

OPTIONS

For
Youth

Press Release

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Options for Youth Announces MacArthur Foundation Award

Chicago, IL -- December 1, 2009 – Options for Youth (OFY) is pleased to announce that the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation has awarded the organization a 1-year \$50,000 grant to support an exchange program between members of OFY and social service organizations in Guanajuato, Mexico, to share expertise and best practices in delaying second pregnancies among adolescent mothers.

The project addresses the issue of rapid repeat childbearing among adolescent mothers, a critical issue for teens in both the U.S. and Mexico because it can be a pivotal factor in determining long-term outcomes for a young mother and her child(ren). One in five births to teens in the U.S. each year is not a first birth. In Mexico, 18% of births each year are to women under 20. The rapid birth of a second child often means school drop out, decreased employment opportunity, and poverty for a young mother, and potential developmental and behavioral problems for her children.

OFY is a community-based nonprofit that develops programs for underserved, inner-city youth in Chicago and surrounding urban communities. Its three major programs are: the *Subsequent Pregnancy Program (SPP)*, a program to delay second pregnancies among adolescent mothers; *Options*, a school-based Subsequent Pregnancy Program, and *Peer Advocates for Health*, a program to train adolescent African American males to be peer advocates for male health.

OFY's *Subsequent Pregnancy Program (SPP)* is one of the few adolescent programs in the U.S. focused *specifically* upon delaying a second pregnancy. Using a model combining an ongoing, long-term relationship with a trained Home Visitor, a bimonthly peer support advisory group meeting, and culminating in intensive training to become peer educators, the program has had remarkable success. Since 1994 it has served over 3,000 adolescent mothers (African American, Caucasian, Mexican, and Puerto Rican) from 30 communities, of whom only 3 % had a second pregnancy while in the program and 85% remained in or graduated from high school.

OFY and its Mexican partner organizations will hold peer education and focus group discussions with adolescent mothers, and a provider workshop led by SPP home visitors in Guanajuato, Mexico. This will be followed by a visit to Chicago by representatives of two Guanajuato-based organizations. Since each year an increasing number of SPP participants are Mexican and Mexican American, the exchange will enable OFY home visitors and adolescent providers in Guanajuato to deepen their understanding of the day-to-day issues facing Mexican adolescents in both countries, and ultimately to meet their needs more effectively.

The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation is one of the nation's largest independent foundations. Through the support it provides, the Foundation fosters the development of knowledge, nurtures individual creativity, strengthens institutions, helps improve public policy, and provides information to the public, primarily through support for public interest media.

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