

# Program provides alternative education for teen-age mothers

By Diana Payne  
Staff Writer  
By Rene Pisel  
Managing editor

"I have to clean the house and take care of the baby and my husband. It (school) is a chance to get away for the day," said one teenage mother.

Most students do not look upon school as a chance to get out, but the Young Family Program provides an opportunity for pregnant teen-agers and teen-age mothers to receive an alternative education. The program is supported by MCHS and is part of the Network for Adolescent Pregnancy Services. There are 18 girls enrolled.

What makes this program special, according to girls that attend it, is that programs are offered in parenting, family living and prenatal care. Although the major part of the program deals with being a parent the basic classes are also taught except for science.

"The only disadvantage is that there aren't as many electives," said one senior girl and for the purposes of this article chose to be called Janette. She said that they can take classes at both Central and the regular high schools.

The main goal of the Young Family Program is to help the girls work toward their diploma or take the GED equivalency test.

"Pregnancy is the number one cause of drop-outs among high school girls," said Donna Benedict, one of the program's two teachers. "Our program offers a lot to young mothers. We're as alert as possible to their needs. We don't always have the experience but we know the resources here, in Missoula, that are available. We are able to direct them to the different agencies they need."

"It is easier at Central," Janette said. "I am due in a week and I get really tired and at Hellgate there are all those stairs." The Central school operates only from 9 a.m. to 1:30 a.m.

"I have changed my ideas a lot" Janette said. "I had to grow up all at once. Instead of thinking who is taking you to the prom we think about caring for a baby. It is nicer, everyone has the same problems and thinks about the same."

Once a week the girls get together and discuss their problems. One of the major problems the girls face is a lack of money.

"Most of us are on AFDC, a welfare program for young mothers. It is hard to support yourself and a little baby on \$192 a month," Janette said. "It gets you down when you never have any money to do anything."

"Last week we had a lawyer come and talk to us about the legal rights of our babies and rights of the fathers," Janette said. She said that another advantage of the school is that all the girls think basically the same way.

"You get lonely when you are not married and have a child," Janette said. The girls that have husbands have problems too. "These guys are still pretty young and they want to go out and party but you can't do that when you have a wife and a baby."

The benefits of this program extend beyond the classes according to both the teachers and the girls.

"We have a comfortable, open atmosphere here," Jaqui Torgrimson the program's other teacher. "We put no value judgements on the girls. We try to meet their individual needs and flexibility is the key word. They should be commended for their efforts because it is not easy for them."

"At first I was worried about what people would say and think because I was pregnant," Janette said. "It doesn't worry me anymore. It doesn't matter what kind of girl you are, you can still get pregnant. It is just as easy for a straight A student as for anyone else. I know a girl that use to gossip all the time about who was pregnant and now she is."

The school has a nursery co-op where they can leave their children while they attend school. Each girl donates one day a week to take care of these children.

"I am not done raising myself and now I have got to raise a baby," Janette concluded. "At first I was really scared. I wanted to run away and forget everyone here. I am glad I found about this school". Janette will graduate in June.



Photo by Diana Payne

These girls are juggling parenthood and a high school education in a program at central school designed to help pregnant teens.

## Student councils seek sex ed

By Lisa Skelton  
News Editor

Student council leaders from all over Montana have adopted a resolution asking for the State Board of Education to require the teaching of sex education in secondary public schools.

A special committee of the state board is studying the sex education question. There have already been two hearings in Helena conducted by the state board, one to hear each side of the issue.

The resolution calls for the requirement of sex education classes but the classes would not be mandatory for every student.

Bob Smith, a Presbyterian minister and the director of Missoula Planned Parenthood, said that only a small percentage of people, about 2 or three percent, don't want sex education in the schools because it "would contaminate the morals of their children." Smith said that these people are usually the most

vocal and usually don't have children.

Some ministers and religious parents don't want the schools to transmit values not in accordance with their religion, said Smith. Most students don't get a good sex education, Smith said. The reason why students are asking for a sex education program is because they know what they are missing.

"The reason kids aren't getting a good sex education is because most parents don't know how to teach them," Smith said. There is a sex education workshop for parents scheduled for some time in February.

A study done in 1979 by the Project on Human Sexual Development, revealed that of 1461 parents interviewed, only about 12 percent have talked about premarital sex, intercourse, venereal disease or contraception with their children.

The study also showed that when discussions do take place, mothers

provide most of the sex education for both sons and daughters. Many parents said that they were waiting for their children to ask questions, but when they do, their parents' answers are short and discourage further discussion. Of all the parents interviewed, 80 percent support sex education, believing that it should be taught in the schools.

Smith said that people bring the issue of teen pregnancy into the question of sex education in the schools. Some people believe that girls become pregnant because they don't know anything about sex, he said, and others think that they become pregnant if they know too much. Smith said that sex education or the lack of it has nothing to do with teen pregnancies. "Unfortunately," he said, "people tie the two together."

Smith said that he would like to see sex education not only in the schools but in community groups and churches as well. "Sex education," he said, "should be done anywhere."



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