



Wider Opportunities for Women

Integrating Career Planning and Job Readiness into Reproductive Health Programs to Help Reduce Teen Pregnancy Project Summary

In November, 2010 Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW) launched an innovative project that aims to help reduce the incidence of teen pregnancy in the DC metro area by integrating career planning and job readiness services into three local, community-based reproductive health programs: Planned Parenthood of Metropolitan Washington's Ophelia Egypt Center, The Healthy Babies Project's Teen Parenthood Empowerment Program (T-PEP) and Mary's Center's Teen Program. A key goal of the initiative is to inspire changes in the attitudes of at-risk teen girls about their own employment goals and the financial resources necessary to support a family –changes that will encourage them to delay pregnancy until they are on a path to fulfill their career goals. The project builds on WOW's decades of experience with employment and training programs for low-income women and girls and WOW's established *Connections to Careers for Teens* Curriculum that has provided career literacy workshops for over 1,000 teens, mostly girls, in the Washington DC area in recent years.

The need for this project is driven by the documented link between poverty and high teen pregnancy rates. The absence of strategies in many reproductive health programs to help teens with their economic struggles has provided WOW with an opportunity to acquaint teens with career building and economic security issues designed to help them prepare for stable, well-paying jobs and encourage them to delay childbearing until they are able to support themselves and a family.

The project grew out of a study WOW conducted at the request of the Ford Foundation to explore the feasibility of building collaborations among economic security and reproductive health organizations. An important finding from this study was that some clinics had already begun to take a more holistic approach to their clients' needs, particularly their economic difficulties, by providing informal job counseling and referrals.

In 2011, the first year of this pilot project, WOW expects to reach 55-60 teens ages 15-19 through a series of career readiness and skills building workshops conducted at PPMW's Ophelia Egypt Center, Healthy Babies T-PEP program, and Mary's Center's Teen Program. These workshops are typically conducted for an hour on a weekly basis with 12 to 15 participants. Program staff and participants provide periodic assessments of the content and quality of the sessions. Additionally, a professional evaluator at the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, helped WOW develop a monitoring instrument that will help us assess the project's success after the workshops are completed in the late summer/early fall.

The selection and scope of topics covered in the workshops is developed with input from teen advisors and program staff at partner organizations. Generally interactive, the workshops start with the concept of self-sufficiency and what it takes to make ends meet in this community. Teens are introduced to the concept of budgeting and the Self-Sufficiency Standard for Washington, DC – the Web-based tool developed by WOW that indicates the monthly cost of supporting a family based on family size and the actual cost of child care, housing, transportation and other essentials in the DC metropolitan area. Other important topics include: an introduction to jobs in high-growth fields in the metro area (e.g. technology jobs and the health care sector), non-traditional jobs that typically offer higher pay and benefits, and exposure to career ladders and career planning. Hands-on sessions include resume preparation, job application and interview skills. There are also sessions led by young adults – frequently from the community – who have embarked on careers of special interest to participants. In conjunction with Bank on DC, the series also includes workshops on financial literacy issues such as credit, opening a bank account and the importance of saving for college, specialized training or emergencies. The mix of topics varies to meet the needs and requests of participants at each partner site.

The project is funded by the Summit Fund of Washington.