

Teen mothers get support with new program

By ANN HAUPRICH

Ideally, a girl's teen years represent a relatively carefree time when a major worry might involve an upcoming math test or what to wear to the prom. Otherwise big concerns might revolve around tryouts for cheerleading, competitive sports or roles in school plays.

At least that's the picture adults are most comfortable with, and this image is certainly supported by the slim, confident teenage girls who smile at us from magazine covers and ads, not to mention the slim, confident, witty and emotionally mature adolescent girls typically featured on prime time TV.

Somehow, the image of a teenage girl wearing fashionable maternity wear as she diligently shops around for the best deal on diapers and baby food just doesn't fit into our comfortable stereotype.

The reason is, of course, our society still has a hard time coping with the issue of teen sex. And, unless and until we come face-to-face with a teen who is obviously in a family way, it's easy to pretend teen pregnancies ceased to be a reality soon after the invention of the Pill.

Well, it may be 1989 and a variety of effective contraceptives are indeed readily available throughout the region, but these things have not put an end to teen pregnancies in Halton. Although many pregnancies were terminated

by abortion, many others were not. Last year at least 105 females, aged 14 to 19, gave birth in Halton.

Young Parents Support Services (YPSS) is a new community program designed to enhance the physical and emotional well-being of both teen mothers and their babies. This service consists of an anonymous pregnancy counselling telephone line, individual and family counselling by professional social workers, one-to-one volunteer support and a pre-natal group for teens.

The pre-natal group is the most recent component of YPSS, representing a sharing of the best prenatal resources available from the Halton Public Health Unit, Halton Adolescent Support Services and the Halton Children's Aid Society (CAS).

The newest service evolved to fill an identified community need for specialized teen pre-natal classes. Studies have shown expectant teens don't feel comfortable attending traditional pre-natal classes with married couples and older mothers-to-be. As a result, they are often ill-prepared for the birthing experience.

The goals of the pre-natal group, which meets weekly in Oakville, are to provide pre-natal information as well as helping participants develop parenting skills and the ability to live independently. The program also offers information on

adoption services and post-adoption counselling.

Corrie Galloway, supervisor of volunteer services for Halton CAS, is excited about the agency's involvement in this community endeavour.

"This is a real opportunity for us to pool resources, and give needed support to adolescent girls who are going through a difficult time," says Mrs. Galloway.

"Many of these girls want to become competent mothers, but the odds are stacked against them because they typically lack the experience necessary to handle the responsibilities of new motherhood and the ability to live independently in the community."

Boosting the self-esteem of expectant teen moms is another vital component of the new program.

"We want them to feel good about themselves and try to arrange a pick-me-up of some sort at each meeting," says pre-natal program co-ordinator Dianne Morrissey.

She says the YPSS program offers a varied lunchtime program dealing with issues as diverse as nutritional needs during pregnancy and exercises which will help teen moms get back into their favourite jeans after the baby arrives. This information is brought to participants via guest speakers and appropriate films and videos.

"It's important to feel good about yourself while you're carrying a baby," notes Ms. Morrissey, who

also happens to be a mother of two. "We try to make the weekly sessions fun as well as informative."

It is also hoped some of the teens will become friends, thus supporting one another emotionally during and after the pregnancy. Trained volunteers are linked to assist a young woman, if requested. They may provide transportation, give individual support and remain involved for some time after the infant is born.

Those who decide to keep their

babies are subsequently referred to an ongoing community support group, such as a parent-child centre. The key is to link the young mothers with the community program(s) best suited to their needs.

If you or someone you know might benefit from this new community endeavour, please contact Dianne Morrissey at 844-8211 or the confidential pregnancy telephone line (844-5502). Free transportation is available to and from the weekly pre-natal meetings.

Couple's 50th anniversary to be celebrated on Sunday

Congratulations to Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Galbraith who will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary Feb. 19.

The Halton Farm Safety annual meeting will be held Wednesday, Feb. 22 at the Muddy Duck Restaurant.

Students at Percy W. Merry School enjoyed a special treat of pancakes last Tuesday, prepared by the Grade 6 class.

Jacqueline Birney of Knox College, Toronto, will be the guest speaker at Boston and Omagh churches for services Feb. 19 and 26.

I'm pleased to report that Mrs. Alma Watson, Third Line, is convalescing at her home following a stay in hospital at Oakville.

The weekly euchre at Hornby Community Centre, Saturday, Feb. 11 had 13 tables in play and the following winners: Mary Workman, Annie Bush, Elva Middlebrook,

Omagh
with
ELLA PATTERSON

Eva Presswood, Harold Middlebrook, Alfred Ford, George Fisher and Tom McLean. Lone hands were played by Myrtle Cunningham with four and Jack Wilkie with five.

Valentine travelling prizes were donated by Vivian Shaw and received by Alfred Ford and Dorothy Featherston.

Birthday wishes to Jacuie Morison on her special day this week.

Joy Finnie of Dunnville, formerly of Drumquin and Greg Shikaze of Toronto will exchange their wedding vows at McMaster Cathedral in Hamilton on Saturday, Feb. 18.

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