

Uplifting Young Parents in LA's Foster Care System

Los Angeles Reproductive Health Equity Project
for Foster Youth

Tweet with Us!
@NCYLHealth
#fosterreprohealth
#epy
#LARHEP

*October 16, 2019
Southern CA Library*

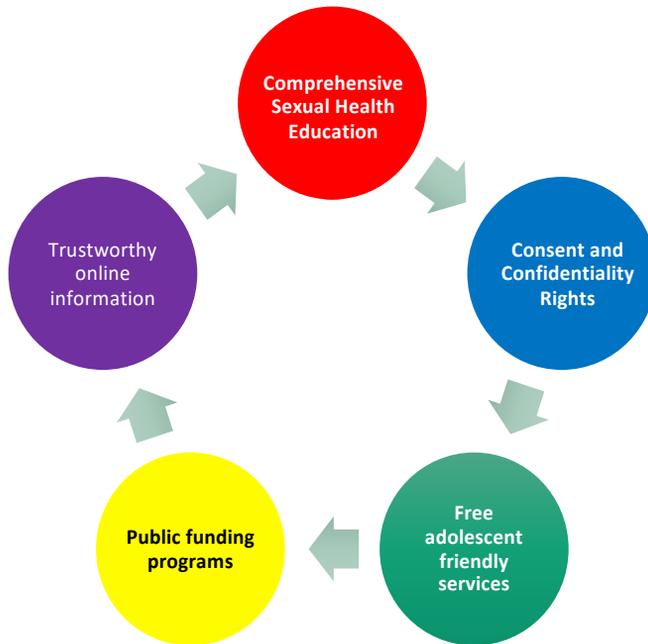


Advancing Reproductive Health
Equity for Youth in Foster Care

Los Angeles Reproductive Health Equity Project for Foster Youth



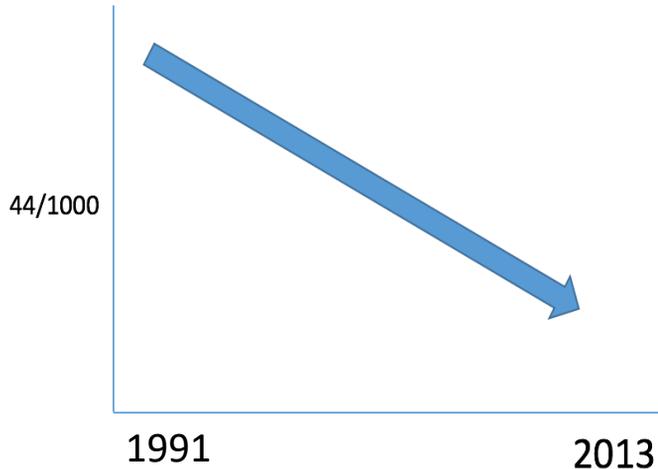
CA has a network of sexual & reproductive health information & services to address adolescent needs



Highlights:

- Mandatory **comprehensive sexual health education** in public middle and high schools
- **Consent rights** that allow adolescents who need it to confidentially access care
- A network of **clinics**, specially trained to address adolescent needs
- **Public funding** streams for sexual health services to ensure free access
- **Trustworthy information** for teens and adult caregivers

Services + programs have effectively reduced pregnancy for teens overall



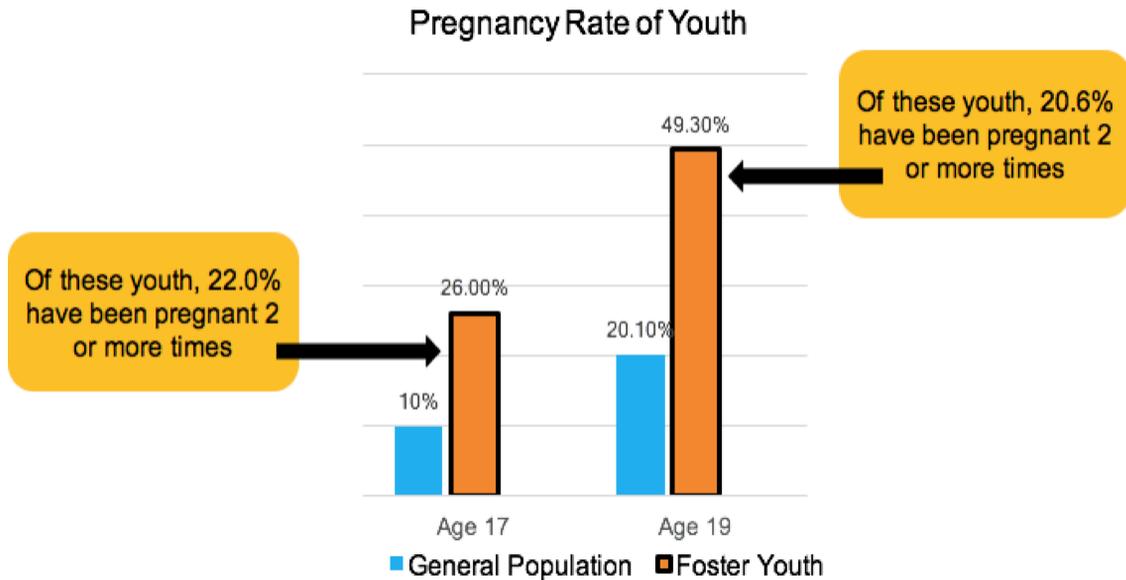
Teen birth rate in CA down **77%** since 1991

