

Lessons Learned...

Findings from The National Campaign's Learning Tour

MONTGOMERY COUNTY: OCTOBER 23-24, 2007

MONTGOMERY COUNTY COLLABORATION COUNCIL FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES ANCHOR ORGANIZATION

KATHY LALLY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ANCHOR LEAD

The fourth site on The National Campaign's (NC) Learning Tour was Montgomery County, a close-in Maryland suburb of Washington DC. Sarah Brown, Andrea Kane, Katy Suellentrop, Ruthie Flores, Jessica Swafford, Kristen Tertzakian, Alexandra Gonzalez, Chelsey Storin, and Cindy Costello attended this site visit. Montgomery County has undergone significant demographic changes in the last two decades from a County largely characterized by middle class suburbs (in the lower part of the County) and rural communities (in the northern part of the County) to a diverse, rapidly developing area with large numbers of African American, Latino, and Asian residents.

The centerpiece of this site visit was the Town Hall Forum convened at Montgomery College (MC) on October 23 in collaboration with MC and MCCC. Expertly moderated by 9NewsNow anchor Derek McGinty, the forum included remarks from Congressman Albert Wynn (D-MD) and a lively panel discussion with four MC students who candidly offered their views about sex, relationships, contraception, pregnancy, and parenthood. Time was provided for the audience of County officials and professionals from the health care, education, and non-profit sectors to make comments and ask questions of the students.

Three other events were organized by MCCC during this site visit. Sarah Brown and NC staff heard from faith leaders and other County professionals about the opportunities and challenges faced by congregations interested in addressing the issue of preventing unplanned pregnancy among young adults. Campaign staff also met with a large group of health and human services providers to learn their thoughts on the barriers to preventing unplanned pregnancy among young

adults in the County and what The NC might do to help. The site visit concluded with a luncheon meeting with leaders and professional from the Minority Health Initiatives in the County. This meeting addressed the similarities and differences in patterns of unplanned pregnancy among young adults in the African American, Asian-American, and Latino communities as well as some ideas for moving forward.

The Learning Tour in Montgomery County—and in particular, the Town Hall Forum at Montgomery College—helped to launch a new NC initiative focused on students in community college. Following the Town Hall Forum, The NC developed a contract with MC to collaborate on exploring strategies for helping young adults in community colleges prevent unplanned pregnancy. Also, The NC produced a video that captures what community college students have to say about unplanned pregnancy, prepared fact sheets that provide an overview of the connection between unplanned pregnancy and community colleges, and announced a request for proposals to develop and assess various ways to reduce unplanned pregnancy among community college students.

This document summarizes the central themes, ideas, and recommendations that emerged from this site visit. Overall highlights synthesizing the central takeaways from all of the meetings are presented first, followed by a detailed summary of each meeting.

Overall Highlights

Views of Montgomery College Students

- Young people do not think about the consequences of unprotected sex until “after the fact.”
- If sex occurs in a “casual” relationship, young adults are more likely to use protection. Young adults in a “relationship”, where there is greater trust, are more likely to have unprotected sex since they are less worried about HIV/STDs. The students acknowledged that this could lead to negative outcomes, including pregnancy.

- A woman needs to take responsibility for telling her partner that he needs to use a condom since men are known for acting in the heat of the moment.
- Those young adults who are responsible, disciplined, and have common sense will use condoms in relationships and in casual sex because they are afraid of disease and having kids.
- Children are influenced by what their parents teach them and even as young adults, they respect their parents' opinions. Parents need to help children develop responsibility and then push them to be self-disciplined as they age.
- Young adults need convenient, affordable contraceptives including the morning after pill.
- Some people, especially some young men, are uncomfortable with condoms. We need to influence youth culture so that the idea of using condoms/contraception is ingrained into the idea of having sex.
- College students and other young adults need good support systems to reinforce sound decision-making around sex and contraception. This could be an anonymous hotline or a support system of friends (as students rely on friends for information).
- The University of Maryland has a program called SHARE -- a peer group that visits dorms, fraternities, sororities, etc. to talk informally about safe sex, STD's, HIV, etc. A program such as SHARE could be beneficial to community colleges such as MC.

What are the barriers to making progress in reducing unintended pregnancy among young adults?

Circumstances/ attitudes/ behavior of young adults

- The children who grow up poor, unattached to an adult at home or at school, are at great risk for unplanned pregnancy and other problems. In poor communities, children often lack adult supervision and family communication.
- In middle and upper income families, there is a clearer understanding of the long-term impact of an unplanned pregnancy and the importance of ordering life decisions: education, then marriage, and then childbearing. In low-income communities, the impact of having a baby at the wrong time is more difficult to quantify.
- Many people aged 20-30 do not value marriage; there appears to be a shifting value among some young adults from "marriage" to "stable partnerships" (without being married) as the precondition for having children.
- Young people are not being taught what it means to be a parent; they need to have very clear markers for what it means.
- Young mothers and fathers often have no plan for childrearing. They never considered how to pay for diapers, much less health care,

food and shelter, education, etc. Girls think, "Someone will help me." Programs need to be tough and consistent to help young people develop and implement plans.

- Many young people who themselves grew up on welfare feel that it is not a problem if they are not financially ready to have a child because the government will pay for everything (through Medicaid, food stamps, etc.).

Individual beliefs/attitudes of young women

- The problem of unplanned pregnancies is very common, and girls and young women often have back to back pregnancies in the County. Girls who get through their teens without having an unplanned pregnancy may have a good shot at not having an unplanned pregnancy in their twenties.
- Many girls and young women are making decisions, but poor decisions with poor results. Young girls who end up pregnant say, "I wanted someone to love...I thought he would stay with me when I got pregnant and continue loving me...but he ran away."
- Many of the unplanned pregnancies in young women stem from social problems, emotional problems, and/or mental health issues, such as depression. The young women do not care if they get pregnant. A number of these women have four or more pregnancies -- and there are often multiple fathers involved.
- For young girls from disadvantaged backgrounds, there is no motivation to avoid pregnancy. Some of these young women believe they can be great mothers.

