

- Work with local family planning providers, pediatricians, ob/gyn, and other health care providers in areas of Berkshire County where family planning services are limited to ensure adolescents are maximizing the health care access to confidential contraceptive services in the community.
- Work with health care providers to ensure services are youth-centered and culturally relevant, that reproductive health and contraception is available in youth-appropriate setting (easy to get to, open the right hours, staff trained in adolescent health), and that messages and care that resonate with youths' culture.
- Review school district policies related to access to condoms, contraceptives, and sexual health through existing health services in schools. The data shows that many youth and adults support increasing access to sexual health services for teens through school.
- Establish community-wide support for youth use of contraception and sexual health services, through engagement of youth, parents, schools, community organizations, and other businesses.

3. Perception of opportunity and hope for a bright future

Absent the *motivation* to delay sex and prevent pregnancy, young people remain at risk even if sex education and contraceptives are available. Connection to schools, parents, and other caring adults, and opportunities to contribute and be engaged in the community are protective. Clear, viable pathways to adult identity and future goals are the basis for motivation to delay sex and parenting.

Berkshire youth and adults recommend

- Safe space that is youth friendly that teens can go to and talk about these issues
- More positive youth development programs that are attractive to teens
- Need for teen to learn from people with experience
- Youth employment
- Community engagement

Strategies

- Align the county-wide response to teen pregnancy with other youth-focused initiatives in order to leverage resources and talents in the community. The Ready by 21 framework, developed by the Forum for Youth Investment is an innovative approach to community wide change for young people.
- Deliver the message that every young person matters. Create a plan for positive youth development that includes increasing the capacity of existing youth programs and adults working with youth.
- Engage youth and parents in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the county-wide responses to teen pregnancy.
- Engage adolescents in workforce development to ensure they have a plan and vision for their future, including youth jobs, internships, and programs that broaden their exposure to opportunities.
- Provide opportunities for adolescents to identify clear, viable pathways to adult identities and future goals – not one-size-fits-all but specific to each – and engage youth in the planning of these opportunities.

Partners:

Berkshire Bank Foundation
 Berkshire County Chapter of the American Red Cross
 Berkshire County Commission on the Status of Women
 Berkshire Health Systems
 Berkshire Hills Regional School District
 Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation
 Berkshire United Way
 Gladys Allen Brigham Center/Girl's Inc.
 Helen Berube Teen Parent Program

North Adams Public Schools
 Northern Berkshire Community Coalition
 Northern Berkshire Healthcare
 Northern Berkshire United Way
 Pittsfield Public Schools
 Railroad Street Youth Project
 Tapestry Health
 US Representative John Olver's Office

4/27/11



Teenage pregnancy is a complex social issue that requires a community response. There is a role for everyone teens interact with - teachers, adults at youth centers, parents, medical providers, coaches, faith leaders, employers - to be part of the solution. Key to community success in these efforts is the youth themselves.

What's the impact of births to teens? Why should you care?

- Teen parenthood is a leading reason 26% of students in the U.S. dropout of school each year, in MA this accounts for approximately 2,600 high school drop-outs each year. Teen parenthood is the *primary* cause of dropout among girls.
- A child has a 27% chance of growing up in poverty if the mother gives birth as a teen. If the mother also does not have a high school diploma or GED, the chance of child poverty increases to 42%.
- Six in 10 community college students who have a child after enrolling fail to complete their education—65% higher than the rate for those who don't have children.

Teenage Pregnancy in Berkshire County: Trending in the Wrong Direction

2003 : Joanna Lipper releases "Growing Up Fast." Chronicling the lives of six Pittsfield teen parents, it correlates teenage pregnancy to poverty, school failure and drug trafficking and provides insights into how the local community may have created a culture accepting of teenage parenthood. The book cites national research and recommendations from experts in the field of teenage pregnancy prevention.

2008: Although "Growing up Fast" could have been seen as a call to action, by 2008 the teen birth rate in Pittsfield and Berkshire County actually increased, while the state, national and international rates decreased.

