



Healthy Perspectives

Spring 2005

Local Programs, Agencies Meet Parents' Need for Information

When Heather first found out she was pregnant, she panicked. It wasn't something she and her boyfriend had planned on happening. Luckily, when she went to the health department for a pregnancy test, a nurse gave her information on the Nurse-Family Partnership program (NFP).

"I didn't have any experience with kids, so everything I learned, I learned from my nurse, Brenda, and the program. Today, I have a wonderful 16-month-old daughter because of it," said 26-year-old Heather who works as a hairdresser and spreads the word about the NFP whenever she can. "My nurse Brenda is like a walking instruction manual. My baby, Renee, is so well-adjusted because Brenda taught me to read her cues of when she's hungry, tired or needs a hug. The program has made me much more self-reliant and confident as a mother. Brenda and I talk about how to love, how to show love and how to live in a positive way. Without the program, I would be completely lost."

A recent survey by the Parent Education Network (PEN) found that parents desire parenting

information, but don't always have the time to go out and get it. That's why programs that bring information to parents, like the NFP, are highly effective.

The Nurse-Family Partnership was developed 20 years ago by Dr. David Olds, a child psychologist at the Colorado Health Sciences Center. Today, the NFP, which records client data for scientific study, has 170 sites in 20 states including Colorado. Primarily, the program focuses on low-income, first-time, young single moms – the average age is 17 years old. Underlying the NFP is Olds' belief that creating a strong maternal bond, as well as providing support, makes for healthier kids.

Through weekly home visits for the first three years of a child's life, a specially trained nurse forms a strong relationship with the young mom, offering health, development and parenting information, plus an open heart.

"Our nurses become mentors, helping moms not only with parenting, but also their own life

School Programs Keep Kids on Healthy Track

Many older kids think they've heard it all when it comes to saying "no to drugs and alcohol." That's why Poudre School District (PSD) partnered with other local youth-serving agencies to create a fresh approach to teaching drug and alcohol abuse prevention.

Reality Check, a locally-written program, is a compilation of the key elements of the nation's most successful drug and alcohol abuse prevention programs. Its approach is conversational, not preachy.

"Some of the most effective drug and alcohol prevention programs don't even talk about drugs and alcohol," said Jim Campaign, PSD safe and drug-free school coordinator. "We talk with teens about lifestyle choices and making good decisions instead of telling them what to do. We don't get the rolling of the eyes anymore."

Reality Check helps high school kids explore the reasons why they might use drugs or alcohol – reasons such as stress, social pressure, media messages, and misperceptions about drug and alcohol use. The curriculum is taught to approximately 1,200 sophomores in the district each year by TEAM Fort Collins staff, parents,

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PROGRAMS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Parents Need Information (continued from page 1)

choices,” said Cindy Braderick, nursing supervisor for the Fort Collins NFP, which has nine nurses who see 25 clients each. The program recently expanded into Loveland and Estes Park.

“Study results are amazing,” Braderick said. “NFP moms in New York show 79% fewer cases of child abuse as compared to their low-income, single teen mom counterparts. They also show 33% fewer subsequent pregnancies, 30 fewer months spent on welfare and 59% fewer arrests.”

Young children whose mom’s have taken part in the NFP are better prepared to start school and are more socially adjusted. As they grow into teenagers, they have markedly fewer arrests and use less illegal drugs and alcohol than their 15-year-old peers.

The PEN survey also found that parents want written information. This is something that *Bright Beginnings*, a statewide program dedicated to giving babies and toddlers a good start in life, provides.

“Our goal is to provide families with information that answers their questions and empowers them to find resources,” said Susan Krcmarik, *Bright Beginnings* coordinator in Larimer County. “We believe a friendly face behind it makes all the difference in getting new parents to receive information and access programs.”

Bright Beginnings staff conduct a “Warm Welcome” visit with parents of newborns. Parents receive over 45 pieces of information about local resources, plus booklets on child development, child care resources and learning games that expand their

babies’ minds. Parents get a second visit and another set of materials when their baby turns two years old. The program serves all new parents in Fort Collins, but focuses on those in lower economic groups. Like NFP, *Bright Beginnings* recently expanded into Loveland.

