INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

Increasing Opportunities for Our Youth Through the Fresno Regional Foundation’s Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative
Adolescence is hard enough to navigate without the added weight of parenthood. Yet too many teens in the Central San Joaquin Valley are parents while they’re still children.

Teen pregnancy rates in the San Joaquin Valley are the highest in the state. They’re stubborn, too. After decades of effort, we’ve seen improvement, though not at the same pace as in other areas, such as Los Angeles and the Bay Area.

The toll on teenagers, their children, their families and communities is enormous. We all pay a heavy price when young people stumble on the path to success.

That’s why the Fresno Regional Foundation believes that teen pregnancy prevention is vital to improving the quality of life in the Valley.

When the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation asked us to help teen pregnancy prevention efforts in the Valley, we set out to learn how philanthropy could have the greatest impact. We considered what makes the Valley different. After all, urban teens struggle with poverty, peer pressure and temptation too. What does the Valley’s uniqueness tell us about finding solutions?

The Valley faces daunting challenges, including concentrated poverty and, often, a sense of hopelessness. The Valley’s sprawling, rural character makes it hard to reach teens and families with the multitude of services they need. Places in California that have made huge strides in teen pregnancy prevention tend to be population centers with a critical mass of teen pregnancy prevention efforts and the funding to support them.

False assumptions here can create a sense that teen pregnancy is inevitable. One stereotype, for example, holds that Latino parents don’t care if their daughters get pregnant. This simply isn’t true.

We found inspiring stories in some of the poorest, largely Spanish-speaking communities and neighborhoods. In Cutler-Orosi, every girl who participated in Adelante Latina, a teen pregnancy program funded by the Fresno Regional Foundation, graduated high school and went on to college. Parents are strongly supportive. They asked for – and received – a program for young men.

From this and other case studies, we learned a valuable lesson: Success in the Valley will come from within. We can learn from programs elsewhere, but we must chart our own course, drawing our own road map.

The Valley’s map must navigate through cities and small, often remote, towns, poverty and language barriers. It must acknowledge the conservative social and political attitudes that influence discussions of teen sexuality and pregnancy.
The map must include every sector – educational, spiritual, medical and non-profit. Effective programs focus on more than reproductive issues. They address the whole person, his or her sense of self-worth and the possibilities the future holds.

In sharing our findings, we hope to generate thoughtful conversation. We want to share what we’ve learned and our belief that solutions are at hand.

We want to recognize the experts and community members who make up our remarkable Teen Pregnancy Prevention Advisory Board, and to salute the work of our grantees.

“I’m thrilled with the achievements of our Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program,” said Dan DeSantis, Chief Executive Officer of the Fresno Regional Foundation. “Helping children reach their potential goes to the heart of our mission – improving life in the Valley through philanthropy. I’m proud, too, that the Hewlett Foundation trusted us to help carry out their mission locally. It’s been a deeply rewarding journey for all involved.”
What’s so different about the Valley?

Teen pregnancy reached alarming heights in California in the early 1990s. Seventy-five of every 1,000 teenage girls became pregnant, compared to 60 nationwide. The numbers became a call to action. State agencies and nonprofit foundations rallied to the cause with innovative programs and grants to fund them, and teen pregnancy rates began a notable decline.

But the picture was initially not as encouraging in the Central San Joaquin Valley, where funding was scarce and services scattered. By 2010, California’s rate of teen pregnancy had declined to 31 per 1,000 girls. Tulare County led the state with 59 births per 1,000 teenage girls, while Fresno and Madera counties were close behind (56 per 1,000 teen girls and 51 per 1,000 teen girls, respectively). Clearly something was wrong, and at great social and economic cost.

Teen pregnancy continues the cycle of poverty and its ills, studies repeatedly show. Children who have children are less likely to finish school and find well-paying jobs. Babies born to teenagers are more likely to have health problems, lag behind their peers in school, be abused, and land in foster care.

