

Teens & Toddlers Fall 2010 Program Report

SUMMARY:

During the Fall 2010-2011 semester of Teens & Toddlers we began the program with a total of 16 students and completed with 12 students. Ages ranged from 16 to 19. Overall we completed with 7 girls and 5 boys. One of our female students was already the mother of two children when she joined the program and one of our male students was already expecting a child when he joined the program. Reasons for being at continuation high school consisted of, a) ditching too much at their conventional high school, b) becoming pregnant and needing a faster, more convenient way of finishing high school, and c) behavioral issues in the classroom which caused them to be expelled from their conventional school. These are the primary reasons for our Teens & Toddlers students to be enrolled at the continuation high school, Phoenix High. The Teens & Toddlers Program considers our participants "at risk" because these students are likely to have unwanted pregnancies as teens or have problems adapting in society due to criminal behavior, violence, and or drug use / selling. The program gives them the opportunity to learn how to prevent unwanted pregnancies effectively, learn how to be professional in a work environment / integrate into society more easily, become educated about non-violent parenting / child development, as well as offers them tools to manage their anger and make more positive life choices.

REPORT:

Goal: Educating young people about the realities of pregnancy and parenting in a practical and theoretical way.

Outcome: SOMEWHAT SUCCEEDED

Indicators: Based on comparison of the responses to the Pre and Post Program Surveys (12 students total) we had only 1 student whose age at which they thought they would need to be before having a child went down from ages "20-22" to "16-18". We had two students whose age stayed at "over 25", one student whose age stayed at "22-24", and two students whose age stayed at "20-22". We had one student whose age went up from "16-18" to "18-20", two students whose age went up from "20-22" to "22-24", two students whose age went up from "22-24" to "over 25", and one student who went up from "18-20" to "over 25". Half of the students showed an increase in the age at which they thought was optimal to have a child; 10 of the students marked that they believed a person should be at minimum 20 years of age, 5 of which thought "over 25" was appropriate. One male student, who is currently expecting, was more diligent than the others about getting more information on unit #11, when we discussed the costs of raising a child.

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Goal: Teaching child development in such a way as to be immediately applicable whilst in the nursery and at home with their own young siblings (and hopefully much later as parents).

Outcome: SOMEWHAT SUCEEDED

Indicators: Based on the Program Surveys we had only one student whose results stated she knew less about child development at the end of the program than she did in the beginning (pre-program she stated her knowledge was “Much better” than others about child development; post-program she stated her knowledge was “A little better” than others about child development). This result could be an expression of her realization that she originally knew less than she thought she did-- that there was so much more to learn about children than she initially understood. We had a total of six students whose responses were the same before and after the program; two students’ responses indicated that their knowledge was “A little better” than others about child development both before and after the program, one student’s responses indicated that her knowledge was “Much better” than others about child development both before and after the program and three students whose responses indicated that they knew “About the same” as others about child development before and after the program. We had a total of five students whose responses indicated that their knowledge increased over the course of the program; one student whose knowledge went from “A little less” than others to “A little better” than others, one student whose knowledge went from “About the same” to “Much better” than others, and three students whose knowledge went from “A little better” to “Much better” than others.

One student’s mother runs a small home daycare, and he felt that he would be able to use some of the techniques in the afternoons working with her. One student, who has two very small children and an infant half sister residing in the home, was especially interested in the redirection formula and how to “wait out” tantrums with kind words and patience. Four students were asked specifically by teachers at McBride to return; one male has already filled out the paperwork and should start in the same classroom he worked in as a volunteer.

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Goal: Facilitating and eliciting a capacity to reflect on the impact that their words and behavior have on others (particularly small children) and developing new, more helpful forms of behavior around such issues as communication and discipline.

Outcome: MOSTLY SUCCEEDED

Indicators: Based on Program Surveys, by the end of the program, eleven out of twelve students disagreed or strongly disagreed with the idea that sometimes smacking a child was the best way to discipline them as well as the

idea that using violence or aggression as the only option you have sometimes.

Only one student responded by the end that she wasn't sure if smacking a child was the best way to discipline them, yet she strongly disagreed that violence or aggression is the only option at times. During the course of the program every student indicated that they were hit as a form of discipline while being raised.