Individual beliefs/attitudes of young men

- A lot of boys and young men do not want to use condoms and girls are afraid they will lose their boyfriends if they object.
- Male attitudes can be an obstacle, such as the attitude, "How many babies can I have to prove my virility?"

Cultural barriers: Latino community

- There are significant language and educational barriers among Latinos. Many have 3rd/4th grade level educations, do not speak English, and cannot read in their own language.
- Many immigrant families are not taught about contraception. Both the young women and men lack information.
- Latino parents of teens and young adults are sometimes complicit in encouraging unplanned pregnancy since they provide girls and young women with a lot of attention when they become pregnant. The message is that love is expressed by having a child. Girls and young women learn that it is their role to serve and stay at home. Girls need to hear the message, "You are more than your womb."

- Some Hispanic high school girls feel that they must be in a relationship. It is very difficult for them to set goals for themselves or to focus on themselves. Others see pregnancy as a way out of school.
- Latino men think: "I'm going to be a man. I'm going to count. I'll have a kid."

Cultural barriers: African-American and Asian communities

- African American young women are afraid to focus on themselves; they get lost and many have 5 or 6 pregnancies by their mid-twenties. Also, they do not believe that there are eligible marriage partners.
- In the Asian community, the major barriers are attitudes (sex is taboo and not discussed at home), language, lack of insurance coverage, difficulty accessing services (i.e. transportation problems), and cultural competence (Asian parents do not educate their children about their bodies).

Religious barriers

- Many congregations do not have discussions about sex and pregnancy with young adults. Some members of the faith community believe that unplanned pregnancy does not happen in their congregations.
- In some congregations, discussion of sex [outside of marriage] is against the teachings of the church.

Policy barriers

- Many policy-makers think that unplanned pregnancy is not a problem among young adults. Other health problems, such as diabetes and smoking cessation, appear more pressing. Given the number of health needs and the limited resources, we need to address the question: Where does unplanned pregnancy fit with other health priorities? If it is an epidemic, we need to highlight this.
- Screening for eligibility for public programs is becoming more stringent, which discourages access to family planning services.

Media barriers

- The message in music videos and on the internet is that you can turn sex on and off whenever you want to. Intimacy is not portrayed.
- Young adults and teens are deeply affected by the many sexual messages that bombard them. We need to say: "You like what you see – great, but respect yourself."
- Spanish radio stations play music that sends a negative message to youth, especially with regard to messages about women. Lyrics are "dirty" and "explicit."

Promising Approaches and Programs

- The Early Head Start program, which serves low-income children, sees many mothers over age 20 who are having additional unplanned pregnancies, with either the father of the previous child(ren) or another man. The program works with the mothers to encourage them to set goals (such as earning a GED), but this is difficult.
- The Family Support Center has the SISTERS Program, which focuses on planned parenthood, life skills, and employment skills. The Sisters Program dispels myths, and teaches girls about their bodies and healthy sexuality.
- Teen and Young Adult Connection serves teens and young adults up to age 35 with family planning.
- The Maryland Multicultural Center offers life skills groups within GED/job readiness classes in a variety of settings including correctional facilities.
- Healthy Families Montgomery/Home Visiting Program focuses on the prevention of child abuse and neglect, and one key strategy is helping first time mothers avoid repeat pregnancies.
- Identity, a program working with Latino families in Montgomery County, has a program that pairs parents with kids other than their own. This works really well since it is taboo to talk with one's own children in the Latino community.

How can The National Campaign help?

Reach out to young men

- It is important to change the assumption that all men are irresponsible and broaden family planning to include men.
- Boys need to be educated about sex/contraception/pregnancy when they come in for sports physicals.
- Reach out to boys and young men with messages that resonate, such as how to counter peer pressure and the child support consequences of unplanned pregnancy.
- Programs need to assist young fathers to make better decisions in the future.
- Men need education and guidance from other men (who have fathered children, contracted STD's/HIV, etc.)
- Work with family planning clinics to engage young men and fathers.

Reach out to young women

- Reach out to young women who already have children through child care centers (e.g. Head Start) where their children are.
- Women need education from other women who have had multiple children, contracted STDs/HIV, etc.

Reach out to the Latino community

- Young women who are recent immigrants need to know about their many contraceptive options.
- Educate Latino men about using condoms; young men need to understand that they'll have to pay child support if a child is born. Prepare them to act appropriately in the "moment of passion."

Develop messages for young adults

- Young adults need education to do well in today's economy, unplanned pregnancies can interrupt education, and children do better with both a mother and a father.
- Unplanned pregnancy has an impact on the economic well-being of the mother, father, and child. Economic stability is necessary for children who need a stable environment in order to be wanted and well-cared for.
- A consequence of unplanned pregnancy is poor prospects for long-term relationships.
- The health consequences of unprotected sex can be quite severe in terms of STD's/HIV and unhealthy children.

Reach out to parents

- Parents need scripts to talk with their children, including their adult children, in order to know exactly what to say in different situations.

Reach out to faith leaders and faith communities

- Educate the leadership of congregations because it is the leaders who make the decisions about whether young adults are a focus, and whether sex/pregnancy can be addressed.
- Help faith communities reach out to parents in their congregations to teach them how to talk to their children, teens, and young adults about sex, pregnancy, etc. – and provide them with scripts so they know exactly what to say in different situations (in English and Spanish).
- Assist congregations in engaging young adults in nitty, gritty discussion about what is happening in their lives that could result in a pregnancy, unplanned or otherwise.

Work with the media

- Launch an effective media campaign (based on smoking cessation, breast cancer awareness, etc.) where young people hear the message about preventing unplanned pregnancy over and over. This should include the music industry, where the message should be one of self respect and self esteem.

Advocacy

- Raise awareness among policy-makers by showing the links between unplanned pregnancy and low birth weight babies, infant mortality, employment, incarceration, and costs to Montgomery County, the state, and the nation.
- Develop language to reach out to elected officials on this issue, including officials at County and State levels.
- Advocate for affordable contraception and family planning; advocate for increase in Title X funding, and for instituting a sliding scale payment system to improve access and affordability.