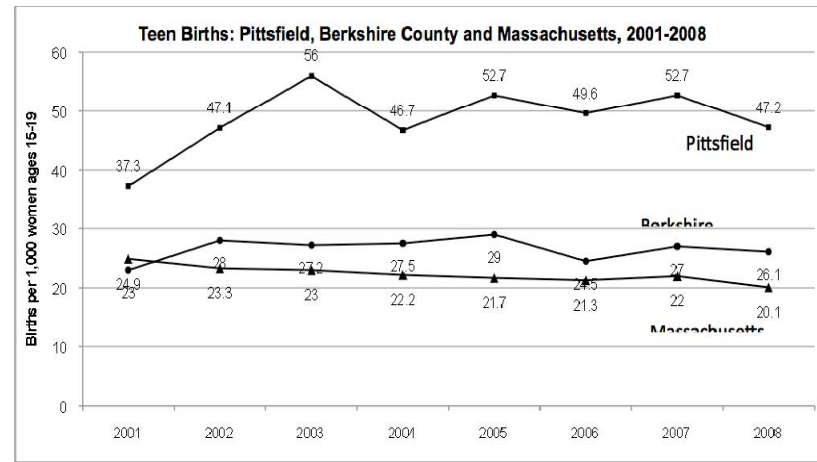
2009: Berkshire United Way (BUW) commissions the first Berkshire Benchmarks report, which provides a snapshot of regional community conditions – both positive indicators and areas of concern. Because the teen birth rate was especially troubling, BUW convenes several community providers, business leaders and concerned citizens to mobilize the community to address the problem. This group evolves into what's now known as the Berkshire County Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative (TPPI). The Initiative partners believe the strengths of youth, families, and Berkshire County communities can promote positive youth development and reduce teenage pregnancy.

2010: With resources and leadership from BUW, the Initiative contracts the Massachusetts Alliance for Teen Pregnancy to guide it in the development of an action plan to reduce the teen birth rate in Berkshire County. While the quantitative evidence clearly documents the problem, MA Alliance recommends detailed qualitative data from the community to gauge community perceptions of teenage sexuality and pregnancy.

2011: In January TPPI surveys more than 200 youth (13-20) and almost 600 young adults (21-24) and adults in Berkshire County regarding the teen pregnancy issue. In February over 90 teens, young adults, and parents participate in focus group sessions.

Quantitative Data: The Facts on Teen Sexual Behavior in Berkshire County

- According to the 2007 Berkshire County Prevention Needs Assessment Survey, sexual activity increases incrementally through the grade levels.
- Between 1998 and 2007, the likelihood of teenage girls (age 15-19) in Berkshire County giving birth increased 20.5% while the state of MA rate steadily decreased 21.7%. In 2008 the rate of teen births in Berkshire County was 27/1,000 teens while the state rate was 20.1. Nationally, 2009 figures for the rate of teen births in the US are at its lowest level in almost 70 years. In the United Kingdom, the rate is 24/1,000; in traditionally Catholic Ireland, it's 16/1000, in Canada it's 13/1,000 and in Italy it's 5/1,000.



- In 2008, there were a total of 117 births to teens ages 15-19 in Berkshire County. Characteristics of teenagers in Berkshire County who gave birth in 2008 include:
 - 77% were 18-19 years of age; 51% of teen births (60 births) in Berkshire County were to Pittsfield mothers. Pittsfield has the 12th highest teen birth rate in the state; 74% of the teen births were to White Non-Hispanic mothers, 14% were to Hispanic mothers, and 7% were to Black Non-Hispanic mothers.
 - Other towns in Berkshire County with teenage birth rates above state rate in 2008: Adams, Dalton, and North Adams.

Qualitative Data: What the Surveys and Focus Groups Revealed

- Both adults and youth believe teen pregnancy prevention is important in Berkshire County, though youth are less concerned about it.
 - More adults (80%) than youth (49%) think teen pregnancy is a “problem “or a “big problem” in Berkshire County
 - More adults (34%) than youth (10%) are “very concerned” about it.
- Perceived lack of condom and contraceptive use among teens is the area of greatest concern among both adults and youths.
 - In the 2007 Berkshire County Prevention Needs Assessment Survey, 32% of all sexually active youth reported they did not use a condom the last time they had sexual intercourse.
- Reasons for having sex, getting pregnant and having babies were explored in the surveys and focus groups.

