

# The Rational Enquirer

2007

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A Publication of the Oregon Teen Pregnancy Task Force

# HEALTHY TEENS IN TOMORROW'S WORLD



# The Rational Enquirer

## A publication of the Oregon Teen Pregnancy Task Force

Contributors include:

William Baney  
Portland State University

Marsha Brantley  
DHS Public Health Division

Sara Carmona  
Boys and Girls Aid Society

Judy Fightmaster  
DHS Public Health Division

Kim Kelly, Graphic Design  
DHS Public Health Division

Virginia Martin, AmeriCorps  
Sexual Minority Youth Resource Center

Simone Rede  
Pathfinder Academy

Ely Sanders  
Pathfinder Academy

Kelly Smith, AmeriCorps  
Insights Teen Parent Program

George Taylor, Editor

Becca Wolf  
Boys and Girls Aid Society

Aylett Wright  
Planned Parenthood of the Columbia  
Willamette

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# HEALTHY TEENS IN TOMORROW'S WORLD

By Aylett Wright

How fortunate we are that the future doesn't land in a sudden lump, but creeps up on us day by day. We have time, if we will make use of it, to ponder, to be intentional about the world we shape for generations that follow.

Can we agree, as a society, on values that promote equal access to opportunity for all young people? How do we take an active role in creating a culture where youth find health and well-being in all aspects of their lives?

We need to make certain youth have access to culturally competent health care, to help them acquire the skills and confidence to navigate systems that are often not youth friendly.

We can create opportunities for youth to push their comfort levels in ways that support growth and development rather than those that present risks of harm.

We continue to see that a holistic approach provides youth with the best chances for embracing their sexuality in ways that add to the richness of their lives and builds healthy communities. We are charged with finding those programs and providing access to all youth.

We can encourage a lifelong love of learning through programs that nurture developing brains and bodies. We must be ever more creative about offering education for those who learn differently, speak a different language, or have life circumstances that keep them from succeeding in mainstream academic settings. We can be more supportive of children from families who are homeless, in dangerous situations, or otherwise marginalized.

We can inspire youth by modeling ways to learn skills and gain love for lifelong recreation. Having passion for activities outside of school and home can help them avoid such difficult outcomes as unplanned early pregnancy and violent relationships.

We can encourage them to join in making the world a better place. Through our own example, we can teach them how to leave their footprint on the future.

A vital starting place is to ask young people themselves what they think — and then listen to what they say. Their wisdom, enthusiasm, energy, and acceptance are vital to building the programs and environments that support their their well-being and success. We entrust them with tomorrow by believing in them today.



# The Strong, Smart, Bold Women of Tomorrow

By Annette Klinefelter

courses and did all within my power to show that she was capable of achieving success.

But like so many others, Jill was discharged from OYA without a place to go or knowledge of what to do next. We lost touch for two years, and in that time, Jill began using again. Homeless, she was taken back into detention. Eventually, she entered treatment for the eighth time.

That's where this story takes a happy turn. Today, Jill is a college student pursuing a career in social work. She works in a transitional living program for at-risk girls and is an employee of Girls Inc. She co-facilitates the GO Onward program at the Donald E. Long Detention Center. To date, no girls enrolled in the program have become pregnant, relapsed, experienced domestic or sexual assault, or failed in school.

Jill's story serves as an inspiration to all the girls in our programs that they too can achieve the goals they set for themselves.

I met Jill in 1998. She was 16, a ward of the Oregon Youth Authority, a drug addict who had been in and out of treatment facilities, and a resident of a transitional living program.

Gradually, I began to see that Jill wasn't getting the training or tools she needed to transition successfully into the world. As our friendship grew, so did my desire to help her create a new future. That desire led to the creation of Girls' Initiative Network, an organization focused on expanding the realm of possibilities for girls like Jill. In 2005, we became an affiliate of Girls Incorporated, the nation's leading voice for girls.

Today, Girls Inc of NW Oregon works to empower girls between 8 and 21 to be "strong, smart, and bold." Six years after I first met Jill, we have helped hundreds of girls understand, value, and assert their rights.

And what of Jill herself, the 16-year-old who inspired it all? She had often expressed a desire to become a therapist. I paid for her SAT prep

*Every year Jill was in detention cost taxpayers \$43,000; every trip to treatment, \$12,000. For the \$139,000 spent on rehabilitating Jill, she could have attended Harvard or purchased a home. Advocacy, along with the common-sense solution of transitional services, is the sensible, economic, humane way to end the cycle that traps so many girls.*

In every choice, there is power. Girls Inc. of NW Oregon is proud to help girls recognize that they hold the keys to their future. They can use their strength, intellect, and power to open doors of opportunity and close doors to defeat.

Annette Klinefelter, MEd,  
is Executive Director of  
Girls Inc of NW Oregon.  
[www.girlsinitiativenetwork.org](http://www.girlsinitiativenetwork.org)

- Girls Inc. of NW Oregon offers these programs:
- Allies in Action:** Helps girls identify and deal with relationally aggressive behaviors.
  - Operation SMART:** Builds girls' skills and interest in science, technology, and math.
  - Friendly PEERSuasion:** Builds girls' skills in resisting pressure to use harmful substances.
  - Economic Literacy:** Introduces girls to basic economic and financial concepts.
  - GO Onward:** Supports girls who are in or transitioning from out-of-home care.

# It's Their Future; They Should Help Shape It

By Sarah Ramowski and Robert Nystrom

*With a wry smile, 17-year-old Alicia Lillie is discussing her experience as an Oregon Action Researcher. Lillie just finished her final group presentation on the findings from surveying high school students about sex. She and her fellow researchers devoted four months of weekly meetings, two days of spring break, and countless additional hours sitting through trainings, developing surveys, and analyzing data. So, why did she do it?*

*"When the state says, 'Come tell me what you think...'" Lillie pauses. "They want to know what I think? I feel important, valued."*

*Lillie, who herself was born to a teen parent, illustrates the importance of Positive Youth Development and how it is being incorporated into public health practice and policy.*

## Agents for Positive Change

Positive Youth Development (PYD) is a term used to describe many different aspects of the same basic concept: empowering and promoting the confidence, competence, and resilience that benefit youth and the larger society. PYD recognizes that all youth have a vital stake in their own future and a pivotal role to play in working alongside adults to shape policies that affect them. Supporting a PYD theory often requires a frame shift toward seeing adolescents as positive change agents, both willing and able to contribute to larger society. Ideally, organizations that serve youth would incorporate youth as decision-makers and equal participants, giving them the support to succeed in those roles.

In Oregon, Positive Youth Development principles are being put into practice with high school students through a project called Action Research. Students from the Bend, Medford, and Portland areas were trained as Action Researchers to answer a research question of their choosing related to adolescent sexual health. The goal: To actively participate in the research and present findings at public, community-wide forums in order to influence school officials, policy makers, and ultimately, the development of Oregon's Teen Pregnancy Prevention/Sexual Health State Plan.