One teenage mom said her Warm Welcome visit and the information she received empowered her to find an answer to a problem – something she doubted she would have otherwise tackled.

For more information about the Nurse-Family Partnership, call (970) 498-6731. For more on *Bright Beginnings*, call (970) 495-8875. To contact PEN, call (970) 495-7503, e-mail krs4@pvhs.org or visit www.fortnet.org/pen.

Teens Learn Life Skills by Giving to Others

Part of becoming a mature and responsible adult is learning that the world is much larger than what we can see. Local agencies, such as the Turning Point Center for Youth and Family Development and Eagle Rock School, use service-learning projects to help struggling teens learn necessary life skills like responsibility, caring, empathy, getting along with others and community-building.

“Through giving to others, our teens learn that their life really matters,” said Shelby DeWolfe, Turning Point transition coordinator. “Many of our clients take the skills they learn and continue to make positive contributions after they leave our program.”

Every Saturday, teens from Turning Point spend time helping people,

the environment and animals in their community. Last year, Turning Point teens volunteered 3,391 hours to better their community.

Eagle Rock, an alternative boarding school for emancipated youth on over 640 acres above Estes Park, makes service-learning a large part of its curriculum. By the time teens leave the school after a two- to three-year stay, the idea of giving back to the community through service is well ingrained in them.

“It’s not rare to hear stories about our graduates who do amazing things,” said John Guffey, Eagle Rock School service-learning instructional specialist. “I just heard from a student who is in the Peace Corps in Nicaragua. Another recent graduate has decided to stay on and teach a class. She’s modeling what we stand

for – building our community through leadership and education.”

Guffey also said Eagle Rock students reach outside the school by running a summer camp for younger kids, tutoring at local schools, working in the national park, visiting seniors, helping run an organic farm in Boulder and more.

For more information about Turning Point, call (970) 482-1037 or visit www.turningpnt.org. For more information about Eagle Rock School, a free, alternative school for struggling teens, sponsored by the American Honda Corporation, call (970) 586-3599 or visit www.eaglerockschool.org

Local Programs Offer Teens Second Chance, Healthy Life

Without Turning Point, Zach believes he wouldn't be alive today. Or at the very best, he thinks he might be in jail or homeless on the streets. His family life had gotten so bad that he couldn't live at home any longer. Between his father's drinking and his mother's absence, there was no one to feed him, let alone care how he was doing or where he was going. He often skipped school and was flunking 10th grade for the second time. Most afternoons, he hung out with a few buddies, and smoked methamphetamine and drank beer. Sometimes they'd go around at night breaking car windows and spray-painting graffiti. A few times they even broke into houses and stole things. The fun ended the night they got caught. That's how Zach ended up at the Turning Point Center for Youth and Family Development.

"Many of the kids who come to us are in trouble with the law, have substance abuse issues or they've been removed from an abusive home," said Shelby DeWolfe, Turning Point transition coordinator. "They each have a treatment plan to help them develop life skills and to heal from abuse, addictions and low self-esteem. They also learn to make a difference through intensive service-learning projects."

Zach needed a second start at both school and life. He moved into Turning Point's residential home, joining 50 other teens with similar stories. At Turning Point, a Larimer's Promise "Site of Promise" (visit www.larimerspromise.org), teens get a whole lot more than food and shelter – they get a chance at a new beginning. Through individual, group and family therapy, teens address their problems and attend an on-site school approved by the Colorado Department of Education.

Zach responded well to Turning Point's services. He caught up in school and was able to transition back into a traditional public high school from

which he graduated. He beat his drug addiction and has been clean for a year. With Turning Point's help, he learned how to live independently in his own apartment. While Zach did not want to return to his family, he does have a stable relationship with them. Zach now attends a community college and is looking toward a bright future.

"We connect teens to the community so they are no longer dependent on us. Zach regularly attends 12-step



Residents of Turning Point recently held a car wash to raise money for the Fellowship House, a group that serves recovering addicts and their

meetings to maintain his sobriety. We got him involved with a variety of pro-social activities. He now has a community of his own," said DeWolfe.

