

Teens & Toddlers Spring 2011 Program Report

SUMMARY:

During the Fall 2010-2011 semester of Teens & Toddlers we began the program with a total of 13 students and completed with 11 students. Ages ranged from 16 to 18. Overall we completed with 7 boys and 4 girls. One of our male students was already the father of one 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) needing a faster, more convenient way of finishing high school due to too few credits, and c) behavioral issues in the classroom which caused them to be expelled from their conventional school, and d) learning differences / deficits necessitating individualized education plans not provided in large classroom settings. 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 fall through the cracks of the educational system, have unwanted pregnancies as teens or have problems adapting in society due to criminal behavior, violence / inability to manage anger appropriately, 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. This semester Karen incorporated a new document at the close of the program requesting students' thoughts on whether we reached each goal and examples of why they felt we did or did not succeed. We have included some quotes from this document as indicators of our successful delivery of the program.

REPORT:

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

Outcome: MOSTLY SUCCEEDED

Indicators: "A" stated: "I learned that there are many types of protection". "B" answered: "I realized that having a baby can cost a lot of money and it can damage the child's life if you don't have all you need to provide": "C" answered: "Use protection and don't do drugs while pregnant". "D" wrote: "Yes, they taught me well; I will always use protection now." "E" says: "They gave us examples of what to do during or after the baby is born" and "it costs a lot of money to take care of a child". "F" agreed: "They gave us examples and tips of how to prepare for a child."

"G" did not disclose to the group that he already had a child until he gave his timeline. It was very moving and impactful for everyone to hear his first hand experiences of choosing to keep his son, sharing custody with the mother, and his dedication to his family.

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: SUCCEEDED

Indicators: "A" said: "I learned to show more affection to the child." "G" liked that: "We had serious conversations and I heard lots of other opinions." "B" stated: "I learned that you need to

treat children like they have independence and have a conversation with them.” “H” learned: “I play with kids because they need to move.” “C” wrote: “I learned to give more attention to my nephew.” “I” wrote: “I learned how to be with children and how to handle them.”

We spent a lot of time talking about natural and logical consequences, and the difference between positive child guidance and punishment. Most of the students had very negative past experiences with the subject, including being hit, beaten or ridiculed. One student shared that her mother “chopped off her hair” as a punishment for breaking curfew. Though a few of the guys indicated that a “heavy hand kept them in line” all of them were amenable to learning more effective ways of redirecting a child that preserved self-esteem, kept them physically safe and actually made a difference in imparting the lesson. Several students shared ways that they had put this into practice with younger siblings, including moving objects/ changing the environment, remaining firm and consistent, using humor and offering choices and alternatives.

“H” was impacted by a video presentation on how important movement is to a child’s development-- especially touch and rocking on an infant and their developing brains. This idea of sensory stimulation “had never occurred to him before”. He played hard with the kids and it made him feel good to know that this was contributing to their development. He also identified with the boys at Beethoven who “got in trouble” and kept them busy by basketball, tag and active play-- all things that he himself craved in his elementary years.

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

Outcome: SUCCEEDED

Indicators: “G” wrote: “I try not to use bad vocabulary around smaller children.” “B” learned: “To give children creative discipline”. “C” stated: “When my nephew messed up my couch, I was going to whip him, but didn’t.” “D” said that: “I have a lot of patience now towards kids.” “E” said that: “When a child is crying, it is up to me to show him affection”. “F” explained that: “Showing affection towards the child helps them learn about mood.”

During the class “J” lost a close friend to an auto accident. He came in very distraught but was able to discuss with both facilitators and the class how he was feeling and the events of the day-- and even sat in the corner and openly cried. This was remarkable because he is a “tough guy” in every sense of the words.

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: MOSTLY SUCCEEDED

Indicators: “A” says: “I am more aware that I have a sense of choice.” “G” said: “We did our timelines, which helped us open up to the others in the classroom.” “B” asserted: “Have your own opinion!” “C” wrote: “I learned to use a condom more often.” “D” commented: “I was shown that I can say ‘no’ when I want to, no matter what.” “E” agreed: “It’s best to use protection to not end up with a kid.” “I” summed it up with: “I learned to be responsible and smart.”

It is difficult to say what our level of success was with “K” because although we did spend some one-on-one time with her discussing her tendency towards rash judgements and overt sexual behavior toward a number of boys in the class, this behavior did not seem to lessen. We hope that our words had an impact as she showed signs of the potential for great maturity in some areas. The other girls in the class often mentioned to the facilitators how this behavior bothered them, but they were able to grasp the concept that sexuality is a form of power and needs to be used responsibly.

