

Small Hands, Big Results



Making a Difference School Readiness Impact Report (May 2011)

"Before I would not read to her at all and now I read a lot to her and I also learned to treat her like a person not just like a child by paying more attention to her and reading to her."

~ Parent

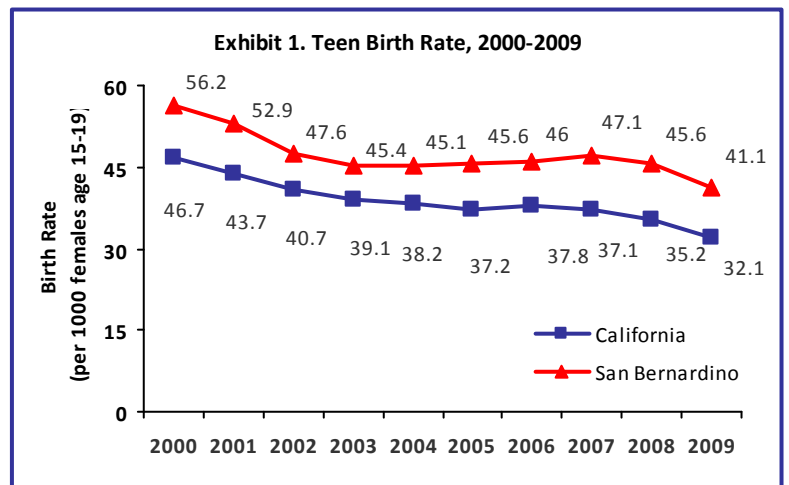
The Challenge: Prepare the children of teen mothers for school and help teen mothers stay in school

Although births by teen mothers in California have decreased over the last decade, rates have been and remain consistently higher in San Bernardino County relative to the state overall (see Exhibit 1). In 2009, the birth rate for San Bernardino County was 41.1 (per 1000 females ages 15-19) compared to 32.1 for the state.¹ While important prevention efforts continue, there are real and pressing needs for the children born to teen mothers in the County.

Children of teen mothers face unique challenges due to their mother's age, inexperience, poverty status, and frequent lack of social support. For example, compared to children of older mothers, children of teen mothers:

- + Do not perform as well on measures of cognition, language and interpersonal skills² critical to school readiness
- + Are 50% more likely to repeat a grade³
- + Are less likely to graduate from high school³

Teen births also place mothers at risk for low educational attainment. Parenthood is the leading cause of school drop out among teen girls and some research reports that less than 2% of teen mothers attain a college degree by age 30⁴. In 2006 teen births were estimated to cost California taxpayers approximately \$1.7 billion.⁵ This is an important challenge with real implications for teen mothers, their children and society.



How are First 5 San Bernardino and their Partners meeting the challenge?

In 2009-10, First 5 San Bernardino (F5SB) funded 12 School Readiness (SR) Initiative programs in partnership with First 5 California, three of which specifically focused on infant/toddlers of



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teen mothers. The SR programs promote children's physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development in early care and education environments. It also includes activities and services to help parents prepare their children for school such as parent education, inclusion and support services. While the program varies across the sites, all programs are comprised of four key components:

- + **High quality childcare center:** Programs provide high quality childcare with a 1:3 child to teacher ratio, highly qualified staff (minimum of a BA), and an evidenced-based child-development curriculum, in some cases on the same high school campus that teen mothers attend.
- + **Parenting/child development education and support:** Program staff provides parenting and child development classes and work with parents throughout the year to support healthy and developmentally appropriate parenting.
- + **Academic support for teens:** In addition to supporting school attendance via childcare for their infants/toddlers, SR programs also provide direct support for teen's academic achievement. Program staff monitor school attendance and follow-up if mothers miss school. Some programs also offer study skills workshops and college prep classes for teen mothers.
- + **Referrals and linkages:** Programs provide case management and crisis intervention support via referrals and linkages to resources in the community. This helps teen's access resources and services for themselves and their children.

Data Sources

In 2010, F5SB's independent evaluator, Harder+Company Community Research, gathered both qualitative and quantitative data about the history of the infant/toddler programs, current operations, and impact on children and families. Specific data sources utilized in this report include:

- + **Program administrators:** Telephone and in-person interviews were conducted with 3 program administrators.
- + **Childcare center teachers:** In-person interviews were conducted with 4 teachers at the child care centers.
- + **Teen parents:** Brief in-person interviews were conducted with 39 teen parents across the three programs.
- + **Developmental assessment:** SR program staff completed the Desired Results Developmental Profile-Revised (DRDP-R, Infant/Toddler version), shortly after enrollment (pre) and again at the end of the program or program year (post) for each program participant.

What impact does the infant/toddler program have on children?

The SR infant/toddler programs had a number of positive effects on children who participated in the program, including:

- + **Improved development.** The results of the Infant/Toddler DRDP-R (see "Data Sources" above) indicated that children increased their mastery in each developmental area (see Exhibit 2). This is important because the children of teen mother's typically are developmentally "behind" their peers. Also, parents and Center staff reported that children have progressed and increasingly met developmental milestones, especially in the areas of language and motor skills.
- + **Improved social skills.** Both parents and program staff observed improved social skills among children who participated in the program over the program year. At the end of the program, parents reported that their

Exhibit 2. 2009-10 Change in DRDP-R Infant/Toddler Scores from Pre to Post (n=67)

Developmental Area	Mean at Pre	Mean at Post	2009-10 Mean Difference
Personal & Social Competence	2.95	3.58	+0.63*
Effective Learning	2.85	3.42	+0.57*
Motor Skills	3.88	4.50	+0.62*
Safety & Health	2.90	3.57	+0.67*

*Changes are statistically significant at $p < .001$

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children did not cry as much, interacted more frequently with other children, talked more, were more independent and had greater empathy skills.

