

Getting Your Community Involved in a Teen Pregnancy Prevention Project

Introduction

The first step to take in establishing a teen pregnancy program of any size is to identify a start-up group. Why? Because the most promising teen pregnancy prevention programs have intensive contact with teens, conduct a range of activities, obtain secure funding, and are around for a long time. These qualities are virtually impossible to create in a small, isolated program.

A start-up group will give you a structure within which to begin planning your program strategies and components. It also will give you the means to:

- build support for your project among community members;
- listen to the community's concerns and feedback;
- conduct a needs and assets assessment in order to refine your initial idea to fit your community; and
- secure resources for your work.

For many initiatives, a start-up group will be composed of a small group of core supporters who have expertise essential to your program and good links to the broader community—six to

ten people, but not more than twenty. Over time, as the initiative develops, the start-up group will broaden in scope and membership to include a more diverse community membership. It will also begin to focus on long-range planning, program maintenance, and evaluation issues.

Forming and beginning a start-up group involves a series of relatively straightforward tasks, including:

- identifying potential members;
- determining the nature of the group;
- creating the group;
- determining the group's work; and
- launching the group's activity.

In thinking about how you will proceed, consider:

- How much time will you have to devote to the effort? It is better to do something small

Reaching out to partners through a start-up group will help you build a more robust initiative, whether you focus on a single classroom or an entire state.

and successful than to spread yourself too thin. You can build on your successes in the future.

- How long do you think your effort should last? It is perfectly fine to start with a brief project to test the waters before proceeding to a long-term commitment.
- How official do you want your group to be?

- What will be the range of the group's activity? Will you focus on one particular task or take on related tasks that require a different set of partners?
- What financial and in-kind resources are available?

The following sections will take you through the tasks involved in creating a start-up group.

Identify potential members of your start-up group

Anyone starting a teen pregnancy prevention program will first need to identify people who can serve on a start-up group. These individuals should include natural allies as well as those who may have differing perspectives and

positions on teen pregnancy prevention, but who nonetheless could be valuable members of a community initiative on this issue.

Identify natural allies

The following questions can help you identify the individuals and organizations that are your natural allies:

- What kinds of activities do you think can make a difference in preventing teen pregnancy?
- What group of young people will you focus on?
- In what ways are they at risk for teen pregnancy?

HERE'S A WAY TO IDENTIFY NATURAL ALLIES

Think through the logic of the problem you are trying to solve:

- **If you are trying to make a clinic more accessible to teens, and transportation is a barrier, *city transportation officials* are natural allies.**
- **If you are trying to start a mentoring program in a neighborhood, involve *principals from schools* in the neighborhood.**

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON INVOLVING KEY PLAYERS...

See all the chapters in Volume 2.

- What is missing in their lives and communities that puts them at risk?
- How can your work produce a change in behavior that will lead these young people to a lower risk for teen pregnancy (for example, increasing the number of teenagers who delay sexual activity, and/or who consistently use birth control if they are sexually active)?

What do your answers tell you about the people you need at the table?

Identify existing organizations working on teen pregnancy

Make sure you are aware of other teen pregnancy prevention activities in the community before you leap in. Avoid reinventing the wheel and stepping on the toes of other organizations. Learn from the successes and failures of other projects. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What is the history of pregnancy prevention activities in the community? What strategies have been tried in the past? What has been learned?
- Who or what groups or agencies are currently concerned about the issue? Who participated in the past?

- What other youth-focused networks, collaborative efforts, and coalitions already exist in the community? Which of these groups, if any, could take on adolescent pregnancy prevention? Are there ways to collaborate or even combine forces?

Identify less obvious but still important partners

Finally, think of groups that are not always at the table when teen pregnancy prevention is discussed. Consider reaching out to members of the community who may not have been involved in the past, but whose skills and roles may help to increase the importance of teenage pregnancy prevention in your community.

Establish a group that reflects the types of activities that you wish to pursue. For example, if you want to focus on helping teens believe in and prepare for their future, plan on engaging the business sector in your community and select a well-respected businessman or woman to join or chair your group—his or her help in organizing career-centered programs or job training will be invaluable.

Determine the nature of your start-up group

There are a number of different options for organizing your group. The list in the box below shows the range of group structures that states and communities typically create. Consider what makes sense for your own community. You can also create your own structure by combining elements from these options.

Temporary group

This option may be attractive if you feel that you have a relatively small task to accomplish and you want the flexibility to decide later whether the group will become more permanent. For example, a temporary group may come together to conduct a community needs assessment or to sponsor special events to celebrate **Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month** in May as a

means of raising community awareness.

