



The National Campaign
to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF
JUVENILE AND FAMILY COURT JUDGES
est. 1937

CRITICAL JUDGMENT:
How Juvenile and Family Court
Judges Can Help Prevent Teen
and Unplanned Pregnancy



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INTRODUCTION

Juvenile and Family Court judges deal with a number of issues important to the lives of the nation's children and families, including foster care, child abuse and neglect, juvenile delinquency, and substance abuse. As the gatekeepers of the nation's foster care system, for example, Juvenile and Family Court judges must ultimately decide whether families in crisis will stay together or whether children will be placed in care. Victims of child abuse and neglect come before juvenile and family court judges for protection from further harm and judges must make critical legal decisions and oversee social service efforts to rehabilitate and maintain families, or to provide permanent alternative care for child victims.

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) have joined forces to help address another issue of importance—teen pregnancy and unplanned pregnancy among single, young adults in Juvenile and Family Courts. The partnership between the NCJFCJ and The National Campaign was established to produce information and materials that will help judges, their staff, and community partners better serve children in their communities.

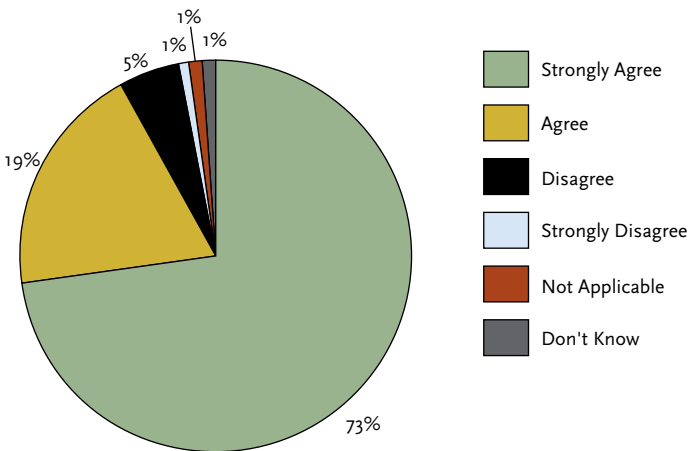
This publication provides the results of a survey of NCJFCJ members on teen and unplanned pregnancy and related issues. The publication also provides a summary of focus groups held with Juvenile and Family Court judges, a detailed case study of how one Miami judge deals with teen and unplanned pregnancy, as well as a brief look at efforts from other localities. Our hope is that this information will inform and inspire readers to develop collaborative community responses to teen and unplanned pregnancy with juvenile and family court judges throughout our country.

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF JUVENILE AND FAMILY COURT JUDGES SURVEY RESULTS

The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) and The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy recently conducted a survey of NCJFCJ members about teen and unplanned pregnancy in juvenile dependency and delinquency courts. Overall, respondents to the survey agreed that preventing teen and unplanned pregnancy is an important issue in their jurisdiction, and nearly one-quarter have taken action steps to address *teen* pregnancy. However, very few judges have addressed the stubbornly high rate of unplanned pregnancy, particularly among *single, young adults*.

Methodology and Respondents. The survey was conducted online between January and February 2009 and was completed by 124 NCJFCJ members. A majority of the respondents (58%) worked with both juvenile delinquency and dependency cases; 21% worked with juvenile dependency cases only; and 9% worked with juvenile delinquency cases only. The 12% that did not work with juvenile dependency or delinquency cases were not included in the survey. Three-quarters of the respondents were judges or judicial officers, and respondents were in their position for an average of 11.5 years. Approximately half (55%) of the respondents were female, 88% were White or Caucasian, 9% were Black or African-American, and 11% reported being of Latino or Hispanic ethnicity.