The bill to taxpayers is staggering. Teen births and their consequences cost more than $130 million annually in the six Central San Joaquin Valley counties, the Public Health Institute estimates. Social costs are even greater.

We’ve studied the landscape to understand why the issue is so severe in the Valley. Demographics and culture are part of the explanation. More than 80 percent of teen births in California take place in poor or low-income families. Two-thirds are to Latina teens. Here in the Central San Joaquin Valley, our farm economy relies on low-paid immigrant farm labor, mostly from rural Latin America, where large families are valued. Children from these Latin American regions often leave school at a young age to work, helping their families survive and eventually caring for older parents and relatives. While child farm labor may not be a necessity here, resources are still sparse and large family values persist.

Over time, Latino families assimilate here and step up the economic ladder, but new immigrants arrive to take their places, welcomed especially by the agricultural industry. It’s a constantly recharging cycle of poverty.
The Challenge

The Valley’s poor often live clustered in remote farm communities, separated by distance and language from services and opportunities. Even in urban areas, high concentrations of poverty create a sense of apartness. Isolation can be greater for immigrants from indigenous populations who speak neither Spanish nor English, and who may be wary of help from strangers who don’t understand their culture.

Isolation is a tall barrier to progress. Children often lack role models to show them paths out of poverty. They might struggle to imagine how to aim high without abandoning family and community if they haven’t seen anyone else do it. And while they try to figure out their place in the world, they might hunger for attention from adults.

Migrant parents care about their children – many move here to give their children a better life – but after long days in the fields, exhaustion may take over. While parents work, older children often are expected to care for younger siblings, assuming big responsibilities while they’re still young. With social services and schools stretched thin, the absence of adult mentors can have a critical impact.

Ingrained cultural norms affect the Central San Joaquin Valley’s approach to teen pregnancy. Among established residents of the region, certain attitudes run deep. The Valley is independent and prefers to handle things its own way. The area is not accustomed to getting much outside help, and so has learned to fend for itself. The Valley doesn’t strive to be San Francisco or Los Angeles, and programs transplanted from other areas might be eyed with suspicion.

In politics and religion, the area is conservative. Teen sexuality, a delicate issue anywhere, is especially hard to discuss here. As the Fresno Regional Foundation began weighing a teen pregnancy prevention role, some experts warned that we’d face resistance from our communities. The Foundation has not experienced pushback, but grantees in Tulare County have. The offices of ACT For Women and Girls in Visalia were vandalized repeatedly, until the program had to change locations.

As ACT built trust in the community, demonstrating it isn’t promoting promiscuity, the harassment subsided, though emotional scars remain with the program’s staff. It’s easy to see why community leaders tend to sidestep the minefield of teen pregnancy. At best, there’s no public applause for addressing it. At worst, the fallout is punishing.

While these things help explain the challenges here, they also point the way forward.
From 2009 – 2011, California saw steep declines in teen pregnancy rates, yet pockets of disparity remained in the Central Valley, where rates continue to be the highest in state.

Over the past seven years, experiences of the TPP program have shown that the Valley’s unique attributes can pave the path to success.

Close-knit families and communities, cultural pride, and the desire for upward mobility are all part of the solution here. Homegrown approaches, built on respect and trust within our communities, are essential. Respectful relationships are crucial, but they take time and care to build. That’s why it’s important to select, monitor, and support grantees who honor cultural values and traditions. It’s also why the Fresno Regional Foundation is well positioned to administer the Hewlett Foundation’s generous grant.

California Teen Birth Rates by County, 2009-2011**

In Comparison to California
- Statistically Significantly Higher
- No statistical difference
- Statistically Significantly Lower
- Too few births to produce a stable rate

With 48 years of philanthropic leadership in the Central Valley and assets over $65 million, Fresno Regional Foundation has earned our reputation as an organization that succeeds when we take on a project. And we know our region.
The core of the Fresno Regional Foundation’s efforts has been the TPP Advisory Committee. It’s a highly engaged group with a rich blend of wisdom. We recruited experts in reproductive issues, youth development, poverty, education and leadership, and sought out people deeply attuned to the Valley’s culture, geography and institutions.