A temporary group may also attract certain members who may be concerned about committing themselves to long timelines or intensive activities, but who are able to provide their skills and talents for at least some time.

Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month activities may include, for example, special school assemblies, community health fairs, television or radio shows, and public service announcements developed by a small group of professionals or volunteers.

Subcommittee of an existing organization

An organization working on a wide set of issues may create a subcommittee on teen pregnancy. For example, a children's advocacy group or a child and family coalition may be a good home for a teen pregnancy prevention initiative. In this arrangement, the parent organization exercises oversight of the teen pregnancy prevention work. The subcommittee may develop activities to be carried out by the larger organization. Being part of a larger organization

TYPES OF START-UP GROUPS

- **temporary group**
- **subcommittee of an existing organization**
- **expansion in scope of an existing group**
- **ongoing ad hoc group (public sector)**
- **agency- or organization-based coalition**
- **independent coalition**
- **government-mandated group**

may give the teen pregnancy initiative additional influence. It may also place limits on the kinds of activities the initiative can undertake.

Children's Alliance of Idaho, which works on a wide range of issues affecting children and youth, has developed a committee on teen pregnancy prevention.

Expansion in the scope of work of an existing organization or coalition

Your community may support an informal network that is already focused on adolescents and wants to expand its activities. For example, a network of groups may have focused on the needs of pregnant and parenting adolescents, and may feel ready to focus on adolescent pregnancy prevention. Perhaps your community already has a logical umbrella group to help sponsor a specific adolescent pregnancy prevention coalition.

A statewide, voluntary coalition in California expanded its focus to include pregnancy prevention as part of its activities to assist pregnant and parenting teenagers.

Ongoing ad hoc group (public sector)

Another type of informal group often found in the public sector may involve a number of similar agencies—health departments and other health programs in

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES...

Of a subcommittee

Opportunities: added influence from links with larger organization
Challenges: potential for limits on activities

Of an ongoing ad hoc group

Opportunities: relatively low costs; informal structure; potential for good coordination
Challenges: limited decision-making power

the community, for example—that meet on a monthly or quarterly basis for a specific purpose (such as improving adolescent health clinic services in the community). Or, it may involve a diverse group of agencies, all of which are concerned with adolescents. There is usually less commitment to securing wider community involvement, such as that from teenagers and parents, for example, than with permanent or more formal groups.

The key element of an ongoing ad hoc group is that the structure remains fairly informal. Costs are relatively low, and staff members who come together tend to be agency employees. The group may rotate responsibility for calling and hosting meetings.

While this type of group is helpful in assuring relatively well-coordinated services, its structure tends to have limited decision-making power.

In Austin, Texas, a coalition of several public and private

agencies meets periodically to share information and develop strategies to prevent teen pregnancy.

Agency- or organization-based coalition

A formally designated lead agency within the public sector—a health department or a department of social services, for example—may establish a special coalition whose membership is made up of a diverse group of agencies that serve adolescents. The coalition may have one primary sponsor or may share sponsorship. Their activities may range from joint fundraising so that additional resources are available for youth, to joint development of agency policies. A disadvantage of this structure may be the necessity of requiring individual members to obtain approval from their individual parent organizations to proceed. As each member may have a different governing bureaucracy, it may delay the work of the coal-

tion. However, the possibility of multiple agencies working together under one structure can ease and encourage the joint planning and development of either new programs and strategies or better coordination of existing efforts.

HEART of OKC, a project of the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy, works with a broad range of community partners that serve various social and ethnic groups in the community. The planners conducted a needs and assets assessment, developed neighborhood youth and adult task forces, and designed a program linking teen pregnancy prevention with a larger focus on youth development.

Independent coalition

An independent, private sector coalition at the local or state level is a more formal structure. It will likely include its own coordinator and other staff to assure that the goals of the coalition emphasize bringing a variety of individuals and community groups together. Funding for an independent coalition often depends on in-kind contributions and other sources of funding to support various activities. This structure, however, does hold promise for accomplishing a great deal by bringing together valuable resources, creating public and private partnerships, and implementing

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES...

Of an agency-based coalition

Opportunities: availability of resources from larger organizations; improved coordination of programs/strategies
Challenges: need for members to get approval from parent organizations

Of an independent coalition

Opportunities: potential for big impact
Challenges: dependence on outside sources for funding and support

a variety of strategies that go beyond the purview of only one type of organization or public agency. For example, the states of North Carolina and Georgia have established this type of coalition model.

