

Viewpoints

Teenage pregnancies are haunting problem

A group of Hoke County residents is close to coming up with a plan for slowing down the number of teenage pregnancies, which have become a severe problem for this community and the nation during the last decade.

During the last two years, teenage mothers have averaged giving birth to 25% of the children born in Hoke County, and if the problem continues to be ignored by the community, it can only grow worse.

Because of recent national attention to teenage pregnancy and because of the promise of some state funds for corrective programs, Hoke County is in a good position to take steps which will make a difference to lives of everyone who lives here.

Although in recent years, the number of teen pregnancies has dropped in Hoke County, the problem is still critical.

In 1979, Hoke County was ranked second in the state in teen pregnancy. In 1983, this county dropped to a 30th place. Much of the credit can be given to limited counseling in the schools, but if a real dent is going to be made, more is needed.

According to an article in *Time* magazine on December 9, most teen mothers are poor and unmarried. The prospect of a good life for their children is slim. National statistics show most teenage mothers are not likely to finish high school and most will be welfare recipients.

Children born to teen mothers are more likely to be victims of abuse or neglect and to be placed in foster homes. Children of teenagers are also prone to illness, educational problems and many end up in prison.

In most cases, teens beget problems when they have children. Here are the facts:

- During the last fiscal year in Hoke County, there were 47 children born to teenage mothers of whom 90% were unmarried. The mothers ranged in age from 14 to 18.

- Currently one-third of the children under the protective custody of the Hoke County Department of Social Services were born to teenage mothers. In Hoke County, foster care has a budget of about \$50,000. Nationwide it costs taxpayers \$8.1 billion.

- Nationally, 71% of women under 30 who receive Aid to Families With Dependent Children (AFDC) had their first child as a teen. In Hoke County, where over 900 children are served by the annual AFDC budget of \$1.2 million, it is safe to assume the national statistics apply, DSS staff members say.

- About 80% of the 150 children, who are referred to the Hoke County juvenile court system each year, are believed to be the offsprings of unmarried teenage mothers. Since a child must be 13 to enter the system, today's problems began prior to 1972. As juveniles, their crimes generally range from petty larceny to truancy, but statistics show many will go on to commit more serious offenses.

- Nationwide, half of the girls, who get pregnant prior to their 18th birthday, do not finish high school. In Hoke County, 89 students dropped out of school last year, and 32 girls who were 17 or younger had babies.

- Last year in Hoke County, two babies were born to 14 year olds, five to 15 year olds, 11 to 16 year olds, 14 to 17 year olds and 15 to 18 year olds. Only five mothers were married. Out of the 47 births to teens, nine mothers had their second child, two had a third and one a sixth.

- Teen mothers also give birth to teen mothers. Surveys have shown 82% of girls who gave birth at 15 or younger, were daughters of teenage mothers.

A recent study by Johns Hopkins University researchers found one in five 15 year olds, one in three 16 year olds and 43% of the 17 year olds were sexually active. The study also showed most were ignorant of birth control methods, and many believe myths such as: You do not get pregnant the first time you have sex. You can not get pregnant if you have sex standing up, and you can not get pregnant if you only have sex occasionally.

One third of the teenagers 15 to 19, who are sexually active, do not use contraceptives.

Hoke County health officials recently conducted a survey of local teens about pregnancy. Most felt many unwanted pregnancies could be avoided with better counseling and if contraceptives were made easily and discretely available.

In St. Pauls, Minnesota, teen pregnancy rates dropped dramatically after full service health clinics were opened in the city's high schools. Once the clinics were in place, the birth rate in one school fell from 45 per 1,000 to 10 per 1,000. Only 1% had a second unwanted pregnancy.

Members of the local teenage pregnancy task force are looking into a number of approaches to the problem in Hoke County, including more counseling through churches and schools. A clinic like the one in St. Pauls is also under consideration. We believe it would make a big difference here.