In other words, we have a brain trust, well versed in best practices, that’s also comfortable in the trenches. This group makes sure that concepts are infused with practical, down-to-earth experience.

“It has been a dynamic and very effective combination,” says Senior Program Officer Sandra Flores, who leads the TPP Grantmaking Initiative, bringing her own special expertise and insight to the table. A Fresno native, member of a large, traditional Mexican family and a former teen mom herself, Flores has a history of community work and leadership.

Like Flores, TPP Advisory Committee members are passionate and results-oriented. They set goals, review grant applications, visit program sites and help organizations grow their efforts. They ask tough questions and they’ve made smart, out-of-the-box decisions. Most important was deciding what kinds of initiatives to fund.

For example, all grantees must meet two requirements: teaching objective, evidenced-based curricula and providing access to clinical services. The curricula must be comprehensive, spanning behavior and consequences from abstinence to sexual activity. Clinical services can be on-site or available through a link with a clinic or physician.

Grantees address far more than teen sexuality. They emphasize healthy relationships and life goals. They help teens become peer leaders. And they involve parents. They know that children who respect themselves and others, who communicate with their parents and who look toward the future are more likely to delay pregnancy.

**Teen Pregnancy Prevention Grantees**

- **ACT for Women and Girls**: 2013
- **Boys2Men Girls2Women Foundation**: 2013
- **Boys and Girls Clubs of Fresno County**: 2009, 2010, 2013
- **Boys and Girls Club of the Sequoias**: 2008, 2010
- **California Health Collaborative**: 2008
- **Focus Forward**: 2009, 2010, 2013
- **Fresno Barrios Unidos**: 2008 - 2013
- **Madera County Public Health Department**: 2009
- **Novelas Educativas, LLC**: 2013
- **Radio Bilingue**: 2009
- **The Latino Commission – Nuevo Comienzo**: 2009-2013
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To select grantees, the Advisory Committee looks for intangibles as well as concrete criteria. Successful sites feel welcoming and inviting, and the people who run them are tirelessly devoted to making a difference. They’re creative, resourceful and ready to push through barriers. They’re well connected in their communities and among other agencies. Flores calls them “social brokers” – people who pick up the phone and find someone to help when a family or teen needs assistance beyond what they can provide. They’re brave enough to take risks, endure hostility and try new approaches.

Some grantees were new to teen pregnancy prevention when they first applied, but were familiar to and deeply trusted by their communities. They became trailblazers, committed to mitigating teen parenthood because they’d seen how it affected the children and families they knew so well.

For example, the Boys and Girls Club of Fresno reached thousands of teenagers and their parents daily. Even though their national organization had traditionally embraced an abstinence-only philosophy, the Fresno clubs’ leaders dared to be different in order to be effective. They selected an evidence-based curriculum – including, but not limited to, abstinence.

Fresno Barrios Unidos (FBU) had built tremendous credibility working with teenagers involved in gangs or at risk of joining gangs, but FBU leaders realized the problem of teen pregnancy demanded their attention.

Both organizations could talk to youth in a way that outside agencies couldn’t, and both felt compelled by what they’d seen to act. They set out to learn how they could help, and they adjusted their missions to meet their clients’ needs.

Not all grantees are as well-known as the Boys and Girls Club and Fresno Barrios Unidos, and some operate on a much smaller scale. The Advisory Committee’s local expertise led to opportunities in places that probably would be invisible to outside funders. They saw potential in tiny Cutler-Orosi, where the work of Adelante Latina is changing girls’ lives in dramatic fashion. It’s showing how inspiration can come from one community at a time.

Since 2008, the Fresno Regional Foundation has regranted $1,352,606 to 11 agencies in Fresno, Madera, Tulare, Merced, Mariposa and Kings counties. Grants have ranged from $10,000 to $100,000. Nearly 30,000 teens and their families have been affected directly.
The Fresno Regional Foundation’s role in teen pregnancy prevention has evolved. We’ve become the hub of a learning community, a growing number of agencies tackling teen pregnancy and sharing information. We’ve cultivated a network of grantees and partners that was not in place seven years ago.

