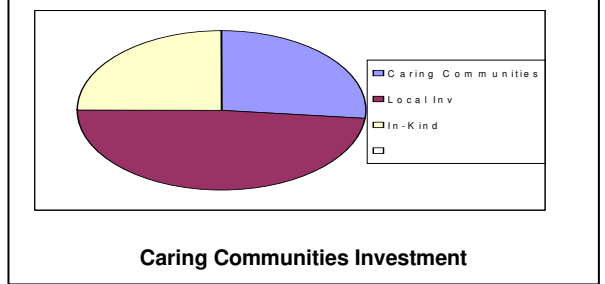


# Pettis County

## Caring Communities Partnership

**Core Result: Children succeeding in school**  
**Benchmark: Births To Teens, ages 15 – 19**



September/2004

### \*Objective

To decrease the teen pregnancy rate in Pettis County from 94 births per 1000 girls, ages 15 -19, in 2001 to below 50 births per 1000 girls, by year end 2005.

### \*Strategies

July, 2001, Pettis County Community Partnership led the development of the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Coalition to aid in the reduction of the teen pregnancy rate in Pettis County. The Coalition's mission is to educate the community and develop additional strategies to address the teen pregnancy problem.

Choosing The Best - Teen Pregnancy Prevention Education  
The "best practices" abstinence-focused curriculum *Choosing The Best* was selected and paid for with Caring Communities funds for school year 2002-2003. Through a Catholic Charities' SPRANS grant we have been able to offer this curriculum to all Pettis County schools.

Uniquely ME! – is a partnership among Unilever Corp, Girls Scouts, and Pettis County Community Partnership. The program's core curriculum focuses on helping girls develop the skills necessary to face life's challenges, inspiring them to develop a sense of individualism, leadership and self-confidence. There is a significant self-esteem problem in the USA for girls in the pre-adolescent and adolescent years. Research shows that many girls today are dealing with the kinds of problems that are often associated with low self-esteem - eating disorders, depression, risky sexual behaviors and substance abuse. Through the grassroots program *uniquely ME!* we lead girls in grades four and five at local elementary schools through the program and we know it makes a difference according to the pre- and post-survey results.

Baby Think It Over – allows students to care for "computerized babies" that simulate the experience of caring for a real baby. Since implementation of this program in 1999, four school districts in the county have used the babies each year. Two schools outside of our county have requested to borrow the babies and we have allowed them to borrow the babies whenever they are not in use by a school in our county. Students have expressed in the pre- and post-test the appreciation they now have for time and effort that it takes to care for a baby.

"Empathy Belly" Pregnancy Simulator – is an action-oriented, hands-on teaching aid to use with teenagers, male and female, to let them "experience" more than 20 of the typical symptoms and effects of pregnancy. Teens discover for themselves the many "price tags" or negative consequences that a pregnancy would impose on their teen-age life style.

### Successes:

- In the Fall and Spring school year 2003-2004 over 40 girls participated in the *uniquely ME!* program. The program expanded from one elementary school in 2002-2003 to three elementary schools. This year emphasis was placed on goal setting and career

exploration. Each week the girls eagerly awaited the arrival of the guest speaker for the day. The speakers shared not only a topic of discussion with the girls, but also spoke about their particular career path. When evaluating the program, girls had these comments: "*Uniquely ME has taught me many things, it showed us how to respect each other*"; "*I like when people came to talk to us about being healthy*" and "*I would do uniquely ME every year if I could.*"

- Through a partnership with Catholic Charities the abstinence education program *Choosing The Best* was offered to every school district in the county. The abstinence educator taught in over 20 classrooms during the 2003-2004 school year. One quote from a post-test reveals the influence this program has on teens, a 15-year-old girl wrote, "*I really didn't enjoy this program but it made me wake up and smell the coffee. I used to be sexually active and now I feel that being sexually active messes up the relationship and now I choose to be abstinent.*"

### Prevention Is A Good Investment:

- Teen childbearing costs US taxpayers at least \$7 billion each year in direct costs associated with health care, foster care, criminal justice, and public assistance, as well as lost tax revenues.
- Research shows that the children of teen mothers are at significantly increased risk of low birth weight and prematurity, mental retardation, poverty, growing up without a father, dependence upon public assistance, poor school performance, insufficient health care, inadequate parenting and abuse and neglect.
- The sons of teen mothers are 13 percent more likely to end up in prison than sons of mothers who delay childbearing even for a few years.

Source: <http://www.teenpregnancy.org/resources/data/pdf/notiust.pdf>

### Observations:

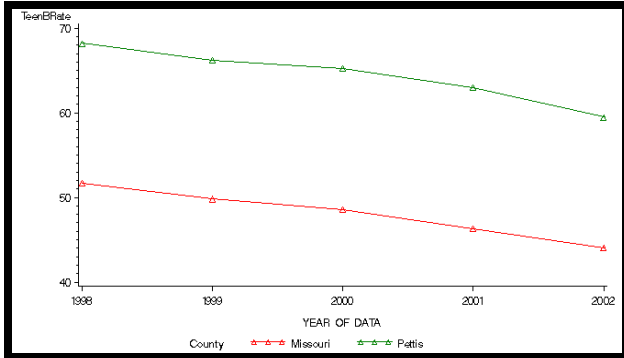
- Not only is the teen pregnancy rate high in Pettis County but the rate for sexually transmitted diseases are high as well, which leads us to the importance of implementing abstinence focused curriculum.
- When teens receive information based on facts, they tend to make wiser choices.

### Challenges:

Getting parents to attend the *Choosing The Best* parent-training night has been very challenging. Each parent is mailed a letter stating they will receive the book *Parents, Teens and Sex, The Big Talk Book* when they attend the parent training session; receiving the book itself does not seem to be an incentive to attend.

## \*Results

Since 1998 births to teens in Pettis County has been on the decline as reported by Missouri Kids Count. Pettis County's teen pregnancy rate is still much higher than the Missouri rate as revealed in the chart below.



Births to Teens ages 15 – 19

(Pettis County top line; Missouri bottom line)

Source: Kids Count 2003– the rate is expressed per 1,000 girls of that age.

## \*Funding/Return on Investment

Caring Communities	\$ 6,468
Local Investment	\$ 11,712
In-Kind	\$ 6,020
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 18,186</b>

Caring Communities dollars supported the work of the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Coalition. We were able to leverage \$2.74 for every Caring Communities dollar.

## Noteworthy

Thanks to the Unilever Corp and Heart of America Girl Scout Council we had personal care products each week as gifts for the girls enrolled in uniquely ME!

Catholic Charities of Kansas City/St. Joseph SPRANS grant is a federally funded program through the Maternal and Child Health Bureau. Last school year, they served over 1800 youth across Missouri through their grant program, which included Pettis County.

## Barriers / Road Blocks

Navigating school bureaucracy to get new programs/curriculum into schools is a barrier many groups like the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Coalition encounter.