



# Battling Teen Pregnancy with Proactive Approach

## Impact Statement

### The Problem/Issue:

Teen pregnancy is a major issue confronting society both at the state and national levels. The United States has the highest rate of teen pregnancy and birth in the western industrialized world. Teen pregnancy costs the United States at least \$7 billion annually.

### What's Been Done:

The Alabama Cooperative Extension System has put a community- and school-based teen pregnancy prevention program called 4-H TGIF in place in eight west Alabama counties. Four of these counties are rated priority one by the Alabama Department of Public Health based on data on teen pregnancy, out of wedlock births and sexually transmitted diseases. Three are priority two and one is priority three. TGIF stands for Teens Getting Involved for the Future.

TGIF is based on the Managing Pressures Before Marriage curriculum, which focuses on helping young people develop skills to resist sexual activity before marriage.

Sixth-grade students are targeted as program participants, and 11th and 12th grade students serve as teen leaders. More than 300 teen leaders were selected from 23 public high schools in the eight-county area. For program impact, it was important these leaders be liked and admired by preteens and could demonstrate their status was not related to being sexually active.

Teen leaders received about 30 hours of training. They taught the six-session series in teams at about 35 elementary and junior high schools. The program reached more than 3,800 sixth graders with more than 19,000 client encounters. A client encounter is defined as one hour of instruction. More than 740 adult volunteers assisted with the program.

Since the program's inception more than 10 years ago, more than 26,000 young people have participated in the program. It has been funded by more than \$800,000 in grants. In 2003, the Alabama Department of Public Health provided funding via a Title V abstinence-one grant.

## **Why We Care:**

4-H TGIF is one of five abstinence programs in the state to be reviewed by two university researchers who are conducting a comprehensive, longitudinal evaluation. That evaluation showed that sixth grade participants were more likely to remain abstinent after the program. Even more promising is the impact the program has on the teen leaders. The evaluation revealed the program had an even stronger impact on the high school students than on the preteens. This group strongly agrees that abstinence is the only way to avoid teen pregnancies, that sexual activity outside of wedlock can have harmful effects and that alcohol and drug use increase vulnerability to sexual advances.

According to ADPH statistics, the number of pregnancies per 1,000 young women ages 15 to 17 in Alabama has dropped from 59.8 in 1998 to 45.4 in 2001. In the TGIF project counties, there was a drop from 58.7 in 1998 to 36.5 in 2001. For young women ages 15 to 17, birth rates in the state for 1998 through 2001 decreased from 40.8 per 1,000 to 30.7 per 1,000. The reduction was even greater for this age group in TGIF counties, where the rate dropped from 38.0 in 1998 to 24.6 in 2001.