to Hector Sanchez-Flores, Center for Reproductive Health Policy Research, University of California, San Francisco, "Young fathers who are left without resources or social supports struggle to sustain a positive presence in their child's life, as well as maintain a supportive relationship with the child's mother."

- **YOUNG FATHERS MAY HAVE MULTIPLE BARRIERS TO PARENTING.** Programs aiming to serve teen fathers cannot focus exclusively on their needs *as a parent*. Adolescent fathers likely have multiple service needs. Factors such as lack of money, poor relationships with the mother and her family, incarceration, substance abuse, and their



When speaking of adolescent parents, the image that comes to most people's minds is a young mother holding an infant in her arms. While resources

and research are limited regarding adolescent mothers raising children, even fewer resources exist for adolescent/young fathers.

own lack of involved fathers, prevent them from achieving the positive involvement they aspire to maintain.

- **YOUNG MOTHERS AND THEIR PARENTS ARE THE GATEKEEPERS OF YOUNG FATHERS' INVOLVEMENT.** Young fathers who are not involved with their children often attribute their lack of involvement to resistance from mothers and maternal grandmothers. Programs that target the adolescent mother and her mother can play an important role in keeping the young father involved in his child's life.

The research is clear: responsible, involved fathers matter to the child and to the dad. Less clear are the specific steps we need to take to shape our programs and services to support these young fathers.

The Minnesota Fathers & Families Network and MOAPPP hope to partner with organizations around the state to challenge current assumptions about young men/fathers, better understand and tackle the complex issues that get in the way of their meaningful involvement, and promote programs and policies that support healthy, engaged fathers in the lives of their children.

RESOURCES

Advocates for Youth

AFY has a comprehensive list of online resources for building local coalitions to prevent teen pregnancy. The site also offers more information about selected publications that may be useful to local coalitions.

www.advocatesforyouth.org/PUBLICATIONS/frtp/localcoalitions.htm

Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs

AMCHP supports state maternal and child health programs and provides national leadership on issues affecting women and children. A section of their website is dedicated to the benefits of collaboration and offers state success stories.

www.amchp.org

The California Wellness Foundation

The foundation's publication, *Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Initiative: Accomplishments, Challenges and Lessons Learned*, offers a candid look at a teenage pregnancy prevention initiative and shares the results of this effort.

www.tcdf.org/pub_lessons/ezine6

Citizen Works

This organization is dedicated to advancing justice by giving people the tools and opportunities to build democracy. Citizen Works enhances the work of existing organizations by helping to share information and build coalitions.

www.citizenworks.org



Minnesota Fathers & Families Network (MFFN)

MFFN is designed to enhance healthy father-child relationships by promoting initiatives that inform public policy and further develop the field of fatherhood practitioners statewide.

www.mnfathers.org

National Coalition Building Institute

This nonprofit leadership training organization conducts peer training to eliminate prejudice and transform communities and organizations around the world.

www.ncbi.org

Deborah Roffman

(2001). *Sex and sensibility: The thinking parent's guide to talking sense about sex.*

(2002). *But how'd I get in there in the first place?*

New York, NY and Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press.

Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign

This campaign, for parents of teens in Minnesota, provides practical advice for parents about how to navigate through the teen years, and connects parents together to share stories and swap tricks of the parenting trade.

www.shouldertoshoulderminnesota.org

RESEARCH

Citations are included from this *Monitor's* articles.

1. Kirby, D. (2007). *Emerging answers 2007: Research findings on programs to reduce teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.* Washington D.C., National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.



MOAPPP Monitor

Newsletter of the Minnesota
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Pregnancy, Prevention and Parenting

INSIDE

FALL 2008

VOTE 08

Director's Notes • 2
Public Policy • 3



Outreach • 4
Announcements • 5

ADOLESCENT
parent
NETWORK

Adolescent Parents • 6
Resources and Research • 7

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- *Community Shares of Minnesota*
- *United Way – Greater Twin Cities; Becker County; Carlton County; Caring Rivers; Crow Wing; Faribault; Hastings; Heart of the Lakes; Hibbing; Morrison County; New Ulm; Northeast Minnesota; Olmsted County; Red Wing; St. Croix*

(MOAPPP's Federal Identification Number (EIN) is 41-1722338. Thank you!)

QUESTIONS? Contact Julie Schultz Brown at julie@moappp.org, 651-644-1447 x16 or contact the charitable federation your workplace uses and ask how you can "designate" the charity of your choice.