We’ve sponsored eight convenings, joining with experts in teen pregnancy, youth and community issues to share best practices and successful approaches with our local partners.

We’ve learned important lessons. It’s no secret that young people are often alarmingly misinformed about reproductive issues. But we now know teens want good, reliable information. Our grantees’ programs are well attended; in fact, all are stretching their capacity to the limit.

We know that even the most caring parents often lack the words to discuss sexuality with their children. Many lack the knowledge. Successful programs include parents, and these parents routinely expressed gratitude for help with conversations they’ve avoided.

We’ve learned the Valley can have an honest discussion about teen pregnancy. It’s a costly mistake to assume the topic is off-limits here. But we also know that the organizations that can best start those conversations have earned their place as part of the community.

Most importantly, we’ve learned that the opportunities here are as great as the need. When information is presented in respectful, culturally sensitive ways, and when efforts are made to build enduring relationships, results are real and meaningful.

“It would be a very different story had we not received funding from the Fresno Regional Foundation. We are very grateful.”
– Debra Camarillo

“We know that philanthropy works.” Says Debra Camarillo, Executive Director of The Latino Commission, which conducts the phenomenally effective Adelante Latina program:

“It would be a very different story had we not received funding from the Fresno Regional Foundation. We are very grateful.”
Now that we have a better roadmap in place, we’re planning the next stage of our journey. Our goal is ambitious but necessary: Teen pregnancy prevention must become part of the very fabric of our community, woven into the many initiatives that address literacy, health, school readiness, workforce readiness and families.

Schools, media, medical and mental health care professionals, and churches – everyone involved in child development – can help. All can influence young people’s choices and the way they feel about themselves. Experts tell us it’s easier to reach a child who has a vision for the future than one who doesn’t. Whatever our beliefs, inspiring children with optimism and confidence is something we can all rally around.

We continue to look for new partners, including faith-based organizations. Religious leaders have a unique ability to build a sense of purpose, and can provide a safe place to discuss values in a comfortable cultural context, with family support. As important as faith and spirituality are to families and communities, they should have a place in a broad-based discussion of children and their future.

Building awareness through media will be vital. Radio Bilingue has discussed healthy relationships and sexual development in its “Rock’n the House” program, with a broad audience of teens and even parents. We can, and will inform the community further with the media’s help.

Building linkages and spreading our message requires staff time and money. The challenges, meanwhile, aren’t going away. Our grantees and partners tell us children are having sex at younger ages. Agencies compete with gangs for teens’ attention. Many rural communities lack teen pregnancy prevention resources entirely.

Programs need to reach more children and reach them sooner; that requires more capacity in already strained agencies and recruiting new ones. We need to make the best possible use of the resources we have. To that end, we will develop better metrics to evaluate our community’s needs and the success of teen pregnancy prevention programs.

We’ve applied for another grant from the Hewlett Foundation, and we’re asking for community support. There’s good news: The California Wellness Foundation has joined our efforts as a funder.
We will continue our leadership in this initiative. Babies born today will face the same decisions as their parents. Our challenge isn’t going away, and neither will we. No other organization has the Fresno Regional Foundation’s capacity to fund and link efforts and to seek and evaluate new players.

**HOW TO HELP:** Interested in becoming more involved with the Foundation’s Teen Pregnancy Prevention efforts? Please consider making a donation through our secure site fresnoregfoundation.org/DonateTPP, or contact the Foundation for information on volunteer opportunities with our grantees.

There’s no finish line, only more roads, each leading to new stories of need and hope. Now, though, we finally have a map that fits the landscape.
Bars cover the windows of the storefront home of Fresno Barrios Unidos (FBU) across the street from Roosevelt High School in southeast Fresno, but inside it’s all vibrant colors and comfortable chairs.