## PYD in Action

In Gresham, Alicia Lillie was one of eight high school seniors to present their survey findings to a standing-room-only crowd of parents, health educators, school administrators, and state policy makers. This group of teens designed and administered almost 900 surveys to students from four area high schools. Adults in the audience listened attentively as the students presented their findings and made passionate recommendations for enhancing



Oregon's curriculum and its teachers' abilities to connect with students on what is sometimes an awkward subject.

After finding that their peers had some misconceptions about STDs and pregnancy prevention methods, the Portland-based Action Researchers turned to the question of how sex education in the classroom should change. They emerged with three recommendations:

1. Health educators should provide more in-class games and activities that are engaging and fun.
2. The topic of sex should be taught as more of a personal conversation, less of an abstract issue.
3. Health educators need to make "the uncomfortable, comfortable" in class.

To address this last issue, the team suggested sending health teachers to a professional development workshop where they work on learning more effective teaching techniques, successfully connecting with youth, and developing engaging hands-on activities that deal with sex and sexuality.

After presenting their findings, students led or participated with adults in small group discussions. Adults were asked to connect the Action Researchers' findings with lessons from their own work to identify specific ways in which the state can promote positive sexual health for adolescents. This same process has been repeated at community forums in all three Action Research sites. Members of the state advisory group that will develop Oregon's plan for adolescent sexual health will incorporate the youth findings into the plan's programmatic and policy decisions.

## How It Started

The seeds for Action Research were planted in 2005 when Oregon State Adolescent Health Coordinator Robert Nystrom heard a conference presentation by a young woman named Sarah Schulman. Schulman had entered Stanford University at age 16 and after completing her bachelors and masters by age 20, was preparing to leave for Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar. She had also started her own youth-run organization (Youth

Infusion) aimed at supporting youth as active participants and decision-makers in policies that affect them. Nystrom contracted with Schulman to help Oregon figure out how to involve youth in a meaningful way in the development of its statewide adolescent sexual health plan. After considering several options, Schulman and Nystrom selected the Action Research methodology and training curriculum.

Eventually, all three sites in Oregon used



a modified version of this curriculum. Students learned about different research options (surveys, focus groups, etc) and were trained to develop their own research question, carry out the research, and make recommendations based on the results.

Much of the work was not easy, especially given their topic. "Sex is taboo!" said Action Researcher Briana Knight. Student researchers expressed dismay at the hurdles they encountered, from getting school administration approval, to notifying parents, to favoring questions that addressed student knowledge of sex rather than their experience.

## Statewide Planning & PYD

Oregon is working to incorporate Positive Youth Development into all relevant state policies and programs. The Oregon PYD Advisory Council was formed in 1999 based on a federal HHS grant awarded to the Oregon Commission on Children and Families, and is comprised of state and local human services, public health and mental health staff, as well as employees of private youth-serving organizations. The council meets regularly with other state partners and has recommended that the state align all state policies to support positive youth development, expand K-12 policies that support service learning and community involvement, and provide PYD professional development opportunities to those who work with youth. The Council also worked with the Oregon Homeless and Runaway Coalition to develop a report focusing on the needs of homeless and runaway youth. This led to a new Oregon law that requires state and local partners to develop legislative recommendations for a comprehensive system of opportunities and supports for these youth.

This past year, Oregon also became the first state to establish a Positive Youth Development benchmark (see box). Preliminary results from the first year confirm the importance of promoting PYD among youth. Those who scored higher on the PYD questions were far less likely to report involvement in a wide variety of risk areas such as substance use, school failure, suicidal ideation, and violence.

All this work and energy at the state level is geared toward encouraging adults to support, empower, and value youth and to more effectively involve them in the planning, implementation, and delivery of programs or interventions that serve them. It is becoming clear that Positive Youth Development has great potential to improve public health practice for the adolescent population. In the end, success in working with youth may all boil down to one thing, according to Alicia Lillie, "Treat 'em with respect."

For more information:

**Oregon Positive Youth Development program**  
[www.oregon.gov/OCCF/Mission/Progs/progpy/miprogy.shtml](http://www.oregon.gov/OCCF/Mission/Progs/progpy/miprogy.shtml)

**Youth Infusion**  
[www.youthinfusion.com/](http://www.youthinfusion.com/)

*Sarah Ramowski is Adolescent Health Policy & Assessment Specialist and Robert Nystrom is Adolescent Health Manager with the Office of Family Health, DHS Public Health Division.*

This article is adapted from one that will appear in Northwest Public Health, Spring/Summer 2007; [www.nwpublichealth.org](http://www.nwpublichealth.org).

### The Oregon PYD Benchmark

*The Benchmark was established by the Oregon Commission on Children & Families and the Oregon Progress Board in October of 2006. It consists of six questions on the statewide Oregon Healthy Teens survey given annually to a representative sample of 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> graders. Those questions reflect the following five dimensions of Positive Youth Development:*

- 1. Competence (Belief in individual ability to do something well)*
- 2. Confidence (Feeling of empowerment and control over the future)*
- 3. Health (Good physical and emotional/mental health)*
- 4. Support (Connectedness to family and the school community)*
- 5. Service (Engagement in the community)*

*To meet or exceed the Benchmark standard, students must answer at least 5 of the 6 questions at a certain level (for some questions, this means an answer of Excellent, Very good, or Good vs. Fair or Poor; for others, it is Very much true or Pretty much true vs. A little true or Not at all true).*

# Youth Action Research: Learning by Doing

In Central Oregon, the Planned Parenthood of the Columbia Willamette Teen Council took part in the statewide Youth Action Research pilot program. Working with community partners and mentors, teens agreed upon the issue to study, devised research methods and implemented them, performed the research, and reported on their findings.

Council members Tony Gordon and Harrison Pride recently talked about the value of involving youth in research on issues that affect them. Both are graduating seniors who have participated in peer education programs for most of their high school years, in Teen Council and in Making a Difference Teen Theater. Their comments have been edited for clarity and brevity.

—Aylett Wright

## What did you like about the process? What did it teach you?

Harrison: It was very cool to take a whole group of ideas and compress them into a few sentences, to survey and interview my peers and find out what they really think. Those were some of the best discussions I have had in my life.

Tony: I really enjoyed presenting our findings. It was powerful to give a presentation to those who attended our community forum, to let them know we have expertise about our own issues.

Harrison: Usually my peers come to me for information and advice. This time I was going to them to learn what they think is important and what schools and other agencies can do. I was reminded that everyone has a story to tell, and that what I do as a peer educator is important in helping to change the future.

