

## EDITORIAL

# Parents have role in teen mom problem

■ Parents who do not monitor the activities of their teens, who don't explain the consequences of casual sex and who don't set behavior expectations are contributing to the problem of teen pregnancies.

Everyone knows there is a human toll in teen pregnancy, but until recently it was not possible to quantify the cost to taxpayers. A new nationwide study has changed that for Arizona.

Our state was the first to get the cost figures from the study conducted by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. As reported in The Sun last week, the total expense to taxpayers in Arizona was estimated to be \$268 million a year. That number includes \$132 million from state and local sources and the rest from federal taxes.

### WHY SHOULD I CARE ABOUT THIS?

There is both an economic and a human cost to Yuma's high teen mother rate.

That total does not include the cost of delivery of the baby, which the government pays for 82 percent of the time, according to Patricia Jo Angelini, director of the Arizona Coalition on Adolescent Pregnancy and Parenting.

Putting a dollar figure on teen pregnancy may seem callous to some, but the reality is that it may be the only way to convince people they have a stake in teen pregnancy, even if their own child isn't one of the statistics.

For Arizona, and Yuma County, teen pregnancy is far from an abstract topic. Our state ranks fourth in the nation for teen births and Yuma County ranks third in Arizona — down from first place last year.

In addition to the costs to taxpayers, there are the individual human consequences. Teen moms are seldom able

to fully cope with parenthood, often because they are also single moms who have had to sacrifice educational opportunities and have a hard time earning a living. Their youth is short-circuited by adult responsibilities.

There are also consequences for the offspring of teen mothers. According to Angelini, the sons from teen pregnancies are three times more likely to be imprisoned and children of young moms are twice as likely to be abused and neglected.

Why does Yuma County have so many teenage mothers? There are probably many answers to that question, but it seems to us a lack of parental oversight has to be part of the answer. Parents who do not monitor the activities of their teens, who don't explain the consequences of casual sex and who don't set behavior expectations are contributing to the problem.

In addition, when teens become pregnant there should not be an expectation that society will step in to fix things. That expectation contributes to a casual attitude toward teen sex and pregnancy. It is the responsibility of the parents and family of the teens involved, both on the male side and the female side, to accept responsibility and help the teens cope with the pregnancy and parenthood.

Unfortunately, not all parents are good parents. Sometimes there is no option except for society to step in and fulfill the parental role. But that should be the exception rather than the rule. And whenever possible that responsibility needs to be given back to the parents where it belongs.

Based on the high pregnancy rate here, there are a lot of parents who don't understand or accept their responsibilities and a lot of teenagers, both male and female, who aren't getting the kind of direction they need. That has to change.