

# Involving Youth in Teen Pregnancy Prevention

## Why involve young people?

No matter how good adults are at empathizing, they cannot know what it is like to be young today. Involving young people in planning and directing a program helps the program be relevant to what is happening today in the lives of teens. It also benefits the teens themselves: recent research points toward youth development programs—which by definition emphasize the active participation of young people—as a significant and effective way to prevent teen pregnancy.

### Authentic youth involvement means...

- involving lots of teens;
- giving them real authority over appropriate parts of a program or planning process;
- listening to them intently and helping them see how their opinions shape the decisions and views of others; and
- designing programs that accommodate the styles, schedules, and preferences of the targeted teens.

### Authentic youth involvement is not...

- asking teens to react to an already formed idea;
- soliciting suggestions from only a few young people, then dismissing what they say if it doesn't seem to fit in;
- adding one young person to an advisory board; or
- inviting teens to join projects that were fully designed by adults.

Really involving youth is demanding. Having young people as true partners means active engagement. It means letting young people define what is needed and using adult skills to make it happen in a way that most benefits the teens. In this way, the adults in the program can become that special somebody in the life of a teen—someone who cares about them, takes their opinions and feelings

### STUDIES SHOW

**Sustained connections to the people and institutions around them help young people...**

- avoid risky behavior
- decrease the chance of early pregnancy

seriously, holds them accountable, and believes in them.

Society too often looks at youth as a series of problems to prevent. We have largely come to ignore the natural give and take between

the generations. An effective program that really reaches out to young people and involves them sincerely can help restore the connection between adults and young people that has broken down in many communities.

## Ideas for youth involvement

Youth involvement programs come in many varieties. Some are wholly independent entities; others are attached to an established youth organization. While some youth involvement programs explicitly address ways to avoid problems like teen pregnancy, most concentrate on engaging young people in activities and encouraging active planning for a brighter future. Programs may want to mix and match several

different types of youth involvement or try several activities over time. This section describes the major categories of youth involvement and provides examples of existing programs.

### Boards, committees, and advisory groups

Young people serve in many ways on boards, committees, and commissions in full partnership with adults. Many cities

## 8 reasons to involve youth in pregnancy prevention programs

1. Youth involvement itself can help prevent teen pregnancy.
2. Teens can design authentic programs that speak to their real needs.
3. Teen involvement may create a favorable reputation for a program among teens.
4. Teens themselves often are the best recruiters for a program.
5. Teens can help develop messages that make a difference.
6. Teens can help hire staff whom young people will respond to.
7. Teens can help design an accessible program. Teen suggestions for sites, activities, and hours of service will help create a program that works.
8. Teens can help keep a program strong. Regularly asking teens for feedback can help staff make the ongoing, small improvements that maintain a successful program.

and states have separate youth boards or councils whose role is to advise on issues and provide a youth perspective.

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### **Options for boards, committees, and advisory groups:**

- establishing an adolescent pregnancy prevention youth advisory board within an organization
  - establishing a youth planning committee to develop a youth-led program or project
  - teaching a cadre of young people about serving on local boards, helping to place them on a variety of boards, and providing ongoing support
  - developing a youth committee to review publications, meet with editorial boards, and comment on community events. Peer counselors, such as older adolescents or teen parents, work directly with other youth. Generally, they are assisted by one or more adults, who provide specific training. Regular support group meetings give them a further mechanism for discussing their work and learning new information.
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These groups are primarily made up of youth, but may include some adults. Local government can provide information on what already exists and can help

programs determine if there is a need for such a group in a particular area. A Massachusetts organization, **Youth on Board**, provides technical assistance and publications to help programs recruit youth to serve in these governance and advisory roles (see Resources for more information).

The **National 4-H Council** began gradually by adding two youths to its board, which was primarily composed of corporate members. The young representatives proved to be such a rich addition that the board later added two more and recently voted to increase the number to ten. Not only has the National 4-H Council board created a place for youth, they have committed to financially support youth participation in national board work. While some parts of the organization were skeptical in the beginning, the young members quickly proved their merit.

### **YOUTH CAN BE INVOLVED IN MANY WAYS**

- **boards, committees, and advisory groups**
- **peer counseling and education**
- **youth-led publications**
- **youth theater groups**
- **Internet and web site activities**
- **civic activism and media campaigns**
- **youth forums**
- **entrepreneurial programs**

An organization with a history of partnering with youth is the **National Network for Youth**, formally known as the National Network of Runaway and Youth Services. In addition to board, committee, and council representation, the Network features a strong youth presence at its annual symposium and includes youth as well as adult keynote addresses. The Network has a scholarship program that supports some youth participants. There are regional networks in every part of the country that provide technical assistance and may have resources to help programs.

