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EXPERTS LABEL TEEN PREGNANCY IN MILWAUKEE AN “EPIDEMIC”

-report lists sexual victimization, violence and poverty as contributing factors-

MILWAUKEE (Thursday, March 29, 2006) – After studying what is being called an epidemic for over one year, the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Advisory Committee in Milwaukee released their 50-page report on teen pregnancy today at the Italian Community Center.

The report, entitled *If Truth Be Told*, was compiled by a group of experts including service providers supporting teen parents, healthcare representatives, funders and government representatives. Currently, Milwaukee is rated as the 2nd highest percent of births to teens in the 50 largest US cities.

The truths revealed about teen pregnancy in the report included how closely tied teen pregnancy in Milwaukee is to sexual victimization, violence, racial and economic disparities and poverty.

“The truth is it’s not about two kids getting carried away in the backseat of a car after prom,” said Lisa Tries, Associate Director of Community Impact for United Way and project lead for the teen pregnancy report, “It’s about sexual victimization, violence and poverty.”

Some of the startling findings related to **sexual victimization** include:

- Over 50% of teen mothers are sexually molested prior to their first pregnancy
- 42% of girls younger than 15 reported that their first intercourse was nonconsensual
- In Wisconsin, 71% of the babies born to teen girls are fathered not by boys, but men over the age of 20 years old. And in 20% of the cases, the fathers are at least 6 years older than the mothers.
- Juveniles accounted for 74% of Wisconsin sexual assault victims in 2001

The report also addresses the financial costs to the community and its cyclical, symbiotic **relationship to poverty and crime.**

- Only 30% of teen mothers finish their high school education, leaving them poorly qualified to enter the job market
- Most teen mothers remain single and less than 40% receive *any* kind of child support from the babies’ fathers.
- 85% of teen births in Wisconsin are paid for by Wisconsin taxpayers.
- According to the national average expenses for teen births and attended expenses (\$79,320), Milwaukee taxpayers may have contributed as much as \$136,596,972 for medical care and other services to teen mothers. Furthermore, it may have already cost taxpayers \$35,194,284 for the 25.8% of teen mothers who previously had children.

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Teen pregnancy as it relates to **poverty and crime** – *continued*

- Babies born to teen mothers are at risk for long-term problems in many major areas of life, including school failure, poverty and physical or mental illness. The teenage mothers are also at risk for these problems.
- Concurrently, the sons of teen mothers are more likely to become incarcerated and the daughters are more likely to become teen parents themselves.

The **racial disparities** around the issue of teen pregnancy were also released:

- In Milwaukee, the risk of a Hispanic or non-Hispanic Black teen girl getting pregnant is 3 times that of a non-Hispanic White girl.
- For all races, the teen birth rate for Hispanic girls was the only racial/ethnic teen birth rate that was not lower in 2000 than it was in 1990.
- The Black teen birth rate was still five times that of the White rate at the end of the decade.

The conclusions of the report included nine major recommendations. The first steps recommended by the committee include building public awareness through a media-driven campaign, creating a collaborative fund and lastly implementing programs that work. The report calls upon the community to “look past the barriers to find solutions” to the teen pregnancy problem in Milwaukee.

Today, United Way of Greater Milwaukee announced the chairs of an oversight committee who will begin putting the recommendations of the report into action. Co-chairs are Bevan Baker, city health commissioner and Elizabeth Brenner, president and publisher of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and 2005 chair of United Way’s Women’s Initiative that has been addressing teen pregnancy in our community. Within the next two months, subcommittees will be formed to implement the recommendations.

Meanwhile, United Way of Greater Milwaukee also announced they would invest \$150,000 in seed money toward implementing the recommendations. Most of that will go toward financing the aggressive public awareness campaign called for in the report. Aurora Health Care, sponsor of Teen Pregnancy Prevention luncheon following the press conference, is also investing \$25,000 toward the effort.

“Now that we have the big picture, we see the teen pregnancy issue more clearly,” said Paul Nannis, Vice President of Government and Community Relations for Aurora Health Care and Chair of the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Advisory Committee, “One thing that everybody agrees on is that ignoring the issue is not an option. The entire community must commit to working together to find solutions. Certainly, the release of this report today is the first step toward reversing the trend of teen pregnancy in our community.”