Teen Pregnancy is a Concern to Me in My Professional Role



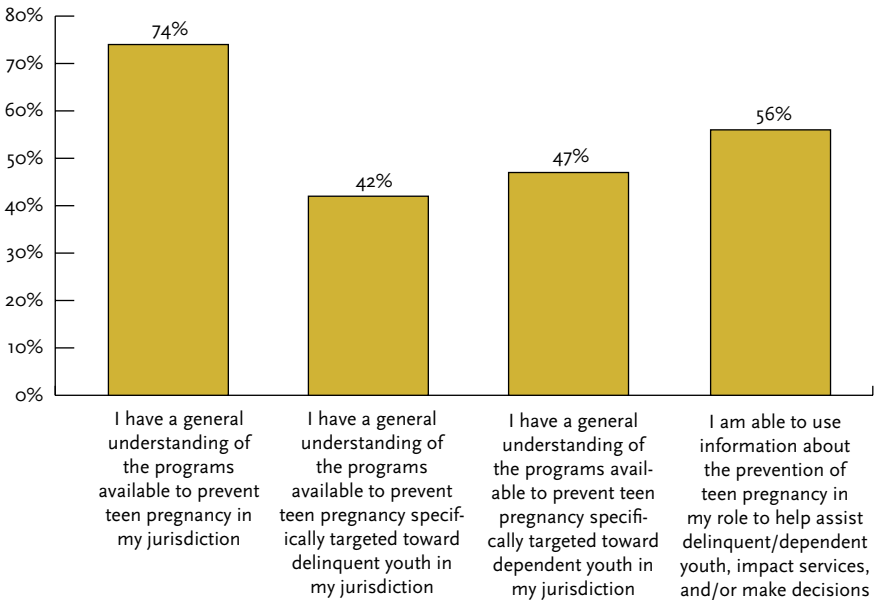
Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. Overall, respondents were concerned about both teen and unplanned pregnancy, and believed that both were prevalent in their jurisdiction.

More than 90% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that “*teen pregnancy* is a concern to me in my professional role” (73% strongly agreed; 19% agreed). Eight in ten respondents also agreed that teen pregnancy is prevalent in their jurisdiction.

Seven in 10 (69%) agreed that more than half of the cases in their court involved youth at risk of causing a pregnancy or becoming pregnant, and more than half agreed that the number of cases involving pregnant youth is considered high by the community’s standards.

Nearly 9 in 10 respondents agreed that “*unplanned pregnancy* for adults with children involved in the juvenile dependency (child abuse) system is a concern to me in my professional role,” and fully two-thirds said that the issue is prevalent in their jurisdiction. About half of the survey respondents agreed that the number of cases involving parents or guardians who already have youth involved in the child abuse and neglect system,

Proportion of Judges who Strongly Agree or Agree with the Following Statements About Programs/Services for Preventing Teen Pregnancy



and then experience an unplanned pregnancy, is considered high by their communities' standards.

Available Programs for Reducing Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. Nearly three-quarters of respondents reported that they have a general understanding of programs available in their jurisdiction that are designed to prevent teen pregnancy. However, less than half reported a general understanding of available programs specifically targeted toward either delinquent youth or dependent youth in their jurisdiction. Less than half (43%) of respondents agreed that they had a general understanding of programs and services specific for pregnant teens in the delinquency system in their jurisdiction. Slightly more than half of respondents (53%) agreed that they had a general understanding of programs and services specific for pregnant teens in the dependency system in their jurisdiction.

More than half of respondents (56%) agreed that they are able to use information about teen pregnancy prevention in their role to help delinquent/dependent youth, impact services, and/or make decisions. Fewer respondents (49%) agreed that they are able to use information about programs and services available for unplanned pregnancies in their role to help assist parents/guardians of children in the dependency/delinquency court system.

Training or Educational Needs. Respondents were asked to identify their top three training or educational needs regarding teen pregnancy and related issues. In order, the responses were: (1) helping youth delay sexual activity, (2) helping youth avoid unprotected sex, and (3) helping youth avoid unplanned pregnancy.

Capacity for Change. Respondents also were asked several questions about their ability to put in place new activities to address teen and unplanned pregnancy. Most respondents indicated that they would be able to undertake the proposed activities at some point (within three years), and several of the activities, such as gathering data about both teen and unplanned pregnancy with the jurisdiction, or conducting jurisdiction-wide trainings on the topics, seemed achievable in within the next 12 months. Other activities such as establishing court teams to address teen and unplanned pregnancy among specific populations of youth (i.e. youth in foster care, youth in the dependency system, etc) seemed more achievable in 12–24 months. It is worth noting that these activities—establishing a court team to address teen and unplanned pregnancy—were also most frequently identified as activities the respondents *cannot* do. Approximately 1 in 5 respondents reported that they are currently working with community partners to establish programs, policies, and