MONTGOMERY COLLEGE TOWN HALL FORUM FOCUS MEETING

The town hall forum, *Planning Your Future: A Discussion about Sex, Pregnancy, and Parenthood*, was the centerpiece of the site visit in Montgomery County. The event was cohosted by The National Campaign, Montgomery College, and the Montgomery County Collaboration Council for Children, Youth and Families. The event was expertly moderated by Derek McGinty, 9News Now Anchor. Brad Steward, Vice President and Provost, Montgomery College, welcomed the students and attendees to the forum. Sarah Brown and Dr. Carol Garvey, President of MCCC, made brief remarks on the importance of the issue of unplanned pregnancy and the NC video, *What Twenty Somethings are Saying About Unplanned Pregnancy*, was shown.

In his remarks, Congressman Wynn addressed the role of public policy in preventing unplanned pregnancy and stressed the importance of involving men in pregnancy prevention. Mr. McGinty then led the student panelists through a lively and candid discussion of their views about sex, relationships, contraception, pregnancy, and parenthood. Following the student panel, attendees from the health care, education, non-profit and government sectors made comments and asked questions of the student panelists.

Highlights

Comments by Derek McGinty

- Mr. McGinty said that becoming pregnant and having a child are some of the most personal decisions that anyone can make. And getting pregnant should be a decision. Part of what we are exploring today is how to help young adults make a decision, rather than a non-decision. Also the government has a role here – but the government isn't the only player.

Comments by Representative Albert Wynn

- The government views the decision to become pregnant as a personal decision. Resources to provide family planning are provided through Title X family planning clinics. The government's position is to prevent unplanned pregnancies by providing information and services. This is the appropriate role for government. The cost to taxpayers of unplanned pregnancy is approximately \$175 million as a result of low birth weight babies.
- The government does not pay for abortions. The goal is to reduce the number of abortions through education and prevention. It is important to disentangle morality from prevention.
- Having access to the morning after pill is critical. Education is needed to make people aware of the pill.
- The Medicaid Family Planning Waiver allows option for family planning and prevention, but the process for receiving the waiver is cumbersome. In Maryland, the waiver expires in May 2008, and politicians are looking for ways to expand it and make it more flexible.
- Rep. Wynn said that we need to place greater emphasis on the role of men in pregnancy, but women still need to insist on male responsibility. Education programs can help instill male responsibility. Also, aggressive child support programs make it a lot easier for men to accept responsibility. He shared the story of his nephew whose education was derailed when his girlfriend became pregnant.
- One of the challenges is that the government focuses on teens, not young adults.

Student panel

- The youth panel was comprised of four students, two male and two female between 20-30 years. All four panelists were asked where they saw themselves in five years. All responded that they expect to either have finished their education and be pursuing a career, or continuing their education.
- The panelists were asked how their plans would change if they or their girl friend became pregnant. All four responded that they would take on the responsibility and continue their education even though it might take a lot longer.
 - o Lucia: If I had a child, it would be tragic and I wouldn't be a happy Mom if I could not fulfill my (educational) dreams.
 - o Chuka: I would have to adjust my educational goals although I wouldn't want it to hinder my plans. It might take longer to reach them though.
 - o Ivory: I would want to strive harder to fulfill my goals. It is already hard enough to take care of myself...I would want to find ways to fulfill my dreams.

o Daniel: I would need to take different steps to take care of the responsibility. We would most likely continue to pursue our goals but it would take longer.

Mr. McGinty: I was struck by and shocked by the video. Young adults react to the instance and the moment. It is the microwave culture, and young people do not think about the consequences of sex. He asked the students if they found themselves starting to have sex but then realized that the male did not have protection, would they stop?

- The students commented that most young people do not think about the consequences of unprotected sex until later. If sex occurs outside of a relationship, then it is more important to have protection.
 - o Ivory: As a woman knowing we're going to carry the child, we need to think, 'Hey, we're in the heat of the moment but you've got to wrap it up.' Guys are going to do what they're going to do. The woman has to carry the baby....women have to take responsibility.
 - o Daniel: Men are known for acting in the heat of the moment. We're aware of what we should be doing but it isn't ingrained in the process of what you're doing.

Mr. McGinty: So what I am hearing is that young adults are not making rational decisions. The students were asked if they were more likely to have unprotected sex if they were in a relationship. They responded that when involved in a relationship, there is more trust and you are more likely to have unprotected sex. You don't worry about STDs.

- o Chuka: That greater trust in a relationship can lead to getting pregnant.
- o Ivory: When you get to know someone well, you relax. You think, 'This is the boo, we can do this.' You are going with the flow.
- o Daniel: People will use condoms in and out of relationships if they are responsible. People who are afraid of disease and having kids will be responsible whether they are in a relationship or having casual sex.
- o Lucia: It is a matter of discipline. Many young people don't study or exercise on a regular basis either. Parents should tackle the issue of discipline. The birth control pill is easier to take. We need to have common sense, be responsible, and be disciplined.
- o Chuka: Parents need to push on the issue of discipline. They should say, "If you get pregnant, we don't want to see you in the house."

Mr. McGinty: So what I am hearing is 'We love each other so if it happens, it will be okay.' Can people be motivated to make better decisions?

- The students said that they think their friends look for whatever is convenient. The problem is decision making.
- Lucia said there is a lack of discipline among young adults in the US. The culture in foreign countries is that parents still have influence on their children regardless of age.
- All four panelists felt that children are influenced by what their parents teach them and even as young adults, they respect their parents' opinions.
 - o Lucia: My Mom said, "Men will go as far as women let them." Also, it is important to educate grandparents who are often raising their grandchildren and young adults look up to their grandparents.

Mr. McGinty: How do you inform young adults age 20-30 about how to prevent unplanned pregnancy?

- We need to offer seminars in school to provide information.
- It would be important to think through how to involve the people who are most at risk.
- We need to influence the culture in order to change values and behavior. Involving rock stars would be a better way to reach young adults than seminars. We need more than sex education; we need a cultural or social push.
- Young adults need convenient, affordable contraceptives. For example, birth control pills, including the morning after pill, are expensive. Pills should be free.
- Adults need to start listening to "kids" who are dynamically involved in decision-making.
- The issue is not lack of information but rather the reasons that people are not using contraception. We need to address the fact that some people are uncomfortable with condoms.
- Young adults could learn from the example of friends who have had an unplanned pregnancy.
- Another idea would be to provide a good support system to support decision-making around sex and contraception. This could be an anonymous hotline or a support system of friends. Students rely on friends for information.
- One student said that we need to expose young adults to what it means to be a parent. Perhaps a class in parenthood should be provided.

