

PREVENTING TEENAGE PREGNANCY & SUPPORTING YOUNG PARENTS

FUNDED BY: The Greets Green Teenage Pregnancy project was set up in 2005 with funding from Greets Green Partnership. It was delivered by Sandwell Youth Services in partnership with Sandwell Primary Care Trust (PCT) and the West Bromwich & District YMCA. Its aims were to prevent teenage pregnancy and offer support to young parents in Greets Green.

The funding came to an end in September 2008, but the Young Parents Group, established by the project, is still meeting at the YMCA until December through funding from Sandwell PCT. It is then envisaged that the group will become registered as a charity to attract ongoing funding and that it will continue to be run by local parents at the YMCA. The Young Parents Forum is also continuing and is run by young parents with the support of the Youth Service.

Sex and relationships education (SRE) is delivered by two peer educators from Sandwell Youth Services. Local youth workers across Sandwell have also been trained in SRE and condom distribution, enabling preventative work to continue in local youth clubs beyond the lifetime of the project.

December 2008



Members of the Greets Green Young Parents Group with their children.



PROJECT BACKGROUND: The Government established a Teenage Pregnancy Strategy in 1999 as the first co-ordinated attempt to tackle the causes and consequences of teenage pregnancy. The strategy's targets were to:

- Halve the under-18 conception rate by 2010 and establish a firm downward trend in the under-16 conception rate
- Increase the proportion of teenage parents in education, training or employment to 60% by 2010, to reduce their risk of long-term social exclusion

All local areas, including Sandwell, have a 10 year strategy in place to reduce the under-18 conception rate by between 40% and 60%. Sandwell opted to reduce the teenage conception rate by 55% by 2010. In Greets Green, between 1998 and 2002, there was an average of 62.81 teenage pregnancies per 1,000 people. Greets Green Partnership was set the target of reducing this figure by 55 per cent to 31.1 pregnancies by the end of 2010, in line with the Borough strategy.

As a result, the Teenage Pregnancy project was launched in 2005. The Teenage Pregnancy Strategy in Sandwell is responsible for delivering sex and relationships education, contraceptive services and support services for local expectant teenagers and young parents. The Greets Green project was a pilot for providing these services, testing new methods of delivery and strengthening the strategy at a neighbourhood level.

Before the project began there was no group for young parents in Greets Green. They often felt isolated and missed out on contact with services which might have been able to help them. There was also no co-ordinated approach to sex and relationships education across the health, youth, education, social inclusion and voluntary sectors.

Due to a lack of capacity within the Youth Service and Teenage Pregnancy Team, Greets Green Partnership funding was used to overcome barriers that were faced and to drive through changes at a local level.

PROJECT DETAILS: The Teenage Pregnancy project had two main intentions: (1) to help and support young parents and parents-to-be, and (2) to prevent teenage pregnancies. It planned to do this by:

- Employing a Teenage Pregnancy Development Worker through the Youth Service to develop a weekly young parents group to reduce social isolation, improve access to local services and to deliver a rolling programme of health promotion activities to raise attainment levels of teenage parents and a young parents consultation forum to develop, evaluate and implement the strategy and the project



- Employing a community worker one day a week through the YMCA to support the young parents group
- Targeting young people either living in Greets Green or at school in the area to reduce the number of teenage conceptions. Close working relationships were created with school nurses, teachers, contraception service providers and youth workers to increase delivery capacity across Greets Green and to develop an annual action plan

Louise Andrews from Sandwell Youth Services was appointed as the Teenage Pregnancy Development Worker to run the project. A Teenage Parents Group Community Worker for the YMCA was also appointed and, for the past year, has been Samantha Guy.

In the last two and a half years, the project has been in contact with more than 300 young parents and parents-to-be to offer information, advice and support.

ACHIEVEMENTS:

(1) Helping and supporting young parents and parents-to-be

As there was no group for young parents in Greets Green, the project started the Young Parents Group. This has been meeting weekly since February 2006, and 111 young people have attended. Louise Andrews explains: “The Young Parents Group has held over 130 sessions during the lifetime of the project, offering support, friendship, personal development and discovery, and development of parenting skills.

“It has also enabled young parents to access and take up opportunities that would not normally be made available to them through 21 rolling programmes of activities. It has undoubtedly made a difference in their lives.”

Some young parents attended the group for a short time, while some left to return to college and then came back when they felt they needed or wanted support for a while. Others have been part of the group for a long time, gaining strong support from staff and other young parents.

At least 21 members of the group have gone back to school or college to learn new skills or have received training, and at least eight have gone into employment. Recently, members of the Young Parents Group completed their ‘Introduction to Youth Work’ qualifications and two members are about to start work as sessional youth workers, running other young parents’ groups. Samantha Guy, Teenage Parents Group Community

Louise Andrews (front) Teenage Pregnancy Development Worker with some of the young parents.