Before enlisting youth to serve on boards or advisory groups, programs should find out whether there are any legal or other barriers. For example, many states require a person to be of voting age (18 years old) to serve on a board. To accommodate this requirement, programs can:

- develop a Memorandum of Understanding so youth can participate; or
- develop parallel youth and adult boards, with the youth board sending representatives to the adult board; the individual boards set priorities and then hold a “weaving session” to develop a common agenda.

### Peer counseling and education

Peer education can be considered a tiered youth involvement program. The first tier is the peer counselors and educators. They are the group most likely to benefit from the program because it offers them a chance to use their leadership skills, connect with adults, and feel they are performing a valuable service.

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#### Options for peer counseling and education:

- teaching in schools and shopping malls, on the streets, or in any number of other community locations
  - providing outreach in school or informal settings, such as churches, temples, or clubs
  - delivering adolescent pregnancy prevention information
  - working with younger adolescents
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### MEDIA LITERACY—A GREAT TOPIC FOR PEER EDUCATION

**Young people may not be aware of the messages they are receiving and how to dissect them. Peer-led discussion groups can address the role of TV shows, movies, magazines, and billboards in promoting:**

- **accurate (and inaccurate) images of males and females**
- **responsible (and irresponsible) sexual behavior**
- **violence**
- **substance abuse**

## A TIP FOR PUBLICATIONS WRITTEN BY AND FOR YOUTH IN HIGH-RISK SITUATIONS

**Use only the contributors' first names as bylines.**

The second tier consists of the youth they reach. Even though the contact may be too brief to make a lasting difference, the intervention can help with a short-term problem. Peer leadership can help to change the norms in a school and support teens in certain behaviors, even if the contact is short-lived.

Since 1995, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has been working cooperatively with 13 communities to delay adolescent pregnancy and childbearing. Youth development and involvement have been key components of the **CDC Community Coalition Partnerships Program for the Prevention of Teen Pregnancy**. In addition to peer counseling, young people help with needs assessments, resource mapping, and program planning, promotion, and implementation. Young people also help determine the “youth-friendliness” of some programs and services targeted to their age group by acting as clients. Staff share the findings with program managers and service providers, which leads to changes in program planning, training, services, and environment. They then issue a report to the service providers rating their “youth friendliness.”

Peer workers need thorough training and ongoing support. Without accurate information,

their influence can be more harmful than helpful.

### Youth-led publications

Youth can communicate on a variety of issues in a way that connects with other young people.

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#### Options for youth-led publications:

- creating an ongoing newspaper or magazine for youth by youth
- working with youth to write one-time publications, such as a comic book or brochure
- developing a creative writing publication that includes short stories, poetry, and art

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**Sex Etc.**, published by Rutgers University's Network for Family Life Education, is one example of youth-led journalism. The newspaper features sexuality and health stories written by teenagers for teenagers. It is available to youth at no cost.

Comic books designed and written by young people for young people can be effective and fun education tools. Over the years, young writers have crafted comic books about sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy prevention, and other topics. The

focus does not have to be adolescent pregnancy, but can be on other areas that interest young people. The publication can be a hook to draw youth into a discussion of teen pregnancy.

Some programs that work with youth in high-risk situations have developed excellent publications. These programs provide young people with a creative conduit to express the complex emotions they are experiencing. These can be juried and edited by a peer editorial board.

### Youth theater groups

Many young people love theater. It appeals to their natural sense of drama and allows a creative release for writing, editing, and stage design skills. For those youth who are outside the mainstream in school, theater can provide a way of staying connected.

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### Options for youth theater groups:

- beginning a youth theater troupe to perform at community events
  - working with young people to perform street theater
  - offering an intergenerational theater program
  - training young people to work with younger adolescents in interactive theater
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The Los Angeles Free Clinic sponsors a teen theater troupe called **Project ABLE** (AIDS Beliefs Learned through Education), which focuses on AIDS information and prevention.

Theater groups and approaches vary, and programs can focus on theater exercises or actually work toward putting on a public performance. One effective, and

## CASE IN POINT

### Two creative ways to help youth achieve meaningful involvement

- One community holds retreats to teach young people about governance structures, roles, and responsibilities. After this training, they meet weekly, before board meetings, to review and discuss the agenda. This helps youth prepare and participate more effectively.
- In another community, a board decided to provide adult mentors for each of its youth representatives. This worked so well, they expanded the program. Now, each new board member, regardless of age, gets an experienced board member as a mentor when he or she joins.

growing, approach is intergenerational theater.

