

Inquiry into teenage pregnancy

Fife Gingerbread

What are your views on the relationship between higher levels of teenage pregnancy and socio-economic inequality?

The relationship between high levels of teenage pregnancy and socio – economic inequality is undeniable and extremely obvious. Low levels of aspirations and low ambitions or goals in young girls are a key factor in teen pregnancy. Many young girls perceive being a parent as the automatic and obvious transition into adulthood and independence. Our experience also points toward high levels of casual sexual activity and abusive relationships (involving both younger and older males) that add to the complexity of the situation. Many young girls mistake sexual attention for love and have low self-esteem, value and sense of self-worth. Recognition, nurture and belonging are craved for and the pregnancy is often the unintentional consequence.

Family settings, role models and influences within the young girls life's often do little or nothing to discourage the route to teen pregnancy.

What are the barriers and challenges to making progress in achieving positive change in communities that might lead to reductions in the levels of teenage pregnancy?

Both barriers and challenges lie in the engagement of teens into services and programmes and in our experience an approachable less formal method of engagement and consultation is more likely to produce desired results. As well as a role in educating teenagers about sexual behaviour and the impact of parenthood, a large part of any progress involves challenging cultures within communities and also delivering services and initiatives that cultivate aspirations.

What are your views on the current support services available to young parents / young mothers, e.g. range of services, focus of services and whether services are being delivered in the most appropriate settings?

A partnership involving Fife Gingerbread initiated a project in Levenmouth in 2009 providing support specifically to teen parents in the area. The project is underpinned by a steering group of local professionals and agencies who oversee and develop the project. The very fact that Fife Gingerbread is a voluntary organisation has been crucial to the success of the project and the levels of engagement have exceeded expectations so much so that the project has now been initiated in two other areas in Fife and evidence is showing the success of the Levenmouth Teen Parent Project is mirrored in these other areas. In past years teen parents have not featured high in the focus of local services although now seems to be changing with the introduction of initiatives such as the Family nurse partnership which is

prescriptive, costly and has a restricted access window. The Teen Parent Project prides itself on a model of delivery that is accessible, cost effective and extremely successful which has resulted in informed and responsible parents which in turn has increased the life chances of them and their children.

Are there specific initiatives that you would wish to highlight to the Health and Sport Committee that you consider indicate good practice with regard to reducing teenage pregnancy rates in Scotland, either in the public sector, voluntary sector or in partnership?

As part of this response Fife Gingerbread obtained the views of teenage parents and although they could not pin point once service, they did make it clear that the impact of educational settings and the role of teachers played a substantial part of raising aspirations in young people which in schools where this was successful in turn led to a reduction in teen pregnancies. The teens did acknowledge that in some cases teens from all areas and backgrounds did fall pregnant but these cases were in the minority.

Are there specific approaches to reducing teenage pregnancy that are not currently getting sufficient attention in order to affect positive change for children and young people?

A key part of any initiative to look at reducing teen pregnancies should look at raising ambitions and aspirations in young people and increasing opportunities for other life choices. Teens respond well to being recognised as individuals this often leads to a very different outlook.

Do you have any comments on any other aspect of teenage pregnancy policy or examples of good practice that you wish to raise with the Committee?

There has been a shift in the age that children at school receive sex education which has moved to meet the increase in younger children becoming sexually active. Education is key, not only in providing sex education but also in challenging attitudes of young people who view becoming a parent as their only option. Peer support has also played a key part in the reduction of teen pregnancies in some areas in Fife. In Levenmouth in particular the Teen parent project has raised confidence and self- esteem in young parents to enable them to share their experiences and share experiences with other teens.

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