Worker for the YMCA, works with the group on a weekly basis. “I organise the programme for them and the childcare and give weekly support to the group,” she says. “When I first took over a year ago, we only had a few parents attending, but it’s gone from strength to strength. We regularly get eight to 10 parents each week now and new parents are still joining – including dads.”

Before the Teenage Pregnancy project began, there was also no forum for multi-agency teenage pregnancy development, although there was an identified need for it in the area.

In Summer 2007, the Greets Green Young Parents Forum, ‘Parents United’, was set up. It meets on Tuesday evenings at West Bromwich YMCA and is run by the 12 registered Forum members. They take turns to Chair the meetings and act as Secretary and, between them, plan trips and activities for local young parents. The Forum is open to any young parents or young parents-to-be from the Greets Green area and is currently working to tackle inequalities in the services provided for young parents.

Samantha Guy explains: “The young parents discuss local and community issues and look at how to tackle them. Individual members take an interest in an issue and look at it in depth. They then report back to the group about what could be done and how they can make their feelings known. A recent example saw the group looking at whether there are enough parks in the area for children and discussing how safe and clean they are.”

The Young Parents Group and the Young Parents Forum have proved such a success that although Greets Green Partnership funding has now come to an end, the participants feel empowered to continue running the groups on their own. Funding has been secured from Sandwell PCT to enable the Parents Group to continue until December 2008 and it is envisaged that the group will run in its own right from January 2009.

(2) Preventing teenage pregnancies

The preventative side of the project has been very successful in its partnership work with local organisations, both in terms of delivering sex and relationships education and in the development of condom distribution projects.

Staff at Sandwell Women’s Agency Network (SWAN) and the YMCA are currently active in running condom distribution projects at their premises. Plus, over the last year, almost all full-time and part-time Youth Service youth workers were trained in condom distribution and have been participating in the Youth Service-led condom distribution project, a mainstreamed project.

The project has delivered sex and relationships education to more than 1,000 young people at various locations throughout Greets Green. A further 2,300



young people and their parents have been reached at local events in Greets Green and at larger events such as the Sandwell Show.

The programme which has been delivered throughout the project in Greets Green has undergone many changes as a response to the changing needs of young people in the area. It now includes work on relationships, self-esteem, assertiveness skills, sexual behaviour, sexually transmitted infections, contraception methods and signposting to local young people's sexual health services. The programme has also expanded to become culturally sensitive towards issues of marriage and pregnancy, and includes information about sickle cell anaemia and thalassaemia.

Figures from between 2000 and 2004 show teenage conceptions in Greets Green have dropped to 52.73 per 1,000 people which is lower than the borough average. Although no more up-to-date information is currently available, it is anticipated that this decline has continued with the intensive focus on the area.

PROJECT IN ACTION:

(1) Working with young parents

Young parents were initially contacted through referrals from a Midwife or Health Visitor. The majority of these young parents had not heard about the project previously, although a significant number of other parents attended after seeing posters in local buildings and GP surgeries, or through word of mouth.

As well as gaining support, participants were given the opportunity to take part in 21 rolling programmes of activities. These ranged from baby weaning to sports, crafts projects, domestic violence awareness programmes and a dance project.

They learned about issues including first aid, oral health, mental health, nutrition, child home safety, family road safety and alcohol awareness. Members also took part in Women's Day events, Sandwell Stride and the Big Toddle, and visited the Baby Show, local gyms and enjoyed raft building, archery, aerobics and swimming. Plus, they had pampering sessions and makeovers, learnt about sex and relationship education and life skills. They were also given help with budgeting, volunteering and CV writing.

Louise said: "The Greets Green Young Parents Group has worked with many partner organisations which has enabled us to offer a wide and varied range of activities in our rolling programmes. These organisations have also provided the young parents with a wider range of support and opportunities for learning and training, personal development and skills acquisition.

"Working together in this way ensures that in the future these young parents and their children will be more comfortable with approaching local organisations. They will also be happier in accepting the advice and support





The Young Parents Group in action.

they may be able to offer.” Organisations involved in the project have included Sandwell Youth Service, the YMCA, St John’s Ambulance, the Community Safety Team, City Hospital Breast Care Team, the Oral Health Team, the Smoking Cessation Service, Sexual Health Services, Sandwell Women’s Aid and Sandwell College.

Here are three examples of projects the group has been involved with:

Mosaic project

In 2006 the group asked to do a session where they made mosaic mirrors. The session went so well that the young parents decided a mosaic would be the perfect way to create a piece of artwork to celebrate the support of the Young Parents Group and present people with a positive image of young parenthood.