The **Full Circle Theater**, operating out of the Temple University Center for Intergenerational Learning, boasts that its youngest actor is 15 and the oldest almost 90. The Theater performs interactive drama in schools, nursing homes, and other settings. Performances deal with tough topics such as aging, teen sexuality, and suicide. Discussions with the audience follow each performance.

Community theaters can be a good resource for information and assistance. They have a stage and may have volunteer actors and behind-the-scenes people who can work with a youth group. Another possibility is to integrate street performances into local festivals and art shows. A youth drama group can perform mime, act as clowns, or act out short skits. The local arts council can be a good resource and can work with programs to develop a schedule.

### Surfing the Internet and creating web pages

The World Wide Web has opened up a new universe of communication. Many young people are more comfortable with computers and know more about the Internet than do adults. A computer club can work with those teens who might otherwise be

left behind in the cyber-arena. A program can put up its own web page to advertise its publications, report on its work, or create an interactive section for teens to talk.

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#### Options for the Internet:

- working with young people to establish and maintain a web page
- using the Internet to connect one youth group with others
- using the computer as a vehicle for community service
- beginning a youth-run business creating web pages

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Teen participants in **Not Me, Not Now**, an abstinence program in Rochester, New York, have created an interactive web page: [www.notmenotnow.org](http://www.notmenotnow.org).

Baltimore's **Campaign for Our Children** has a web page and an on-line club house for adolescent discussion called Room 411 ([www.cfoc.org/room411](http://www.cfoc.org/room411)).

Programs can also use the Internet to connect their youth groups with other similar groups or to earn funds for activities by marketing their services in the community. For example, one California youth group charges a small fee to design web pages for nonprofits.

## KEEP IN MIND...

**not all home pages are appropriate for young surfers**

- **establish ground rules for what youth can view and what is best left alone**
- **consider “watchdog” software packages that block access to inappropriate pages**

- work with young people to make their views public
- involve young people in fundraising visits

Computers also provide an opportunity for intergenerational service and this may appeal to some programs.

The University of Pittsburgh’s **Generations Together** sponsors a program in which teens teach seniors how to access and surf the Internet. The program is so popular with seniors they have a hard time finding enough young people to participate.

Teens can become involved in any issue that concerns them—it does not have to be teen pregnancy. The connection to adults and community and the sense of value that young people will derive from working to benefit the community provide an important foundation that help young people make healthy choices and avoid too-early pregnancy.

From the start, **Earth Day** celebrations were planned with the involvement of all ages. In New Mexico, youth and older adults have successfully tackled several issues related to the environment. Currently they are working together to save whooping cranes.

### **Civic activism and media projects**

Young people can be powerful and persuasive speakers, whether addressing youth concerns or general community issues. They offer a new voice and often a fresh perspective. **Toastmasters** has a youth program and can provide help in establishing a young speaker’s program.

Young people can become involved in civic issues in various arenas. They can do the research and report their findings on a particular issue. They can meet with local newspaper editorial boards to discuss important community issues. They can also work with teachers, who are often looking for ways to link classroom lessons to real-world problems. In helping youth become involved, however, programs need to be sure to prepare youth properly, by making sure the youth are

#### **Options for civic activism:**

- develop a youth speakers’ bureau that can address a variety of topics, including teen pregnancy
- work with the media to use youth spokespeople
- involve youth in current issues in the community



briefed in advance on the issue and by helping them communicate their thoughts clearly.

Young people also can be good media spokespeople. Editors, researchers, producers, and writers often search for the “youth viewpoint.” While any one young person does not represent all young people, working as a spokesperson can be a good way for teens to express themselves. Print media, such as newspapers and magazines, or electronic media, such as radio and television, can offer opportunities for young people in a program. Local newspapers may have regular high school correspondents.

The **National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy** publishes a useful guide, *Sending the Message: State-Based Media Campaigns for Teen Pregnancy Prevention*, which describes the efforts of many media campaigns that involve young people in their planning and implementation.

### Youth forums

Town halls, youth summits, and focus groups all provide avenues for youth involvement.