Mr. McGinty: We could look to the example of smoking culture, which has changed. A lot fewer people smoke. It is unstylish. Can you

change the culture to make it more stylish to use a condom?

- Ivory: There is a way to make using condoms stylish. However, it still comes back to family, where young people should have learned responsibility as a child. My Mom said, "Keep your legs closed.... you have to say no." But as young people, we can be impressed (with messages).
- Daniel: We need to influence youth culture so that the idea of using condoms/contraception is ingrained into the idea of having sex.

Mr. McGinty: What about men? How do we influence them?

- Chuka: Women need to influence men because men are more emotional. Women carry and care for the baby. The man is caught up in the moment. The women need to train the men.
- Lucia: My Mom says that "Man is the head, but woman is the neck."
- Daniel: Men may care about the issue (unplanned pregnancy) but only if it affects them directly. This isn't something that guys talk about—sexual behavior or consequences.

Mr. McGinty: I have a friend who is deciding to have a baby alone. Do you think it is important to be married when you have kids?

- The students said that it is important to have financial security before starting a family. Stability is needed in order to take care of a child. Some felt that marriage was important; others did not, although they all thought it was important to plan for a child, a value that is passed on by parents.
 - o Lucia: Educated people think about having stability before marriage here on the East Coast whereas in California where I lived before, people have kids and get married without financial stability.
 - o Ivory: I expect there to be a mother and father before I have a kid; two parents are important to show children, "This is what you do to have a family. This is how love is built."
 - o Daniel: I grew up in Las Vegas where marriage is not a big deal. I do want stability but the fantasy has moved from marriage to stability.
 - o Chuka: God created marriage. You need to plan for responsibility when you have a kid – if not, you're passing on the chance of your own kid having an unplanned pregnancy. You need a mother and a father, and to pass this "gene" on. I firmly believe in being married.

Audience remarks

- The University of Maryland has a program called SHARE -- a peer group that visits dorms, fraternities, sororities, etc. to talk nonchalantly about safe sex, STD's, HIV, etc. A program such as SHARE would be beneficial for Montgomery College.

- You need teachers who are connected to students in order to have discussions about sex, contraception, and pregnancy.
- The “Baby Think It Over” Baby Doll program has been successful in some states, but not in others. Many teens don’t see the baby doll as real.
- The community plays an important role in influencing the behavior of young adults. Older adults need to share their own stories with young adults, and provide advice.
- Women need to be taught to respect their bodies. Even teens are posting “hot” photos of themselves on My Space.
- We need to think about how to influence TV programs and commercials.

FAITH & OTHER LEADERS FOCUS MEETING

National Campaign staff met with a group that was originally planned as a meeting with faith leaders but ended up including a small group of faith leaders as well as leaders and professionals from school health services, the public schools, the Latino Health Initiative, and Families Services Agency. Chaired by Becky Wagner, Executive Director, Community Ministries of Montgomery County and a member of the Presbyterian Church, the other faith communities represented were the Church of the Latter Day Saints, the Catholic Church (through a Catholic attendee who came as a representative of a social service agency), the Disciples of Christ, and the Young Community Ministries of Montgomery County. The discussion ranged from specific thoughts regarding the role of faith communities in preventing unplanned pregnancy among young adults to broader comments about the scope of the problem in the County and recommendations for how to address it.

What do you see as the major challenges and barriers in the young adult population with respect to unplanned pregnancy?

- We are seeing isolation among teens and young adults.
- There are 15,000 young adults, aged 20-30, living in high rise apartment buildings in Bethesda.
- Girls who get through their teens without having an unplanned pregnancy may have a good shot at not having an unplanned pregnancy in their twenties. Many of those who have unplanned pregnancies in their 20’s are having subsequent pregnancies.
- Many people aged 20-30 do not value marriage; many young African American women are living in a different culture and just trying to make it with few prospects for marriage.

- Increasingly, weddings involve brides/grooms with children from different prior partners.
- No one teaches young people what it means to be a parent; they need to have very clear markers for what it means.
- Young girls who end up pregnant say, “I wanted someone to love...I thought he would stay with me when I got pregnant and continue loving me...but he ran away.” Girls are making decisions, but poor decisions with poor results.
- In the English as a Second Language (ESOL) community, youth are under pressure to succeed at school, home, and in church – and there are limited programs to support them. We need to ask, what programs can we provide to young people that incorporate their culture, help them succeed, and emphasize prevention?

How do you address issues surrounding unplanned pregnancy among young adults in your congregation? Do young adults seek your guidance?

- The religious context is important: many Latinos go to fundamentalist churches, while others go to Catholic churches.
- Young adults are not well represented in the pews. Many young adults are working overtime, have responsibility for rent and families, and don’t have time for church.
- Becky Wagner said that the interfaith organization she directs does not take a position on birth control. The faith community is limited in what it can advocate for or suggest.
- Many congregations do not have discussions about sex and pregnancy with young adults. Some members of the faith community believe that unplanned pregnancy does not happen in their congregations. “It does not affect their young adults.” Many churches do not provide moral or academic support to young adults.
- In some congregations, discussion of sex is against the teachings of the church. It is important to teach young people to respect themselves and others, and that sex outside of marriage is wrong. These teachings need to start when children are young because by the time they are 20, young adults are on their own and making their own choices.
- “Just say no” is a principle that many faith communities uphold but how do you teach young people to “say no”? What is the interface between the belief and the practice of living? Connecting the two is the challenge. There needs to be more nitty gritty discussion with young adults about what is happening in their lives that could result in a pregnancy, unplanned or otherwise.
- The leadership of the church makes the decisions about whether young adults are a focus, and whether sex/pregnancy can be addressed. The leaders often are too busy to address the problem

of unplanned pregnancy (which often they don't see as a problem). Until the minds of the leaders are opened, little will happen in the faith community. The church needs to change its views and see that things have changed.