Two words, black on a bright yellow wall, greet visitors: Imagine. Dream.

Initially FBU’s mission was to get teenagers to imagine life outside of gangs, to dream of a future without violence. Over time, the focus evolved as staff saw a need that transcended gang boundaries.

Wherever FBU reached out to teens – at high schools, in continuation schools, in Juvenile Hall – too many teens were having babies.

Where there’s a problem, there’s an opportunity, and FBU saw both.

When teens complained about long waits and rude treatment at health clinics, FBU installed its own clinic. If a teen wanted information, an exam or contraception, it was available then and there. In the hormone-fueled teenage world, a delay could be life-changing.

“It’s a needy community. Whatever they need, they need it right then,” says Executive Director Socorro Santillan.

FBU began offering fact-based sex education, building on its credibility with teenagers and other agencies. If teens can’t come to FBU offices, staff will go to them, in after-school programs at schools and apartment complexes. They reach out to parents too.

The response has exceeded expectations. There is a thirst among teens for information from trusted adults. They act on the information too. After a session on sexually-transmitted diseases, for example, clinic visits invariably rise.

Trainers make sure to involve parents. They tell them what teens are learning. They sent teens home with assignments designed to open conversations. The kids ask their parents ice-breaking questions: “When was your first date?” “How old were you when you had your first kiss?”

Parents attend sessions on how to talk to kids about sex. They come to program graduation ceremonies, listening as their children explain the projects they’ve completed, and thanking the staff for initiating conversations they had struggled with. Their engagement dispels the myth of indifferent parents. The doors of communication are opening in their families.

What teens say:

“If it wasn’t for this location, I would have ended up pregnant a long time ago. Now I am a full-time college student.”

“I think this program is good because it helps us with our feelings and protects us from diseases. If I didn’t have this program, I would have a girl pregnant already.”

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In 2011, FBU launched a new program that sees Latino culture as an asset in developing character in young men. It’s called Joven Noble, or “noble youth,” and it aims to reconnect young men to age-old concepts of honor and responsibility.

The 10-session curriculum was created by Jerry Tello, an internationally recognized author and trainer, recognized by the White House as a Champion of Change for his work with men and families. Joven Noble demystifies “machismo,” and encourages youth to become men of palabra (their word), contributing to their families and communities.

Young men in the program come to recognize how hard their parents work. Parents, feeling more appreciated, become advocates of the program, often turning to the staff for information and referrals.

Success has created high demand for FBU’s expertise. Many organizations call on FBU for insight on connecting with young people, and FBU has generously shared its approach and curricula. Among its partners are major child-centered efforts in the Central San Joaquin Valley, including The Children’s Movement, Fresno Promise Neighborhoods, Building Healthy Communities, Boys and Men of Color, the Juvenile Justice Campus and Boys & Girls Clubs of Fresno County.

What trainers say:

“There’s a huge disconnect when you look at why young adults have sex. It’s not just about sexual feelings. It really has to do a lot with ‘lack of’—lack of relationship with parents, lack of relationship with adults.”

“If they don’t see a future for themselves, they’re not as likely to make good decisions today.”

“You can’t address teen pregnancy in a bubble. It’s not just about sexuality. It’s about the whole package.”
When a teenager is facing a life-changing decision, it helps to have an “askable adult” – a trusted and knowledgeable grownup – to talk to. But the adults who teens feel safe approaching aren’t always prepared to answer the most sensitive questions.

The Boys and Girls Club of Fresno recognized this. Teens spend hours a day at the clubs. Adults there are often their primary mentors and role models, the people they turn to with problems and questions. It made sense that the adults should be prepared if talk turned to sex.

The clubs’ leadership made a bold decision: All staff members at every club, whether they answered phones, tutored children or coached sports, would be trained to be ready.

Starting in 2010, each employee completed 24 hours of training in reproductive issues from Planned Parenthood Mar Monte. Some have been trained to be trainers because the clubs don’t just wait for teens to reach out. They’re proactive, conducting comprehensive sex education linked to access to clinical services.