North Carolina has developed a statewide group, the **Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Coalition of North Carolina**, as well as local community coalitions to focus on preventing teen pregnancy. As an umbrella, non-governmental group, the statewide coalition sponsors annual conferences, provides special training and consultation to the local coalitions, and serves as a clearinghouse of information.

The Georgia Campaign for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (G-CAPP) works statewide to reduce teen pregnancy. A non-profit agency, G-CAPP employs print, radio,

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES...

Of a government-initiated structure

Opportunities: high visibility and clout that can boost potential impact
Challenges: formal structure; strict reporting requirements

and television to reach its audiences of parents, teachers, youth, legislators, advocates, and other groups working to prevent teen pregnancy.

Government-initiated or mandated structure

Sometimes, a legislature or governor decides on the type of group that should be set up. A government-initiated structure tends to be more formal than the other models. It is generally created to carry out a specific set of goals and objectives. A group such as a Governor's Task Force or a County Supervisor's Task Force has specific responsibilities and often needs to report its results to a governing organization, such as a county board of supervisors. Timelines and funding for such efforts are often dependent on the elected

FIELD NOTES

Considerations in creating a start-up group

- Be sure to identify the informal leaders in the community you want to work with. Do not limit yourself to those leaders with official titles.
- Do not pull people together prematurely. Nurture your relationships through one-on-one meetings first.
- Do not let the professionals control a meeting where community residents—including teens and parents—are present.
- Listen to community members. Learn their specific concerns and be responsive to them, so that you and your initiative will be well-regarded.

leadership and often represent a significant commitment. In spite of these potential limitations, the highly visible nature of this type of structure, as well as the public clout it receives because of its sponsorship, greatly enhances the group's ability to gain attention and make major inroads.

In the state of Maryland, the Governor played an important role in establishing the state-wide coalition.

New York City initially established a Mayor's Council on Adolescent

Pregnancy Prevention, which over time has evolved into a broader group, the **Mayor's Council on Children and Youth**. In this case, teen pregnancy prevention is seen as one of a cluster of important issues affecting young people.

Needless to say, there are many ways to get organized, and, regardless of how you start out, your group will undoubtedly change over time. Remain flexible and focused on your goal of assuring that teens have a pregnancy-free adolescence.

Create your start-up group

Select members

Look through your list of potential members. Consider the mix of stakeholders and skills you need to develop and carry out the various components of your program. For example, if you are planning a needs assessment, make sure to include a member with data analysis skills or be prepared to hire a consultant with those skills. Include someone who has media skills if that activity will be part of your work.

Sometimes choices are limited. For example, if a coalition or task force is set up by legislation or executive order, membership

may be spelled out quite specifically. Even then, however, it may be possible to add needed members or set up various committees or groups to provide missing perspectives.

It is important to also consider whose support you need to make the group successful. Remember to reach out to members of the community who may not have been involved in the past, but who can help increase the visibility of teen pregnancy prevention in your community.

This initial group should include representatives from the follow-

ing categories as appropriate. Individuals may fit more than one category:

- teenagers;
- parents;
- teen pregnancy prevention organizations;
- health care and social service providers;
- youth-serving or youth development organizations;
- faith communities;
- educational institutions;
- businesses;
- the philanthropic community;
- media; and
- policymakers, elected officials, and state, city, or county administrators.

Apart from contributing experience and expertise in a range of areas, members of the group should ideally:

- share basic beliefs about the need to reduce adolescent pregnancy in your community; the members can and should, however, vary in the details of *how* they think teen pregnancy should be addressed;
- represent a wide array of community interests;

STEPS IN CREATING A START-UP GROUP

- **select members**
- **match members' skills to tasks**
- **choose a leader**
- **invite members**
- **plan for staff support**
- **set initial meetings**
- **establish ground rules**

- be strongly committed to preventing teen pregnancy and be willing to commit time to the work;
- be influential enough to be able to overcome inevitable obstacles; and
- be willing to provide constructive comments on the proposed program itself and on its implementation.

Once you have compiled a list of members that you will be inviting, consider the overall mix. You want to include a diversity of individuals, backgrounds, and perspectives, but you also want to create a group that will be able to work together effectively. Making wise decisions now

KEY ATTRIBUTES OF A START-UP GROUP

- **shared concerns about teen pregnancy**
- **varied approaches to problem-solving**
- **wide representation of community interests**
- **strong commitment to prevention**
- **ability to be influential**
- **willingness to be constructive**

about the right balance of people within your group will reduce major conflict down the line.

Match individuals' skills to the work

Once you have thought about the mix of people you would like to invite, consider the tasks the group will carry out and the roles of individual members. The planning group can be used to:

- conduct a needs and assets assessment of the community;
- clarify the initiative's goals and objectives;
- develop an organizational structure;
- create strategies and a plan of action;
- build community support; and
- generate resources.