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

Outcome: SUCCEEDED

Indicators: “A” wrote: “Yes, T&T made me think about people’s feelings.” “G” said: “Even though I love my son, I shouldn’t have had a kid too early.” “B” stated: “I learned more about finding right things to do.” “H” explained that: “Playing with the kids made me feel responsible.” “C” found that: “When other people are going through things, I care about other emotions from mine.” “D” asserted: “I think about how I do stuff, I’m more responsible.” “E” wrote: “Having a child is a major responsibility throughout your life.” “F” learned: “Responsibility is a huge part of having a child.”

“B” was just coming out of an abusive, controlling relationship and often took the opportunity on the walk to talk in depth with her facilitator, who has personal experience with this type of situation. “B” was able to practice self-reflection during these talks.

Though this will be discussed in depth within his summary section, “H” grew the most in terms of talking about his feelings before acting. There was an incident where he felt unheard / disrespected during his timeline and was able to share that he needed to leave rather than blow up.

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

Outcome: MOSTLY SUCCEEDED

Indicators: “A” wrote: “Yes, this class made me stop thinking about only myself.” “G” wrote: “I am more respectful to others.” “B” wrote: “I need to feel secure with myself to make kids feel confident.” “D” wrote: “I definitely feel better about myself way more.” “E” said: “Having respect for one’s self is important because if you are not confident of yourself you are not gonna be as loving towards your child.” “F” stated: “If you don’t have respect for yourself, you won’t have respect for your child.” “I” commented: “I learned not to let other people put me down.”

As always, the confidentiality and respect engendered by the timeline sharing increases feelings of empathy and “bonding” among the group by making them think outside themselves. Though outright comments were not an issue for this cohort, often we reminded them that “judgemental” remarks hurt rather than help. In addition the volunteering at the day care centers left these students feeling good about themselves, knowing that they contributed to the development and education of a young child. Many of the teens in this class shared feeling that being a role model for the toddlers allowed them the opportunity to be a responsible and respected young adult. They were always surprised that the toddlers knew their names, asked for them when the other group was there, or looked for them as soon as they came in.

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: SUCCEEDED

Indicators: "A" wrote: "This made me learn I can't take my anger out on a child." "G" stated: "We had serious conversations about consequences which made me value finishing school more." "B" said: "I want to get a hobby." "H" learned: "I need to think before I speak." "C" stated: "I think more long term what can affect me in the future." "D" commented: "I have to be able to talk it out with someone." "E" wrote: "My actions affect everybody." "F" wrote: "Every baby is affected by our actions and mood."

Again, "K" had difficulty recognizing how she used sexuality as a tool. We are unsure of the impact we had in helping her to recognize this. "J" is a self-described "player" and this extends to adult females as well as peers. Several times he was redirected to "tone it down" and be appropriate and we were able to discuss how such pushiness doesn't endear but repel women and makes them uncomfortable. In all we do feel he learned something in terms of a more respectful way to be inappropriate, so there was improvement.

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: "A" answered: "This program taught me to be a positive mentor." and "C" seconded "I learned to be a positive mentor towards the kids." "G" stated: "I learned how to take care of my son better, and teachers noticed me using skills learned in T&T at the Centers." "B" explained: "This program made me feel like I had a say in things, and like the children relied on me." "H" wrote: "Yes, I thought play with the kids was helpful." "D" was happy that: "People trust me now to be very responsible." "E" answered: "Communication is the best key in a relationship and with your child."

The staff at the Centers are very good at asking the teens to be part of the group by offering specific tasks, jobs and making them feel needed. In several instances we were low staff and the teens presence was crucial to maintaining the toddlers. "B" was repeatedly complimented by Teacher Kara on the work she was doing, and Joyce felt the students in her class were invaluable to their preschool program.

Goal: Development of job skills and life planning.

Outcome: MOSTLY SUCCEEDED

Indicators: "A" wrote: "I want to wait until I am emotionally, physically, and financially stable to have kids." "G" learned: "About resumes in class, and feel more confident about excelling in a job because of volunteering." "B" said: "This program made me feel more responsible and reliable." "H" asserted a goal: "Yes, I want to be a probation officer." "D" felt we "somewhat succeeded" because "I don't know what I want to be still." "E" wrote: "Having a good resume can lead you to many job opportunities." "F" felt that: "Volunteering helped me with coworker skills". "I" learned: "How important it is to have a successful job".