It’s a big departure for the Boys and Girls Club. Their national organization has long embraced an abstinence-only curriculum. “That worked, to an extent, but the real issue was teens were getting pregnant and teens were in relationships at young ages and there was no one else there for help,” says Kristen Rojas, Assistant Executive Director of the Fresno County clubs.

The Fresno clubs include abstinence in their Safer Choices curriculum, but they also discuss pregnancy, sexually-transmitted diseases and contraception. They talk about emotional issues, healthy relationships and decision-making. And the grownups try to help teens see how special they are.

“I feel like when kids are empowered and inspired and feel like there is a caring adult, they hold

What teens say:

“I know of a friend that was sexually active and she changed after she went through the program. The session on STD’s and unplanned pregnancies opened her eyes.”

“The most interesting thing I learned was how different boys and girls think about sex and how some make bad decisions because some girls want to get pregnant because they think it would make their life better and it doesn’t. I am glad that I participated because it taught me a lot about waiting and not being pressured into doing something that I really don’t want to do.”

When it comes to teen pregnancy prevention, teachable moments aren’t just for the young.
themselves more responsible and accountable and they start setting expectations for themselves,” Rojas says. “They start feeling good about themselves, and no one can tear that down.”

The clubs have reached thousands of youth, and as often as possible, their parents. They hold Bingo nights for families and discuss how parents can talk about sex with their children. A film series from Novela Educativas (another Fresno Regional Foundation Grantee) called “Yo Soy Tu Niña” is a recent addition to help parents and girls talk. In telenovela style, it’s the story of a 15-year-old Latina pulled in different directions by peer pressure, her very traditional parents and her own aspirations.

Sometimes training opens communication between parents and children in unexpected ways. When a teenage girl asked her mother to sign a permission slip for a field trip to Planned Parenthood, the mother began asking questions about what she was learning. Intrigued, she asked club staff if she could go too. She’d been a teen mom herself, and had never received such comprehensive information.

What trainers say:

“He was surprised when he became a father. He had no idea that it would happen to him because it hadn’t happened for so long. This youth was unaware of contraceptives that keep him and his partner safe.”

“A youth in one of our clubs believed that wearing Chap Stick on his lips would prevent him from an STI and he believed he was taking care of himself when he kissed girls. These teachable moments help other youth understand the severity of STI’s and the effectiveness of protecting themselves and others.”
Resolve, resilience and relationships: They’re the three R’s of teen pregnancy prevention in the Valley, and no one knows that better than the staff of ACT for Women and Girls.

When the Visalia-based staff arrived at work three years ago to find their office trashed and computers stolen, they resolved to continue. They’d need resilience, though. Vandals struck again. The office was burglarized. The landlord received death threats and his car’s convertible top was slashed. The staff received hate mail.

Why would ACT be a target? Through its Female Leadership Academy, ACT helps girls become leaders. ACT also teaches comprehensive sex education to help girls make intelligent choices about relationships, and distributes free condoms, no questions asked. At the time of the break-ins, Planned Parenthood Mar Monte – an organization that often faces controversy for the reproductive health services it provides – was sharing office space with ACT for a half-hour a week.

Some in conservative Visalia thought ACT was promoting promiscuity and radical feminism. In fact, says Executive Director Erin Garner-Ford, the goals are respect and dignity.

The vandals were never found, but their message seemed clear when they destroyed instructional materials and tore up pictures of girls in the Female Leadership Academy visiting the state Capitol. ACT moved to another location with only one window and no sign announcing its presence. “That’s how incognito we’ve been, for fear,” Garner-Ford says.

But things have changed. Three years later, a sign is up again. Mainstream community leaders support ACT’s work. The Soroptimists honored both ACT and Erin this year, and the Lions Club welcomed Erin as a speaker. ACT’s annual Coming Out for Women and Justice event in downtown Visalia this spring brought speakers from the Tulare County Board of Supervisors, the Visalia City Council, Visalia Unified School District and the Tulare County Office of Education.