The overall responses on program surveys indicate that these students have learned a different way of parenting may be better for them with their own future or present children.

One student shared that her father, though now in recovery, was very abusive physically to both her and her mother, while another was basically a "servant" to her father, who even went so far as to hold her against a wall and choke her. Another male student described an altercation between himself and his father.

Goal: Discussing and exploring the realities of teenagers' lives today: sex, drugs, peer pressure, in order to open up new possibilities and to engender a more informed and empowered sense of choice. Increased sexual responsibility by both males and females.

Outcome: SOMEWHAT SUCCEEDED

Indicators: In terms of sexual responsibility, based on program surveys every student's responses indicated that they either had the same amount of knowledge about preventing sexually transmitted diseases before the program as they did after, or that they learned more about this through the program. All students indicated that they felt they knew at least as much as most teens their age, or more about sexually transmitted diseases. Two students indicated they knew about the same about STDs as their peers, five students indicated they knew a little more than their peers about STDs, and five students indicated they knew much more than their peers about STDs.

This particular group of teens had much less interest in drugs than previous groups. This group seemed much more prone to under-age drinking, which we discussed quite a bit in class. One student who shared that he drank every day, stated that he was cutting way down because he has a child on the way (as of three months before starting the program). Another student marked his 180 days sober (from drugs and alcohol) on the first day of class.

In terms of peer pressure, by the end of the program most students felt they were able to make their own choices without being impacted by peer pressure, however there were a few who seemed to have difficulty standing their ground.

One girl in particular showed time and time again that when her mind was made up about something, nothing was going to stand in their way. We are seeing this more and more often with teens in our class, which is great.

The female students expressed that for the majority of them, terminating a pregnancy would never been an option in the case of an accidental pregnancy. One in particular felt very strongly about this, though she also explained that she would never have sex with someone she was not "in love with" and had some

strong commitment to in the first place. Another stated that in her opinion, almost always an “accidental pregnancy” was like “drunk driving”, and that she felt it truly was an irresponsible choice, something that can and should be prevented and within one’s control. During the talk with the guest sex educator, the students seemed very well versed in the different methods of birth control, and several of the males said that they routinely used condoms. Two of the girls shared that they have implants, and one is using an IUD. The student with the two children, although not planning to have anymore (at least for several years) is extremely concerned about it “happening again”-- she tried very hard to impress upon the others about the difficulty of her situation.

One of our greatest successes in terms of empowering choice came through closely working with one of the students , the principal and his mother on the issue of his “being forced” to attend boot camp. His mother had promised him that he would no longer have to go if he met certain grade and curfew requirements, but continually “pushed back” the age that it would end. We discussed at length with him that he had more power than he thought, and that “getting what you want” is a process or negotiation-- what are you willing to give up, change or do to get to your desired goal. He felt very powerless and in a stuck place; we met with the principal and had an hour long bilingual phone session between the four of us hoping to be an advocate for him. His grades and his home time after school continued to improve, and he seemed to really take to the idea that if he could show how he was trying with solid facts, and present his “demands” in a fair and respectful way, adults would listen to him, and making more positive life choices would “pay off”.

Goal: Developing emotional literacy through teaching skills such as self-reflection, in order to heighten a sense of responsibility, ethical behaviour and the capacity to form healthy relationships

Outcome: MOSTLY SUCCEEDED

Indicators: Most students showed improvement in the area of overall self-reflection, as indicated through classroom discussions. One painfully shy student truly “came out of her shell” in discussions and on the walk with her facilitator, and though she was the very last to do the timeline, showed great insight and shared deep trauma. As mentioned previously, another student was able to improve his overall relationship with his parents through the development of emotional literacy and self-reflection on his life choices.