Many of the students were able to state goals for the next month, three months, six months, year and three years by the end of the program. Though this is always a difficult subject, we were also able to help them “dream outside the box” by coming up with more specific questions as to what they wanted to do-- “do you prefer working with people or alone”, “a routine or different task every day”, “inside or out”, etc. One of the themes throughout the program has been that if you have a clear definition-- can visualize and conceptualize in a concrete form-- of what you want to achieve/ obtain it is more likely that you will get it.

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: “A” learned: “Parenting skills for the future.” “G” strongly asserted: “I will not have another child as a teenager.” “B” suggested: “Having a child hold me back from getting my dreams.” “C” said: “I learned that being a good parent takes a lot of responsibility.” “D” stated: “I know how to take care of myself so I won’t end up pregnant.” “E” summed it up with: “I learned using protection is the best way to prevent pregnancy and to wait until you have a better lifestyle until you are ready to have a baby.”

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

Outcome: SUCCEEDED

Indicators: “A” wrote: “An example of this is our well-trained facilitators!” “G” said: “They held my hand and listened.” “B”’s specific examples of role models included: “My T&T facilitator, some teachers, and stories of mothers.” “C” pointed out that he modeled appropriate behaviors when he “told the kids to share.” “D” said her toddler, “Ivy looked up to me because I taught her how to say ‘no’ when she wants to say ‘no’.” “I” wrote: “I learned how to redirect children”.

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: “A” felt that “Karen gave me good individual support”. “G” wrote: “Facilitators kept things confidential, talked to us and gave good advice.” “B” commented: “This program or never made me feel bad or in doubt of my opinion. Facilitators just gave me a better suggestion.” “C” writes: “If I was going through anything, I can count on my facilitators.” “D” added: “They were able to talk to me when needed.”

“F” struggled with addiction to opiates. Both facilitators were able to speak with him at length about different ways in which he could get help with this. Most of the time facilitators just gave support by listening and being there.

“J” felt he could rely on his facilitator so much that he called her at 2am at one point because he was in the hospital for what turned out to be a severe bladder infection. He was scared that

it might be a venereal disease and his facilitator was able to console and support him through that.

"I" lives in the Valley and was able to catch a ride with her facilitator every Friday after class. This enabled her facilitator to give "I" quite a bit of individual attention aside from in class time.

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

Outcome: SUCCEEDED

Indicators: "A" felt that: "Interacting with many races improved my social skills." "G" wrote that: "Classes are close with each other despite many races and cultures." "B" said "T&T gave me a better way to communicate with children." "H" agreed that: "T&T improved my social skills." "D" wrote: "Yes, I appreciate life so much more." "I" commented that the class: "Improved my citizenship skills."

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

Outcome: MOSTLY SUCCEEDED

Indicators: "A" felt that the program: "Gave us anger control skills for the outside world." "G" said we succeeded: "Because we talked about consequences long term". "C" agreed: "I am more aware of my anger that can affect my future." "D" asserted: "I can seek to have help with my anger." "I" explained that T&T: "Taught us skills to calm ourselves." "J" felt we did not succeed-- in his timeline he describes himself as a "survivor" and that "hustling" is the only way he can take care of basic needs.

Conclusion:

We were initially very excited to have a class with so many participants and were sad to see 2 students withdraw. Each group feels different, of course, with unique needs, issues and personalities. The cohesion in this cohort was better than usual, and despite the (rather surprising) fact of more males than females, was not as boisterous but allowed for good participation in discussion from all. It did make for some interesting dynamics in terms of "flirting" and competition. This semester it seemed as if more students however, were coming in with significant life "baggage", for lack of a better term. These kids, more than in the past, have been through a great deal, including homelessness, teen parenting, domestic violence, parental abandonment, sexual trauma, murder of a parent, and a major gang related gunfight. Decreasing minor criminal behavior (tagging, curfew breaking, shoplifting and the like) and the use and sale of illegal substances is inevitably our weakest area, as these behaviors are most ingrained in teen social life. On the other hand, open discussion of the short and long term effects of such behavior patterns made several people question their use and two working towards stopping drinking and smoking entirely. Overall we feel we succeeded with all of our goals and in our new way of evaluating outcome measures the majority of the students agreed on most goals. All of them expressed having a positive experience within the program, and during graduation we as facilitators were able to share what we saw in them and wanted them learn about themselves from the course-- I honestly feel from their own expression that this is something they will take away with them...