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#### Options for youth forums:

- holding a town hall on adolescent pregnancy prevention

- planning a youth summit on general issues of concern to young people
- working with youth focus groups to provide guidance to proposed programs

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The **Community of Caring** in Kansas City, Missouri, uses this approach to integrate values in school curricula. Young people are brought together in student forums to share their ideas, experiences, and values with teachers, administrators, peers, and a variety of adults who represent the community. The meeting provides opportunities for participants to identify the difficult problems facing young people in school, family, and community. The meeting sets in motion active solutions to prevent and reduce the impact of the problems.

### Entrepreneurial programs

Young people say employment opportunities and preparation for future employment are major concerns. Developing a youth-run business can teach valuable skills and provide financial support to a program. Many

#### FOR MORE ON MEDIA

See **Chapter 15 (Volume 3), “Working With the Media to Promote Teen Pregnancy Prevention.”**

successful youth-run businesses exist around the country.

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**Options for entrepreneurial programs:**

- working with young people to develop a business plan for a youth-run business
- creating a youth-run business

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In Texas, one of Public/Private Ventures' **Community Change for Youth Development** projects helps young people run a concession stand in their Family Resource Center. They are responsible for maintaining the inventory and the accounts. They also meet as a group to decide how to spend the profits. In the warmer months they run a lawn care service.

In New Britain, Connecticut, the **Pathways Senders** program has embarked on a youth-run bulk mail service. The program trains young people in technology, postal regulations, and other areas of business operations, including marketing. The business not only provides revenue for their pregnancy prevention program, but also keeps older teens involved in the program, its values, and philosophy.

Venture capital can be a concern in developing youth entrepreneurial programs; it takes money to make money. Many business opportunities require that money

be invested in the beginning to buy inventory and equipment. Programs should consider approaching local businesses or civic organizations for a loan, grant, or donation of materials to help get the effort started.

Several international web sites give encouragement and advice to young entrepreneurs, including **Aboriginal Youth Business Council** ([www.aybc.org](http://www.aybc.org)) and **Canadian Youth Business Foundation** ([www.cybf.ca/frames/index.htm](http://www.cybf.ca/frames/index.htm)).

**Community service**

Many school districts now require students to perform community service in order to graduate. They hope to encourage life-long civic involvement. Programs should contact local school districts to obtain further details and to determine how to recruit students who will receive credit for community service.

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**Options for community service:**

- involving youth in efforts to combine service and learning
  - contacting national volunteer groups to begin a local chapter
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Several current national efforts have local or state chapters.

**America's Promise**, created at the April 1997 President's Summit for America's Promise in Philadelphia, encourages

youth and adults to volunteer in their communities. Many states have had or are planning to have their own summits.

Created in 1993, **The Corporation for National Service** is a public-private partnership that oversees **AmeriCorps** and **Learn and Serve America**. Learn and

Serve America provides models and assistance to help teachers integrate service and learning from kindergarten through college. State commissions on national and community service (which can be contacted through a governor's office or a state's higher education board) can provide more information on Learn and Serve America programs.

## Program strategies for involving youth in pregnancy prevention

Results of research and experience from many different types of youth development programs suggest a number of strategies for programs to follow in creating and sustaining meaningful youth involvement in pregnancy prevention initiatives. Some programs can start from scratch and can choose a locale best suited to kids, hire staff, and set teen-friendly hours; others have less flexibility because they are part of larger institutions or have other restrictions. Both types of programs should find the following strategies for involving youth helpful.

### **Plan deliberately**

Communities and organizations that are creating or expanding a teen pregnancy prevention effort—or a more general youth

development program—need to lay the groundwork for successful youth involvement.

### ***Determine what kind of program to offer***

Pregnancy prevention efforts do not necessarily need to be, and in some cases should not be, labeled as pregnancy prevention. Young people are more likely to come to the “Youth Leadership Club” than the “Let’s Not Get Pregnant Group.” They can tell their friends and family about the activity without feeling stigmatized.

### ***Listen to youth***

Before describing a program's goals, intentions, and activities or promising anything, its leaders need to make time to hear

what the young people in a community think. What is on their minds? What are their interests? What do they worry about?

Other ideas for listening to youth:

- get to know teens through their churches, schools, or other clubs or institutions;
- get to know youth workers and youth-serving organizations and talk to teens who are active in those groups;
- volunteer in a school or youth-serving organization;
- organize informal focus groups over pizza; and
- gather teens to provide feedback about the program and, more generally, talk about their lives and needs.

