

**MONTEREY COUNTY**  
**CALIFORNIA STATE ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES 2012 CHALLENGE AWARD ENTRY**

**MONTEREY COUNTY PATERNITY EDUCATION PROGRAM**

**Overview**

The Paternity Education Program teaches teens about the child support program and raises awareness about realities of parenthood, including costs associated with raising a child.

**Problem or Challenge**

Data from the California Department of Public Health shows that in 2007, Monterey County had one of the highest teen birth rates compared to other counties in California. According to a profile published by First 5 Monterey County, teen mothers are less likely to graduate from high school and more likely to have lower incomes. They are more likely to have low birth weight babies, and their children are more likely to have health problems and developmental delays. Teen mothers tend to have fewer parenting skills than adult women, and their children are more likely to be victims of abuse and neglect. As a result of these disadvantages, children born to teen parents are more likely to have academic and behavioral problems throughout their school years and sometimes into adulthood, and are more likely to become teen parents themselves. Also, teen fathers tend to have fewer job skills, and are often absent or not supportive to the mother with raising the child. This compounds the effect of teen mothers being poorly prepared for motherhood, often with limited social support and emotional maturity. The challenge for this program is to reduce the number of teen births in Monterey County as well as improve the future health and welfare of children within our community.

**Solution**

With schools being underfunded and understaffed, most teachers have hectic schedules and do not have time to develop a curriculum regarding paternity education. To fill the gap, Monterey County Department of Child Support Services (DCSS) decided to take a pro-active approach with their paternity education program. This program was refined from other selected programs throughout the state as well as from lessons learned from other states. Each year, dozens of letters are mailed to local middle and high schools offering an opportunity to request the paternity education presentation. The letters are mailed directly to the teachers to ensure the information is received by them and they have said the annual reminder to request the presentation is much appreciated. When invited, DCSS staff visits the health, economics and social studies classes. At least one presenter speaks both English and Spanish. The materials are bilingual as well. These informational presentations are lively and encourage interaction with students. They are customized to age appropriate classes and offer visual aids, a video, and interactive discussions with middle and high school students. The presentations focus on the legal and financial consequences and responsibilities when one becomes a teen parent. DCSS staff goes equipped with teen booklets and applications for child support services. They give out their business cards and also do follow-up on specific case inquiries. They often stay afterward to answer questions privately. DCSS has received comments from teachers saying they really like the presentations and feel they are precise and to the point. As one teacher stated, "They give the students a reality check when it comes to the financials and the fact that they just can't go away to college or just plain go away and not expect consequences."

## **Budget/Costs/Savings**

As a cost saving measure, DCSS conducts the presentations by utilizing internal staff on a volunteer basis. Doing the presentations provides a break from the normal routine for staff and their expertise is appreciated by the students. In 2004, DCSS received a small grant from the Barnet Segal Charitable Trust, a local non-profit organization, to create booklets called, "Becoming a Teenage Mother is No Joke" and "Becoming a Teenage Father is No Joke." In 2005, DCSS visited a local high school drama class, and together, they produced a video called, "My Decision." It is about two high school couples, each making a different decision that would affect them for the rest of their lives. One couple graduates and one couple become teen parents. Regular State and Federal matching funds were used to produce the video as part of the mandated "outreach" activities found in the California Code of Federal Regulations Title 45, part 302.30. Teachers have expressed their appreciation to DCSS for providing the paternity education presentations at no cost to the schools.

## **Results**

The positive feedback from teachers and students show that the presentations are effective. Also, DCSS receives many repeat requests from teachers each year. The Monterey County Paternity Education Program has received national recognition and praise, and has also been written up in the national magazine, *Child Support Report*, Vol. 34, No. 5, dated May 2012, published by the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement. A report released by the California Department of Public Health shows that the teen birth rate for Monterey County fell by 5.8 percent from 2007 to 2009. It is believed that the Paternity Education Program is helping, in part, to slow the rate of teen births in Monterey County to an all-time low. However, despite this progress, nearly 3 in 10 girls get pregnant by age 20. This suggests a continued need to help teens postpone their families until they are older, through school, and in stable, committed relationships.

## **Program Contact**

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