The most significant example of success in this area can be seen in two examples with a female student. Early in the semester, she was reprimanded publicly by the administration for the outfit she was wearing-- told that she was unprofessional and disreputable looking. This hurt her feelings-- not the comment per se but they way it was presented to her and in front of the others. Through facilitator coaching, she was encouraged to go to the principal and express her feelings directly and that we would support her in this. She did so, and after a very good conversation returned to the group much more positive. We

commended her “for standing in her power” and not letting it brew inside instead. Later she was asked to leave the class briefly due to continual side talking. When the facilitator went to speak with her, along with the principal, although she was visibly upset and crying over the incident, she was able to show insight into how she was responsible for overall difficulties in class, even with other teachers. The facilitator apologized for the way in which she had asked this student to leave and the student was very appreciative of the facilitator’s ability to take responsibility for her own inappropriate handling of emotion. Interestingly, this event happened on the day of discussing discipline styles and the ineffectiveness of disciplining while angry. It was a great lesson for all the students, as well as the facilitators in how to effectively handle situations we are unhappy or uncomfortable with.

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Goal: Increasing self-confidence and respect for self and others.

Outcome: MOSTLY SUCCEEDED

Indicators: Self-confidence, self-respect and respect for others was indicated through previous measures, such as the responses from teens about peer-pressure and their unwillingness to let it stand in their way. This group seemed to have a higher level of self-confidence in general than previous groups. In speculating, it seemed that this group had more students with deeper friendships than other groups. We come in contact with many students who feel they can trust no one. In this group it seemed every student had at least one student they could trust beyond measure. One student asked if he could bring his bike to show tricks to the students at one of the day-care centers because he was aware and proud of his skills in this area. Two other students were the highest ranking students in the school in-so-far as academic points. In our discussion on future plans and goals, several of the students had well developed dreams, including buying a house and starting a small beauty shop after cosmetology school. This provided a fascinating session in which the facilitators, as well as the class, were divided on optimism versus realism versus cynicism. Some were of the opinion that one can attain anything they set their mind to, if the steps to reaching that goal are outlined realistically. Others were of the opinion that if one sets their dreams too high, they will end up disappointed - set up for failure-- and should start small and build from there. A plus to this was that the students were able to see how people with differing viewpoints could “talk it out” and process in a respectful yet passionate debate. This also showed how some personalities feel more confident about attaining their goals by thinking big and building toward that even if the destination isn’t clearly in sight, and others feel more confident in attaining their goals by starting small and building toward visibly attainable goals first.

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Goal: Engendering an experience and understanding of the concept of consequences in their lives, whether in the way they use their power, anger or sexuality.

Outcome: MOSTLY SUCCEEDED

Indicators: In addition to some of the other indicators that would fall into this category as well as ones before this, we had one student we saw had a developed concept of consequences in his life, as he had discontinued the use of alcohol and drugs completely, however due to the fact that he went to NA and AA meetings regularly, he refused to make any attempt to engage in the idea of what he wanted for his future (even to the point of refusing to decide on Friday what he would be doing on Monday). It is clear that this is something he was taught through the anonymous meetings-- "one day at a time", however facilitators were concerned that he was not looking at the consequence of THIS. We felt he may end up not accomplishing all he is capable of (and he is very capable) because of his refusal to plan for his future.

On our graduation day there was a random drug search of the school and all our students passed with flying colors! Another student shared that he has severely curtailed his illegal activities (he used to sell) because it is "just bringing him too much trouble", especially at home. Another student who is currently on probation did not seem to make the connection completely between his actions (drug use and fights) and continuing to end up on house arrest. He said that someday he would like to be a probation officer himself because "their job seems really easy", and that his record would be sealed at 18. Yet, we saw that he was making certain efforts to stop specific behaviors that would extend the length of his probation. In the case of another student, who came off house arrest during the semester, we saw in him the ability to see that some of his actions were not serving him and there was a marked improvement in his school work as well as diligence to successfully graduate.

Another student was very proud of the fact that working two jobs allowed her to purchase a car (as well as insurance) and showed this off to the others as a great example. The female student with two children discussed with her facilitator on the walks how to deal with the balance of personal power (including jealousy, sexuality and "crushes") in her relationship with the child's father. Though she hopes to marry him within a few years, she was also very practical about the stressors in their relationship, and talked extensively about handling her anger better, ("not saying mean things you can't get back when upset") and creating a budget for the two of them, with her creating an "allowance", because they both agreed his "is not so good at handling the money". As stated before, one student is very strict with herself about not having sex without love for the simple fact that she does not want to end up with an unwanted pregnancy. At least half the students indicated a desire to continue on to college. And about half of the class is currently employed.