Capacity for Change	Already doing (%)	Can do in 1 year (%)	Can do in 2 years (%)	Can do in 3 years (%)	Cannot do this (%)	Total N=107
Establish a court team to focus on prevention of teen pregnancy among foster youth	10%	25%	21%	9%	35%	100%
Obtain data on teen pregnancies in foster care in my jurisdiction	17%	67%	6%	4%	7%	100%
Obtain data on teen pregnancies among delinquent youth in my jurisdiction	17%	58%	11%	6%	9%	100%
Obtain data on unplanned pregnancies among parents/guardians who have children in the dependency court system	5%	53%	14%	6%	22%	100%
Work with community partners to establish programs, policies, and practices to prevent teen pregnancies among youth in foster care	19%	38%	25%	10%	9%	100%
Conduct a system-wide training on pregnancies and the foster care system	5%	41%	28%	14%	12%	100%
Establish a court team to focus on prevention of teen pregnancy among delinquent youth	8%	29%	27%	14%	23%	100%
Establish a court team to focus on services, programs, and responses to parents in the dependency court system with unplanned pregnancies	5%	33%	25%	14%	23%	100%
Work with community partners to establish programs, policies, and practices to prevent teen pregnancies among delinquent youth	18%	30%	28%	18%	6%	100%
Work with community partners to establish programs, policies, and practices to address unplanned pregnancies among parents who have children in the dependency court system	9%	32%	29%	18%	12%	100%
Conduct a system-wide training on preventing teen pregnancies in the delinquency and dependency systems	4%	39%	27%	16%	15%	100%
Conduct a system-wide training on preventing teen pregnancies in the delinquency system	6%	38%	27%	16%	13%	100%
Conduct a system-wide training on preventing teen pregnancies in the dependency system	4%	39%	26%	15%	16%	100%

practices to prevent teen pregnancies among delinquent youth or among youth in foster care.

Addressing Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy within the Court System.

Overall, approximately one-quarter (24%) of respondents to the survey reported that they have taken specific steps to address teen pregnancies, and 2% reported that they have taken specific steps to address unplanned pregnancies more generally. Among those who are addressing the issue of teen pregnancy, their actions include providing services to pregnant teens, putting in place specific programs or mentoring projects to reach teens, referring teens to other service organizations, and developing specific teams to address the issue of teen pregnancy prevention.

While many judges and court staff indicated an interest in and ability to work on preventing teen and unplanned pregnancy, lack of time and resources were cited as major barriers to establishing long term solutions. Among the 64% of respondents who had not taken specific steps to address either teen pregnancy, unplanned pregnancy, or both, many cited reasons such as lack of funding, lack of support, and other competing issues as barriers to addressing these problems. Other barriers included cultural issues, lack of leadership on this topic, and the belief that teen and unplanned pregnancy prevention is an issue best addressed by social service agencies rather than the court.

Several of the judges reported that supportive colleagues, community collaboration, and available resources were the most helpful factors in addressing teen pregnancy through the court system. Most survey respondents seemed confident that they would be able to take some steps toward addressing these issues such as obtaining data on teen and unplanned pregnancy in their jurisdiction or holding trainings about these issues. Other steps, such as establishing a court team, seemed to be more challenging.

Technical Assistance. A variety of technical assistance needs were identified including resources and training for staff. Respondents were very interested in receiving more information about evidence-based practices for addressing these issues. Others suggested providing information about how other courts are addressing teen and unplanned pregnancy prevention. Funding for data collection and more information about the scope of the problem within their jurisdiction and community was also a technical assistance need identified by the respondents.

THEMES FROM A FOCUS GROUP WITH MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF JUVENILE AND FAMILY COURT JUDGES

Participants: Judge Jeri Cohen, Miami, FL; Judge Louis Trosch, Jr., Charlotte, NC; Judge Dale Koch, Portland, OR; Judge Margaret Johnson, San Jose, CA; Judge James Seals, Fort Myers, FL; Judge Chester Harhut, Scranton, PA; Judge Kristy Timko, Canyon City, OR; Judge Ernestine Gray, New Orleans, LA

Shay Bilchik, Director of the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform at Georgetown University; Elizabeth Whitney Barnes, NCJFCJ; Kristen Tertzakian, The National Campaign

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Date: March 13, 2009—Orlando, FL

· **There are three populations of young people that judges can reach:** youth in dependency court (foster care), youth in delinquency court, and young parents. The majority of the judges who participated in the focus group said they were not tracking the number of pregnant and parenting teens in the court, yet they do think teen pregnancy is a problem. Although the conversation did not focus on data collection, several judges said that tracking these numbers would be a relatively task.