### ***Assess what the program has to offer teens***

Assessing the characteristics, talents, and resources of a pro-

gram and its staff and volunteers will help a program determine its focus, activities, and approaches. Staff in an existing program may be talented as artists, entrepreneurs, activists, or athletes. Or, a staff member or volunteer may be a teacher with lots of experience working with teens. The program may be housed in a church that does community service, or it may be a business looking for a way to become involved in the community. The program could be a newly established effort or be part of an existing teen pregnancy prevention or other youth program looking to strengthen its work. Whatever these special strengths, programs should know what they are so that they can be made available in a meaningful way to the young people in the target audience.

## CASE IN POINT

### **Creative listening**

One program staffer spent five evenings a week, including Fridays and Saturdays, on a town's main strip where young people hung around parking lots and drove their cars back and forth. Several months went by, and the teens realized that she was not going to go away. She wanted to talk with them about creating alternative recreation programs. The young people that

she recruited to help plan dances, car shows, and late night softball games would have never responded to a flyer posted at school or a story in the local newspaper. They did respond to her actual presence, her personal invitation, and the way she listened to their ideas and supported them as they designed their own activities.

### ***Plan for a multi-year commitment***

Sustained commitment is critical to the success of any teen pregnancy prevention work or youth development activity. To be effective, programs must be involved over the long term. Long-term involvement with a small group of young people will have far greater potential to prevent early pregnancy and other ills than large, one-time-only activities that last only a few months. Instability and change are not uncommon for young people and the participating young men and women need to know they can depend on the program to be there. Moreover, the underlying causes and attitudes that can lead to teen pregnancy are often complicated, and it would be unrealistic to think that a brief intervention could make much difference.

One highly-regarded program developed by Dr. Michael A. Carrera, Director of the **National Adolescent Sexuality and Pregnancy Prevention Training Center** at the Children's Aid Society in New York, begins with young people in the sixth grade and continues with them until they graduate from high school.

### ***Determine the target group of young people***

Programs need to tailor their approaches and activities to the

age group they plan to work with. Research suggests that preventing teen pregnancy requires interventions that begin sooner rather than later—waiting until teens are in high school may be too late. Part of designing an intervention is determining what age groups most need activities in the community. For example, most communities lack programs for late elementary and middle school youth. Yet these are the ages when young people most need support. Risky behavior, including sexual activity, first start at this age for many young people.

Other considerations include:

- Will it be possible to mix ages and backgrounds? Often, older teens will want to spend time with younger teens only if they are in a service or leadership role. For recreational or social activities, older teens would rather be with their own age.
- What are the social and economic backgrounds of youth in the community? Just like adults, youth will feel more comfortable spending time with young people from similar circumstances.
- What are the gang structures in the community? It's wise not to compromise the safety of young people by bringing together youth from different neighborhoods who, but for

## Before planning a youth program

- List five things staff members (or the organization) love to do.
  
- List five things staff members (or the organization) do well.
  
- What days and times of the week could staff members be available to work with young people?
  
- What age group would the organization prefer to work with?
  
- List others who could be recruited to participate.

the program, would not otherwise mix socially. The local police department's gang unit or officer who has responsibility for gang monitoring can be a good source of information on this issue.

### ***Learn from existing efforts***

Many community groups already work with or have access to young people. New programs being organized to reduce teen pregnancy may want to take advantage of the infrastructure, expertise, and community connections of existing efforts. These groups include, for example:

- schools, including alternative schools for youth who are not in mainstream settings;
- churches, temples, and other houses of worship;
- community-based organizations, such as YWCAs, YMCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, Girls Inc., Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, and Camp Fire Girls;
- government-funded groups, such as a County Extension's

4-H youth development program, youth employment programs, mayor's and governor's youth councils, juvenile court programs, foster care, and child welfare systems; and

- sports programs.

Programs focused on pregnancy prevention should consider attaching their efforts to existing organizations that promote positive youth development, especially because a broader youth development approach is increasingly recognized as effective in reducing teen pregnancy. Even if a formal association does not result, meetings with members of the groups to discuss ideas and learn about what they do will help a program refine its plans and determine whether it can go it alone or should operate inside an already existing organization.

### **Work with young people to create and sustain program efforts**

Outlined below are some of the many special considerations for

**JOINING WITH AN EXISTING ORGANIZATION THAT PROMOTES YOUTH DEVELOPMENT CAN BE A GOOD IDEA BECAUSE IT...**

- **enables faster start-up**
- **can provide an immediate source of credibility and trust with youth**
- **offers an existing knowledge base of best practices**
- **may offer risk management policies and practices**
- **may offer insurance**

## GOOD PLACES TO RECRUIT YOUTH

- **amusement parks**
- **concerts—especially flyers in the bathrooms**
- **outdoor skating parks and indoor rinks**
- **music stores**
- **schools and alternative schools**
- **parks and beaches**
- **shopping malls**
- **coffee shops**
- **movie theaters**

working with youth in a sustained and meaningful way.