Goal: Creating a sense of achievement through a successful relationship with the toddlers and through an in-depth work experience where they are treated as responsible young people by nursery staff, their own peer group and project leaders.

Outcome: MOSTLY SUCCEEDED

Indicators: Again, four students were asked to apply as volunteers at the daycare centers after completing the program because of the quality of their work with the toddlers. Many of the students came back from the centers with a sense of pride about their interactions with the toddlers. One student was very proud of the fact that she was able to learn sign language in order to better communicate with some of the kids she was working with who did not have spoken language. She even came up with a name for herself in sign language (which is usually based on a physical characteristic of the person in question). In the first few weeks especially, the teens expressed surprise that the toddlers looked to them for help, and asked for them on the alternate weeks. One student asked for help in how to say goodbye to her student, who dissolved into tears and silence when she explained this was her last day. One teacher in particular is very good at asking the teens to help with specific tasks, and “assigned” a particularly difficult child to her for one-on-one; after the class she asked how she could help him more in the future.

Goal: Development of job skills and life planning.

Outcome: SUCCEEDED

Indicators: This goal was mostly covered by a previous goal. About half of the students in this group are currently employed however, they still showed interest in developing their resumes. Most of the students had some indication of their longer range goals, with the exception of the one student attending AA and NA. On two occasions two different students called outside of class time and asked for facilitator information to put down as they were filling out job applications. As always, the exercise in which students were paired and given “planned or unplanned” pregnancy scenarios at random met with some laughs, silliness and the like, but two students took it very seriously and created a whole plan including what job he would hold, where they would live, how they would tell the parents, manage childcare and the like.

Goal: Preventing teenage pregnancy through direct experience of the enormous responsibility and work parenting involves, through interaction with the nursery children and discussion in class. The development of alternative goals to being pregnant, such as developing satisfying work and relationships.

Outcome: SUCCEEDED

Indicators: No students became pregnant during the course of the program. One student already has two children and another student has a child on the way, hence their decision to participate in the class; though the male did not share this fact with the whole group until the second to last week of class (several of his friends knew but he asked facilitators to keep it private) the young mother often shared stories of the realities of the task of raising two children

under 3 and continually stressed how strongly she felt that the others should wait to have children. Most students shared that they felt it was better to complete school and have some sort of financial stability before having a child and all indicated that they wanted to wait or would have preferred to have waited before having a child. Most teens were specifically impacted by what they saw at McBride because many of them were previously unaware of the potential complications which can occur, especially when having a child with disabilities or developmental delays. One student in particular who was adamant about waiting until she had a stable career, knew first hand about these complications, having a brother who is developmentally delayed and attends McBride.

Goal: To give the toddlers who participated in the program a positive experience of older role models.

Outcome: SUCCEEDED

Indicators: All the students felt very bonded to us because we showed up as positive role models for them, so they were quite good about showing a good example to the toddlers. Most students were very respectful about their language when at the centers, with very few slip-ups. One student was moved when the toddler called her “mom” multiple times, and helped another child who was very sad that his mother could not show up for the class Halloween party--she followed him around, trying to engage him in activities, and generally made “him feel better”. As stated one of the teachers at McBride specifically complemented our student on her skill with the most disabled children each session. One male student bonded quite intensely with a child with leukemia, and referred to him as a “special friend”. Though his participation in class was not as good as some of the other students, in the room he was surprisingly involved--this was also a class where the teacher has previously not been receptive to teens and has some severely autistic students, including a biter.

Goal: To provide sufficient individual support to students during and after the project to enable them to manage their lives more effectively and seek to make the fullest use of the program.