“We have really made a huge transformation,” Garner-Ford says.

How did they do it? It’s about relationships, she says. Staff and participants network, meet with community leaders and politicians and use social media
to communicate what they’re doing. “We try to be as kind and considerate as possible,” Garner-Ford says, and always sensitive to different opinions. They’re inclusive; they talk to anyone who’ll listen. And it helps that Visalia’s a small community and Garner-Ford seems to know everybody. “Erin’s quite a popular person,” Program Director Sarah Hutchinson says.

It’s taken time to explain what ACT is about. Yes, they hand out condoms. But no, they don’t promote casual sex. They teach that abstinence is the only completely reliable way to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted illnesses, but they also teach about birth control and healthy relationships.

“We talk about abstinence, but we know there are teens having sex and there’s no way to skirt around it,” Garner-Ford says. “And we know at some point in their lives, they will become sexually active and need to be prepared.”

ACT addresses broader issues, too, encouraging women of all ages to speak up for things they care about, improve their community and build purposeful lives. That’s the bigger picture, and maybe part of the reason for its success. Still, free condoms generate discussion.

The same night as Coming Out for Women and Justice, ACT had another event. For the annual “Don’t Let a Hot Date Turn Into a Due Date” campaign, teens and staff distributed “safety kits” outside the convention center where five high schools held their proms. The kits contained condoms and information about important teen issues including suicide prevention, dating violence and pregnancy.

A local country music radio station asked its Facebook followers their opinions of the distribution. The response was quick, plentiful and mostly supportive. “Way to go, ACT! You ROCK!” said one follower. “I love this organization and everything they try to do for our teens,” said another.

The staff realized they had won support from scores of people they didn’t even know. And while the challenges are never over, Garner-Ford says a lesson has emerged over the past three years:

“Everyone is a potential ally.”

What community members say:

“I’m a parent of three teens. Handing out condoms and teaching about STDs is not saying it’s OK to have sex. It’s all about making choices in your life and knowing what the consequences will be.”

“Telling kids that you don’t want them to have sex isn’t enough. Kudos to this program for helping teens stay safe and healthy.”
There’s not much for teens to do in the Tulare County farm town of Orosi. It’s a long way from the nearest mall or movie theater, and for most families, money is tight.

But those things don’t explain the popularity of Adelante Latina, a program of The Latino Commission – Nuevo Comienzo. They can barely keep up with the demand.

Some teens come at first for the stipend – $170 if they complete all 24 three-hour sessions of a teen pregnancy prevention class. Some come to learn. The important thing is that they stay.

Midway through the latest round of Los Guerreros, the program for boys, the guys are already dreading the end.

“Why can’t it be 36 weeks?” one wants to know.

“I think it should be 48 weeks,” says another. On second thought, “Why can’t it be a year?”

And that’s just the boys. Maria, a quiet, slender 20-year-old, signed up for Adelante Latina, the program for girls, at the end of senior year in high school. Her family had moved from a village in Mexico where she walked an hour to school. Still learning English, she dreamed of college. The possibility seemed remote to her, but not to the Nuevo Comienzo staff. They helped her apply and now she’s at Reedley College, soon to transfer to Fresno State.

“If it wasn’t for this program, I wouldn’t be what I am right now,” Maria says.

It all started with a group of teenage girls. They walked into Nuevo Comienzo out of curiosity and found a program in a state of flux.

Nuevo Comienzo was started by the San Francisco-based organization The Latino Commission in 2003 to help men with drug problems, but branched into other areas, like emergency food pantries and translation services, pitching in where help was needed – and help was always needed somewhere.

Then the girls came along with the idea for a pregnancy prevention program. They helped plan the curriculum, with help from staff. They talked about reproductive issues, how women get pregnant and how not to. But they also talked about healthy relationships and life goals.
Amazing things happened. Every one of the girls finished high school and went on to college. Their program, Adelante Latina (Latina Woman Forward), took root. The first graduation night brought smiles through tears as the girls told what the group had meant to them. Then their parents stood, one by one, and gave thanks.