· **Judges can play an important role in preventing teen pregnancy.** These roles have various levels of involvement. Judges have contact with hundreds of young men and women, and oftentimes they are the only consistent, caring adult in the child's life. Judges can be proactive by having open, honest, and non-judgmental conversations with teens about preventing teen pregnancy and STIs, abstinence, birth control, family planning, and options for pregnancy. These conversations can occur on and off the bench. Judges should know what services and programs are available in the community for referrals. As respected, influential members of the community, judges can also call for action to reduce teen pregnancy among our most at-risk youth, with the involvement of community partners. It is important to be clear that judges do not have to solve this problem themselves. Youth need to hear prevention messages from schools,

social workers, foster parents/parents, health care providers, faith communities, the media, and others—not just judges.

· **Not all judges are comfortable talking about these tough issues.** If a judge is uncomfortable, he/she can find someone in the court to talk to teens about preventing pregnancy or can talk to them off the bench with a support team including social workers. As a general matter, the male judges in the focus group said they were more comfortable talking to the boys and female judges tended to say they were more comfortable talking to the girls.

· **Prevention must be placed in the context of the chaotic lives these young people lead.** There are several challenges to be mindful of when working with young people in the foster care/juvenile justice system including dysfunctional families and lack of education/dropping out of school. Many of these young people were, themselves, born to teen parents. Some of the judges were very concerned that being a teen parent is becoming increasingly popular and many of the young people they come into contact with planned to get pregnant. Many of the judges were conflicted about how to address this. Several judges indicated that youth need a reason to not become pregnant. It is clear that the youth who want to finish high school, go to college, and have goals for their future are the ones who are not getting pregnant, according to several judges. One judge felt strongly that the message should be clear and straightforward: it is unacceptable to get pregnant as a teenager.

· **Prevention messages and program referrals need to be focused on both girls and boys and teen parents.** The judges noted that boys have been left out of the picture for far too long, and a fair number of them can be reached through delinquency court. They need to hear directly about the importance of using contraception and such topics as child support. Judges express interest in working with teens and young parents to prevent subsequent pregnancies as well. Nurse home visiting programs garnered the most interest among the judges gathered.

· **Concise reading materials and conference presentations are important.** The judges were unanimous in their belief that the best way to distribute information is through the Model Courts. These judges tend to be open-minded and their buy-in is important. Once you have model courts involvement, others follow suit. The judges suggested providing background data to judges to convince them why preventing teen pregnancy matters and to focus on best practices from judges around the country.

Most of the judges gathered discouraged having a training session at their respective state continuing judicial education conferences. These conferences tend to focus on civil/criminal justice and very few sessions are slotted for juvenile justice. Judges from larger states like California and Florida were more enthusiastic about the possibility of getting a session at their statewide trainings to reach large numbers of judges.

The judges suggested creating brief, concise reading materials, such as a checklist, on how to talk to teens about these issues with sample questions and tips (such as it's important to talk to both girls and boys, as well as teens in dependency and delinquency court; tips on how to start the conversation). They also cautioned that the judges receive checklists on lots of issues so brevity is important. It is clear that they look forward to learning about best practices from their peers and reading the case studies.

MIAMI JUSTICE: PREVENTING TEEN PREGNANCY IN MIAMI THROUGH THE JUVENILE COURT SYSTEM

Finding a respected and trusted community member to be a champion for your issue is integral to the success of any public health or social services initiative, including preventing teen pregnancy. In Miami that champion is Judge Jeri B. Cohen. As a juvenile dependency court judge, Judge Cohen works with hundreds of families and teens every year on matters related to foster care and family reunification, mental health, substance abuse, and supportive housing. In addition, she misses no opportunity to also discuss pregnancy prevention with the teens and young families who come through her court, and often refers them to local programs and services. Through her leadership, a group of community partners came together to collaborate on preventing teen pregnancy among youth in foster care and those in the juvenile justice system. Judge Cohen's support and encouragement paved the way for a county-wide initiative that will be led by Our Kids, Miami-Dade County's lead child welfare agency.