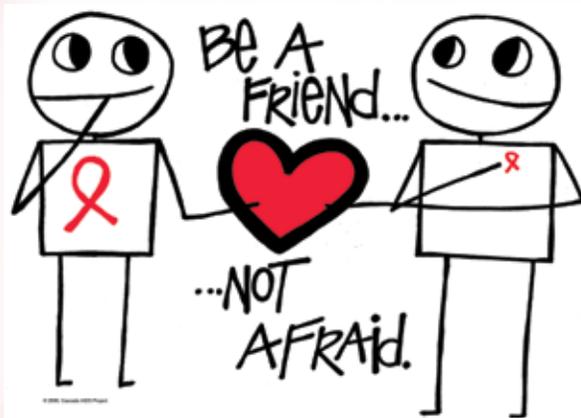
Tony: We learned how to use research methods professionally, and that is great experience for the future. We learned that we can help make a difference in the long run.

## Why is it important for youth to be involved in helping develop policy?

Harrison: Young people can and do initiate change, especially with the support of adults who believe in them. Adults have the biases and filters of their own experience. We have the wisdom of youth and a fresh perspective. We're not afraid to make mistakes. If we're the generation that will inherit the earth, we need some practice.

Tony: It's important for us to know we can make a difference. When you can start out young, it gives you the training you need to be involved in the process of healthy change. People do not expect it of us — that we have the ideas, the motivation, and will find the opportunities to impact our futures. As we grow up, we have the confidence we need to be whole, healthy people helping to create a whole, healthy world.

## Looking for new ways to reach youth?



Cascade AIDS Project's Youth HIV Prevention program has buttons, zines, and stickers that are youth created and youth developed, and all profits support Youth HIV Prevention at CAP!

Go to [www.cascadeaids.org](http://www.cascadeaids.org) for more information, or call 503.223.5907 to place an order!

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# My Mother/My Daughter

*What would mothers and daughters say to each other, given time to reflect on their true feelings? As part of a Family Engagement Event, Jamie and her mother each wrote a letter about their hopes and dreams for one another.*

— Sara Carmona

*Dear Jamie,  
I love that you look like me and even act like me. Sometimes when I watch you, it is like I am watching a film of my life. While we have many differences, we have many more similarities than you will ever know.*

*As you know, I am also the youngest of four girls, and I very much know those struggles first hand. The age difference is so difficult to deal with, and I remember like it was yesterday the constant feeling of being an outsider amongst my very own family.*

*School was just as hard. I never thought of myself as pretty and struggled constantly. I remember a talk with my mom. She told me that I should decide what I liked to do and do it. That as long as I felt good about what I was doing, I would do well. I found that I loved softball and cheerleading. And not only did I finally find something I loved, I made friends at the same time.*

*I know how hard it is to take your mom's advice or to even talk to her. I know the feeling that your mom can never understand exactly what you are going thru. But one thing I learned from my mom — kids are still going thru the same things, just at different ages. When we give advice, it doesn't mean we think we know everything. It is just that we remember how painful, fun, exciting, and devastating it all was and desperately want to be a part of that — good or bad. I want to stand by your side, to comfort you and be excited with you and be scared with you and be depressed with you. I know that I*

*have to let you go off on your own and that there are things kids just don't tell their parent. That's O.K. too.*

*I just want you to know that I will always be there for you, no matter what it is and whether or not I agree with it. My job is to guide you thru life till you are an adult, and then let you go on your own and come when you need me or ask me to be there.*

*I love you always and forever,  
Mom*



*Dear Mom,  
I love the way you always have such good ideas on how to fix a problem no matter what it might be. How you give such unconditional love, I'll never know. At times things may have been difficult and we have had our fights, but what's really special is that you never stay mad. You have the ability to get over things, or make it look like you have, so quickly.*

*I hope that you come to understand why all of your daughters have done the things we've done and that you know it wasn't to hurt you.*

*There is one thing that I wish I could change, and that's our communication.*

*It may seem like we talk a lot and that I tell you everything, but there's a lot that I don't say. I wish I could, but I always get scared. I don't even know why you give me the option of telling you things.*

*I am grateful that we have time to grow with each other because there is still a whole lot more to know. Also, know that I love you always and that I hope we stay close throughout our lives. I love what you have done for me.*

*Jamie*

# My Father/My Son

*Fathers and sons can find it difficult to talk to each other, especially once the sons reach their teen years. In this exchange through the Early Childhood Training Center, Chuck and his son Robbie were asked to answer the same questions, then shared their responses with each other. Their responses have been edited for brevity and clarity.*

—William Baney

## What is your greatest hope or dream for your father/son?

**Chuck:** My greatest hope is that he finds satisfaction in his life. I hope that he gets to a place where he is content with himself, and he is doing something that has meaning for him.

**Robbie:** My greatest hope for my dad is that he will be happy doing what he wants to do because he wants to, not because he has to.

## What do you love about your father/son?

**Chuck:** I love that he is able to care about others, and he is passionate about some of the things he does. I remember him looking out after his sister when she was afraid, and reaching to keep contact with a neighbor who had gone through a really traumatic experience.

**Robbie:** I love that my dad accepts my faults.

## How do you think your father/son would describe you to someone?

**Chuck:** I think he would say that I am usually pretty cool. However, sometimes I am a real hard ass, and I can get pretty upset.

**Robbie:** I think he would say that I am funny and have a mind of my own.

## What is difficult about your relationship? How do you address these challenges?

**Chuck:** We don't say a lot, and that is difficult when either of us has strong feelings or gets angry. My priorities right now for him are different than

what he has for himself. I can't make him have the same view that I have of what is important. I try to show interest in him, let him know my view about things, and try to give him room to make his own decisions.

**Robbie:** We can both get very mad really fast. It could just be a normal conversation, then we will be yelling the next minute. Now we try not to get angry when talking to each other.

## Strong Families, Healthy Futures

*The Early Childhood Training Center (ECTC) and its Center for Healthy Inclusive Parenting (CHIP) provide support to individuals, organizations, and communities in meeting the social, emotional, health, and educational needs of young children, youth, and their families. For more information, visit [www.ectc.pdx.edu](http://www.ectc.pdx.edu).*

## What is one thing that you wish you could change about your relationship?

**Chuck:** I wish we had a better track record for how we have dealt with anger — less fights and threats. I hope we can learn to talk about our frustrations sooner.

**Robbie:** I wish that the feeling of unspoken words would go away.

## What is something your father/son has done that you are grateful for?

**Chuck:** I am grateful that Robbie has made an effort to improve his relationship with his mother and me.

**Robbie:** I am grateful for him letting me stay at his house when my mom didn't know what to do about me anymore and was ready to give up.

Continued on next page

**How has your relationship changed as Robbie has gotten older? What do you hope your relationship will look like in the future?**

**Chuck:** There has been more tension in our relationship over time, and we don't spend as much time with each other. However, the tension has been much less recently. My hope for the future is that we will enjoy each other when we are together (we usually do), and we develop some common interests.

**Robbie:** We had been getting in more fights, but now it seems like the tension is relieving. In the future, I hope we can just talk about anything and not have to resort to fighting.