Sociologists attribute teenage pregnancies to a lack of sex education and a lack of easy access to birth control, but they also believe the true root to the problem is a sense of worthlessness and despair on the part of the mother.

Most of those who become pregnant as a teenager are from a lower socio-economic group and they do not have a sense of the future. Having a baby gives them a feeling of belonging.

To paraphrase answers given to health officials by Hoke County teens: Many times girls don't have a good home life and feel the need for love and attention. Having a baby is a way to achieve fulfillment of the needs. If parents don't show her concern and respect, then why should she respect herself.

It is the syndrome of "I was nobody, but now I am a mother." In her *Time* article, "Children having children" writer Claudia Wallis summed up the problem which exists in Hoke County.

"As long as adolescents look in the mirror and see nobody there, they are likely to seek identity by becoming somebody's mother." It is time to stop ignoring the problem of teenage children having children in Hoke County. We need to take our heads out of the sand and do something about reality.

To do less would be unconscionable.

MERRY CHRISTMAS



Madilyn

Old Christmas can be savored

Complaints grow louder each year that Christmas has become mostly a party binge and commercial bonanza but those who wish to enjoy an old-time Christmas can do so, with proper planning and determination.

Family members will enjoy helping mothers prepare special Christmas dishes and foods ahead of time. Some of these specialties can be the presents to be given family, friends and neighbors. All of us appreciate self-made remembrances -- which also save money and shopping time.

The secret to a relaxed Christmas is to plan ahead so that Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and one or two days after Christmas are not hectic.

Imagination and perhaps sometimes discipline will be needed to keep the family together and calm during the holidays. Television can often be profitably disconnected, temptations of the highway resisted.

Instead, family games, talks, sports, meals and home projects of pleasure can be enjoyed-- good food, good company, and the meaning of Christmas.

VALLEY FORGE ... One of the most discouraging Decembers for Americans was that in 1777, after the battles of Brandywine and Germantown, which led to the occupation of the nation's capital at Philadelphia that autumn.

Washington had kept his army intact, which numbered about 11,000 men, and he moved it into a strong position about twenty-four miles northwest of Philadelphia.

The position was easily situated for defense and Congress when then sitting in York; from Valley Forge, Washington was in a position to block the British if they moved on the temporary capital.

Washington encamped there exactly 208 years ago on the 19th (1777). It was to be perhaps the hardest winter for his army because the commissary department and quartermaster general failed to deliver adequate supplies to his troops. But under the strong training of German-born Baron Steuben, the men were turned into a disciplined army.

After that gloomy winter, American hopes began to rise. The

Cliff
Blue



People and Issues

British evacuated Philadelphia in June, 1778. Washington reoccupied it on the 18th. Lord Cornwallis surrendered to Washington on October 18, 1781, at Yorktown, Virginia, ending the Revolutionary War.

GOVERNMENT CHECKS ... The familiar green punch cards issued by the U.S. government since the 1940s are being replaced by multicolored paper checks that are lighter, easier to store and more difficult to counterfeit. The first checks are being delivered to 20 million Social Security recipients.

HOSPITAL PROFITS ... Hospitals receiving Medicare payments recorded above-average profits during the first year of a new payment strategy that the industry had said might cause substantial losses, says an internal report by the Health and Human Services Department.

ON DEBATES ... Making candidate debates a formal part of presidential campaigns won the endorsement of the Republican and Democratic Party chairmen, who also conceded that they lack the power to force their nominees to go along.

WEATHER ... Does winter have days with less sunlight than the other seasons? Is this why it's the coldest of our seasons?

Strangely enough, winter does not have less sunlight than any other season. Fall, which ends December 20, this year, averages the same amount of sunlight, per day, as does winter.

The shortest day of the year, December 21, is the winter solstice in June, the days are getting longer as soon as winter begins.

Winter is the coldest of seasons because the earth loses most of its summer heat by January and February contain more daylight than November and December.