Louise said: “The project was a success in many ways; the young parents were able to use their creative skills and achieve something lasting in a relatively short space of time, it was brilliant for bringing the individuals who attended the sessions into a group and it was instrumental in spurring several young parents into raising their aspirations, eventually leading them to returning to education and college.”

The mosaic was unveiled in February 2007 in the Healthy Living Café in the YMCA. Local magazines were interested and Voice 21 ran an article on the group and on teenage parenthood, which led to an increase in the number of young parents attending the group.

Dance project

In May 2008, the young parents worked with dance artists to learn street dancing. They were interviewed by community arts group, MultiStory, about how they felt the project was improving their confidence, self-esteem, health and any other benefits. They were also filmed as they progressed from learning the dance to performing it in front of an audience at Coneygre Arts Centre in July.

Active Lifestyles project

In 2007 the Young Parents Group applied to Greets Green Partnership’s Active Lifestyles project for funding to undertake an Active Lifestyles project of their own. They secured £500 to plan and participate in a wide range of sports and health based activities which they had never tried before, including body



balance, TaiKwan Do, aerobics, badminton, swimming and learning about nutrition and healthy lifestyles. This project helped the young parents to learn more about why and how a healthy, active lifestyle can improve health outcomes for them and their children, reduce obesity and improve mental wellbeing.

(2) Reducing teenage conception rates

The preventative side of the Teenage Pregnancy project has seen sex and relationships education (SRE) delivered at many local community venues including Wood Lane Youth Club, Yemeni Community Centre Youth Group, OSCAR Youth Club, Lodge Road Youth Club, the YMCA, SWAN, Sandwell College and George Salter Collegiate Academy. The project also developed drop-in services providing information, advice and support. Two examples of areas the project was involved in are:

OSCAR youth club

At the beginning of the project, Louise Andrews wanted to engage with young African Caribbean people attending the newly-established youth club at OSCAR. However, their parents were very wary about their children receiving SRE from a stranger and didn't want them to participate.

Louise invited parents to attend an SRE session with their children, to meet her, look over the material that was to be used during the informal education, and to experience a session for themselves. The session proved a success and the parents felt more at ease with letting their children learn sex education in a fun and informal way. This also helped in building links between the Teenage Pregnancy project and OSCAR.

Sandwell College

During the Summer of 2007, Christine Blair from Sandwell College contacted the project about delivering SRE in Physical Health and Social Education (PHSE) lessons at the College. The College had read about the project in the Greets Green Magazine.

The initial sessions went very well, and an agreement was made between the project and the College to deliver SRE to the entire PHSE groups for Years 12 and 13. Over the course of the academic year, it was agreed to deliver a drop-in session at each campus to offer advice and information to young people who didn't attend the PHSE sessions.

Louise Andrews worked with the College to allow condom distribution both in PHSE sessions and at the drop-ins. The College now has an established condom distribution project in all three campuses and access to Teenage Pregnancy Team youth workers to deliver SRE in PHSE sessions as required.



FACTFILE:

- 51 youth workers from young people's services across Sandwell have been trained in sex and relationships education (SRE) and condom distribution
- 111 young parents have attended the Young Parents Group and the Young Parents Forum
- The Young Parents Group has held over 130 sessions
- 312 young parents have been contacted through referrals and events
- 53 young parents have received SRE training through the group and can now deliver SRE to others
- 21 young parents have returned to school or college as a result of the project
- 8 young parents have entered employment as a result of the project

Contact: To find out more contact Sue Wilson, Teenage Pregnancy Team Co-ordinator, on 0121 569 8414 or Samantha Guy, Teenage Parents Group Community Worker at the YMCA on 0121 524 1950.

Kerry's Story

20-year old Kerry has a daughter aged three and a son aged nine months. She started attending the group when she found out she was pregnant with her second child.

"When I first came I had no support, I was bored and generally unhappy with my life," she says. "The group has offered me a lot of support, a place to go and a chance to meet new friends. I've completed an 'Introduction to Youth Work' course, I'm much happier in myself now." Kerry is now working as a sessional youth worker to help run other parents' groups.



Greets Green Partnership was awarded £56 million in 2000 to deliver a 10 year regeneration programme under the Government's New Deal for Communities (NDC) initiative. It has funded over 340 projects throughout the area, covering community services, crime & community safety, health, housing & urban form and jobs & skills. The Partnership area, which is adjacent to West Bromwich Town Centre, is home to just over 12,400 residents living in 4,900 households.

For permission to publish this case study and to request photographs, please call Brian McKinstrie, Greets Green Partnership's Communications & PR Manager on freephone 0800 953 0215 or email brian_mckinstrie@sandwell.gov.uk



Greets Green Partnership,
Ground Floor, Court House, 335-337 High Street, West Bromwich B70 8LU
Tel: 0121 533 3188
Fax: 0121 533 3168
Website: www.greetsgreen.sandwell.gov.uk