

# Remembering the Boys

## The Male Role in Pregnancy Prevention

By Kauthar B. Umar, M.A.

Closing the Gap, Maternal Health • January/February 2004

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has implemented abstinence education programs such as the Adolescent Family Life program, the Adolescent Male Family Planning initiative and the Partners for Fragile Families demonstration program to encourage boys to postpone fatherhood until they are emotionally and financially capable of supporting children.

But teaching boys about abstinence can be difficult, according to Kim Dettmer, manager of special projects at the Lao Family Community of Minnesota.

“It’s difficult working with boys, trying to get them to believe that they actually have a choice not to have sex,” she said. “There are many social pressures, not just the media, that tell young men it’s okay to have sex.”

Now in its sixth year, it’s Kev Xaiv: Making Choices program teaches 11- to 14-year-old boys and girls from Laotian Hmong refugee families how to make informed decisions through role-playing. Each week, the youth discuss cultural enrichment and steps to break the cycle of teen pregnancy and interrupted schooling. Traditionally, Dettmer said, Laotian youth are not supposed to have sex until after marriage, so cultural learning is an important part of the program. In Hmong culture, however, there isn’t a word for “no,” so the program teaches a variety of alternate refusal skills.

Though tailoring the abstinence message to reach various cultures has proven difficult, programs are taking on the challenge and providing additional opportunities for underserved youth.

For example, the Decision for Life (DLF) program of the Baptist Child and Family Services in San Antonio, Texas, is tailored to teach predominately Mexican American youth and successfully reaches young males.

“What’s that saying, ‘Only men can teach boys to be men?’” said Christina Diaz, the program director. “We have two teams and each team has a male and female team leader. Boys really look up to our male staff and they see a positive, healthy male/female working relationship. The males treat the female staff with respect and our boys learn how to respect women.”

Now in its fifth year, DFL works annually with 60 -70 bilingual youth on a variety of abstinence curricula, like Families United to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. In an attempt to eliminate the belief that boys don’t have to abstain from sex but girls must, both sexes participate in sports and recreation, cultural enrichment, leadership and character development. With each activity, youth receive the message that waiting to have sex will allow them to reach their goals.

Setting goals is the secret to Jonathan Marin’s success. The recipient of DFL’s 2003 Student of the Year award, Marin, 16, feels abstinence is a sure way to get what he wants in life.

“After high school, I would like to go to college,” said Marin. “I don’t want to have to worry about being a dad or having kids, or anything like that.”

“It’s hard for guys, it’s not easy,” added 17-year-old Elson Sandoval, DFL’s Student of the Year for 2002. “For me, I’m not ready to have a kid because I’m way too young, but some guys they say they don’t care whether they have a kid or not.”

“Once they find out the news, that they’re having a kid, they don’t know what to do,” Marin chimed in. “They struggle a lot, and they start saying they should have waited to have sex.”

Exposure to new and different experiences and community service is a huge factor in teen pregnancy prevention says Diaz, because it helps teens feel more vested in their community and gives them something to strive for.

“Exposure to local events like college football games has provided these kids with goals,” Diaz said. “Most have not been off of their 10-block area, so we take them out and teach them about making the right choices.”

“I tell them, ‘all that’s out there could be yours,’” she said.

For more information on the Kev Xaiv: Making Choices Program, call 651-221-0069 or go to <http://www.laofamily.org/programs/family.htm> ❖

For more information on the Decision for Life program call 210-212-5518 or e-mail [decisions4life@aol.com](mailto:decisions4life@aol.com) ❖

### Office of Population Affairs Factsheets

#### Teen Talk (Volume 1): Many Teens Are Saying No

[http://opa.osophs.dhhs.gov/pubs/teentalk\\_vol1\\_sayno.pdf](http://opa.osophs.dhhs.gov/pubs/teentalk_vol1_sayno.pdf)

#### Teen Talk (Volume 1): Many Teens Are Saying No (Spanish)

[http://opa.osophs.dhhs.gov/pubs/teentalk\\_spanish\\_vol1\\_sayno.pdf](http://opa.osophs.dhhs.gov/pubs/teentalk_spanish_vol1_sayno.pdf)

#### What You Should Know About Abstinence

[http://opa.osophs.dhhs.gov/pubs/whatknow\\_abstinence.pdf](http://opa.osophs.dhhs.gov/pubs/whatknow_abstinence.pdf)

#### What You Should Know About Abstinence (Spanish)

[http://opa.osophs.dhhs.gov/pubs/whatknow\\_spanish\\_abstinence.pdf](http://opa.osophs.dhhs.gov/pubs/whatknow_spanish_abstinence.pdf)