- Teens say the faith community is silent and that it does not connect with young people. Young people will not go to clergy if they don't have a good relationship with them.
- A young woman attended the meeting who is Catholic and became pregnant at age 15. At that time, she needed counseling about how to prevent a second pregnancy, but she thought that going to the church would not be helpful. It is interesting to note that this young woman is now 21, has two children, and attends Catholic church every week with her children. She said that young, adult Latina women do go back to church as young adults but the men do not.

What kinds of support, counseling, and referrals do you provide to young adults and/or their families with respect to unplanned pregnancy? What programs do you provide to support young adults develop skills to make responsible life choices? (The responses included initiatives in both faith and non-faith settings.)

- Faith communities are a natural place to educate young adults about unplanned pregnancy, since they address the core issues of family and marriage – and they often teach values-based decision-making.
- The Catholic Church has the Gabriel Project for young women with unplanned pregnancy but girls must agree to keep the child.
- One church has a youth ministry where kids can go and relate to each other.
- Identity, a program working with Latino families in Montgomery County, has a program that pairs parents with kids other than their own. This works really well since it is taboo to talk with one's own children in the Latino community.
- Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) have parent/child communication courses that are presented in many languages.
- Also, MCPS has school nurses who teach prevention of unplanned pregnancy and STDs. The nurses are the point of contact for students around sex/pregnancy/HIV/STD prevention.

How do current media messages influence the life choices of young adults in your congregation and in the community, and what can we do about it?

- Young adults and teens are deeply affected by the many sexual messages that bombard them everywhere. We need to say: "You like what you see – great, but respect yourself. Look pretty and elegant but close your legs."

- Spanish radio stations play music that sends a very bad message to youth, especially with regard to messages about women. Lyrics are "dirty" and "explicit." (Adults need to listen to these messages and communicate respect for women to both young women and men. They need to say: What do you think about this? Do you respect yourself? Do you respect the girls/women you go out with?")
- There is a need for an effective media campaign where young people hear the message about preventing unplanned pregnancy over and over.
- Music can also be used to get a message across of self respect and self esteem.

How can this issue of unplanned pregnancy among young adults be addressed by the broader faith community (and other community institutions)? (Note: Some of these responses referred directly to the faith community; others were broader.)

- We need to teach self esteem and self respect. Young girls need to hear the message: "Any man will value a girl who has no man or one man. But if the girl has many guys, then the man will think, 'I can do it with her and discard her.'"
- There needs to be more community outreach to young adults, who may be attracted to congregations if they see the relevance to their lives. One strategy is to reach out to young adults around the mission of community service.
- Churches need to change and take into account the way people live today. There needs to be an interface between beliefs and the practice of living.
- Churches need to provide someone for teens and young adults to talk to after they have become pregnant so that the young people can learn how to move on with their lives (and prevent future pregnancies).
- For churches, there is a gap in the young adult age bracket. Young adults need someone who can provide guidance and who they feel comfortable talking to. Young people need mentors – someone they can trust and to whom they can say, "This is what's happening to me and this is what I need from you."
- Kids need somewhere to go. They need youth groups; one idea is to have a "standards night" led by young adult leaders, which helps to build self-esteem.
- Fireside discussions can be held with young adults aged 18-30 where "standards" are discussed; young adults need to realize that, if they have an unplanned pregnancy, the children are the ones who suffer.

- Churches that have parent peer groups could reach 18-30 year old parents to educate them about planning subsequent pregnancies.
- Kids need to hear their parents' values. Morality needs to be taught to children at a very young age so that they develop a moral code. Faith communities could help parents tell their children that they want their children to marry before having children.
- The cultural aspect needs to be addressed. What is culturally okay in some countries is not acceptable in America. Parents need to be educated to teach their children.
- The extended family needs to be a focus. We need to ask: what are the critical moments and opportunities where the extended family could influence young adults around unplanned pregnancy?
- Parents do not know what to say to their children – both teens and young adults. We need to provide them with scripts so they know exactly what to say in different situations. Churches could sponsor research-based, parent education programs (about sex, relationships, pregnancy, etc.) in English and Spanish; these programs are adaptable to different perspectives.
- A link needs to be established between school nurses and the churches. School nurses could speak to congregations about how nurses can be a resource for students around prevention of pregnancy and HIV/STDs.
- Faith communities need to get involved in STD/HIV prevention; ministers need to start a campaign against HIV and cervical cancer. Young adults need to be frightened into different behaviors.
- People are needed within schools who are culturally savvy about different faith communities so that there will be greater understanding about the backgrounds of the children. One idea is to have people from youth ministries come into the schools.
- The African-American community needs to address prevention of both unplanned pregnancy and HIV/STD's.
- Clergy need to know how to talk to a bride/groom who are already living together before marriage since there are different risks involved in this situation – i.e. the marriage is less likely to last.
- Someone needs to talk with the boys; when boys are young, there is lots of pressure to be cool. And then later on, adult men hook up with young women and pressure them to have sex. Young men need to know that, when they become fathers, they cannot disappear from a child's life. Also, young men need to be informed about enforced child support.
- One place to reach out to young women who already have children is in child care centers (e.g. Early Head Start and Head Start) where their children are. We need to reach out to single mothers and encourage them to earn their GEDs. Social workers need to ask single mothers: what is your family plan?

- The Interagency Coalition on Teen Pregnancy could add someone from the faith community to its membership.
- Birth control needs to be made affordable to all.

How can The National Campaign help?