**After the interview, Chuck and Robbie examined what they learned.**

**Chuck:** In many ways we are quite similar, and we both acknowledged it in our answers. We both shared similar hopes for each other and knew the difficulties that come between us. I was very appreciative that the questions gave me an opportunity to let Robbie know how good I felt about some of his qualities, especially since most of my complaints are usually about him being a self-centered teenager. I can't even come up with a word that described how good I felt when he told me that one of the things he loves about me is that I accept his faults. I come from a long line of men who kept striving to be better because they could not accept their own faults. That Robbie is able to see that I have hopes and dreams for him and I also accept him as he is gives me a very hopeful feeling about our relationship as he works his way to adulthood.

**Robbie:** I was kind of iffy about the interview at first. Later I realized that it can't make things worse (not saying that things are that bad at the moment), but only good or neutral reactions will happen. It was a little bit awkward to answer these kinds of questions because we don't normally talk about our feelings towards each other. This was an experience that I think a lot of fathers and sons should have together. It seemed that we both had similar interests for each other and wanted the other to just enjoy life.

# Fragile Life

A. Smith, 7th grade

Kellogg Middle School

Sitting in my death bed  
Looking at my past  
Wishing I had lived a better life,  
Time goes so fast.

I would take it back,  
The X, the drugs and the speed  
Taking my life,  
Forming my need.

Who had to choose  
to have some booze?  
The choice was clear  
It was my choice to choose.

I had a wife at 18  
A child before then.  
My life was over  
before it could have even began.

My life, my soul,  
And even my heart  
They all crumbled  
They all fell apart.

The weed, the girls,  
The money and the guns  
I'd give it away  
Just to see the sun,

So hear my words  
Because my story is true  
But what's scary is this,  
I started out just like you.

# Everyone Has a Role to Play in Preventing Sexual Violence

## Here's a Place to Start

By Jessica Duke

*During the 2005-2006 school year, 3.2% of Oregon 8<sup>th</sup> graders and 5.1% of 11<sup>th</sup> graders report that they were physically forced to have sex.*

Those percentage numbers may seem small, but we should remember that behind them are the lives of real people: more than 1,400 girls and boys barely into their teens, and more than 2,200 other students who are just 16 or 17 years old. Now add the teens who report being coerced into sexual activity: Nearly 2,000 8<sup>th</sup> graders and more than 5,400 11<sup>th</sup> graders.

The consequences behind these sets of statistics are serious, both in personal and societal terms. Studies show that victims of sexual violence experience more long-lasting mental and physical health problems than the general population — effects that can follow them throughout their lives. Fortunately, a number of organizations exist to help teens in responding to sexual assault. In Oregon, you can call 1-800-SafeNet for assistance in your area.

Just as important for the future, a growing number of Oregon individuals and organizations are working to stop sexual violence before it occurs by identifying and eliminating the root causes. While it's a given that sexual violence should be stopped, not everyone is sure just how to do that. A number of paths need to be explored.

With this in mind, a multidisciplinary group spent a year collecting and assessing information from around the world to develop "Recommendations to Prevent Sexual Violence in Oregon: A Plan of Action." Based on the conviction that everyone has a role to play in preventing sexual violence, the plan provides eight recommendations for action, each supported with objectives, strategies, examples of implementation activities, and indicators of success. It's a practical document, designed to be used.



The plan is available on the internet at [www.endsexualviolenceoregon.org](http://www.endsexualviolenceoregon.org)  
For a printed copy, call (971) 673-0361.

*Jessica Duke is the Women's Health Educator for the Oregon Public Health Division Office of Family Health.*

### From the state Plan of Action:

#### Support sexual violence prevention by:

- » **Promoting healthy and safe attitudes and beliefs about sexuality**
- » **Empowering those who witness violence (bystanders) to speak out**
- » **Developing interventions for young people who show risk factors for becoming perpetrators**
- » **Promoting the status of women and girls**
- » **Addressing the root causes of violence in our society**



# Eileen's Dad Can't

She wants something nobody

By Elizabeth

Eileen's favorite person in the world, until she died. And her dad is a loser now. This is the way Eileen speaks. Frankly. I treasure this.

Eileen went on to tell me that her father has been in and out prison her whole life.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because he's a meth cook," she said, her voice falling flat.

"How long has he been doing that?" A ridiculous fill-the-silence question, but it escaped before my mind sounded the "this is an important moment, say the right thing" alarm.

"Forever." Eileen shrugged and leaned over her glass of water, pulling at the straw. "He's a loser. I never want to talk to him again. But if he gets out soon he promised he'll take me shopping."

Her father did get out of prison. I met him — the first and only time — a few weeks after he'd gotten out. Every day had felt like an eternity to Eileen. His call interrupted the dinner I was treating her to — her first time at a Lebanese restaurant.

It was a warm summer's night. Eileen's eyes got so big when she heard her father's voice on the other end of her cell phone. He was at her house. We had to go. We didn't know if her father would wait. I set aside my own emotions and let Eileen

For the past year I have mentored a young teenage girl in Southeast Portland. I'll call her Eileen.

In many ways Eileen is an ordinary teen — she likes to wear faded jean skirts, she wrinkles her nose at vegetables and public radio, she wishes her mom didn't have a MySpace account, she worries about whether the boy she likes this week likes her, too.

But Eileen has her secrets, and she keeps them well. Like what she really wanted for Christmas. She didn't scribble it on a wish list, because what Eileen really wanted is to see her father again — and Eileen has long stopped wishing for the impossible.

"He's a loser"

We had only known each other a few weeks when Eileen first mentioned her father. We were sharing an enchilada at a tidy Mexican taqueria, talking loftily about foreign languages and heritage.

Eileen was proud of her Native American blood — her father is half Chippewa, and her grandmother was fully Indian. Her grandma was

## There Are Hundreds of Eileens in Oregon

The U.S. Department of Justice recently released an alarming fact: As of December 31, 2005, one in every 136 U.S. residents was in prison or jail. In 2005, 14 states had prison population increases of at least 5%. While these statistics speak loudly about efforts to increase community safety, they also carry implications about the need to serve the children of this growing population.

Children whose parents are incarcerated are five to six times more likely than their peers to become incarcerated themselves. Families where a parent is incarcerated typically face multiple challenges, including substance abuse, poverty, and mental health issues. Unspoken loss and grief accompany the stigmatization that plague children separated from a parent due to incarceration.

# Hug Her, But I Can

else can give: her dad's affection.

by Elizabeth Armstrong Moore

experience hers. The indifference toward her father had quickly turned into giddy adoration. She applied her lip gloss carefully as I sped to her house. Then she leaned back and looked out the passenger's window, her whole face still, quiet, frozen in the pre-encounter.

Her father was handsome. Stocky and stubbly. A firm handshake kind of a guy. He met my eyes and held my gaze, thanking me for my role as mentor, and I found myself smiling under the pressure.

I'll never forget Eileen's face. She looked like the sun rising, all beams of light. I took my exit quietly, leaving the Styrofoam box of leftovers on the counter.

Today, Eileen's father is back in prison. She doesn't talk about him at all now. If I ask, she doesn't even shrug, just replies flatly that she doesn't care where he is or who he is or how he is. She gave him too many chances. She's done.

