

## **HRA Works to Reduce Teen Pregnancy**

Over the past 20 years, New York City has made great strides in reducing teen pregnancy, but the problem is far from solved. Pregnancy for New York women aged 15-19 fell sharply in the 1990s, but has remained steady at about 90 pregnancies per 1,000 teens for the past six years. Because even one teen pregnancy can trap parents and children in a cycle of poverty, HRA believes in doing all it can to make this number even lower. HRA already has several programs in place, with plans to expand and coordinate their efforts to make the city's teen pregnancy rate as low as possible.

Teens signed up for Medicaid have anonymous access to family planning services like birth control. The Family Planning Benefit Program (FPBP) provides the same services to teens whose family incomes are too high for Medicaid. The Office of Citywide Health Insurance Access (OCHIA) is organizing an outreach campaign to tell uninsured high school students about the FPBP program.

The FPBP outreach is being piloted at DeWitt Clinton High School. If the program is successful, OCHIA will bring it to other schools, and will begin coordinating FPBP outreach with two other teen pregnancy prevention programs: *No Kidding: Straight Talk About Teen Pregnancy*, and the Relationship Abuse Prevention Program (RAPP).

The *No Kidding* program brings real teen parents to schools to talk about their experiences. *No Kidding* peer educators describe both the emotional and financial costs of raising a child as a teenager. They describe things they can no longer afford now that they are parents, the hard truth about the relationships they thought would last forever, and other consequences. "One peer educator was confronted by a woman on the subway who started yelling at her, demanding to know how old she was, how she got pregnant, and what she was thinking," said Victoria Bennington, Director of Teen Pregnancy Prevention at OCSE, who oversees the program. "There are consequences many students haven't imagined yet."

On the whole, she says, the program's first year was very successful. "The peer educators were extremely generous with their stories, and students related to them even more than we'd hoped," she said. The *No Kidding* program debuted last year in four schools. The full results have not been assessed yet, but initial plans are in place to expand the program to more schools and work more closely with other teen pregnancy prevention programs.

The RAPP program aims to stop domestic violence before it starts by teaching students to identify and seek out good relationships. "It's helping teens make healthier choices with their lives," said Program Director Tracey Thorne. Since 1999, RAPP's counselors have been speaking at NYC high schools, helping teens identify abusive behavior, overcome stereotypes, and look for positive relationships. Preventing early and unwanted pregnancies is a large part of the program's message. RAPP is now in 62 schools citywide.

With these three programs, HRA provides medical and social resources to help teens avoid early pregnancy and start families when they are emotionally and financially ready. As they expand to more schools, the programs will work more closely together to give comprehensive help to at-risk teens during this difficult time in their lives, and help them prepare for a better future.