Greatest percent reduction in US, along with CT and MA

<https://powertodecide.org/what-we-do/information/national-state-data/california>

<https://powertodecide.org/what-we-do/information/national-state-data/change-teen-birth-rate>

Yet, almost 50% of youth in foster care in CA will have been pregnant at least once by age 19



Source: Courtney et al., Findings from the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study: Conditions at Age 17 and at Age 19 (2014, 2016).

For CA youth in care, most of these pregnancies were not intended



Young women in foster care at age 17:

Wanted to become pregnant:	%
Definitely no	30%
Probably no	14%
Neither wanted nor didn't want	26%
Probably yes	18%
Definitely yes	7%

70%

24.3% report using contraception at last pregnancy



Young men in foster care at age 17:

Wanted partner to become pregnant:	%
Definitely no	31.8%
Probably no	11.7%
Neither wanted nor didn't want	23.1%
Probably yes	16.5%
Definitely yes	8.7%

67%

23.% report using contraception at last pregnancy

Source: Courtney et al., Findings from the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study: Conditions at Age 17 (2014).

We all know the “doomsday data” ...

“Humility is really important - we have to engage with youth in a non-judgmental way ... providers know the doomsday data on teen pregnancies and parenting, but if teens choose to parent, think about how you can support them in that journey to be safe. **Youth in care are going to want agency and autonomy over their bodies; they want choices and that may not align with the provider’s worldview,** particularly around electing to be a parent. If the youth is telling you something that you don’t want to hear you need to be open, flexible, and honor their agency.”

- Dr. Eraka Bath, UCLA

How might we move beyond a “risk only” view of young pregnancy & parenting within foster care to compassionately support pre-birth & parental well-being?



Pregnancy
+ Birth



Transition
to
Parenting



Unfolding
Journey of
Parenting

“My body is strong and amazing”

Embodied experiences of pregnancy and birth among young women in foster care (Aparicio et al, 2019)

“The love that I was missing”

Exploring the lived experience of motherhood among teen mothers in foster care (Aparicio et al, 2015)

“I can get through this and I will get through this”

The unfolding journey of teenage motherhood in and beyond foster care (Aparicio et al, 2018)

"My body is strong & amazing"

Pregnancy
+ Birth

*Personal Pain,
Personal Renewal*



Sense-making through deep personal reflection. Experience of pregnancy as a time of scrutiny & invisibility. Intensely felt absence of missing people in their lives & missing parts of childhood. Identifying greater meaning, a larger plan.

*Unplanned
Pregnancies,
Intentional Births*



"Shock" & "disbelief." Feeling harshly judged – few had baby shower. Little prep for breastfeeding. Caregivers "taking over" or "you did this, now deal." Aversion to adoption as an option – connected to fear of baby being "taken." Variety of reasons for continuing the pregnancy.

*Powerful Bodies,
Powerful Families*



Time of pride in physical & emotional strength. Realizing the greater impact, recommitting to crafting a safe & happy life for their children. Bringing baby home to placement opportunity to make meaning of being a "powerful family" in this context. Caregivers described fondly.

Implications for Policy & Practice



Need specialized **sexual health education** with trauma informed lens that addresses intentionality & prior experiences of neglect.



Foster parents, social workers, & other askable adults should **engage young people in conversations** about sexual relationships & pregnancy, beginning in early adolescence.

Post-pregnancy discussions should cover the “adoption” option very sensitively – a lot of youth fear their children being taken by foster care.



Youth in care need opportunities to see their bodies as “strong & amazing;” encourage **holistic youth development programs** that have embodied physical component (yoga, dance, etc.).

Pregnancy
+ Birth

"The love I was missing"

Transition
to
Parenting

*Darkness &
Despair*



Difficult experiences being parented have powerful effects on young people as parents, including experiences of parental substance abuse, homelessness, poverty, breakdown of family ties, community disempowerment, absence & loss, abuse & neglect.

*Glimpses of Light in
the Darkness*



Several glimpses of light in the experience of being a parent that provide support & a sense of hope in the midst of despair experienced in childhood, including widening the circle of support (including to co-parents), identifying "othermothers," education, & getting support from foster care.

New Beginnings



Part of the experience of parenthood includes overwhelming sense of hope. Emerging identity as "mother," love for their children, & hopes & dreams for the future.

Implications for Policy & Practice



Tailored sexual health support: *Making Proud Choices!* for Youth in Out-of-Home Care and Power through Choices

Opportunities for **strengthening support & rebuilding family connections** is key to helping teens navigate the relational world of being both daughter/son and mother/father in a very complicated set of circumstances.

New parents should receive support on how to provide **healthy parenting** & form secure attachments between baby & parent.



Education has a critical role in offering sense of opportunity to new parents in foster care – explore online, night, & summer school as options as well.