Make sure that members will be able to carry out the work you envision for the type of group you are establishing. For example, if you will be establishing an independent coalition to carry out a media campaign, someone on your list should have fundraising experience and public relations skills. Some members should also have media expertise.

Choose a leader

You should choose a dynamic person to lead your start-up group. A well-connected leader

will raise the visibility of your work and help you attract other participants. Your leader should be well respected by many of the other leaders you want to attract and be available to provide concrete help. Be sure to provide good staff support for your leader.

The leader may head an agency, business, or other organization that wants to take the lead for or otherwise house the project.

Invite members

The way you reach out to potential participants can help build cohesion and commitment. Before you actually issue invitations, be sure to meet one-on-one with potential members to seek their advice and determine their interest in joining. You may choose to request someone well known or prestigious in the community—the mayor, for example—to formally issue an invitation to potential members of the working group. Think carefully about who should invite whom in your community. Make sure everyone gets a formal written invitation to participate.

Create a sense of excitement and energy in your letter of invitation. Explain clearly what the group will attempt to accomplish and why it is being formed now. Provide details about the type of group it will be and explain existing financial and

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES AND CHOOSING A LEADER...

See Chapter 13 (Volume 3), “Planning and Carrying out a Teen Pregnancy Prevention Project.”

other support. You may also want to include other details, such as information about other members who have agreed to join, or about the leader you have selected.

Plan for staff support

Many of the activities that the group will undertake will require staff support. If a public agency is involved in the start-up group—or perhaps even leading it—public funds might be available to underwrite needed staff. The more formal the structure, the more likely it will be that funding for a coordinator will be needed. Providing appropriate staff support is crucial to the success of your efforts. Without someone to do the nitty-gritty work—making the calls, writing the funding proposals, organizing the meetings—even the most energetic group will founder.

Look for the following qualities in a staff member:

- strong interpersonal skills, including high-level skills in mediating, listening, and leading;
- commitment to a comprehensive and community-oriented adolescent pregnancy prevention strategy;
- an understanding of the challenging nature of the position;

- relevant work experience that provides an understanding of the physical and mental health needs of youth and familiarity with other pregnancy prevention efforts;
- familiarity with the community, its local politics, and its formal and informal leaders;
- enthusiasm for the project and an ability to engage others in the project; and
- proposal writing skills, including how to contact public and private sources, develop grant proposals, and negotiate support from state and private agencies, such as foundations.

Examples of a staff person’s main tasks include:

- support the work of the start-up group, including conducting the needs and assets assessment if the group establishes this activity as a priority (strongly recommended);
- maintain liaison with community agencies and other participants; and
- help the group to move forward with its agenda.

Set your initial meeting(s)

You may wish to hold a series of small meetings as the start-up group first gets organized and then convene larger, more inclusive meetings once the group is well-established. Select a time and place that is as convenient as possible for your planning group. For example, if you plan to invite members of the business community, you may choose to begin with a series of breakfast or lunch meetings. If your group includes many parents, you may need to offer a meal and childcare.

Choose a convenient location

Choose a convenient community site in which to hold your meeting. Consider the composition of the group and identify a central location with adequate parking or public transportation. Plan to provide food for the meeting as an additional incentive. Eventually, once membership is established, work with the group to define where it is most convenient for the largest number of members to meet, as well as the best time for meetings.

Develop an agenda

Thoroughly prepare for the group's first meeting. In planning your agenda, consider where you want the group to be at the end of the meeting. Your agenda may include:

- providing an overview of your community's adolescents and the magnitude of the teen pregnancy problem;
- making the case for an intensified effort to reduce teen pregnancy;
- developing a preliminary set of priorities and program ideas for guiding the community's effort to reduce teen pregnancy; and
- agreeing on next steps in order to move forward.

Establish ground rules

Developing a set of ground rules will help assure a successful effort. A small subset of members can draft this set of guidelines. One of the most important ground rules is how your group will make decisions. For example, the group should decide whether to require a majority vote or consensus for every decision, the types of decisions the full group (versus subcommittees) will need to make, and how often the group will meet.

Other issues to decide include:

- who will represent the group to the media and under what circumstances;
- how funds will be raised;
- what spending priorities will be followed;

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON CREATING GROUND RULES...

See Chapter 17 (Volume 3), “Moving Forward in the Face of Conflict.”

- how long the start-up group will last; and
- terms of office for leaders and members.

The group should set a regular interval, such as once a year, to

revisit the ground rules and evaluate whether they still meet the group's needs.