“I want to thank God for permitting this program to happen,” one father said.

“I am full of gratitude that this program exists because it takes a weight off my shoulders,” said another.

Younger girls took the graduates’ place. Then came a request from parents: Could a program be created for boys? That’s when Los Guerreros (Warriors) began.

Boys required special handling. They drummed their fingers on tables, fidgeted and whispered. Lesson learned: Start with a half-hour of physical activity. The boys settled down. Those in the current class, just two months in, say they’re like family. They have each other’s backs.

The groups are kept small to foster relationships, but there is a multiplier effect. Teens influence siblings and friends. When they hear other teens spreading misinformation, they step in. Recently some girls were talking in the school cafeteria about whether it was OK to re-use condoms. An Adelante Latina graduate overheard and gave them the facts.

Nearly 200 teens have taken part in the programs. Since 2010, teen pregnancy rates at Orosi High School, the main program recruitment site, have declined by 50%.

Teachers see a change in students who’ve participated, and the programs have earned support from the Cutler-Orosi Unified School District, which awards class credit for them. Nuevo Comienzo has moved to a building on the Orosi High campus. It’s part of the fabric of the community.

“I think that’s the difference of gaining the trust of the community you’re working in,” says Latino Commission Executive Director Debra Camarillo. “But it’s taken years of hard work.”

What mothers say:

“I am learning so much through my daughter who shares what she learns with me.”

“My daughter and I are now starting to communicate with each other.”

“I am so happy because my daughter is doing much better in school.”
The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, a worldwide leader in efforts to reduce teen and unplanned pregnancy in disadvantaged communities, approached the Fresno Regional Foundation in 2007 about opportunities in the Central San Joaquin Valley.

Hewlett officials hoped we could channel funding to reach underserved communities that may otherwise be overlooked. They offered to help FRF develop expertise in teen pregnancy prevention, and to provide technical support as we worked to invest their grants wisely and well.

It was the beginning of an exciting chapter in the Fresno Regional Foundation’s history. It made sense for us to undertake this work. In 2006 we’d just marked our 40th year as a leader in Valley philanthropy. We’d undergone a rebirth as an organization, re-emerging with a new sense of purpose and direction. We’d earned respect in the community, and knew the culture and landscape in the region.

A three-year initial $1.3 million grant from Hewlett in 2007 was renewed in 2010, a welcome sign of confidence in our work.

Peter Belden, Program Officer for Hewlett’s Global Development and Population Program, praises our progress in the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative. “I feel that Hewlett’s investments have not only had a direct benefit through the grantee programs supported, but there has also been an important long-term asset created through Fresno Regional Foundation.”

We're grateful for the Hewlett Foundation’s trust, support and guidance, and we're proud to have assisted in this crucial mission.
“I feel that Hewlett’s investments have not only had a direct benefit through the grantee programs supported, but there has also been an important long-term asset created through Fresno Regional Foundation.”
– Peter Belden, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
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PUBLICATION POSSIBLE:

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LEAD WRITERS:
Betsy Lumbye
Hector Sanchez-Flores

FRF TPP PUBLICATION TEAM:
Sandra Flores        Darcy Pickens
Michelle Murphy      Kelvin Alfaro

FURTHER RESOURCES:
Center for Research on Adolescent Health and Development;
Policy Reviews and Data Updates:
http://teenbirths.phi.org

Guttmacher Institute; American Teens’ Sexual and Reproductive
Health Fact Sheet:
www.guttmacher.org/pubs/FB-ATSRH.html

Information on Fresno Regional Foundation grantees’ teen
pregnancy prevention efforts, and additional resources on teen
pregnancy and reproductive health:
www.fresnoregfoundation.org/grantmaking/tpp.html

To download additional copies of this report, visit
http://fresnoregfoundation.org/cbo/v2/teenpregnancygc.html