### *Recruit a core group of young people who can recruit others*

Recruiting young people is not necessarily difficult, but it does usually require a personal invitation from an adult or a teen. Programs should start their recruitment efforts by building a core group of young people who can then reach out and involve

other youth. Peer recruitment can be effective and gives the recruiters a sense of ownership in the program. The message they give other teens about the program will be stated in a way that appeals to their peers.

A core group can also help programs identify where they should concentrate their recruitment efforts. These teens can help through a process called “youth mapping,” which involves developing a map of the area that highlights the various locations youth congregate. The map should include demographic information such as age, socioeconomic data, racial and ethnic make-up, and gang boundaries.

It may take several attempts for a core group to successfully reach out to their peers, especially ones who are socially isolated or disconnected. Staff can help the group persist and be creative. Young people have many demands on their time. They may or may not be in school. Some are so bright they find school boring and drop out. Others are slower and give up. They may spend time hanging out on the street, in malls, and at parks or coffee shops. They may or may not work, and they may have responsibilities at home for younger siblings or other family members. To make contact with youth, especially those who are not already

## PEOPLE WHO CAN HELP WITH RECRUITMENT

- **school activity directors**
- **school counselors**
- **special education teachers**
- **parents**
- **juvenile probation officers**
- **juvenile court judges and lawyers**
- **teachers in alternative schools**
- **police**
- **owners or managers of businesses that attract young people (music stores, clothing stores, coffee shops)**



participating in other youth development programs—and often more at risk of early pregnancy—programs will need to reach out and meet them on their own turf. Reaching higher-risk youth may well require intense efforts, but the difficulty of doing so should not be a deterrent. Disconnected youth are the teens most at risk, who often need attention and intervention the most, even if they don't know it yet. Persistence will pay off.

### ***Be a guide and a coach***

Young people need support in their leadership roles in programs. Often, the best way for adults to work with teens is to act as a guide or coach.

Sometimes young people in a program come up with ideas that staff may think are crazy. The goal should be to help the youth fully explore the merits and feasibility of an idea, not to make the decision for them. Staff should ask questions, probe gently, and help teens reach conclusions for themselves. Of course, there may be times when an adult needs to assert more direct authority.

Staff should ask the teens to help establish the goals and the rules under which the youth group will operate. This list can be posted at meetings or printed and included in materials group members receive. Teens will be more likely to follow the rules if they help decide what they are rather than have a list

## FIELD NOTES

### Getting started with young people

- Determine the general type and focus of the group you want to form.
- Work with your core group of young people to organize the first meeting or event.
- Get contact information on all those present and discuss how you can reach each other.
- Ask those who participate to help identify and recruit other young people.
- Follow up on commitments made during the first meeting or contact.
- Arrange to contact parents, school officials, or other responsible adults to tell them about the group, answer any questions, and provide contact information.

#### **If a youth involvement group is being formed within an existing program or organization, there may be some additional tasks:**

- Talk with adult staff about how the youth involvement program will benefit the organization.
- Train adult staff in how to bring in teen voices (see Ideas for Youth Involvement).

imposed on them. The group can then amend or change the rules as it evolves. Depending on the purpose of the group, rules may include:

- confidentiality—what is said in the group, stays in the group;
- mutual respect—each member is respected as an individual;
- value for each contribution—there are no dumb ideas;
- careful listening—each person will have an opportunity to talk and when not talking, will listen;
- promptness—meetings and other events will begin and end on time;
- no swearing;
- no gang colors or markings;
- no violence or weapons; and
- no drugs or alcohol—no one under the influence will be allowed to stay.

### ***Expect young people to outgrow the program***

Young people do not stay young forever. They grow up and become adults. One of the biggest challenges youth organizations face is losing teens as they progress into high school and beyond. A program may be well-received by a teenager for a year or two and then he or she will decide to move on to other things. Programs need to be continually reinvented. A good way to do this is to let the young people continue to change the program and recruit new members.