Eileen is a few months into high school. She has gone from jean skirts and hoop earrings to black eyeliner and heavy hoodies. She has smoked her first cigarette. She has been suspended from school.

In some ways I understand this Eileen better. There was a time when I, too, wore black eyeliner, fixing my face in a defiantly pensive pose the way only teenagers can. But I was listening to Brahms and reading Proust, not getting suspended. Then again, I always had a father, and I could

While mentors will never take the place of an absent parent, they can be a support and guide to help young people navigate their lives.

In 2003, The Boys & Girls Aid Society of Oregon received a federal grant to provide mentors to youth with an incarcerated parent. The Committed Partners for Youth Mentor Program in Portland serves Multnomah County youth between 10 and 14.

reach him at any time. There is more behind Eileen's eyeliner than there ever was behind mine.

This Christmas, as I brainstormed my list of gifts, I was stuck on Eileen. What she really wants is something only her father can give. Attention. Discipline. Time. No, more than that. What she really wants is him, giving.

What matters is giving, not the gift

And it dawns on me that, more important than what I give, is the fact that I give at all. What matters is the giving, not the gift. It isn't something you do during a season. It's devotion — sometimes glorious and sometimes tedious, sometimes noticed and sometimes not. The gift is merely the exclamation point.

When I hand Eileen a little something tied in a tidy bow a few days ago, my real gift was shared in the span of our hug. And maybe, just maybe, she will find it useful in the moments she needs it most.

And then maybe, somewhere down the road, she'll pass it on to someone else, someone just like her, someone who dreams of more than tidy bows.

*Elizabeth Armstrong Moore is a freelance journalist in Portland, and the editor of [www.CommonTies.com](http://www.CommonTies.com). This article is reproduced with permission from the January 2, 2007, issue of *The Christian Science Monitor* ([www.csmonitor.com](http://www.csmonitor.com)). All rights reserved.*

To learn more about the program, please contact Kristin Harper at (503) 542-2702 or visit [www.mentorportland.org](http://www.mentorportland.org). For information regarding mentor programs in your local area, contact Oregon Mentors at (503) 517-8990 or visit [www.ormentors.org](http://www.ormentors.org).

— Sara Carmona

# Helping Teen Mothers Find a Path out of Poverty

By Ely Sanders

Maria was 7 years old when her parents dropped her off on Portland's Lombard Street. They'd be back to pick her up, they promised. She never saw them again. Her life after that was a chain of foster homes and more schools than she could remember. By the time she enrolled in Pathfinder Academy, she had had one child and was pregnant with another. Quiet and unsure of herself, admitting she had never done well in school, Maria predicted that she would attend only a short time.

Pathfinder Academy has been helping teen parents like Maria break the cycle of poverty and criminality since its founding by Pathfinders of Oregon in 1999. As a community-based alternative school, the academy contracts with Portland Public Schools to serve approximately eight 14- to 24-year-old students a year. All are pregnant or parenting, and most live substantially below the poverty level. During the 2005-2006 school year, for instance, 95% of Pathfinder students qualified for DHS assistance: cash grants, food stamps, the Oregon Health Plan, and education and employment-related childcare.

At Pathfinder Academy, these young people find a real-world curriculum that includes GED instruction, parenting instruction, parent support and parenting services, job readiness, college transition assistance, case management, resource referral, and a sense of family.

It's a caring yet disciplined environment. Students are told that a staff member may stop by for a home-visit if they miss school. But that visit, they are told, is a way to make sure

they and their child are okay. Relationships grow between staff and students in which students are encouraged to call, even after hours, if they need to talk, and graduates continue to stop by or call weekly. Once a Pathfinder, students soon discover, always a Pathfinder.

Eighteen months later, Maria earned her GED. Now 20, she attends Portland Community College working toward her associate's degree. Her two children are enrolled in Head Start programs and enjoy stable housing for the first time in their lives.





**"In 2004, 13 million American children (one in six) were poor, an increase of 12 percent since 2000.... Children living in extreme persistent poverty are more involved in delinquency, especially serious delinquency."**

**—Children's Defense Fund, Cradle to Prison Pipeline Initiative**

*Pathfinders of Oregon has seen firsthand the impact that incarceration has on families. As the sole-source provider of cognitive and parenting programs for the Oregon Department of Corrections, the program has served more than 7,000 inmates in the last biennium alone. In 1999, Pathfinders of Oregon partnered with Portland Public Schools to create Pathfinder Academy as a response to evidence showing that the two best predictors of future involvement in the criminal justice system for children are the age of the mother at birth of the child, and the educational attainment of the mother.*

## TOMORROW

Vance Fluharty, 7th grade  
Kellogg Middle School

*The sight of pure paradise  
Feeling like a soft pillow  
Smelling like chocolate  
The color of chrome  
It sounds like children laughing.*

## THE GIRL

Hannah Bonin, 7th grade  
Binnsmead Middle School

*How I used to be the girl  
Who said nothing  
But everything has changed now  
There's nothing I won't say to anyone*

*That girl I used to be  
Acted so differently  
but now everything has changed*

*Everything has changed  
In every way, every day  
The girl who said nothing is  
now just a memory, now everything is different.  
Because I was the girl who said nothing.*

*Ya, ya, everything has changed  
Everyone in every way,  
Day by day  
Side by side  
Life goes on without a doubt  
Everything has changed.*

*The girl who said nothing  
The girl who said nothing*

*I was the girl who said nothing.*

## HEALTH

Mike Mengistu, 7th grade  
Kellogg Middle School

*When you are hungry  
You eat soda and chips  
Greasing up  
Your fingers and lips  
Whatever happened  
To fruit for dessert?  
All around people eat  
Cake and frozen yogurt.  
Teens sitting down say  
Watching TV is fun,  
Why don't you go outside for fresh air  
How 'bout a run?*

*If you keep eating at McDonald's  
You'll gain weight and lose money  
And when you weigh 300 pounds  
People look at you funny.  
So come on,  
Let's go out and exercise!  
Get off of the couch and  
Put down the fries.*

# GLAD to Help Girls Become the Women They Want to Be

By Sara Carmona

“I’m a thirteen year old girl living with her dad, and it’s not easy to tell him everything — like questions I have about my period and boys and my body and life,” says Amy. Fortunately, she has someone she can turn to: her GLAD Advocates. “They’re easy to talk to when I’m shy or too embarrassed to tell my parents.”

Girls Leadership and Development (GLAD) is a strengths-based prevention program of The Boys & Girls Aid Society of Oregon for young women ages 11 to 14. Originally developed as a pregnancy prevention program, GLAD addresses issues of importance to girls and supports them to make positive life choices.

Each week, GLAD girls attend a group where they participate in a fun, active, and engaging curriculum intended to build their knowledge around gender-specific topics.