Like Turning Point, Wingshadow, Inc., pulls kids out of a destructive cycle and helps them get on a healthy track. Wingshadow's residential home – The Wing – is for teens in crisis. Troubled teens often are referred to Wingshadow or sometimes Wingshadow staff goes out and finds homeless or runaway teens that need help.

According to Lynn Millar, Wingshadow's public relations coordinator, Poudre School District reported 600 homeless youth in 2004, some of whom were staying with friends. "We put the number of truly homeless teens in Larimer County at 85," she said.

Besides The Wing, Wingshadow operates Frontier High School, an

alternative school for teens who have dropped out or been expelled from a traditional school. Additionally, Wingshadow operates Sheltering Wings, a child care center for young parents working at a low wage. Finally, Wingshadow has a foster care placement program for emancipated teens.

Last year, the organization served more than 1,100 at-risk youth and their families, but Millar believes there are many more youth out there in need of help. "Endangered youth are a hidden population. Some kids stay in hiding because they don't want to become part of the system," she explained.

Millar tells the story of Sara, a 17-year-old who came to Wingshadow with an expensive methamphetamine habit and a warrant out for her arrest. When she was 12 years old, Sara moved in with her alcoholic, abusive father after her parents divorced. While living there, she was raped by her father's roommate and turned to drugs and friends for comfort. Then Sara was raped again – this time by a relative.

"Today, Sara courageously faces her drug addiction, attends a 12-step program, and works in therapy to overcome the abuse," said Millar. "Kids come to us with heavy burdens of abuse, neglect and poverty. Our motto is 'breaking the cycle, one child at a time.'"

For more information about Turning Point, call (970) 482-1037 or visit www.turningpnt.org. For more information about Wingshadow, call (970) 419-4745 or visit www.fortnet.org/Wingshadow.

COMMUNITY TIDBITS

Youth-related Events in Our Community

March 12

Sharin' O' the Green 5k Race. To benefit Partners Mentoring Youth of Larimer County. 8:30 a.m. Library Park, 200 Matthews, Fort Collins. Contact Amy at (970) 484-7123.

March 24

Moms' Night Out at The Melting Pot. Join other moms for an evening of fun, dessert and socializing at one of Fort Collins' newest restaurants. 7 p.m. Contact Nicole at (970) 266-8630, The Mother's Center.

April 5

Mothers Helping Mothers: Dealing with Aggression. Connect with other moms and support one another in a safe environment where you can express the concerns, frustrations, joys and fears of motherhood. The focus of this monthly dialogue is aggression. 9:30-11:00 a.m. Contact Jennifer at (970) 482-0822, The Mother's Center.

April 27

Heroes Among Us Dinner and Award Presentation. This event honors adults, nominated by Loveland and Berthoud youth, who are positive role models for kids. 6-8 p.m. First National Bank Exhibition Hall, The Ranch/Larimer County Fairgrounds. Contact Kim Sharpe at (970) 495-7503 or krs4@pvhs.org.

Tuesdays, Ongoing

Wingshadow, Inc. Breakfast Tour. Come learn about Wingshadow's youth services by attending a breakfast tour from 7:30-9:30 a.m., second and fourth Tuesday of every month. Make a reservation at (970) 419-3252.

Do You Work With Youth? Join Caring & Sharing!

Caring & Sharing is a forum designed to bring youth-serving providers together for interaction and information sharing. Call the HCC office at 970-495-7503 for more information (or to sign up to give a presentation) and for meeting times & locations.

Upcoming Meetings:

March 11 Presenter: A special surprise world-renowned motivational speaker will treat us to a presentation about mediocrity. Location: 2900 S. College Avenue, Fort Collins (downstairs from the First MainStreet Bank)

April 8 Presenter: Mary Robertson of FirstCall 211 will tell us about the Technical Assistance Partnership of Northern Colorado (T.A.P.). Location: 2900 S. College Avenue, Fort Collins

May 13 Presenter: Bob Slade, human relations expert, will offer tips on crucial conversation elements. Location: 2900 S. College Avenue, Fort Collins

Meetings are held the second Friday of each month from 8:15 to 9:45 am.



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