

Virginia Roundtable on
Teen Pregnancy Prevention
for Youth in Foster Care

Fostering Connections: Improving Access to Sexual Health Education

*Policy Recommendations to Enhance Success and
Sustainability for Youth in Out-of-Home Care*



Preventing Teen Pregnancy Among Youth in Foster Care: The Challenge

Youth in foster care face multiple factors that put them at increased risk for teen pregnancy, STIs and HIV and early parenting. Many of these youth have little access to information about sexuality and do not receive consistent messages about teen pregnancy prevention. During adolescence many of these youth engage in unhealthy behaviors and relationships.

- **Foster care youth, both boys and girls alike, are less likely to use contraception at first sex compared to their non-foster care peers.ⁱ**
- **Teen girls in foster care are two and a half times more likely than their peers not in foster care to experience pregnancy by age 19.ⁱⁱ**
- **Half of 21-year-old men aging out of foster care report they had gotten someone pregnant; compared to 19% of their peers who were not in the system.ⁱⁱⁱ**
- **Juvenile and Family Court systems recognize teen pregnancy prevention as an important issue in their professional role.^{iv}**

These data indicate that youth in foster care are more likely to become pregnant and have a child compared to teens in general. Children born to teen parents also face many challenges. The children of teen mothers are at increased risk of either being in foster care or being a victim of abuse and neglect when compared to children born to mothers aged 20 or older. The federal, state, and local costs associated with these child welfare outcomes were \$2.3 billion in 2004 alone. In Virginia, in 2004, child welfare costs associated with children born to teen mothers was \$27 million.^v

Almost half of teen girls in foster care will become pregnant at least once by age 19.^{vi}



The Richmond Experience:

These facts prompted teen pregnancy and child welfare professionals from the Richmond Department of Social Services and the Richmond City Health District to take action. Program leaders collaborated with TRAINING 3, and the Virginia Departments on Health and Social Services to form a partnership on teen pregnancy prevention. A number of approaches were taken to address teen pregnancy among youth in foster care.

- Provided technical assistance and training on adolescent reproductive health and behavioral risk reduction to members of the Central Region Independent Living Advocates for Youth and Independent Living Program staff, social workers, youth advocates and group home directors.
- Delivered a series of Train-the-Trainer sessions to health educators and foster care case managers on skills for implementing *Power Through Choices* (PTC), a curriculum designed specifically for youth in foster care and group home settings.
- Piloted the selected 10-session sexuality education curriculum with older girls from at least six group homes in Richmond, Chesterfield and Henrico Counties.
- Provided teen sexual communication workshops for foster parents through the Richmond City Department of Social Services, Foster Parent Team Training Unit.
- Sponsored a symposium for clinical and human service providers on issues faced by young males in out-of-home care to help them avoid early parenting and delinquency in child support.
- Hosted a statewide event to deliver effective counseling strategies for juvenile case workers and health educators offering professional continuing education credits to support social work licensing practices.
- Facilitated workshop for foster care program directors from across Virginia on program replication.
- Engaged youth as panelists to share their perspectives on sexual health issues with provider audiences.

Fostering Connections

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (P.L. 110-351) was enacted in 2008 as a comprehensive child welfare reform law to support caregivers and improve permanency outcomes. In addition to promoting permanent families for youth in foster care through relative guardianship and adoption, extending federal support for youth to age 21, improving education and health care; there are also provisions in the law that provide an opportunity to help youth avoid early pregnancy. The federal Fostering Connections mandate can guide state and local programs to:

- **Improve child welfare policies and practices by expanding support for sexual health education**
- **Ensure that children receive health information to remain healthy and increase protective factors**
- **Prepare parents and juvenile workers to adequately address unhealthy relationships and pregnancy prevention**

Recommendations for State and Local Implementation:^{vii}

The following recommendations will assist with preparing youth with the information and health services needed to avoid pregnancy:

- **Section 202 - Transition Plan for Children Aging Out of Care:** Include sexual health education and services in the health section of the transition plan and encourage case workers to distribute information on pregnancy and STD/HIV prevention including the consequences of early pregnancy and parenting and connect youth with local/community health care services.
- **Section 203 - Short Term Training to Private Child Welfare Agencies, Relative Guardians and Court Personnel:** Identify training tools to assist staff and foster care parents to more effectively communicate with youth regarding sexual health issues. Collaborate with community partners to provide education to staff, parents and youth on pregnancy prevention and support opportunities to attend training.
- **Section 205 - Health Oversight and Coordination Plan:** Include regularly scheduled reproductive health screenings within coordinated health plans improving access to family planning services (including counseling on abstinence, birth control and medical treatment for STIs).

Health Education, Pregnancy Prevention & the Foster Care System

Leaders must recognize that the health and well-being of adolescents depends upon access to comprehensive education and health services and better policies and practices to ensure that youth in foster care have the life assets to avoid early pregnancy.

Child welfare administrators can develop policies and practices that support the integration of pregnancy prevention and youth development into existing programming and invest in innovative approaches to reach at-risk youth within the juvenile delinquent and foster care systems, including:

- **Encourage the collection of data to better assess the trends of teen pregnancy among youth in foster care.**
- **Design straightforward messages to reach young males about the importance of using contraception to avoid early parenting and distribute materials on other relevant issues including child support.**
- **Make efforts to establish programs, policies and practices that prevent teen pregnancy among and youth in foster care and delinquent youth.**
- **Identify evidence-based curricula that address sexual health education and life skills for youth in group homes and individual family placements.**
- **Provide training to foster parents and staff on how to engage adolescents in communication about relationships, health and decision making.**
- **Collaborate with local and state teen pregnancy prevention programs to provide services to youth, parents and caregivers.**
- **Case workers should ensure that adolescents in care have opportunities to engage in conversations about healthy relationships and how pregnancy can derail life goals. Continue to place more emphasis on motivations to avoid pregnancy.**
- **Improve counseling skills by increasing access to training for social workers on talking about sexual health issues.**

Did you know....



Approximately half of all adolescents in Virginia have not had a preventive healthcare visit in the past 12 months.^{viii}

The Virginia House Joint Resolution (HJR) 823 recognized the importance of the Adolescent Well Health visit as a preventive measure and the need to support youth in adopting healthy behaviors that will affect their current and future health outcomes.

Virginia Department of Health Health GOAL 2015

A reduction in the teen pregnancy rate to 47.5 or fewer per 1,000 females ages 15 to 19 by the year 2015.

Select cities with high teen pregnancy rates per 1,000 in 2007 for ages 15-19

VIRGINIA (State rate)	27.2
MANASSAS City	58.1
MARTINSVILLE	70.2
NORFOLK City	48.4
PETERSBURG City	85.5
RICHMOND City	67.4
ROANOKE City	71.1

Promoting What Works to Reduce Teen Pregnancy with Out-of-Home Youth!



- i *Reproductive Health Outcomes Among Youth Who Ever Lived in Foster Care.* Washington, DC. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/resources/pdf/FastFacts_FosterCare_Reproductive_Outcomes.pdf
- ii *Why it Matters: Teen Pregnancy and Child Welfare.* Washington, DC. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/why-it-matters/pdf/child_welfare.pdf
- iii *Ibid*
- iv *Critical Judgment: How Juvenile and Family Court Judges Can Help Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy.* Washington, DC. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/resources/pdf/pubs/critical_judgment.pdf
- v Hoffman, S.D., *By the Numbers: The Public Costs of Adolescent Childbearing.* 2006, The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy Washington, DC. <http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/costs/pdf/states/virginia/onepager.pdf>
- vi Bilaver, LA., & Courtney, M.E. (2006). *Foster Care Youth. Science Says #27.* The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/resources/pdf/SS/SS27_FosterCare.pdf
- vii *Briefly: Opportunities to Help Youth in Foster Care: Addressing Pregnancy Prevention in the Implementation of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008.* Washington, DC. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy.
- viii Tavenner, M. (2009). *State memorandum. Commonwealth of Virginia.*

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