### **Make the program accessible and “teen-friendly”**

#### ***Arrange transportation***

How do young people get to the program? If it is located in an urban area with good mass transit, teens may need help covering the cost of public

## FIELD NOTES

## Considerations for adults in working with young people

**Listen openly to what young people have to say**—which may mean suspending judgment for awhile.

**Focus on building a relationship with the young people based on mutual respect**—respect is gained when it is given.

**Share information about themselves**—young people are curious about adults, how they think and how they make decisions; this kind of personal connection can be the most powerful part of a program for a young person.

transportation. Young people in smaller towns and rural areas face a major barrier when it comes to getting to and from activities. Middle school youth in particular may need help with carpooling and rides. Older youth may be able to share driving responsibilities.

**Survival Skills**, a collaboration between Planned Parenthood and the YWCA in Lincoln, Nebraska, that was replicating a teen pregnancy prevention program in New York, found that the program model was fine, but the lack of transportation locally was a big potential problem. They ended up using the YWCA's van to get young people to and from the program, but this required funds to pay for the driver and mileage.

If the program takes place right after school, transportation is

less of a problem because the young people will already be there. This frees staff to concentrate on how they will get home.

### ***Provide food***

Providing free food is a near-certain requirement for a well-attended meeting, particularly with young people. As with all other aspects of the program, staff should be sure to find out what the young people want—healthy snacks and meals may be preferable, but if that's not what they want, they won't eat it. If buying food is too costly, the group can work together to raise a little money for a food fund. Some young people or their families may be able to contribute personally, but others will not have the resources. Programs need to be sensitive to the individual situations of members.

## **Retaining youth is the key to success**

Recruitment is the easy part—the harder part is keeping young people involved. Young people are pulled in many directions. They may be in school full time. They may also work for pay part time or have other volunteer commitments. Sports, drama, church or temple, and clubs all vie for attention. And, just like adults, young people want to see their friends and have fun.

Recruitment and retention strategies work hand in hand.

Programs can successfully retain youth by:

- involving teens early in developing the program
- listening to their ideas
- remembering that the teens are equal partners
- accepting and caring about each teen
- encouraging staff to become trusted mentors
- having high expectations for each and every teen
- letting teens grow with—and out of—the program

### ***Arrange accessible meeting times and locations***

Young people should help determine meeting times. This may mean Saturday mornings or Friday nights. Recruit staff who are able to work during times they might normally save for themselves.

Program times also will depend on the age group. Young adolescents may not be able to stay out as late as older teens. Friday nights can be bad during football season and Wednesdays, a traditional church night, can be bad all year round. Once established, the meeting time and day should stay the same unless the group requests a change. The location may also help staff determine the hours—some areas may not be safe after dark, for instance.

If a program is partnering or working with the support of an existing youth group, such as a YWCA, YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, religious institution, school, community theater, or community center, space may already be available for the program. If there is a fee involved, the existing organization may be willing to waive it as part of their contribution to the program. When choosing a particular space, programs should consider the following:

- Does the space need to be swept and cleaned up afterward?
- Will there be heat or air conditioning?
- How will participants and leaders lock up when they are done?
- Will young people be able to safely wait around outside for their transportation?
- Is it safe to walk to the subway?
- Is it on a bus line?
- Is it in any gang's territory that would keep it from being safe for all the young people who might be involved?

## Conclusion

Chances are that in every successful person's youth an adult stepped forward to make a difference. The adults who staff pregnancy prevention programs have a chance to be that adult for a young person, a chance to change someone's life. Teens need adult involvement. They

need adults to care enough to provide the safe environment that is necessary for learning, growth, and development. Involving youth in meaningful and significant ways in planning and carrying out programs can ensure that all young people get a vital chance to succeed.

## Programs and resources mentioned in this chapter

### **America's Promise**

909 N. Washington St., Suite 400  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
(888) 55-YOUTH  
[www.americaspromise.org](http://www.americaspromise.org)  
Newsletter, information about local and national activities.

### **Campaign for Our Children**

120 W. Fayette St., Suite 1200  
Baltimore, MD 21201  
(410) 576-9000  
[www.cfoc.org/room411](http://www.cfoc.org/room411)

### **CDC Community Coalition Partnerships Program for the Prevention of Teen Pregnancy**

Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
4770 Buford Highway NE  
Atlanta, GA 30341-3724

### **Community of Caring**

1325 G St., NW, #500  
Washington, DC 20005  
(202) 824-0215

### **Corporation for National Service**

1201 New York Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20525  
[www.nationalservice.org](http://www.nationalservice.org)  
AmeriCorps and Learn and Serve America information.