- The National Campaign needs to approach the faith community and respond to the needs of different congregations. One idea would be to help faith communities reach out to parents in their congregations to teach them how to talk to their children, teens, and young adults about sex, pregnancy, etc. – and provide them with scripts so they know exactly what to say in different situations.
- The NC could advocate for increased emphasis on education and prevention so young adults do not have unplanned pregnancy in the first place.
- Senator Forehand said that what The National Campaign is trying to do – its work around prevention – is very important. People are upset about rising birth rates and the rising costs of these births. It is important to emphasize the budget consequences of unplanned pregnancy and the fact that prevention of unplanned pregnancy leads to healthy kids and lower costs. Also, she said that the NC could help to educate Hispanics about using condoms; young men need to understand that they'll have to pay child support if a child is born. We need to prepare them to act appropriately in the "moment of passion."
- The NC could reinforce the importance of school health services as a point of contact for teens. School health services are required to focus on HIV, which provides an entry point for discussing the importance of planning pregnancies.
- The NC could spearhead an effective media campaign where young people hear the messages around preventing unplanned pregnancy and "strong family values" repeatedly.
- The NC could reach out to boys and young men with messages that resonate, such as how to counter peer pressure and the child support consequences of unplanned pregnancy.
- The NC could reach out to young women who already have children through child care centers (e.g. Head Start) where their children are.

SERVICE PROVIDERS FOCUS MEETING

Chaired by Kate Garvey, Chief, Children, Youth and Family Services, this well-attended meeting of providers, educators, County leaders, hospital personnel, and minority program representatives engaged in a wide-ranging discussion of the problem of unplanned pregnancy

among young adults in the County, innovative approaches and programs now in place, and what is needed to make progress in the future.

From your vantage point, how big a problem is unplanned pregnancy among young adults? What do you see happening in the County and the State?

- The problem of unplanned pregnancies is very common and there are often back to back pregnancies.
- Many of the unplanned pregnancies in young women stem from social problems, emotional problems, and/or mental health issues, such as depression. The young women do not care if they get pregnant. A number of these women have four or more pregnancies – and there are often multiple fathers involved.
- The children of low-income mothers with multiple children are at risk of child abuse.
- National data shows that the typical person with an unplanned pregnancy is a white woman with some college education.
- Unplanned pregnancies have significant economic and social consequences.
- Unplanned pregnancy often interrupts education and has an impact on the economic well-being of the mother, father, and child.

What do you see as the biggest challenges or barriers to preventing unplanned pregnancy among young adults?

General

- Poverty is a major factor in unplanned pregnancy. Title X programs are not available to a lot of people.
- Many middle class young adults have no health insurance and don't use contraception regularly.
- The terminology itself can be a barrier. Kathy Lally said that when she used the term "unwanted pregnancy" at the County Council meeting, there was a negative reaction.
- Access to services -- i.e. transportation -- is a barrier.
- Lack of appropriate education on the topic of sexuality is a barrier.
- Many young people feel that if they are not financially ready to have a child, this is not a problem because the government will pay for everything (through Medicaid, food stamps, etc.), which is not surprising because they grew up on welfare.

Boys and young men

- A lot of boys and young men do not want to use condoms and girls are afraid they will lose their boyfriends if they object.
- Young men complain that there are too many "rollers" out here. A "roller" is a woman who sleeps with many guys and has STDs/HIV.

Girls and young women

- For young girls, there is no motivation to avoid pregnancy. Young girls see this as something they can do very well. Some young women from disadvantaged backgrounds believe they can be great mothers.
- In late teens and early twenties, some girls want a baby but they don't want to get married. In some communities, there is a dearth of potential marriage partners.
- Girls who were adopted themselves sometimes have a compulsion to have a child and keep the baby, so that the outcome is different than it was for them.
- Some teens use pregnancy as an excuse for dropping out of school.
- Programs find that women with babies often do not want to initiate contact with the fathers. Some of the questions asked by social service programs focus on the father, and the girls/women are uncomfortable answering them.
- Young women with children who have new relationships with guys are often looking for help with the rent and they end up with another pregnancy/child.

Cultural barriers: Latino & other communities

- There are significant language and educational barriers among the target populations (e.g. Latinos). Many have 3rd/4th grade level educations, do not speak English, and cannot read in their own language.
- Latino parents of teens and young adults are sometimes complicit in encouraging unplanned pregnancy since young women get a lot of attention when they become pregnant. The message is that love is expressed by having a child. Girls and young women learn that it is their role to serve and stay at home. Girls need to hear the message, "You are more than your womb."
- Latino men think: "I'm going to be a man. I'm going to count. I'll have a kid."
- For first generation immigrants, the best way to be accepted is to have a child, which is a status symbol. Sometimes young girls/women want a baby because they want something of their own. (In some case, this also applies to college girls.)
- Many immigrant families were not taught about contraception.
- Some Hispanic high school girls feel that they must be in a relationship. It is very difficult for them to set goals for themselves or to focus on themselves.
- Certain populations are neglected in the County. Half of African Americans and Latinos do not graduate from high school.
- In the Asian community, the major barriers are language, lack of insurance coverage, difficulty accessing services (i.e. transportation

problems), and cultural competence. (Asian parents do not educate their children about their bodies).

Promising Approaches and Programs

- The Early Head Start (EHS) program serves children of low-income families with incomes below the poverty line until the child turns three. Last year, EHS served 126 families – 61 percent were single parents and 31 of the single Moms were completely unemployed. EHS is seeing a lot of mothers over 20 having additional unplanned pregnancies, with either the father of the previous child(ren) or another man. The program works with the mothers to encourage them to set goals; many mothers say they don't want to have another child. The program encourages women to focus on themselves (which is difficult) and to set goals (e.g. earning a GED). In particular, African American young women are afraid to focus on themselves; they get lost and many have 5 or 6 pregnancies by their mid-twenties.
- The Family Support Center has the SISTERS Program, which focuses on planned parenthood, life skills, and employment skills. The SISTERS Program dispels myths, and teaches girls about their bodies and healthy sexuality.
- The Teen and Young Adult Connection serves teens and young adults up to age 35. The challenge is reaching those people who haven't had a pregnancy and are in their 20's. We need to figure out where these young adults are and target them with messages while also targeting younger teens who will age into young adulthood later.
- The Maryland Multicultural Center offers life skills groups within GED/job readiness classes in a variety of settings including correctional facilities. They have found that rapport must be established with youth so that they are comfortable coming to adults.
- Healthy Families Montgomery/Home Visiting Program focuses on the prevention of child abuse and neglect, and one key strategy is helping first time mothers avoid repeat pregnancies. Young women must enter the program in the first 30 days after a child is born, and can stay in the program until age 24. The program provides services to children up until age 5. A professional visits the home every week for five years so that a relationship is formed between the home visitor and the young mother. The home visitor discusses sex/contraception, life skills/empowerment/refusal skills, and myths about how to get pregnant. For ten years, this program has had a positive outcome: ninety percent of the women in the program avoided having second pregnancy for two years.