- + **Improved motivation to learn:** Parents believed their children showed greater interest in books and reading; verbal communication, and learning about numbers, letters and colors as a result of their time in the program. One parent said, “[My child] started counting with me. He talks a lot more and know his colors. He seems excited to go to the center. Before he would cry a lot, but now he’s happy to go.”

What impact does the infant/toddler program have on parents?

Program staff and parents reported a number of positive impact the programs have had on the parents. The three main areas of impact include the following:

- + **School attendance and graduation:** Teen parents were able to attend school more consistently and provided support to deal with the dual demands of being a parent and a student. This is critical to increasing the likelihood that teen mothers will graduate from highschool. One parent expressed what the program meant to her by saying, “I probably would not have finished school and I would not have bonded with my daughter as much as I did.”
- + **Improved parenting skills.** Teens learned basic parenting skills through parent education classes and one-on-one support services offered by the program. They learned how to take care of their children, discipline them, bond with them, and support their development and learning. One program staff reported that the teens now “know what to expect and [have] realistic expectation about their children... The knowledge they gain ... is really huge and it’s going to affect the every day decisions they make about their kids. The treatment of their baby is affected.”
- + **Improved confidence as a parent.** Many parents reported improvements in their confidence as a parent. They felt empowered by the knowledge they have acquired through the program. One parent said, “I learned to talk to [my child] and be patient when he gets angry and throws a temper tantrum. Also, my confidence as a parent has improved.”

“The counselor at this school told me about the program. I wanted to focus on finishing school and this center is making it possible. I needed help with someone taking care of my baby while I go to school.”

~ Parent

What are the challenges and lessons learned in the SR infant/toddler programs?

The SR infant/toddler programs have accomplished a great deal, but also face challenges and have lessons learned:

- + **Parents’ school attendance.** The unique strength of the SR Infant/Toddler program is that it deals with the dual needs of the child and their teen parent(s). During the course of the program, it became apparent to staff that some parents dropped their children off at the center but did not subsequently attend school that same day. Some programs responded to the issue by dedicating staff to following up with the parents to make sure that they attend school and to help overcome barriers that prevent consistent school attendance. *This is likely a best practice that should be replicated across all SR Infant/Toddler programs designed to support teen parents.*



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- + **Involvement of fathers in the program.** Very few fathers participated in parent classes or Center activities. Program staff reported that many fathers are no longer in school, so the co-location of Centers and high schools did not have impact fathers' participation. *In future efforts, alternate outreach plans specifically targeted at fathers and clear goals for the participation of teen mothers and fathers is recommended.*
- + **Decreased funding.** All programs have experienced decreased funding over the past few years, especially at the state level. Most organizations are dealing with decreases in funding by having staff members wear multiple hats, but this strategy will not work over the long run. *SR Infant/Toddler programs should be encouraged and provided support where necessary (via capacity building activities) to develop long-term sustainability plans so that they can continue to offer comprehensive services to teen parents and their children.*

Conclusion

The SR infant/toddler programs provide a much needed service and support to teen parents who are unprepared for parenthood and struggling to juggle the demands of high school and learning to effectively parent a young child. Both program staff and teen parents interviewed reported that the services provided are highly valuable and they enabled them to learn better parenting skills, be on track to finish school, helped their child developmentally, and provided referrals and linkages to needed services in the community. However, one of their main challenges is the decrease in funding to continue to provide comprehensive services to the teen parents. The programs will need to focus on their sustainability to continue to provide high quality child care and support services to the parents.

“By the time the moms graduate from high school, they’ve grown so much. They are a better mom because they have a support group.”

~ Program staff

Notes

¹ California Department of Public Health (n.d.). *Center for Health Statistics: Vital Statistics Query System* [Database]. Retrieved April 18, 2011 from <http://www.apps.cdph.ca.gov/vsq/default.asp>.

² The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy (March 2010). *Why it Matters: Teen Pregnancy and Education*. Retrieved May 9, 2011 from <http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/why-it-matters/pdf/education.pdf>

³ Healthy Teen Network (n.d.). *Unique Needs of Children Born to Teen Parents*. Retrieved May 9, 2011 from <http://www.healthyteennetwork.org/vertical/Sites/%7BB4D0CC76-CF78-4784-BA7C-5D0436F6040C%7D/uploads/%7BC55038AC-056D-4D1A-9AC3-D1C7D72BBE4B%7D.PDF>

⁴ The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy (March 2010). *Why it Matters: Teen Pregnancy and Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/why-it-matters/pdf/education.pdf>

⁵ Constantine, N.A., Nevarez, C.R., and Jerman, P. (2008). *No Time for Complacency: Teen Births in California. 2008 Spring Update*. Berkeley, CA: Public Health Institute.

For more information, please visit First 5 San Bernardino website at: <http://www.first5sanbernardino.org/>