

Teen Pregnancy Down

By Joseph Young
WI Staff Writer

Brenda Rhodes Miller, the executive director of the D.C. Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, announced last week that the teen pregnancy rate for African American young women has decreased rapidly in the District of Columbia.

Last year, 75.4 percent, or 746,820, of teen pregnancies that occurred in the U.S. were among girls ages 15-19. The national teen pregnancy rate for Black girls was 60.9 per 1000 compared to 65 for White girls. The national teen pregnancy rate for Hispanics girls was the highest, at 131.5 per 1000.

The most recent statistics compiled from 2004 data show that the teen pregnancy rate in the District is 79.4 per 1000 for girls aged 15-19. That is down from 152 pregnancies per 1000 a decade ago.

Miller sat down with The Washington Informer last week to expound on efforts to further reduce teen pregnancies.

JY: What are the economic arguments for investing in the prevention of teen pregnancy?

BRM: Well, if you prevent teen pregnancy, you're going to see a higher graduation rate. You're going to see more people who are going to be prepared to be in the work force. You're going to see fewer fragile families that need very expensive support.

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We know the children of teen parents suffer abuse and neglect. They have a higher rate of learning disabilities. Sons of teen mothers go to jail three times more than the sons of other mothers. And the daughters of teen mothers are more likely to become teen parents themselves.

So, if you can reduce teen pregnancy, you give people a better chance to get out of poverty, to develop the skills they need to be self-sufficient, to grow up to be adults, to give parents what they need to be strong and stable.

JY: What are some of the related consequences of teen pregnancy, both economic and social?

BRM: We talked a little about the economic cost. The social costs are that you essentially have children bringing each other up. If you're 15 and you have a baby, your growth and development sort of stops right there. And then there you are with the responsibility of nurturing another life in your

hands and you're still somebody who needs to be nurtured and supported yourself.

So, the economic consequences are that we have families without the support and strength they need to thrive. And you have lives that face a dead end. If you don't have an education; you don't have any opportunity; you don't have any support; you really can't go very far.

It's a tragic cycle we see repeated when teen parents have children and their children have children. You could have several generations of a household where nobody got to have a safe childhood, a productive childhood and a happy childhood.

JY: What recommendations would you make to prevent teen pregnancy?

BRM: The research is really clear. Teen pregnancies are less likely when girls and boys have a close and caring relationship to a trustworthy adult. It needs to be an adult, not another kid. It's less likely when they have school success. It's less likely when they have a plan that doesn't include pregnancy in

their teen age years.

When they have safe places to spend their time, where they can learn interesting things with adult supervision, and when they have a sense of belonging. Essentially, what it takes to prevent teen pregnancy is you look at people who weren't teen parents and see the positive factors that were present in their lives. I always say if I hadn't had the family support, the expectations and guidance that I had in my life, there's no telling where I would have been.

And it's true for all of us. We want to give every child in the District, regardless of income or ethnicity or neighborhood or race the same things we want for our own children - a safe place to be, a stable family, a good school, and the motivation it takes to plan ahead so that teen pregnancy isn't a part of what you're looking at when you're a teenager.

For more information contact DC Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy at: (202) 789-4666 or info@teen-pregnancydc.org.