Survey Resondent Perceptions	% Youth	% Adult
About sex; about waiting; what it means to be ready		
• Feel teens should wait until they’re out of high school	47% agree	75 % agree
• Feel it’s OK to have sex w/ steady boy/girlfriend	85% agree	43% agree
Reasons for getting pregnant		
• Unplanned	68%	70%
• Don’t have condoms/contraceptives in the moment	68%	62%
• Don’t want to use condoms/contraceptives	65%	36%
Reasons for having babies		
• Opposed to terminating pregnancy (abortion)	78%	49%
• Teen doesn’t realize pregnancy until too late to terminate	53%	31%
• Because pregnant teen wants a baby	50%	56%

- Youth and adults agreed that a person should be emotionally ready, comfortable with themselves, and ready to deal with a consequence that may be life changing.
 - Somewhat less important among young adults was the importance of a respectful, committed relationship.
 - Perceptions of what teens need in order to delay sex included: understanding their values; positive self esteem; supportive peers; delay having serious relationships; parents that are engaged and future goals.

Priorities, Conclusions and Recommendations

Youth and adults identified two overarching priorities that have implications on the tone and approach for improving the sexual health of Berkshire County youth:

- The need for parents and other adults to teach Positive Sexuality to youth. The Resource Center for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (ReCAPP) defines Positive Sexuality as:**
 - an understanding of sexuality as a natural and healthy aspect of human life
 - knowledge of human sexuality and reproductive rights with which to make responsible choices
 - respectful communication and exchange of personal thoughts and feelings between partners
 - practice of safe and mutually consensual sexual activity
- Belief that all youth matter - Every young person needs to know that they matter and each should have their own individual expectations.** As one participant noted: *“Stop giving every teen the same set of expectations. At school, everyone is expected to be a great student, and to be involved in the community, and to be able to focus and contribute to their classes. But that’s not realistic for everybody... Give them the tools to have a life that is realistic, not a goal that will only make them feel discouraged.”*
- Based on research teens need three things to prevent pregnancy:**
 - Access to sexual health information (the knowledge)
 - Access to condoms and other contraceptives for sexually active youth (the means)
 - Perception of opportunity and hope for a bright future (the motivation)

1. Access to sexual health information

Young people need information and skill-building practice on how to abstain from sex, as well as reasons to postpone, information on condoms, contraceptives, and sexual health. This information needs to be age-appropriate, medically accurate, comprehensive, and from a non-judgmental perspective.

Berkshire youth and adults recommend:

- Comprehensive sexuality education in schools
- Parent education
- Peer education and learning from older youth
- Incorporating sexual health education into youth programming
- Positive youth and adult communication about sex

Strategies

- Work with schools to strengthen and ensure the provision of age appropriate, medically accurate comprehensive sexuality education from a non-judgmental perspective that includes information and skill-building practice on how to abstain from sex, reasons to postpone, as well as Information on condoms, contraceptives, healthy relationships, and sexual health.
- Integrate teen pregnancy prevention programming into existing youth service provider programs using evidence-based approaches which have shown success in helping youth choose healthy behaviors.
- Provide parent education through existing programs and institutions that serve families (i.e. youth programs, youth sports, schools, major employers, health centers, faith-based organizations, etc.), ensuring parents’ ability to share their values and expectations with youth in honest, open conversations.
- Establish a “Parents and Teens Talking Campaign” that provides some key messages for parents to share with teens that align with the county-wide health goals for Berkshire youth.

2. Access to condoms and other contraceptives for sexually active youth

Young people need access to confidential reproductive health and contraception services that are available in youth-appropriate settings (easy to get to, open the right hours, staff trained in adolescent health). The community needs to support young people’s responsible decisions and use of contraception and sexual health services.

Berkshire youth and adults recommend:

- More access to reproductive health services for youth
- Condom availability in schools
- Reproductive health services in schools
- Need to overcome barriers of cost, transportation, confidentiality
- Youth need to know where they can go for services: “Have clinics that you can get everything you need.”

Strategies

- Establish a youth-friendly awareness campaign of current adolescent services available by intra-county region. This can include a resource tool that can be shared using social media, and disseminated through schools and youth programs.