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United Way continues campaign to reduce Milwaukee's teen births

The Business Journal of Milwaukee - April 24, 2007 by [Jennifer Batog](#)

The United Way of Greater Milwaukee unveiled the rest of its current media campaign to prevent teen births in Milwaukee Tuesday and launched a Web site to increase community involvement.

Milwaukee has one of the nation's highest teen birth rates. In 2005, 16.7 percent of all city births were to mothers under age 20. Teen births cost the Milwaukee area at least \$48 million a year in foster care, health care and lost tax revenue, a figure based on information from a 2006 report from The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, of Washington, D.C.

The high rate hurts businesses' attempts to find skilled workers and stem rising health care costs, and hampers the city's opportunity to attract new businesses, local business and public officials have said.

The United Way formed an oversight committee on the issue after it released a report labeling teen births in the city a crisis. The task force is charged with implementing the report's nine recommendations.

The ads unveiled Tuesday include print, television and radio spots. Ads also will run on billboards and bus shelters in the city.

The print spots picture a pregnant teenage boy, noting "It shouldn't be any less disturbing when it's a teenage girl." Another pictures a face with all the consequences of teen pregnancy etched on it.

The radio campaigns include spots that deal with sexual violence, which often is a component of teen pregnancy. One discusses date rape, while the other makes the point that having sex with a teenager is statutory rape. Another radio spot talks about how a teen mother feels, with a squalling baby in the background.

Studies report that 71 percent of babies born to teen mothers are fathered by adult men, 73 percent of sexual abuse survivors are juveniles and 23 percent of them become pregnant during the assault.

The agency also plans to roll out a television ad featuring a newborn getting passed from a nurse, to a businessman and a host of others in the community, showing that teen births affect everyone.

"We hope we can create a dialogue and inspire more people to get involved," said Gary Mueller, president of Serve, the nonprofit arm of Glendale advertising firm BVK. Serve created the campaign.

The Web site, onemilwaukee.org, reiterates that teen pregnancy affects the entire city.

The task force, which includes members of the health, social services and business community, also presented an update on achieving the report's recommendations.

One of the goals was to raise awareness of the city's teen birth rate as an issue. A 2000 survey found 20 percent thought it was a key issue facing the city. That number has more than doubled, to 46 percent in a recent survey, said committee co-chair Betsy Brenner, publisher of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.

The committee also is working with foundations and other organizations to create a collaborative fund.

The group plans to have a way to measure its progress in place by 2008. Brenner noted that through the United Way's Health Girls Initiative, nine programs dealing with teen births or sexual violence reached 1,800 teens, 1,200 girls and 500 boys, in 2006.

However, tackling the issue and seeing results is not a quick process, Brenner said.

"Teen pregnancy is insidious," she said. "This is a battle that will take a very long time in Milwaukee."

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