- Florence Crittenton provides services to 13-19 year old mothers, and does not focus on young women age 20 and older.

What types of policies and programs would be most helpful in preventing unplanned pregnancy among young adults?

- It is important to be careful to use data and research to guide policy and programs.
- Teens and young adults need options other than unplanned pregnancy. Schools need to become culturally competent to counter the high drop out rates of Latinos and African Americans.
- Young adults need to be exposed to other realities in order to make good choices. Individualized goal planning (e.g. earning a high school diploma, going to college, etc.) can then become a reality.
- Each time a young girl/woman has a pregnancy, this is a critical time to intervene, educate, provide contraception, etc.
- Both male and female children need to be taught how to have healthy and respectful relationships -- whether they are young children, teens, or young adults. They need education about their bodies, conception, and basic health information in English and Spanish. We need to dispel myths about how you can get pregnant.
- Young women who have had several children need to educate other young women without children about the challenges involved.
- The message needs to get out that young adults need to be economically stable before they bring children into the world. This is critical in order to create an environment where children are wanted and well-cared for.
- Free contraceptives need to be made available to clients who lack health insurance.
- Young people need to hear that a large impact of unplanned pregnancy is poor prospects for long-term relationships as people with children who were not planned often move in and out of relationships after the child is born.
- Programs need to be culturally competent (we need greater understanding of the cultural history of each group). Staff needs to connect with and forge relationships with families and acknowledge strengths and commitment of families.
- There must be a trusting relationship between the counselor and the youth or young adult.
- We need to move from a crisis model to a prevention model. One idea is to hook onto the development in downtown Silver Spring to become part of charity days, health fairs, distribution of information, etc.
- Health insurance companies should be encouraged to provide information on sex, pregnancy, and contraception to young adults.

- Providers should be trained to provide age-appropriate information to young adults.
- Information on prevention should be dispersed widely, especially to those who don't think they need to hear it.
- Connections should be made between what people learn at home and in school.
- Men need education and guidance from other men (who have fathered children, contracted STD's/HIV, etc.) and women need education from other women who have had multiple children, contracted STDs/HIV, etc.
- Women need help to become competent parents, independent of their partners.

How can The National Campaign help?

- Develop a clever catchy PR campaign targeted to young adults.
- Use the web to educate young adults, including education about birth control options.
- Make family planning affordable; advocate for increase in Title X funding, and for instituting a sliding scale payment system to improve access and affordability.
- Advocate for cheaper contraceptives.
- Focus on preconception health and gear the information to providers who come into contact with 20 somethings.
- Focus on messages for 11-14 year olds, who are the most captive audience. Help young pre-teens and teens learn what it means to be responsible.
- Focus on what is the same for those under 19 and over 19—what issues do both age groups share with respect to prevention of unplanned pregnancy?
- Focus on specific target populations, e.g. undocumented Latinos, college educated, etc.
- Target, educate, and provide health insurance and contraception to young women with some college education since the typical woman with an unplanned pregnancy has some college education.
- Advocate for more funding for early childhood education (e.g. programs like Early Head Start).
- Partner with local organizations to change awareness and advocate for change.
- Help get treatment for those who have mental/emotional issues and problems.
- Provide girls and women with equal access to their futures.
- Provide guidance on adapting programs and messages for the local level.
- Conduct research on barriers to contraception for specific groups in specific regions so programs can be culturally competent. (Many

providers and programs are providing transportation, translation, etc. but they need further guidance based on research.)

- Change the perception about the problem of unplanned pregnancy among young adults; create awareness at the political level and advocate for change at the department level within the County.
- Focus “above the belt” by helping providers and families come together to help young men and women develop positive life skills so they can see a future for themselves, thereby building on positive youth development programs.
- Focus on boys and young men.

MINORITY HEALTH INITIATIVES

FOCUS MEETING

The last event in Montgomery County was a well-attended luncheon meeting with leadership and staff of the three Minority Health Initiatives in the County: the African American Health Initiative, the Latino Health Initiative, and the Asian American Health Initiative. Mandated by the County, the purpose of these Initiatives is to eliminate health disparities and improve the quality of life for African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans in Montgomery County. This meeting was chaired by Judy Covich, School Health Administrator, DHHS, and School Health Services. Discussion focused on the similarities and differences in unplanned pregnancy in the African-American, Hispanic, and Asian communities – as well as promising solutions.

What do you see happening in the County in terms of unplanned pregnancy among young adults in the African-American, Latino, and Asian communities?

- In the Latino community, there is a higher rate of unplanned pregnancy. The Latino community has lots of health issues including diabetes.
- There are good statistics on teen pregnancy, but we see that in the Latino community high pregnancy rates among older teens are pushing up the rates.
- Young mothers and fathers often have no plan for childrearing. They never consider how to pay for diapers, much less health care, food and shelter, education, etc. Girls think, “Someone will help me.” Programs need to be tough and consistent to help young people develop and implement plans.
- The children who grow up poor, unattached to an adult at home or at school, are at great risk for unplanned pregnancy and other problems. Poor communities lack adult supervision and family communication.

- In certain communities (e.g., African-American), girls see that they had their first baby as a teen and received temporary assistance, food stamps and Medicaid, so they then go on to have another baby in order to receive more income.
- In the Asian community, sex is very taboo and is not addressed at home. Asians are considered the “good minority”—well-behaved and successful. Asian youth may be having sex but parents will deny it so the schools need to play a key role.

What do you see as the biggest challenge or major barrier to preventing unplanned pregnancy among young adults from African-American, Latino, and Asian backgrounds?