### **Full Circle Theater**

Center for Intergenerational Learning  
Temple University  
1601 North Broad St., Room 206  
Philadelphia, PA 19122  
(215) 204-6970

### **Generations Together**

University of Pittsburgh  
121 University Place  
Pittsburgh, PA 15260  
(412) 648-7150

### **National 4-H Council**

7100 Connecticut Ave.  
Chevy Chase, MD 20815-4999  
(301) 961-2800  
[www.fourhcouncil.org](http://www.fourhcouncil.org)

**National Network for Youth**

1319 F St., NW, Suite 401  
 Washington, DC 20004  
 (202) 783-7949  
[www.nn4youth.org](http://www.nn4youth.org)

Regional networks and individual members; new training/consultation subsidiary called Strategic Innovations Group; national conference. The National Network also publishes *New Designs for Youth Development*, a quarterly journal dedicated to voicing progressive, humane, and caring approaches to the development of youth and community. Annual subscription rate: \$29.

**Not Me, Not Now**

John Riley, Director  
 Monroe County Department of Communications and Special Events  
 39 W. Main St., Suite 204  
 Rochester, NY 14614  
 (716) 428-2380  
[www.notmenotnow.org](http://www.notmenotnow.org)

**Pathways Senderos**

Greater New Britain Teen Pregnancy Prevention, Inc.  
 100 Arch St.  
 New Britain, CT 06051  
 (860) 229-2776

**Project ABLE**

Mill Street Loft  
 20 Maple St.  
 Poughkeepsie, NY 12601  
 (914) 471-7477

**Public/Private Ventures**

One Commerce Square  
 2005 Market St., Suite 900  
 Philadelphia, PA 19103  
 (215) 557-4400

Publications and information on mentoring, including information on its Community Change for Youth Development project.

**Search Institute**

Thresher Square West  
 Suite 210  
 700 South Third St.  
 Minneapolis, MN 55415  
 (612) 376-8955  
[www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org)

Healthy community characteristics, developmental asset framework, publications, training.

***Sending the Message: State-Based Media Campaigns for Teen Pregnancy Prevention***

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy  
 2100 M St., NW, Suite 300  
 Washington, DC 20037  
 (202) 261-5655

***Sex Etc. (a free newsletter for teens by teens)***

Network for Family Life Education  
 Rutgers University  
 Building 4161  
 Livingston Campus  
 New Brunswick, NJ 08903  
 (732) 445-7929  
 (732) 445-4154 Fax  
[sxetc@rci.rutgers.edu](mailto:sxetc@rci.rutgers.edu)

**Youth on Board**

58 Day St., Third Floor  
 Somerville, MA 02144  
 (617) 623-9900

Technical assistance and publications, including the new book, *Youth Governance: 14 Points to Involving Young People Successfully on Boards of Directors*.

## Other helpful resources

### **Academy for Educational Development**

Center for Youth Development and Policy Research  
Academy for Educational Development  
1875 Connecticut Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20009-1202  
(202) 884-8267  
email: cyd@aed.org

Youth development publications, free *Center Connections* quarterly newsletter.

### **Advocates for Youth**

1025 Vermont Ave., NW, Suite 200  
Washington, DC 20005  
(202) 347-5700

Mentoring clearinghouse, annual conference, resource library, publications.

### ***Lessons for Lifeguards: Working with Teens When the Topic Is Hope***

Donkey Press  
PO Box 20583  
New York, NY 10021-0071

An inspirational book by Dr. Michael A. Carrera for people who care about teens.

### **National Youth Leadership Council**

1910 West County Road B  
St. Paul, MN 55113  
www.nylc.org

Service learning, conference, publications, clearinghouse.

### ***The New Community Collaboration Manual***

The National Assembly  
1319 F St., NW, Suite 601  
Washington, DC 20004  
(202) 347-2080

Includes a chapter on youth involvement.

### ***Reducing the Risk: Connections that Make a Difference in the Lives of Youth***

Add Health  
c/o Burness Communications  
7910 Woodmont Ave., Suite 1401  
Bethesda, MD 20814

Research based on the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health published in 1997.

### ***Some Things Make a Difference for Youth: A Compendium of Youth Programs and Practices***

American Youth Policy Forum  
1001 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 719  
Washington, DC 20036-5541  
(202) 775-9731

### ***Young and Old Serving Together: Meeting Community Needs through Intergenerational Partnerships***

Generations United  
440 First St., NW, Suite 480  
Washington, DC 20001  
(202) 662-4283  
www.gu.org