

WHAT ABOUT THE BOYS?

An Often Overlooked Element in the Teen Pregnancy Equation

MOAPPP was always cognizant of the importance of “the boys” in preventing teen pregnancy. Records from MOAPPP Annual Conferences as far back as 1992 show topics such as “Programs for Fathers” and “Research and Interventions with Males.”

A recent grant from The McKnight Foundation, however, gives MOAPPP the opportunity to share its experience in this arena with the increasing number of organizations that also recognize the critical role of boys and men in adolescent sexual health and parenting.

Dr. Christopher Reif, a family practice physician and chair of MOAPPP’s board of directors, recently suggested, in fact, that the responsibility for teen pregnancy prevention should perhaps be shifted from teenage girls, their parents and teachers—to better include teenage boys. Older teen boys are often involved with younger girls; teen boys carry half the responsibility for contraception; and teen boys often become teen fathers. Explains Dr. Reif, **“Teenage boys must learn, especially from adult men, that unprotected sex is not the road to manhood,** and that fatherhood means taking on the responsibilities of a man.”

When they do become fathers, how do teenage boys become part of a new family? The girls who become mothers often have their hands full with the new baby and don’t have the time or skills to renegotiate their relationship with the new dad. Sometimes, the young father is not welcomed by the girl’s family. So the question continues to be, *“What about the boys?”*

Research indicates that family planning and parenting are most effective when both males and females are involved—and that children have the best outcomes when both mothers and fathers actively take part in their lives. With teen families, that can happen best with the help of parents, teachers and other supportive adults. **For teen parents, it is twice true that “It takes a village to raise a child.”** Teens, teen parents and the children of teen parents need the arms of the

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Overlooked Element

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community around them to answer their questions, point them in the direction of resources and help them be strong *and* safe.

MOAPPP has the connections and experience to be an effective bridge between programs that serve adolescent parents. With its long-term relationships with the cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul—both of which provide services to the state's most populated areas—as well as seats on advisory panels for two statewide home-visiting providers, MOAPPP can successfully negotiate the state's service-providing systems.

MOAPPP is ready to advance its McKnight-funded work with young boys to:

- **Identify the best way or best practices** for providing services to boys at high risk of becoming adolescent fathers or who already are;
- **Encourage expansion of existing services** for adolescent mothers to include the best methods for involving young fathers;
- **Promote initiatives that inform public policy** on behalf of the positive programs that address boys as a resource to be mobilized on behalf of their peers at high risk of becoming adolescent fathers or those who already are.

According to the Minnesota Fathers & Families Network's 2007 report, "Do We Count Fathers in Minnesota: Searching for key indicators of the well-being of fathers and families," how boys learn to be male is a complex societal process. The report recommends that Minnesota embrace the ideal of healthy fatherhood through **a cultural shift that will require healthier messages for boys**, and ultimately a better focus on healthy, responsible fatherhood and the prevention of absent or uninvolved fathers.

MOAPPP is uniquely situated to bring together the players who can begin this important shift toward healthier boys in Minnesota.

For more information, contact MOAPPP Program Manager Sue Fust at sue@moappp.org, or go to www.moappp.org/outreach/apn/resources.html#father_involvement.

MOAPPP is the statewide leader in promoting adolescent sexual health, preventing adolescent pregnancy, and gaining support for adolescent parents.

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The board membership offers started coming Connie's way even before her husband, Chris, was elected to serve as the Mayor of Saint Paul. Her warmth and sincerity, combined with her community connections and knowledge of the Twin Cities from her realty work, made her a great board candidate.

WHY DID SHE CHOOSE MOAPPP? "I kind of believe in signs," Connie explains. "In one single week that year, I saw Youth Performance Company's "The Talk," with my teenage daughter — a really funny show about sex education. Then my son started the O.W.L. Program at our church ["Our Whole Lives" — a MOAPPP-recommended sex ed program]. And finally, [MOAPPP Co-Founder] Nancy Nelson invited me to a fundraiser for MOAPPP and I heard Robbin Frasier speak about her experiences as a teen mother. I knew right then that MOAPPP was where I was supposed to be."

Connie now serves as an active member of the board's Fundraising Committee, working hard to share MOAPPP's story with people and companies who may want to join her in helping assure positive life outcomes for Minnesota teens.

"Sexual health can be a tough story to tell," she says. "We can all agree that we don't want our kids to use heroin. Not ever. But sex? We want sex to be part of our kids' lives — but not until they're ready, and not until they have all the information and skills they need. It's an integral part of who we all are — but it's hard to talk about.

"I'm continually amazed at what I learn at MOAPPP about how sexual health affects so many parts of a person's life — and how so many other things affect a teenager's sexual health. MOAPPP is getting important information to thousands of kids every year."



CONNIE COLEMAN

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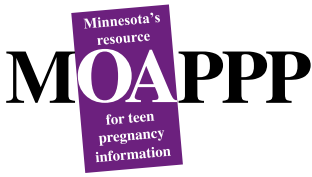
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More information coming in early May. Visit www.moappp.org for up-to-the-minute details and opportunities to donate to MOAPPP.