Determine the group's ongoing work

It is helpful for your group to anticipate the ways you will work together. Have the members discuss the kinds of activities they want to take on.

What follows is a range of typical activities for a teen pregnancy initiative. This list was adapted from one developed by the **Minnesota Organization of Adolescent Pregnancy, Prevention, and Parenting (MOAPPP)**:

- establishment and support of local adolescent pregnancy prevention councils
- research and evaluation
- needs assessment
- publications development
- program development
- training workshops
- facilitation of networking among professionals
- youth involvement
- work in partnership with other prevention efforts
- conferences
- newsletters
- public awareness campaigns
- community events
- public education
- advocacy for youth-oriented public policy
- advocacy for coordinated services and funding
- fundraising

Conclusion

With appropriate planning, clarity about next steps, well-defined activities, and specifically designated individuals to implement efforts, you are now ready to begin. Establishing your start-up group and beginning the planning process are important steps, but do not let them be

your ending point. They are a means to an end for implementing specific actions that will improve the lives of young people in your community.

FIELD NOTES

Mistakes to avoid when organizing a teen pregnancy prevention group

- Neglecting to involve, or at least advise, key people in the community about the group.
- Spending too long (e.g., six months or more) trying to define the group's purpose.
- Beginning with a needs assessment study that takes a year and precludes other decisions or actions from taking place.
- Becoming preoccupied with organizational structure, including by-laws, without working on the actual agenda of the group.
- Developing a beautiful plan, but neglecting to assign responsibility for carrying it out.
- Neglecting to assign deadlines or at least target dates.
- Failing to develop the ability to deal with hard issues, such as group leadership and agency "turf," or the potential controversy of some solutions.
- Turning into a discussion rather than an action group.
- Failing to build in a process for self-evaluation.
- Losing sight of the young people the group is supposed to serve.
- Allowing only a vocal minority to dictate policy or action; in other words, failing to engage all sectors of the community.
- Taking on a highly controversial strategy before developing credibility in the community.
- Allowing one agency to dominate or control the group.
- Failing to rotate members off the board of directors.
- Failing to establish decision-making rules, such as *Roberts' Rules of Order*.
- Trying to achieve a 100 percent agreement on every decision or issue every time.
- Failing to have fun and forgetting to celebrate successes.

Source: Huberman, 1994, Unpublished materials developed for the Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Coalition of North Carolina.

The next chapter focuses on conducting a needs assessment. Whether you formally conduct an assessment or not, be sure to gather in-depth information about your community. This first-priority task is important to

make certain that your efforts to put your program in place will occur in a manner that is tailored to the needs and characteristics of your community and is acceptable to its members.

Programs mentioned in this chapter

California Alliance Concerned with School Age Parenting and Pregnancy Prevention

5714 Folsom Blvd., #218
Sacramento, CA 95819
(916) 454-1450
Fax: (916) 454-3478
Email: info@cacsap.org

HEART of OKC

Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy
Sharon Rodine, Project Director
420 NW 13th St., Suite 101
Oklahoma City, OK 73103
(405) 236-5437
Fax: (405) 236-1690
Email: sjrodine@aol.com

Governor's Office for Children, Youth, and Families

301 West Preston St.
Suite 1502
Baltimore, MD 21201
(410) 767-6231
Fax: (410) 333-7492

Minnesota Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Prevention, and Parenting (MOAPPP)

Donna Fishman
P.O. Box 40392
St. Paul, MN 55104
(651) 644-1447
Toll Free in MN (800) 657-3697
Fax: (651) 644-1417
www.cyfc.umn.edu/moapppp/

Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Coalition of North Carolina

10001 Main St., Suite D
Southern Village
Chapel Hill, NC 27516
(919) 932-9885
Fax: (919) 932-7223

Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month

National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy
2100 M St., NW, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20037
(202) 261-5655
Fax: (202) 331-7735
www.teenpregnancy.org

Advocates for Youth

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

Resources

*Community Empowerment Manual:
Helping Solve the Puzzle of Teen
Pregnancy Prevention for the
Community and Policy Makers*

Minnesota Organization on
Adolescent Pregnancy, Prevention,
and Parenting
P.O. Box 40392
St. Paul, MN 55104
(651) 644-1447
Toll Free in MN (800) 657-3697
Fax: (651) 644-1417
www.cyfc.umn.edu/moapp/

This is a how-to manual of community organizing and also includes background information on advocacy and best practices.

See also the resources on community organization and coalition development listed in Chapter 13, “Planning and Carrying Out a Teen Pregnancy Prevention Project” p. 69.