- In middle and upper income families, there is a clearer understanding of the long-term impact of an unplanned pregnancy and the importance of ordering life decisions: education, then marriage, and then childbearing. In low-income communities, the impact of having a baby at the wrong time is more difficult to quantify.
- Large challenges exist in the Latino community where parents have 2-3 jobs and children are often separated from their parents for 5-10 years (because the parents remain in the home country). More than half of Latino kids do not graduate from high school. Latinos do not think they belong in this culture.
- Immigration is a major problem and many people are afraid (of being deported). Latinos are receiving mixed messages: “Leave, you’re not welcome but come into the County to get services.” Also, many Latinos do not know where to go for services, which are costly and there is a language barrier for Latinos to access services.
- High birth rates do not necessarily mean high rates of unplanned pregnancy. Many of the births (in Latino and African-American communities) are not unplanned.
- Screening for eligibility for public programs is becoming more stringent, which discourages access to family planning services.
- One challenge in terms of helping young women move forward is that government welfare programs will not count college education as “training” – which makes it difficult for young mothers to get out of poverty.
- In the U.S., sex is seen as dirty, which makes real intimacy difficult. “Everybody is doing it but we don’t discuss it.” Also, teens are not supposed to have sex or relationships so adults don’t want to address it. Kids need education about sex, intimacy, and relationships.
- One similarity across all three cultures is that there is a taboo against parents addressing sex, pregnancy, and contraception with their

children of all ages. Adults feel totally uncomfortable discussing sex and the physical body.

- It is important to consider the role of religion and cultural practices in unplanned pregnancy.
- Male attitudes can be an obstacle, such as the attitude, “How many babies can I have to prove my virility?”
- Family planning is female focused. Most birth control methods are for women.
- The message in music videos and on the internet is that you can turn sex on and off whenever you want to. Intimacy is not portrayed.
- Pressure from friends can be an obstacle to being responsible.
- Young people don’t know where to go for health services and reproductive health services are expensive in the County.

What is the County doing now to support young adults to develop the skills to make responsible life choices?

- The Interagency Coalition on Teen Pregnancy is a robust organization that is also concerned about unplanned pregnancy among young adults. This organization wants to ensure that young people have choices.
- The County is in the process of developing a Blueprint for Latino Health.
- Identity is a Latino organization for kids.
- The Latino community has documents to assist parents in talking with their children about sex, contraception, and pregnancy.
- The County has great partnerships to provide family planning through Planned Parenthood.
- Early Head Start and Healthy Families were mentioned (see summary of meeting with service providers), as was the African-American Home Visiting program, which has a number of case managers.
- One program is teaching young children (1st grade) about healthy behaviors so that by the time they become pregnant down the road, they will be healthy.

What do we need to do in the future to help prevent unplanned pregnancy among young adults from African-American, Latino, and Asian communities?

- In the future, we need to focus more on what the data and research shows in order to plan effective interventions. Because of the County’s strong emphasis on outcomes, it is important to show that programmatic interventions have positive outcomes. Building on the PRAMS data on unplanned pregnancy in the state, we need to investigate whether the PRAMS data can be broken out by county and demographic groups.

- It is not clear that the community or policy-makers think that unplanned pregnancy is a problem among young adults. Other health problems, such as diabetes and smoking cessation, can appear to be more pressing. Given the number of health needs and the limited resources, we need to address the question: where does unplanned pregnancy among young adults fit with other health priorities? If it is an epidemic, we need to highlight this and raise awareness among policy-makers about the links between unplanned pregnancy and low birth weight babies, infant mortality, employment, incarceration, and costs to the County, the state, and the nation.
- We need to educate young adults about the consequences of unprotected sex by showing photos of the effects of STD's/HIV and photos of unhealthy children born as a result of unplanned pregnancy. We need to show that the consequences are a big deal so that young people hear the message.
- We need to help families understand that their expectations for their children influence their behavior around pregnancy. Relationships with mothers are critical. If children think their mothers are approachable, they will talk with them about tough issues.
- Young women who are recent immigrants need to know about their many contraceptive options. But at the same time, we need to take into account the fact that women are coming from cultures where sexual discussions are taboo.
- We need to put intimacy back into discussions about sex; the mechanics of sex should not be separated from intimacy.
- A focus on preconception care is an effective strategy for raising awareness about the importance of planning pregnancies.
- We need to raise expectations for both women and men regarding sex, contraception and pregnancy planning. We need to communicate that it is all about choices and following through in a responsible way.
- A variety of approaches are needed so that young people can get information about intimacy/relationships/sex/contraception/pregnancy from parents, schools, churches (from grade school through college), and the internet. These approaches should include interesting programs and other avenues for reaching target audiences, including parents.
- The male voice is missing and critical; the County needs programs for men. It is important to change the assumption that all men are irresponsible and broaden family planning to include men. We need to look at what is happening in Wellness Centers and Planned Parenthood to raise men's awareness about preventing unplanned pregnancy. Also, midwives need to engage men.
- Boys need to be educated about sex/contraception/pregnancy when they come in for sports physicals.
- We also need to focus on male responsibilities, through education about and enforcement of child support among other strategies.
- Programs need to assist young fathers to make better decisions in the future. Many men feel proud of their children even if they admit they may have made a mistake. Education programs and messages need to take this into account.
- We need more partnerships with the schools, and an increase in school health services. Also, grants are needed to schools and communities to start educational programs on pregnancy prevention.
- Individualized approaches are needed for African-American, Latino, Asian, and Caucasian communities.
- Young people need to hear the message that young adults need education to do well in today's economy, unplanned pregnancies can interrupt education, and children do better with both a mother and a father.
- Since media shapes values, we need to make unplanned pregnancy a big deal on TV through campaigns modeled on the breast cancer awareness and smoking cessation campaigns.
- The internet should be used as a vehicle to get the information on preventing unplanned pregnancy to young adults.

How can The National Campaign help?

- Develop language to reach out to elected officials on this issue. (In the County, there is less concern about older teens and young adults; officials think that the government should not be involved with people over 18 who have reached the age of majority. We need to educate elected officials about the problem with older teens and young adults – where impulse control is still a problem.)
- Work with family planning clinics to engage young men and fathers.
- Emphasize that unplanned pregnancies lead to lower birth weight babies and infant mortality.
- Note: The NC offered to provide the document on Latino parents (authored by Dr. Vincent Guilamos-Ramos) to the group. The document focuses on what the literature says about how Latino parents can talk with their children about sex/contraception/pregnancy.