State Plan Recommendation

2 Ground the program in a youth development approach

The Minnesota State Plan includes this specific recommendation which emphasizes the importance of youth development in pregnancy prevention efforts. The recommendation also includes these three actions:

- Formally embrace youth development strategies that use dual approaches of reducing risks and promoting the strengths of individuals, their families, and the community.
- Recognize and engage youth as resources within their families, schools and communities.
- Involve youth in the planning and implementation process for effective teen pregnancy prevention and teen parenting programs.
- Make service learning opportunities available to all teens

Defined

The youth development framework assumes that young people have fundamental, underlying needs for healthy development, some of which are unique to adolescence as a time of life.1

In addition to describing youth programs that address the developmental needs of adolescents, the phrase is also used to create a contrast with traditional problem-centric approaches.

Yet youth development is not meant to supplant or substitute for public health approaches. Rather, it is intended to compliment them. Research2 has shown that programs which combine prevention through risk reduction with youth development approaches that increase protective factors have the best results.

By introducing youth development methods into your prevention activities, you are improving your odds of success.

Youth Development on All Fronts

Douglas Kirby and his colleagues at ETR Associates reviewed the literature, conducted interviews and implemented a panel process to uncover the important qualities of youth development programs that may help reduce adolescent pregnancies.

According to the panel, a comprehensive approach to meeting the development needs of adolescents means effective youth programs that are intensive, sustained and include a number of components:

- Tutoring to improve school performance
- A life skills component (e.g., career planning and goal setting)
- Career development activities to help youth think about, believe in, and plan for future jobs and careers
- Opportunities for youth to be in charge and to learn leadership skills
- Structured opportunities for community service
- Components to address stress and emotional problems
- Ongoing small group discussions, as well as meetings with individual youth to discuss their particular problems and needs
- Comprehensive sexuality education
- Arrangements or linkages that improve access to reproductive health services

Learn More

Preventing Teen Pregnancy Youth Development and After-School Programs3 is written for youth serving agencies to use in building effective youth development programs. An entire chapter is dedicated to each of the program components listed here.

Each component-focused chapter includes how-to information, essential elements, and funding information. Of note are call-outs on the “evidence base” for each component which detail exactly how it relates to adolescent pregnancy prevention, cites the applicable research and offers context for its significance.

1Michael Resnick, Adolescent Medicine: State of the Art Reviews, 2000

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- Make service learning opportunities available to all teens

Why service learning?
The state plan recommendations include a specific reference to service learning opportunities as a youth development strategy. While service learning may seem a world away from adolescent pregnancy prevention efforts, in fact the opposite is true.

“Service learning programs may have the strongest evidence of any intervention that they reduce actual teen pregnancy rates while the youth are participating in the program.”

Defined
Service learning is defined by the National Youth Leadership Council as “an educational method that involves students in challenging tasks that meet genuine community needs and requires the application of knowledge, skills, and systematic reflection on the experience.” This definition dramatizes the increased intensity of service learning as compared to traditional volunteering.

Evidence Base
There is strong evidence that properly designed, intensive service learning programs can reduce teen pregnancy. Multiple studies, including one rigorous study, have indicated that some intensive service learning programs significantly reduce teen pregnancy during the academic year in which the students are involved.

One additional study demonstrated that when service learning was combined with an abstinence only program, the addition of the service learning component significantly delayed the onset of sexual intercourse among middle school youth.

Research also indicates that service learning improves school performance and has other positive outcomes. However, it is not clear exactly which risk and protective factors it affects that in turn reduce sexual risk taking and adolescent pregnancy.

Proven Program: Teen Outreach Program (TOP)
This youth development program combines community service, classroom-based activities and service learning for junior and senior high teens as an in-school or after-school program.

TOP has been shown to reduce teen pregnancy rates, decrease school drop-out and increase school attendance and academic achievement. Spanish and English versions are available at www.cornerstone.to

Service Learning Resources
ETR Associates
Preventing Teen Pregnancy - Youth Development and After-School Programs offers an excellent overview of service learning and was the source for much of the information presented here. Strongly recommended reading and grant writing resource.

www.etrassociates.com

National Service Learning Clearinghouse
Starter kits, listservs, fact sheets and funding resources are just the tip of the iceberg at the clearinghouse.

www.servicelearning.org

National Youth Leadership Council
Sponsors the annual National Service Learning Conference. Also offers training, TA and publications.

www.nylc.org

Youth Service America
Sponsor of National Youth Service Day – the site provides access to their resource center and alliance of organizations.

www.ysa.org

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1Emerging Answers, D. Kirby, ETR Associates, 2001