



February 9, 2005

Dear Participant:

*Fostering the Bond: Dependent Teens and their Babies* sponsored jointly by the Children's Law Center and Westside Children's Center Summits provided invaluable opportunities for professionals from a wide range of disciplines to come together around the needs of teens and their children in the foster care and probation systems. Thanks to all of you who participated, these were stimulating, encouraging days during which all of us learned something new about the work of our colleagues.

A number of recommendations emerged from the two days. We have enclosed a full report with this letter. In summarizing the topics discussed the various groups, a number of clear themes emerged:

- First, up-to-date tracking and monitoring of pregnant and parenting teens – including fathers – is needed in order to provide appropriate referrals, assess outcomes, and support the development of strong parent/child bonds.
- Second, specialized foster homes for teen parents and their children must be developed. Foster parents who wish to mentor teen parents must be provided with specialized training and supportive services. To qualify for increased rates, they should also receive the designation “special circumstances” foster homes.
- Third, Probation and DCFS should create a Joint Assessment Group. This group would have three initial tasks: developing “Reverse 241.1” protocols; creating a section in court reports regarding issues related to pregnancy and parenting; and forming a leadership council from Probation and DCFS to coordinate and implement changes.
- Fourth, specialized multidisciplinary home visitation teams are needed to provide attachment-based services to teen parents and their children.

These are exciting recommendations. However, as with all conferences, the real value comes from the follow-up. We already have some inspiring news from the Probation Department, the Department of Children and Family Services and the California State Legislature. Immediately after the Summits, the Probation Department began a process of identifying and tracking young mothers under their supervision. They have created specialized case loads for several probation officers who will provide increased monitoring and services to teen mothers. These probation officers have joined forces with the Department of Health Services' Nurse Family Partnership, the Center for Law and Justice and others to ensure a full range of supportive services for these young women.

DCFS has created two working groups, one focusing on the needs of parenting and pregnant teens who are themselves in foster care and a second aimed at developing a sexual development curriculum for children under the jurisdiction of the Department of Children and Family Services and their caregivers. Both groups are comprised of DCFS staff along with a multitude of stakeholders. Improvements to the DCFS and ILP websites focused on identifying existing resources for parenting and pregnant teens are underway and additional recommendations are forthcoming.

Finally, SB 1178 The Teen Parents in Foster Care Act was signed into law in October of this year and goes into effect January 1, 2005. This new law:

- Requires the court and responsible agencies to protect the best interests of dependent minor parents and their children as a unit and make diligent attempts to place them together in a family-like setting;
- Requires that teen parents in foster care have access to services specifically targeted at supporting, maintaining, and developing both the parent-child bond and the teen's ability to provide a permanent and safe home for the child;
- Ensures that minor parents are permitted to attend school, complete homework, and participate in activities unrelated to and separate from parenting; and
- Directs child welfare agencies, the State and providers to develop, identify and utilize whole family placements and other placement models that provide supportive family-focused care for dependent teens and their children.

As encouraging as these developments are, there is more to do. If you are interested in learning more about the two DCFS workgroups described above please contact Leslie Heimov of the Children's Law Center at 323-980-5762. For information on how to participate in workgroups aimed at implementing the additional recommendations outlined in the attached summary, please fill out and return the enclosed form. Thanks again for your involvement in the Summits. We look forward to working with you in the future.

Sincerely,

Richard Cohen  
Executive Director  
Westside Children's Center

Miriam Krinsky  
Executive Director  
Children's Law Center

**Children's Law Center  
Westside Children's Center**

**Fostering the Bond: Dependent Teens and Their Babies**  
*Recommendations from May 7<sup>th</sup> Breakout Groups*

GROUP A: PLACEMENT ISSUES AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

- 1 **Dedicate a staff person in each DCFS and Probation office to assist pregnant teens with referrals for community and placement services.** Train that person to serve as an advocate/ombudsperson.
- 2 **Develop specialized foster family homes for teen parents and their children.** These placements should have a full range of supportive services for both the teen parent and the child.
- 3 **Modify TILP protocol to include an addendum that is client-directed.** Ask "What do you want to do to keep yourself and your child safe after emancipation?" and "Is there a committed adult in your life?"
  - Require that this addendum be updated regularly.
  - Include community based service providers in plan as emancipation nears.
  - Consult with DCFS/Probation Resource specialists (if available).
- 4 **Dispel "urban myths" regarding DCFS and Licensing.**
- 5 **Develop pre-placement protocols/agreements among teen, caregiver and DCFS.**
  - Clarify responsibility for non-dependent babies residing in foster care with their dependent parent.
  - Ensure that teen parents will receive adequate support to develop strong attachment with baby and to prepare for emancipation.

GROUP B: IDENTIFYING FUNDING ISSUES AND BARRIERS

- 1 **Identify the scope of the population.** This is critical to acquiring funding. Create a taskforce to improve tracking of pregnant and parenting dependent and recently emancipated teens.
- 2 **Investigate funding services for the new family through the Title IVE waiver request.**
- 3 **Explore public and private partnerships to support data tracking, case management, and development of specialized placements.**

GROUP C: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE COURT, CHILD WELFARE AND CHILD ADVOCATES

- 1 Develop outcomes for success for pregnant minors.**
- 2 Target sex education and sexual development programs for dependent teens.** Include parenting teens to prevent second birth.
- 3 Create specific follow-up protocols to Family Group Decision Making for pregnant and parenting teens.**
- 4 Develop focus on teen dads.**

GROUP D: PRESERVING FAMILIES AND DEVELOPING HEALTHY ATTACHMENTS

- 1 Create home visitation, multidisciplinary team, attachment –based, measurable models.**
- 2 Create links to the school systems, a “school success” team that includes all those involved.**
- 3 Develop specialized, “mentored” foster homes willing to take pregnant teens and their babies, where both receive county fees.**
- 4 Explore Foundation funding for more creative programs that are not tied to public funds/regulations.** An evaluation could compare Foundation funded programs against public funded programs and determine which is more effective in serving target population.
- 5 Develop innovative parenting classes, both specialized and individualized for the population.**
- 6 Develop religious/spiritual programs, support networks (though traditionally biased against out-of-wedlock births).**
- 7 Develop culturally relevant mentoring programs in all impacted communities.**
- 8 Utilize existing communities where culture is integral and supportive of teens.**
- 9 Develop culturally relevant programs that include trainings for parents/foster parents on how to talk with youth about sexual health.**
- 10 Collaborations identified below are essential to realize the goals outlined:**
  - Comprehensive models for mental health/tutoring/transportation/in-home services/support and resources for self-advocacy/access.
  - Case conferences (perhaps through the school) that include social workers, nurses, and any others identified by the family.

- Boys and Girls Clubs should be considered especially because of their many locations throughout the community creating ease of access for teens.

GROUP E: INTEGRATING SERVICES FOR CROSSOVER KIDS

- 1 **Develop methods for tracking pregnant and parenting teens.** This should include outcomes as well as compliance.
- 2 **Create leadership council to include executive team level personnel from Probation, DCFS and other relevant stakeholders.**
- 3 **DCFS and Probation should, when relevant and in consideration of confidentiality issues, add a section to the court reports regarding issues of pregnancy and parenting for both males and females.**
- 4 **Initiate a legal rights clinic for pregnant and parenting teens at Juvenile Hall locations.**
- 5 **Create a Joint Assessment Group to do "reverse 241.1" when the teen returns to DCFS from Probation.**