

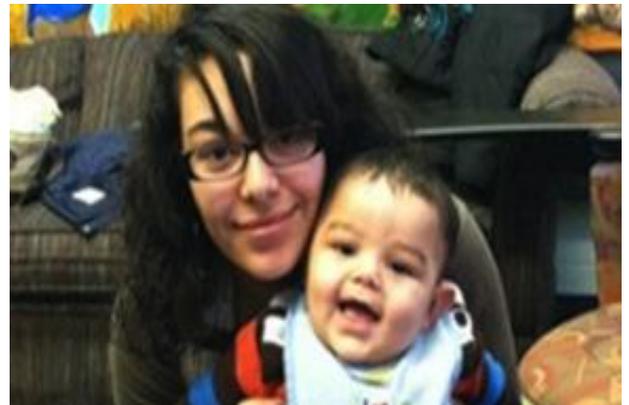


Success Story: Massachusetts Department of Public Health

Building on Strengths to Empower Expectant and Parenting Teens in Massachusetts

Massachusetts Pregnant and Parenting Teen Initiative (MPPTI) is a community-based program that serves expectant and parenting youth ages 14-24 in five cities across Massachusetts including Chelsea, New Bedford, Holyoke, Lawrence, and Springfield. The five communities identified for MPPTI experience a disproportionate burden of school dropout,¹ poverty,² and sexually transmitted diseases³ compared to the state as a whole.

In an effort to address these challenges, Massachusetts Department of Public Health implemented MPPTI to provide a comprehensive support model to help participants. Program goals are to (1) Increase academic achievement through individualized academic and career goals; (2) Improve reproductive health outcomes by delaying subsequent pregnancy; and (3) enhance family stability through increased connection with social and emotional support systems, improved self-sufficiency, and healthy parenting practices.



A mother holds her child. Source: MPPTI

Estimated to reach approximately 1,000 families in the next four years, MPPTI offers an array of services to participants with a strength-based approach. Services include a weekly check-in with a youth worker who identifies specific needs of program participants and acts as a link with community resources, monthly or bimonthly meetings with an education or employment counselor, and individual or group counseling as needed. The program also offers health education and preventive screenings by an RN approximately every 6 months, and weekly or monthly pre and postnatal groups.

One of the successful components of MPPTI is the Digital Story Telling Project. The project involves developing digital stories to illustrate expectant and parenting youth's transition into parenthood. The project not only empowers youth to share the challenges of adolescent parenthood, but also teaches youth without technical background to produce work that tells a story using moving images and sound. After the digital stories were recorded, MPPTI launched a digital storytelling event to showcase the stories to community members, program participants, state agencies, and other providers at a movie theater. The stories have also been used for training new MPPTI staff and in parenting groups with young parents. The following is an account from one of the participants.

Even with two children, my life was out of control. Parties, drugs, gangs, and just living that fast life. I thought that was it. I didn't love myself and therefore I didn't know how to love my children enough to make a change....it is not that I didn't know the things I had to do, it is that I had no confidence, no dreams, and no inspiration. Things started to change when I got assigned to a youth worker. At first I put up a wall with her and



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ignored her calls countless times. But she never gave up. She did it all to help me work toward my GED. It felt good to have one person believe in me even though I kept falling off track. She and I begin to have a great friendship. Not just a youth worker-teen relationship. I attended the program and tried half the time just for her because she always gave me her time and attention. I attended nurturing programs to help me deal with my two beautiful daughters and the third that was on her way. I also attended “Circle” which allowed me to grow and be relieved from a dark past...my past lied to me. It made me believe I was nothing, had nothing, and was never going to be better. When it came to my GED, it was the giant obstacle that wouldn’t let me break out of that tiny miserable world....my GED teacher told me that I was worth way more than I believed—that I was smart and I could do it. I would sit there and say miserable things about myself and [my ability to do] math. But he would constantly fight the negative attitude with words of encouragement. He believed in me more than anyone, more than my mother, and that gave me strength. Once I pushed the negative aside, my brain became like a sponge. I thank God for my youth worker and GED teacher. I have obtained my GED—that is my stepping stone to be a better me. I am inspired, I want to go to college, I *will* go to college and be whatever I want to be.

MPPTI’s Program Coordinator reports that prior to the program many of their teen parents have never been asked about their strengths. Working with MPPTI program staff to identify their strengths has resulted in a feeling of empowerment and increased their desire to work toward attainment of their life goals. To show gratitude to the program that helped them find their voice, program participants have expressed wanting to give back to the program through peer leadership. MPPTI is hoping to implement this new component in the years to come.

Contact Information

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¹ Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2012). 2011-12 Indicators Report. Retrieved April 2, 2013 from http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/indicators.aspx,

² US Census Bureau. American Community Survey, 2007 – 2011, Selected economic characteristics. Retrieved April 9, 2013 from http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_11_5YR_DP03

³ Massachusetts Department of Public Health. (2010). Sexually Transmitted Disease Program. *Massachusetts Community Health Information Profile (MassCHIP)*, version 3.00 r327.