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Teen birth awareness ads to target teens and businesses

Campaign will feature phone messages from a young parent

The Business Journal of Milwaukee - November 10, 2006 by [Jennifer Batog](#)

The **United Way of Greater Milwaukee** is launching an awareness campaign about the city's high rate of teen pregnancies, with two audiences in mind: the business community and the city's teens.

The campaign will begin the week of Nov. 13 and focus on informing the business community about the impact the city's teen birth rate, one of the highest in the nation, has on the region's economy. The campaign also will inform teens about the hard truths of having children too soon.

Milwaukee's teen birth rate impacts the ability of businesses to find qualified skilled workers, to stem rising health care costs and to attract new businesses to the city. A recent national study found that teen births cost Milwaukee at least \$48 million in foster care, health care and lost tax revenue in 2005.

The United Way formed a task force in the spring to study ways to reduce teen pregnancy after the agency issued a report on the subject, deeming it a crisis. Among the report's recommendations was the public awareness campaign. The campaign also includes two newspaper advertisements aimed at businesses and direct mail that should go out by the end of the year. The ads are part of an effort to encourage the businesses to donate to the public awareness campaign.

High rates

The message to youth will be delivered in the form of signs placed on 20 bus shelters and on 15 buses in neighborhoods where teen birth rates are particularly high. The signs, which will target teens 12 to 18 years of age, will encourage teens to call a telephone number "for a good time."

Teens who call the number will hear the voice of a teen talking about the drawbacks of being a young parent. With a screaming baby heard in the background, the teen tells the story of changing diapers, middle of the night wake-up calls, paying child support and dropping out of school.

There are separate phone messages for boys and girls, as well as an alternate number that plays the message in Spanish.

The business community ads, which begin running the week of Nov. 13, highlight two areas teen births impact: the availability of qualified workers and the public costs of teen births.

One ad features a storefront window with a sign reading "Help really, really wanted." The ad points out the impact teen births have on the area's potential work force. Another ad discusses the taxpayer cost of teen pregnancy, with the tagline: "When a teen gets pregnant, we all see results."

United Way executives hope that once Milwaukee businesses understand how the consequences of teen births impact business, they'll be encouraged to donate to or volunteer at the prevention awareness campaign.

The involvement of the business community and its funding "is necessary to help us combat this problem," said Gary Mueller, creative director at Serve, the nonprofit arm of Glendale advertising firm BVK, which created the campaign. "The ads enable us to reach a bigger audience in a provocative way."

Campaign price tag

One year of the public awareness campaign is expected to cost about \$650,000, which will be funded by donations and in-kind support from businesses. It received seed money from the United Way and from **Aurora Health Care**, Milwaukee, which donated \$25,000. **Rockwell Automation**, Milwaukee, donated \$50,000 to United Way's Healthy Girls Initiative, which will be used for the public awareness campaign.

Business leaders can no longer ignore the economic impact of teen births, said Mary Lou Young, Rockwell's director of global community relations.

"The company feels like anything we can do that will reduce the amount of teen pregnancies is a good thing," she said.

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