Before the child welfare system became privatized in Florida, conversations about abstinence, birth control, and pregnancy—all important issues for teens—were rarely heard in the court or child welfare system. Most people did not want to touch this sensitive and often uncomfortable issue. Perhaps most illustrative is the story of a 13-year-old girl from Palm Beach who became pregnant while in foster care. She told her caseworker about the pregnancy and after much thought and counseling, she went before a judge to request an abortion. The Florida Department of Child and Families stepped in to prohibit the procedure. This extreme and somber case received national media attention and clouded efforts focused on pregnancy *prevention*. There was confusion among child welfare workers as to whether they were allowed to talk about primary prevention to make sure no young person ever found her/himself in this situation. Once the system became privatized, these conversations became more frequent, thanks to the help of Judge Cohen.

Judge Cohen believes judges can play an important role in preventing teen and unplanned pregnancy. Judges come into contact with hundreds of teens and young families at critical points in their lives and they are often the only consistent, caring adult in a child's life. "We talk about so many issues with teens, yet we often miss the boat on preventing pregnancy, HIV, and STIs" according to Judge Cohen. She is proactive in the courtroom by talking directly and honestly with teens and families about

pregnancy prevention. Judge Cohen drives home several important messages, including:

- it is unacceptable to become pregnant as a teen;
- parenting a child when you are not ready comes with serious consequences;
- it is hard to finish school and get a job while caring for a baby.

Judge Cohen also notes that young parents who grow up in foster care may also lose their Road to Independence stipend (monies available to young adults up to age 23 who exit care in Florida on the condition that they are working and in school). All too often, the children of these teen mothers are placed in the foster care system and the cycle continues. Rewarding good behavior is critical to Judge Cohen. When a young person has chosen to remain abstinent or is sexually active and using birth control, she applauds them for their responsible behavior. She encourages her fellow judges to find out what reproductive health services are available in their community to refer young people and families who come through their court.

Young adults and parents do not get a pass at prevention messages either. Judge Cohen speaks with young parents in their 20's about preventing unplanned pregnancy and family planning as well. Young parents enter her court because of alleged abuse and neglect of their children. She encourages them to be responsible by finishing school, getting a better education, developing their careers, and taking the best care of the children that they have.

As Judge Cohen notes, juvenile judges certainly do not have to become experts in preventing teen and unplanned pregnancy—there are organizations around the country which specialize in just that. Rather, a more fitting role for a judge is to use his/her influence to call attention to teen pregnancy. Judge Cohen went beyond the courtroom to lead prevention efforts by bringing together a coalition of community groups. Several public health, child welfare, and faith-based organizations were already providing services to youth in foster care in Miami, but there needed to be better collaboration between existing services to provide a continuum of care. An important part of the *Healthy Teens Initiative* that Judge Cohen spearheaded requires that all seven foster care agencies in Miami-Dade County identify a Healthy Teen Coordinator to be the resident expert in preventing teen pregnancy, STIs, and HIV. This individual coordinates prevention programs for foster care youth and refers teens to counseling and contraceptive services.

Foster care “hubs”, or service centers where teens visit regularly to receive services, proved to be an ideal location to bring educational programs directly to teens in foster care. Without any additional funding, Planned Parenthood of South Florida and the Treasure Coast provides a part-time educator once a week at the hubs to work with teens by scheduling appointments for preventative checkups at their clinics, providing emergency contraception, and testing teens for pregnancy and STIs. They have reached more than 250 teens through sex education workshops at the hubs and group homes and have also trained caseworkers. Through the *Teen Time Medical Services* program, Planned Parenthood provides free reproductive health services, like pap smears and contraceptives, to young adults in foster care up to age 23. *Teen Time* is supported through Title X funds and private donations. Not surprisingly, as they educated more teens in foster care on pregnancy prevention, they saw an increase in the number of teens seeking preventative health care in their clinics.