*“We talk about how good it is to be a girl. We always talk about other cultures and sexual harassment, drugs, gangs, tattoos, and sexual minorities. In health class, I know more about sex, condoms and women’s rights than anyone. GLAD has taught me how to protect myself, be safe, and to do what is right for me and not to change for anyone. Because of GLAD, I feel very empowered.”*

— Juana

GLAD Youth Advocates are stationed at middle school sites in some of Portland’s highest risk neighborhoods. Their offices, painted in bright colors and decorated with female positive messages, serve as a sanctuary for many girls experiencing the tumult of adolescence.



Mural painted by GLAD youth at Lane Middle School

*“There’s no drama here. You can say how you feel and not be criticized for how you think. It’s a place where it’s okay to make mistakes. We treat everyone here equally, even if you’re in a fight with them or have different friends.”*

—Amy

Advocates work closely with school staff to identify youth who will benefit from program services. Although some are referred to the program by teachers, counselors, and community partners for being high risk for school failure, early pregnancy, or gang involvement, many girls seek out GLAD services on their own.

*“My GLAD Advocates are such huge role models for me. I don’t know how to thank them, besides ‘making it’ in my life. If girls have a problem with rape, family, friends, AIDS, or anything else, we all know that we have someone to talk to. And I get to do community service like painting murals or helping at the Oregon Food Bank. Oh, and I also have a mentor.”*

— Juana

Each month, GLAD girls participate in community service projects with groups such as The Humane Society, Friends of Trees, The Oregon Food Bank, and Race for the Roses, a half-marathon to benefit local non-profit organizations. During the summer, the girls plan and execute a 7-week service learning project. These have included leading activities for residents at an assisted living facility and writing stories to share with children in their neighborhood.

GLAD has been serving girls in Portland for over ten years. In that time, the program has maintained a pregnancy rate close to zero percent, and no youth have dropped out of school while participating in GLAD. Participants have demonstrated a dramatic improvement in academic success and a significant decrease in the number of suspensions or other serious school disciplinary actions.

*“If I hadn’t gone to GLAD and learned who I am, I would still be slumped in my bed pretending to be sick so I could skip school half the week. When I went to school I got in fights so I could go home. Now I have a goal and I plan to meet it — and part of it is going to school and getting a good education.”*

—Amy

Ultimately, GLAD’s program services and activities are part of a larger goal to help girls develop a sense of self-confidence, become positive leaders, and inspire them to believe they can achieve their goals. Mimi, who graduated from high school in 2005 and attends the University of Portland, talks about what the program has meant to her:

*“GLAD reassured me that no matter what anybody says, I’m positive that I will make it in my life. Whatever I put my mind to I can achieve — and, not only will I achieve it, but I will surpass the expectations that everyone has for me.”*

*The mural was painted by GLAD youth at Lane Middle School as part of an 8-week service learning project. Working with local artist Hope Medford, they first discussed the idea of what it means to be a teenage girl today, then designed the image and proposed it to school administration. When the mural was complete, the girls hosted an unveiling for the school, funders, and community partners. The project was funded in part by the W. Glen Boyd Charitable Foundation.*

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*GLAD is one of many programs of The Boys & Girls Aid Society, which has served children and families throughout the state since 1885. The agency seeks loving homes for children in need of both adoption and foster care, and provides safe places for homeless and runaway youth to live temporarily. Experienced staff help young people from birth to age 18 to develop the skills needed to learn and grow into healthy and productive citizens. For more information, visit [www.boysandgirlsaid.org](http://www.boysandgirlsaid.org).*

### *The Real Seven*

Bethany Moua, 7th grade

Binnsmead Middle School

*A class of teens was discussing that Seven Wonders of the World and how it related to them. The Teacher was saying all this stuff about pyramids, statues, and special landmarks and how it all came down to them. As if the whole world would end if they didn’t have this information.*

*Then a boy raised his hand and said, “Does any of this have to do with our health?”*

*“Well, what do you think?” the teacher asked.*

*A girl raised her hand and said these very words, I mark, “Teacher, you are wrong. Those aren’t the seven wonders. You want to know the truth, I’ll tell you. The real seven wonders are to taste, to feel, to hear, to see, to smell, to laugh and to love. A teen would need that to be good and healthy.”*

*The real seven. Beautiful, isn’t it?*



# Word Power

## How Today's LGBTQ Youth Define Themselves and Why

By Simone Rede

Asexual, bisexual, pansexual; non-gendered, omni-gendered, questioning. Today's LGBTQ youth use all manner of new and evolving ways to describe themselves. This wide diversity of "genderterms" suggests a shift in which sexual orientation is no longer considered a rigid gay-straight division, but a fluid spectrum of identities and preferences. It's a brave new world that welcomes brave new language.

Words are powerful tools; by defining themselves, young people take a measure of control over their own beings, looking toward a time when being LGBTQ is seen as but one aspect of one's identity rather than a dominating quality. In that future, says a 19-year-old lesbian named Martha, "I hope... it won't be something that you come out to someone and they will think 'Oh, that girl I know who's gay.'"

One day, perhaps, gay youth will be acknowledged as no different from straight youth. "It should be like whether you like basketball or baseball better," says Eric, an 18-year-old who identifies as one who "plays with" traditional gender roles, "it kinda doesn't matter. Sometimes people argue about it, but you're not gonna kick somebody's ass because they like basketball."

Austin, a 23-year-old androgynous youth, believes in the freedom to explore sexual, gender, and personal identities simultaneously. Many older

members of the LGBTQ community agree. They should, says Nina, a 35-year-old queer female, be allowed to explore such aspects of themselves "alongside what they want to do with their life or how they can contribute to society."

### *Using Language to Achieve Visibility, Unity, Power*

Many LGBTQs see greater visibility as the strongest antidote to stereotyping and discrimination — and therefore a central issue in the movement toward equality. One key lies in the adoption of language that broadens and includes rather than divides. "Words are symbols," says Eli, a 21-year-old non-gendered asexual youth. "I think if we make any progress, it'll be in the realm of talking about ourselves as a culture in the mainstream."

The recognition of multiple and diverse identities may also lead to greater unification within an LGBTQ community that remains largely fragmented. "Clearly" notes Jenn, a 52-year-old lesbian transfemale, "we are a loose construction of communities whose primary similarity...is that we're discriminated against because of who we are, how we love, and how we express that." "In terms of community," adds Cameron, a 19-year-old queer pansexual, "we need to realize and respect our differences and...our similarities."

And that, suggests JP, a 54-year-old gay male, calls for a healthy dose of self-examination. As a young man coming out in the 1970s, he found the discrimination helped him become more aware of his own prejudices and forced him to confront issues he otherwise may not have had to face. “Everyone’s capable of being a role model,” he says now. “One just has to be true to oneself.”

## ***That Loaded Word***

*The word “queer” has long been used as a derogatory term. Recently, in an example of “semantic inversion,” many members of the LGBTQ community have adopted it as a positive self-describer. This view is not universal, however, and the word remains controversial.*

### ***Defining the Terms***

***Androgynous:*** exhibiting the appearance and/or behaviors of both, neither, or in between male and female.

***LGBTQ:*** stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and/or questioning people.

***Non-gendered:*** a person who chooses not to identify in terms of gender.

***Omni-gendered:*** a person who identifies with all genders.

***Pansexual:*** a person emotionally, and/or physically attracted to people across a spectrum of genders, outside of the male/female binary implied by bisexuality.