Outcome: SUCCEEDED

Indicators: This is one area in which we always truly succeed. The students know that we are available for them after class is over and have our email, phone numbers and social networking information. During and after the semester we respond to texts and communication in a quick and involved manner. This year we are going to send a follow-up postcard describing some of the things we admire about each individual student. Another student will receive one positive “affirmation” text weekly as we talked about encouraging her to make positive self-statements, something she said she was totally unable to do. The student soon to be a father has promised to let us know the progress of the pregnancy,

when the birth occurs, and seemed reassured when we both stated at graduation that if there is anyway we can help him-- especially with more information on child care and rearing- he just needs to ask. As stated in previous reports, students-- sometimes from several years before-- each semester come back to visit, to stay after class and share their joys and concerns, and do keep in touch with us. In fact, one the last full day of instruction, one of our girls from the previous year returned with her new baby and mother and stayed for 40 minutes updating us on her life-- she is currently in school and doing well considering, and her infant daughter is healthyhappy and pretty darn cute.

Goal: Citizenship skills through multi-cultural participation and promotion of an appreciation of difference and improved social behaviour.

Outcome: SUCCEDED

Indicators: This class seemed less diverse than in other semesters (one student is half African-American, another half-Philipino), one white, with the rest of Hispanic heritage (though multiple Latin and South American countries are represented) but at least outwardly racial bias seemed less of a salient issue. At least three students were more comfortable in Spanish (as evidenced by their language of conversational choice on the walks) and almost all speak Spanish in the home. In the sharing and timelines, however, we did explore the differences in cultural beliefs about male and female roles, and the teens had a great deal of input into this. Several of the girls were annoyed by the idea of machismo versus "marianismo", the idea that while the men had the freedom to do what they wanted, the women were expected, in their words "to shut up and take it". Many rebelled against this concept, and two felt that their mothers had instilled this in them by leaving their fathers, who were acting in the above manner. Though there was some allusion in the timelines to racial division in terms of gang turf, again this did not come up as a major factor in the class.

Goal: Crime prevention through anger management, work with awareness of choice and personal responsibility and future life goals.

Outcome: SOMEWHAT SUCCEDED

Indicators: Parts of this outcome measure were covered in previous sections. Though it seems almost impossible to get them to stop tagging, one student did confide his "crew has rules-- no residences, businesses or people's stuff". On the day our student brought this bike to share with the Center and he was riding back with us, slowly so he could stay with the group, he was stopped and harassed, truthfully, by a female Officer. He handled this incident with tact and composure, though he was visibly distressed by it. This then prompted a discussion among the group about their perception of law enforcement and other confrontations they have had with them. Another student gave in his timeline a

vivid description of his incarceration and how it changed his perspective on fights and criminal activity and that he never wanted to go back again.

The facilitators believe that we had a positive impact during the “anger management” section due to the fact that many student responses on the program surveys changed from thinking that violence is sometimes their only option to it not being their only option. We feel strongly that we helped them to see that there is always an alternate choice to violence and inappropriate behavior when angry, however, it is yet to be seen how many of them are able to continue to regularly implement these tools in the moment of anger. There are times when those tools are being used and other times when students slip. This is the nature of being human, however overall, we feel we were successful in offering the tools necessary for them to deal with their anger more productively, create positive life goals, and show increased personal responsibility. Time will tell if crime prevention is one of the results, although we did see indicators that students were pushing themselves to make more responsible decisions in regards to “crime”. Many students are aware that “things will be different” when they turn eighteen, and that the consequences of fights and tickets etc. are more permanent and impactful when they become of age.

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Conclusion:

Overall, we feel we succeeded in our goals. Since every group is different, learns differently, communicates differently, participates differently, etc., it becomes difficult to reach each student as effectively as we would like, but overall we give 100% of ourselves to the task.

Next semester, we will be implementing a few new ideas to see if they will help measure our successes and failures. #1: Karen typed up two sheets, one to be filled out by students at the beginning of the program and one to be filled out at the end. The pre-program sheet asks students to write down what they hope to learn from the program. The post-program sheet asks students to write down what they did learn from the program (including at least three things and why they were important for them), what they enjoyed most about the program, and whether they would recommend the program to others & why. #2: Karen typed up the goals and will be asking students (at the end of the program) to look over the goals and write down whether they feel facilitators have succeeded or not. We feel this important because although our indicators may give a general idea of our successes and failures, only the students can really know what they have learned.