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Project H.O.P.E helps young mothers in community college

By Heather Thomas



I am a non-traditional student and the vice president of scholarship for the Omicron Beta Chapter of Phi Theta Kappa, the honor society of the two-year colleges. I attend Mesa Community College (MCC) in Mesa, Ariz. In January of 2010, MCC was awarded a Make It Personal: College Completion grant from the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC). Funded by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, the goal of the grant was to educate students through research and service-learning projects on unplanned pregnancy and the often-devastating effect unplanned pregnancy has on completing one's education. In fact, 61% of women who have children after enrolling in community college fail to finish their degree, which is 65% higher than the rate for those who didn't have children.

When I first heard about MCC's project for the grant, called Project H.O.P.E. (Healthy Outcomes through Prevention and Education), I was eager to learn more about it and how I could get involved. This was an ideal way for me to share my story, and if I could impact one person I knew I would be making a difference. I began by filming my own personal story, "15 and Pregnant: A Biography of a Teenage Mother", and designing a website for students to share stories, view upcoming events for Project H.O.P.E. and find local resources on family planning and birth control.

Part of being a Phi Theta Kappa officer is to focus on the four hallmarks of our organization: scholarship, leadership, service and fellowship. This year, our team members at MCC put their hearts and souls into this project, tackling this major issue in our society and on our campus. We organized many events on and off campus, educating thousands on how this devastating issue could alter their life-long goals and education.

The National Campaign and the Center for Service-Learning at MCC have brought new meaning to the word support. They provided unlimited resources to students such as www.studentsexlife.org and www.bedsider.org for information to help our cause. MCC advisors, Elizabeth Meyer and Duane Oakes of the Center for Service-Learning have supported and led students, faculty and Phi Theta Kappa officers into one of the most successful projects our college campus has ever seen.

Our success this year has led to an extension of the Make It Personal: College Completion' grant. Our work has been dually recognized by the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society as a successful Honors in Action Project. On Feb. 26, 2011 the Omicron Beta Chapter from MCC won honorable mention at this year's regional convention held at Cochise College in Sierra Vista, Arizona. Who says community college students don't make a difference?

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