***Transgender:*** describes those who “cross-over” gender identities without necessarily changing their bodies. People of all sexual orientations may be transgender.

***Transsexual:*** a person whose gender identity does not match that assigned at birth and who generally desires a physical transition that includes hormones and/or surgery. People of all sexual orientations may be transsexual.

## ***En Mi Barrio***

*by E. Dominguez*

*En mi barrio,  
I learned from birth the roles of my gender,  
that a boy plays with cars or a gun &  
that girls play with dolls.  
Even though toys have no gender.  
A boy is a puppet,  
who walks with his father’s eyes on his shoulders.*

*En mi barrio,  
I learned that males have to be alpha,  
& that we have to make the money.  
A man’s importance and value is measured  
based on how many dollars are in his bank account.  
I learned that an open mind is for failures,  
& that closed lips are your pride.*

*En mi barrio,  
our hands are our futures,  
& with them we solve our conflicts.  
We don’t use our words to argue with difference,  
& to back down from a fight makes you a MARICON.  
En mi barrio,  
it’s not okay to be gay,  
it’s not wanted or known.  
Because a fag is shut out as an outcast,  
even in his own home.  
To be queer is a sin that many hide.  
But I can’t hide from myself, not then,  
not now, not ever or forever.*

*En mi barrio,  
it’s okay to lie to keep your family pride,  
but it’s not okay to keep my own self-pride.  
To be me is disgrace,  
to my name & my family.  
Because I am a man,  
& man does not cry.*

*En mi barrio,  
I’m called Ernesto,  
but I lost my name by being myself.  
So I call myself E  
& it lets me be FREE.*

E. Dominguez is a participant in SMYRC, the Sexual Minority Youth Resource Center that exists to “create safety and support for LGBTQ youth in Oregon.” He is 18 years old.

# Insights at 28: Looking Back, Looking Forward

From grassroots beginnings in a church basement nearly three decades ago, the Insights Teen Parent Program has grown to become the primary provider of support services for pregnant and parenting youth in the Portland area. Early on, the agency learned it needed to focus on immediate day-to-day needs — transportation, baby clothes, car seats — and by the end of its first year, was serving young mothers at every hospital in Multnomah County.

Today, under its mission “to create a climate of positive options for young families,” Insights serves 1,500 unduplicated clients each year. A professional staff of 37, supported by 25 to 30 volunteers, administers 14 different programs dealing with issues ranging from domestic violence to fulfillment of life goals.

Executive Director Diane Cohen-Alpert was one of the founders of the Oregon Teen Pregnancy Task Force — at 30 years, the longest-running such task force in the country. She and I met recently to talk about the role of Insights in the past, present, and future. Answers have been edited for clarity and brevity. For more on Insights, visit [www.insightstpp.org](http://www.insightstpp.org).

— Simone Rede

*How has the population you serve evolved since 1979?*

Back then, over 40% of clients were married. If you got pregnant, you got married. They didn't have telephones and weren't allowed to leave the home. This made it difficult for clients to attend group. It was hard to get their husbands' permission to receive services, even if he was in jail. Now we're down to about 9% getting married. And I consider it to be a good change because it means you have the women going to school, getting out of the house, getting a driver's license, having cell phones. They are more in touch. Not just with us, but with community health nurses, with the world. They aren't as isolated.

*How have the services you offer changed?*

We always start with what's on the mom's list, what her immediate need is. And that doesn't mean that she isn't conscious of what's on our list. That list may include conversation about going back to school, making peace at home, or seeking a stable living situation. For the most part, the services have come from what the clients have said they'd like us to have. With one exception — the domestic violence prevention program was based on a federal research grant that revealed that 30% of clients experienced some form of domestic violence.

*How have evolving societal expectations impacted the way teens are served?*

I would say there's a little more compassion about teen parents. I think it's still hard because you're still talking about teenagers having sex. The general public's misperceptions of the circumstances that lead to teen pregnancy and parenting remain a problem. People don't understand that this is a culture and outsiders fail to see beyond the negative stereotypes of teen parents as being promiscuous or drug users. But I think parents have a better name in this society right now. It's okay to be a parent. Ten years ago being a parent wasn't as important as having a career. Now it's okay to do both.

*Which issues affecting teen parents have changed since the beginning?*

We used to have so many of them living at home with their families. And now so many want to be out on their own, but there is frustration around the fact that it is so hard and expensive. Or their families don't want them and therefore they end up couch surfing or living in cars.

*How has your organization changed to meet the needs of young dads?*

We've become a lot more gender inclusive. With help from the Ford Foundation, the staff went



through massive training that emphasized integration rather than separation. Young men now attend almost all of the Insights groups. And the moms are more willing to have us work with the dads now. There's a lot more openness to young fathers as people. We'd like to have more men on staff and more attention to men.

*What suggestions do you have for other programs?*

You have to do a lot of listening. I think people come in with agendas. Young moms often tell staff what they think they want to hear. Ask questions that are open-ended, like, "How can I actually, really help you right now?" This is an ongoing, changing society and I think we're obligated to be changing with it and paying attention.

*What does the future look like for teen parents?*

I worry sometimes when stuff comes out that there's less of them, because really that's less support. We've been having trouble getting funds from foundations for Spanish-speaking moms. Teen parenting isn't going to go away. The need for services is still very much there. And the complexity of some of the situations we're dealing with takes more time than it used to. But there's such creativity in this population, such joy around parenting, and a huge desire to succeed and make things work. I think it's inbred in this culture, the feeling that it's possible to be a good parent, to have a better life. It's possible.

## Healthy Teens in Tomorrow's World

Tihara Frazier, 8th grade  
Binnsmead Middle School

What do I know? I'm just a  
Young Black girl-  
That's true but I'm determined to be  
A healthy teen in tomorrow's world -

A vision of a place where  
Race isn't the main case -Teenagers like my  
Self loving one another no matter the  
Color of the face  
A dream of an AIDS-free world  
Where it doesn't matter if you're a boy or a girl

A world where all children and teenagers  
Have a safe place to sleep  
A place where there are no homeless  
Families on the streets

A healthy teen in tomorrow's world  
Where I pray there will be no hate  
Where I plan to live out my life  
And always educate -

People need knowledge I know  
'Cause it is strength for this young Black girl  
Who will be a leader as a  
Healthy Teen in Tomorrow's World.

*How do young people themselves see the future?*

*For a poetry contest at Kellogg and Binnsmead Middle Schools in SE Portland, students explored the theme of healthy teens in tomorrow's world. Three poems were selected from each school. We are proud to publish those prize-winners throughout this issue.*

# The Brain at 15

## Why We Do Some of the Things We Do, and What We Can Learn From It

By Sarah Ramowski and Robert Nystrom

Adolescence is often a time of encountering new freedoms and new situations. Many debates rage in the political and healthcare fields about just how much responsibility teens should be given and at exactly what ages. Over the past few years, strong research has emerged that documents the enormous changes to the brain between childhood and adulthood. The more difficult issue is how to apply this research when creating and implementing sound public health policy.