"I can get through this & I will get through this"

Unfolding
Journey of
Parenting

Ambivalent Beginnings



Description of new motherhood is mixture of positivity ("amazed"), uncertainty ("scared"), & frustration ("impatient"). Little support for postpartum period. Some fell deeply in love with baby right away & had joyful foster parents; some struggled to cope with living placement & were unsure about providing for basic needs.

Coming Into Our Own



After several years of parenting, in a "better place," "stronger," "happy & less emotional," "blessed," & "more responsible & understanding of kids." Feeling better attuned to meet their children's needs, still trying to access support to meet needs, &/or struggling with basic needs (homelessness).

Finding Our Way



Practice of being a parent, each day, is an experience that cannot be taught in class. Going through foster care meant experiencing both support & hardship & teaches how to manage pain & adversity. Wanting to do things better than own parents. Social networks & informal mentorship as critical components of finding identity as parent.

Implications for Policy & Practice



Ongoing, **relationship-based sources of information** & support related to parenting – particularly for youth experiencing isolation from birth family & community of origin.

Through gentle persistence & unconditional positive regard – even love – foster parents can help youth **reduce barriers to forming secure attachment** bonds with babies.



Embed young parents in contexts where they are **nurtured themselves** in order to shift their own working models of attachment & support their ability to nurture their own children.

Careful balance to strike between supporting the positive sense of identity formed through becoming a parent & **honest discussions about subsequent birth timing.**





Uplifting Young Parents in LA's Foster Care System

Fatima Juarez, Student @ CSU Fullerton

Tweet with Us!
@NCYLHealth
#fosterreprohealth
#epy
#LARHEP



Uplifting Young Parents in LA's Foster Care System

*Jessica Chandler, Los Angeles County
Department of Children & Family Services*

Tweet with Us!
@NCYLHealth
#fosterreprohealth
#epy
#LARHEP

Tweet with Us!
@NCYLHealth
#fosterreprohealth
#epy
#LARHEP

Uplifting Young Parents in LA's Foster Care System

Monet Meadows, LA RHEP #FosterReproHealth Ambassador

Barbara Facher, Alliance for Children's Rights

Mara Ziegler, Public Counsel

Valerie Esquivel, Friends of the Children Los Angeles

Noribel Dela Cruz Taguba, LA County Dept. of Public Health

Shiré Wortham, Alliance for Children's Rights

Pregnant & Parenting Teen Conference

WHAT WOULD *YOUR* LIFE HAVE BEEN LIKE WITHOUT AN ADULT TO HELP SUPPORT YOU?

A PPT Conference brings the teen and their village together to look at the young person's:

- Strengths
- Resources
- Goals

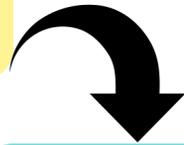
Helps the young person:

- Identify needs
- Discover new needs the youth may not even have considered
- Fill in gaps

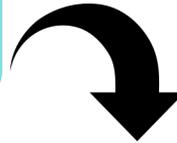


Pregnant & Parenting Teen Conference Outcomes

Positive Birth Experience



Successful Parenting



Resolution of Barriers to Achieving Independence



Unique Needs of EPY in Care



- Need access to appropriate *trauma informed* pre- and postnatal care
- Assistance with developing and implementing their birth plan
- Help with attachment and parenting
- Placement support for young families (finding and maintaining)
- Education and Employment issues related to being a teen parent in care
- Custody and other legal issues
- Child care
- Health and Mental Health Care
- Family planning
- Pregnancy and parenting related Government Benefits
- Connection to transition support people and services
- Baby items and more...



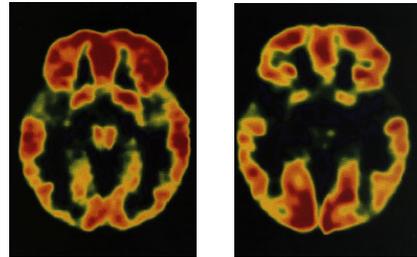
AND, their social worker may not ever have had an EPY on their caseload or it has been a while so they are not aware of ALL that is available



Trauma CHANGES THE BRAIN in ways that can impact us psychologically, emotionally and physically.

Because of this trauma response, people who have experienced trauma may have difficulty with:

- Planning and follow through
- Problem solving
- Controlling impulses
- Exercising judgment
- Perceiving social cues



(Image from Children's Hospital Michigan)

There is **HOPE** – our brains continue to repair and build new connections with each new experience. **YOU** will be helping to change their brains...

THEIR TRAUMA can IMPACT US SO WE MUST:

- Have a “self-care” plan before, during and after the conference
- Have a self-regulation “tool kit” (“there’s an app for that”)
- Seek support every step of the way
- Think about how we define success
- Understand that at the end of the day, the choices are theirs to make...





Uplifting Young Parents in LA's Foster Care System

*Learning Labs: How might we move beyond a "risk only" view
of young pregnancy & parenting within foster care to
compassionately support pre-birth & parental well-being?*

Tweet with Us!
@NCYLHealth
#fosterreprohealth
#epy
#LARHEP