Another important partner of the Healthy Teen Initiative is the University of Miami, Miller School of Medicine, Division of Adolescent Medicine’s *Promote to Prevent*. They provide health education workshops for the teens at foster care service centers as well. The curriculum, *HELPIN’* (Health Education and Life Prevention Issues Now), is an intensive, six-session curriculum focused on preventing teen pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, STIs, date rape, and other related topics. An innovative project, *Keepin’ It Reel*, works with young people to turn their sketches and drawings into short animated films with themes on HIV/AIDS and practicing safe sex. The University’s work is supported by Ryan White, Part D federal funds, and private funds.

Prevention education and services for youth in foster care and juvenile justice must be placed in the context of the unfortunate, chaotic lives these young people lead. Several child welfare and public health community groups in Miami-Dade County remind us that these youth are often growing up in dysfunctional families. There are numerous compounding challenges such as finishing high school and breaking the cycle of dependency.

There are a variety of services made available to support teen and young parents in the foster care or juvenile justice system in Miami-Dade County. Judge Lester Langer was concerned with the number of pregnant and parenting teens coming through his juvenile delinquency court. He started *The Young Parent Project*, a nurse home visiting program that employs a three-person team of a nurse, social worker, and infant mental health worker to help teen mothers to improve maternal and child outcomes.

They also provide counseling on birth control to prevent subsequent pregnancies and connect the young mothers to necessary services such as Medicaid, WIC, and quality day care. The program is modeled after Yale University's *Minding the Baby* program. Housed at the Juvenile Justice Center, the program has served 42 parents since its inception in November 2007. It is supported by a Florida State University grant with matching funds from the Early Learning Coalition.

The Hurwit Maternity Shelter, run by The Family Resource Center of South Florida, Inc., provides a structured, group-living home environment for pregnant and parenting girls in foster care and their children, who may or may not be in the child welfare system. The program has the capacity to serve eight mothers and up to two children each and addresses the numerous challenges facing dependent teen mothers. The program works to prevent subsequent pregnancies by providing youth with self-sufficiency skills, parenting skills, and hope and a sense of purpose. The program aims to keep teen mothers and their babies together and provides case management, mental health and medical services, pediatric services, parenting classes, on and off site day care, and education and transportation, in addition to a number of other services.

Additional support for teen parents comes from *The Families First Network* at the University of Miami's School of Medicine, Department of Pediatrics. This initiative works with community partners through Miami-Dade County to provide an intensive ten-session relationship-based intervention that encourages positive relationships and interactions between mothers and their babies. The *Baby and Me* curriculum is available to any parent regardless of age or income. *Strengthening Multi-Ethnic Families* is a 12-week violence-prevention program for parents with children up to five years old. Both curricula are delivered in several locations such as community centers, foster homes, childcare centers, health clinics, etc. These programs are funded by The Children's Trust. Additionally, *The Starting Early Starting Smart-Healthy Start Program* is a service integration program for high risk infants and their families. The program offers several services including care coordination, nursing home visits and physical health guidance, parenting interventions (including the *Baby and Me* and *Strengthening Multi-Ethnic Families* curricula), childbirth education classes, breastfeeding consultation, and psychosocial counseling. These activities are funded by the Healthy Start Coalition of Miami-Dade and the Alliance for Human Services.

Prevention efforts in Miami-Dade County have progressed to a new level with Our Kids, the county's lead child welfare agency, taking the lead in

spearheading an initiative. Their Board of Directors has made preventing teen pregnancy a priority, and they have support from the Florida Department of Children and Families to focus more on primary prevention. While they are in the beginning planning stages, Our Kids has made a commitment to working with case management agencies, social service organizations, educators, and medical and legal professionals to ensure that boys and girls in foster care have the resources necessary to remain in school and achieve permanency before facing the challenges of pregnancy and parenthood. They plan to hire a coordinator to manage the initiative.

Judge Cohen proves that judges can be effective in preventing teen and unplanned pregnancy. They can serve in a variety of roles from talking about prevention directly with young people to referring teens to community programs and services. As respected, influential members of the community, judges can also call for action to reduce teen pregnancy among our most at-risk youth with the involvement of community partners.