Previously, it was thought that most of the “work” of brain development was complete by adolescence and that teenagers’ brains were as fully matured as adult brains. Increasingly sophisticated research and imaging abilities shows that this is not the case. Just as teens’ bodies are maturing and their social skills/networks are expanding, their cognitive centers are also in flux. Understanding how this affects adolescent decision-making is key to setting up optimal conditions in which teens can thrive.

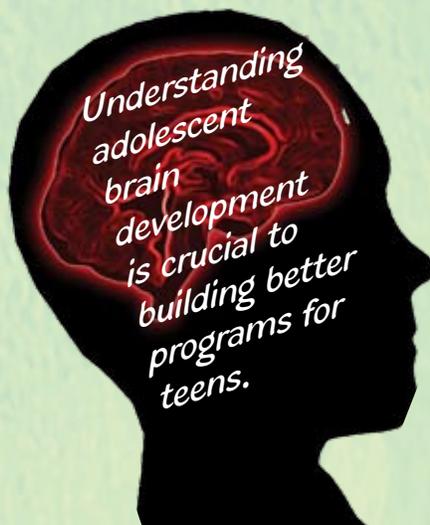
During adolescence, the brain adopts a “use-it-or-lose-it” pruning system, resulting in a decreasing number of connections among brain cells even as the speed of these connections is increasing. Major changes are also underway in the prefrontal cortex (PFC), the “CEO” of the brain. The PFC is responsible for weighing risks and benefits, strategic thinking, and impulse control. Throughout adolescence, the PFC is refining its wiring to become more sophisticated.

The PFC is among the last parts of the brain to fully develop, in many cases not maturing until well into the third decade of life. Unused branches are sloughed off and pathways are

increasingly developed. As this “construction” phase progresses, synapses that would normally go through the PFC in an adult brain are instead re-directed to the amygdala ([uh-mig-duh-luh]), the emotional center of the brain. When this happens, the response is rooted in emotion — fight, flight, freeze, freak out — rather than rationality. This is known as the “amygdala hijack.” The amygdala can also misinterpret others’ facial emotions, perceiving fear or nervousness as anger or hostility. All these processes can alter the ability of adolescents to harness their decision-making abilities, making them more vulnerable to risk-taking and impulsive behaviors.

### Functions of the Prefrontal Cortex

- ◆ Decision-making
- ◆ Evaluating risks & benefits
- ◆ Empathy
- ◆ Strategic and planning behavior
- ◆ Impulse control
- ◆ Adapting behavior as situation changes
- ◆ Restraining inappropriate behavior
- ◆ Receptive to feedback (reward and punishment)
- ◆ Allowing working memory to engage simultaneously with other functions



Contrary to popular lore, it is not that adolescents are incapable of understanding the risks of their actions. It is more that other priorities take over: escaping boredom, feeling the need to energize the situation, latching onto the emotional benefit. The adolescent brain is especially sensitive to the effects of dopamine, a chemical neurotransmitter that is activated by substance use, exposure to high-intensity media, and gambling. When substances are introduced in adolescence,

the brain's natural supply of dopamine can be decreased, making teens more vulnerable to addiction. Research has shown that feelings of boredom and alienation, and lack of connectedness can account for a majority of teen experiences. It is more understandable, then, that teens may try to escape by "jump starting" their brains with risky experiences.

Context is everything, however, and it is important that teens be provided an environment that is supportive and encourages independence within limits. It is still not known how much of brain development is influenced by environment vs. genetics, but there is evidence that creating constructive learning experiences can positively shape teen cognitive development.

Understanding adolescent brain development is crucial to building better programs for teens. (For one example, see "It's Their Future; They Should Help Shape It" in this issue.)

As this research has emerged, some public health professionals have voiced concern that it will be used to squelch teen decision-making, independence, or rights in areas such as reproductive health and health care decisions. One response is that brain development should be just one of several factors considered when designing good programs and policies. Also, experience has shown that teens have a very real and valued role to play in advocating for their own health and making good decisions. A recent example comes from prominent researcher John Santelli, who examined the reasons behind the national decline in teen pregnancy rates over the past 15 years. He found that the driving force is that teens are making safer and more effective choices around birth control options, being less likely to use withdrawal and more likely to use multiple methods simultaneously. As reproductive options and education have expanded, teens have exercised better decision-making resulting in fewer teenage pregnancies.

*Sarah Ramowski is Adolescent Health Policy & Assessment Specialist and Robert Nystrom is Adolescent Health Manager with the Office of Family Health, DHS Public Health Division.*

*This article is adapted from one that will appear in Northwest Public Health, Spring/Summer 2007; [www.nwpublichealth.org](http://www.nwpublichealth.org).*

# *What's New in Protection and Prevention*

## **HPV Vaccine Now Readily Available**

The Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted virus in the U.S. Now, a new FDA-approved vaccine lets women protect themselves from this potentially deadly virus. The vaccine is remarkably effective against the two viral strains that cause 70% of all cervical cancer in women. It's recommended for girls and women from 9 through 26, with a specific recommendation that all girls ages 11 to 12 be routinely given the three-dose series for maximum protection.

Under the federal Vaccines for Children Program, eligible kids 18 and under can receive the vaccine at no cost. In Oregon, it's available at all Planned Parenthood clinics and county health departments. Call the State Immunization Program at (971) 673-0300 or visit [www.youngwomenshealth.org/hpv.html](http://www.youngwomenshealth.org/hpv.html).

## **"Morning After" in Oregon**

In 2006, the FDA approved selling emergency contraceptive pills (ECPs) without a prescription to anyone over 18. Often called the "morning after" pill, ECPs lower the risk of pregnancy by up to 89%. They work best if taken within

72 hours after sex, and will not work for those who are already pregnant. ECPs are very safe with no known health effects. But they aren't as effective as birth control methods used all the time, and they don't protect against STDs.

ECPs are sold under the brand name Plan B behind pharmacy counters (buyers must show ID) and in health clinics (call 1-800-SAFENET for locations). They can also be obtained from Planned Parenthood.

## **Implanon: The 3-Year Pregnancy Protection "Pill"**

Suppose you could "take" one pill and prevent pregnancy for up to three years? Now you can. Implanon is a soft, small rod that a health care provider quickly slips under the skin of the inner upper arm using a local anesthetic. It's barely noticeable and ultra reliable: there were zero cases of pregnancy in the first 70,000 cases studied. Stop using Implanon, and the ability to get pregnant quickly returns.

Implanon does not protect against STDs, and it's important to discuss its use with a physician, especially for those who have had blood clots, heart disease, breast cancer, or certain other medical conditions.

## **The Rational Enquirer**

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