New education group has great potential

RALEIGH -- When Gerry Hancock was a state senator, he ran into a problem many legislators complain of. They'd like some guidance on education policy but when they turn to the education community, they often find it was divided as the different factions in the legislature.

In hopes of developing a unified voice for education, a number of influential North Carolinians have joined together to form the North Carolina Public School Forum. The Forum will be comprised of politicians of both parties, educators and businessmen. Hancock is chairman. Jay Robinson, superintendent of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools, is president. The Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation has chipped in with \$75,000 to help get the Forum rolling.

The idea is to provide the many groups concerned with education a form of ongoing summit where they can find common ground on education issues.

If the potential good of such unity is to be realized, however, the forum will have to walk a pair of political tightropes. First, the Forum must help build trust between its business and educational interests, and keep both committed to the idea of the Forum. Second, the leadership of the N.C. Association of Educators will have to commit themselves to a greater flexibility on issues than they may have shown in the past.

Over the past decade there has been considerable distrust between the different elements of the education lobby. Groups representing teachers, superintendents, school boards and principals have had different ideas and they've clashed. The business community, with its push for tax cuts and merit pay for teachers, has alienated elements of the education community.

In the past two years, however, one man has played a big role in bringing the different education groups together. John Dornan, executive director of NCAE, has played a pivotal role in forging a peace between the groups. As Robinson said, Dornan "has the



Watching
By Paul T.
O'Connor

ability to bring diverse groups together."

That experience made Dornan a natural selection for executive director of the Forum. But the test before him in this job will be far greater than that he has already passed.

Gov. Jim Martin told a recent meeting of the N.C. Foundation for Research and Economic Education, a business group that plans to flex some political muscles, that he'll push for more tax cuts in coming years. He got a healthy round of applause. Educators worry that such tax cuts and new money to help the Highway Fund will come out of resources that should go to the public schools. But Sherwood Smith, chief executive of Carolina Power & Light and Forum director, said business is committed to increased education funding. He said that state revenues are growing fast enough to allow both extra spending for schools and tax cuts.

If business leaders are to compromise on one hand, they'll expect compromise from education leaders on the other. In the past, NCAE has been pretty thick-headed. Gladys Graves, NCAE president, admitted almost that much but said that obstinance came in a different climate.

In past years, Ms. Graves said, NCAE was arguing that considerable improvements were needed in teacher salaries before other issues could be addressed. Those improvements have started now, she said, and NCAE might be in a better mood to compromise, if others share that attitude.

But she warned that on some issues, like merit pay, NCAE's opposition will never be compromised.

The Forum may be a great idea but we can all be excused if we are a bit skeptical about its chances for success.

Holiday season gives time for reflection

Historically, the holiday season is a time for reflection, a time to count our blessings which are many in this country. It is sometimes easy to lose sight of how fine and great a country we have. And, a lot of this nation's strengths are due to agriculture.

Agriculture can take pride in its accomplishments because without an abundant food supply much of this prosperity, which we take for granted, would not be possible.

American farmers remain unchallenged as the world's greatest supplier of food. As farmers, we are quite proud of this.

Americans are the best fed of any country and it takes less of our disposable income than ever before.

It's difficult these days to think of anything as cheap. However, whether we admit it or not, this country does have a cheap food policy. Occasionally, it may bring temporary relief at the checkout

counter. But the long-term costs can and will be very high indeed and the dangers of continuing in this direction are great.

For one thing, it threatens one of the real basic strengths of our economy; our ability to produce food and fiber better than any other nation in the world. Our freedom to a great extent is based on a strong and independent agriculture system.

Today, production agriculture provides jobs for nearly one out of every five Americans employed in the private sector. It fights inflation with a productivity growth five times that of non-farm industry in the past several years.

Without agriculture, our dollar would have less buying power since exports have been a leading factor in our balance of trade.

So, let's be thankful for our country as we get ready for 1986 and especially for the farmers who help make it all possible!

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