For more information, please visit:

Our Kids of Miami-Dade/Monroe, Inc.; www.ourkids.us

Planned Parenthood of South Florida and the Treasure Coast
www.plannedparenthood.org/ppsoflo

Promote 2 Prevent – P2P ; www.p2ponline.org or (305) 243-2174

Family Resource Center; www.frccflorida.org

Miami Healthy Start program; www.hscmd.org/HealthyStartProgram

FIVE JUDGES, FIVE APPROACHES

In addition to the extraordinary work taking place in Florida, a number of other judges and court systems around the country are working to prevent teen pregnancy. Here is a snapshot of what several judges are doing:

Illinois. Judge Mary Mikva, a child protection judge in Cook County, Illinois, talks to teens about preventing teen pregnancy and provides young people with reasons why it's important to avoid too-early pregnancy and parenthood. She also provides young people with educational brochures. According to Judge Mikva, the real educators are the guardians *ad litem*, who often have close relationships with the teens. Her role as judge is one of support and supervision to make sure these conversations are happening between the frontline workers and the teens. One of her most common program referrals is to Planned Parenthood, which provides free education, counseling, and preventative medical services to teens in foster care in Cook County.

Judge Patricia Martin, Presiding Judge for the Child Protection Division in Cook County, Illinois, shares a similar view. She believes that teen pregnancy should be seen as a health and medical issue. As she put it, if you had a client with a precondition for a weak heart, you would send the client to a cardiologist—the same should go for teens at risk for pregnancy, HIV, and STIs. Judge Martin also believes that integrating education about prevention into service plans would help ensure that all teens receive consistent messages about abstinence and contraception. As presiding judge, Judge Martin is not just worried about teen pregnancy; she acknowledges that judges have a checklist of many issues concerning the youth who pass through their courtrooms—each judge focuses on the issues that they care about the most. However, she wants the young people and their families to receive consistent and accurate information. She believes that the most uniform way to get a consistent message to families is through a service plan that has a general prevention message.

In Illinois, all teen parents in foster care receive intensive case management through the Teen Parenting Service Network. The Network provides prenatal care, helps young parents finish school, and works to prevent repeat pregnancies, among other supportive services. While this is a much needed intervention, both Judges Martin and Mikva underscore the need for a new focus on primary prevention. Stronger links between the courts and existing prevention programs will help provide teens in

foster care the information and skills needed to make responsible decisions and lead healthier lives. The Illinois Department of Child and Family Services has made preventing teen pregnancy among youth in foster care a priority, assembling a committee that will make specific recommendations for the child welfare system.

North Carolina. As a Family and Juvenile District Court Judge in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, Judge Louis Trosch, Jr. sees great value in delivering prevention messages to teen parents. Judge Trosch recognizes that when a judge places importance on something, then both parents and treatment team are more likely to act on that message. When working with teen parents, Judge Trosch emphasizes the challenges of raising a child, and encourages them to be the best parents that they can be to the children they currently have. He reinforces the importance of education, career development, and responsible behavior. There are several protocols in both the abuse and neglect and delinquency side of the court when working with pregnant or parenting teens. Teen parents are offered service plans with age-appropriate services and prenatal care is mandated for youth on probation. It is standard protocol to provide teens with family planning education, but this education is not always delivered consistently. Supporting and educating teens that aren't pregnant or parenting is equally important. If Judge Trosch knows a teen is sexually active and is not acting responsible, he will talk about prevention. As a man, the judge admits that he is more comfortable talking to young men than young women.

Teen Health Connection is the primary agency serving teen in Mecklenburg County. The group provides a combination of physical and mental health care, in addition to health education on family planning and parenthood. Mental health programs run by public and private agencies also address healthy relationships and teen pregnancy. These programs are either mandated or suggested by a social worker or court counselor. But, according to Judge Trosch, a greater emphasis on primary pregnancy prevention and more consistent service delivery is needed. Judge Trosch is also quick to point out that boys represent the other half of the teen pregnancy equation. Resources and energy must be invested into messages and programs for young men in addition to young women.

Kentucky. With an issue as complex as teen pregnancy, intervention needs to happen at multiple levels, explains Judge Patricia Walker FitzGerald, a Family Court Judge in Jefferson County, Kentucky. While she does not traditionally deliver a prevention message from the bench, the social workers and guardians *ad litem* do. There is also court approval for—and

collaboration with—prevention programs. Community program partners often meet with judges to discuss the well-being of children and what is needed in Jefferson County. While there are no specific protocols for teen parents in the court, several violence prevention programs are being developed that will have a component that focuses on preventing teen pregnancy. For example, a domestic violence prevention program being developed for teen parents will include information on birth control. The University of Louisville is creating a dating violence prevention program for runaway and truant girls that will include lessons on teen pregnancy prevention. Young adults will be supported as well with a new parenting program for unmarried couples with children that will address family planning and dating violence.

New Hampshire. Hailing from the state with the lowest teen pregnancy rate in the country, it comes as no surprise that Judge Sue Carbon, a Family Court Judge in Merrimack County, New Hampshire, interacts with few pregnant and parenting teens. She would like to see more education and outreach to parents as their involvement is crucial to the success of any case involving a teen. She is specifically concerned with younger teens becoming sexually active and/or pregnant and making sure there are appropriate messages and programs available to serve their needs.

In general. Although many of the judges were deeply concerned with the high rate of teen pregnancy in their community and the high number of pregnant and parenting teens they see in their court, some cautioned against delivering a stern prevention message from the bench. For some, teen pregnancy prevention is simply too personal to talk about in the courtroom. Others cautioned that judges are not counselors, doctors, or experts in preventing teen pregnancy. Instead, they tended to describe their role as one of support and helping ensure that frontline workers like counselors, social workers, and guardian ad litem are talking to teens and parents in detail about these issues and referring them to community programs. Generally, the judges would like to see more teen pregnancy prevention programs and greater collaboration between the court and these programs.

IMPLICATIONS

Preventing teen and unplanned pregnancy are important issues in their jurisdictions, according to the overwhelming majority of judges surveyed and interviewed for this publication. While many respondents indicated an interest in and ability to work on teen and unplanned pregnancy prevention, lack of time and resources were cited as major barriers to actually doing so. Given this, what can be done? The following list of suggested actions is based in the responses and comments received from judges who participated in The National Campaign/NCJFCJ survey and focus groups.

- Assess the rates of teen and unplanned pregnancy in communities using up-to-date data.
- Understand relevant and available resources and programs in the community and assess the potential capacity for growth.
- Identify gaps in services throughout community.
- Convene community leaders who have an interest in and/or responsibility for providing services to at risk youth, including parenting teens.
- Identify laws and/or regulations that require modification to support at risk youth, including parenting teens.
- Through a community advisory group, identify new evidence-based programs that might help fill the gaps in services for youth.
- Commit to regular education and training opportunities for court staff to ensure improved services within the court system.
- Establish a routine method of communication between the court and community-based groups that serve at risk and parenting youth.

Judges are visible and respected leaders in communities nationwide. A judge's influence as a convener or facilitator on important community issues is immeasurable. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy remains committed to working closely with the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges to provide resources the courts can use to address this important issue.

The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. Since its founding in 1937 by a group of judges dedicated to improving the effectiveness of the nation's juvenile courts, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) has pursued a mission to improve courts and systems practice and raise awareness of the core issues that touch the lives of many of our nation's children and families.

Every day, our membership of more than 1,900 judges, referees, commissioners, masters and other juvenile and family law professionals confront a variety of juvenile and family related issues, including, child abuse and neglect, juvenile delinquency, victims of juvenile offers, termination of parental rights, minority issues, adoption and foster care, family violence, alcohol and drug abuse, and custody and visitation.

The NCJFCJ provides cutting-edge training, wide-ranging technical assistance, and research to help the nation's courts, judges and staff in their important work. Each year, the NCJFCJ provides education or technical assistance services to an estimated 30,000 judges, court administrators, social and mental health workers, police, probation officers, and others working in the juvenile and family courts.

www.ncjfcj.org

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy seeks to improve the lives and future prospects of children and families and, in particular, to help ensure that children are born into stable, two-parent families who are committed to and ready for the demanding task of raising the next generation. Our specific strategy is to prevent teen pregnancy and unplanned pregnancy among single, young adults. We support a combination of responsible values and behavior by both men and women and responsible policies in both the public and private sectors. If we are successful, child and family well-being will improve. There will be less poverty, more opportunities for young men and women to complete their education or achieve other life goals, fewer abortions, and a stronger nation.

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