

What to Expect When You're Expecting (to Give)

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Pregnant adolescents find themselves in one of the most vulnerable and unique groups of pregnant women in all major areas. This includes their social environment as well as their psychological and physical development. It should be of no surprise that the average childbirth education class does not fully pertain to teenage mothers and their circumstances. What happens, then, is that the average (and more readily available) childbirth education class does nothing for adolescents who find themselves pregnant. A whole population is essentially being ignored.

This is a population that is underserved or not served the right way in many aspects, especially in terms of adolescent pregnancy. Barbara May, of the Mental Health Association (MHA) of Frederick, says “as the director of family support services, one of the programs I oversee is the Healthy Families Program... A lot of the families that are participants in that program are teenagers... Young families, young moms, young dads, and they fall right into that population.”

When the most vulnerable group of pregnant women are ignored and not provided with proper childbirth education, the risks of poverty, illness, and even death of the mother and/or infant is significantly higher than that of other expecting mothers.

Thankfully, these risks are potentially much lower in Frederick, and largely due to a program designed specifically for adolescent and first-time expecting mothers. The MHA of Frederick holds a monthly course specifically designed for this population.

May states “helping educate them [adolescents] on what to expect in pregnancy, labor, delivery, and postpartum helps prepare them in a way that they wouldn't be otherwise. I think that it provides better outcomes for the baby, the mom and the family...”

MHA of Frederick launched their Adolescent Childbirth Education Program in 2016 and continues to hold classes once a month for young and expecting first-time mothers. “It started out thanks to a grant from United Way [of Frederick County]”, says May, “they got us started and off the ground, and then we were able to continue it”.

United Way of Frederick County provided the MHA of Frederick a one-time grant of \$1,120 in 2016 to launch this program. May explains “this was really a strategic grant because the outcomes were related to health, so that was what our focus was going to be”. What she means is that this money was put directly towards a program that aligned with United Way's *Community Impact Strategy*- focusing on the convergence of Health, Education, and financial Stability in Frederick County.

Additionally, May stresses that “by providing these educational classes to younger pregnant folks, the amount of money that is being saved for the hospitals and for the community is huge”.

The average cost to an employer for a healthy full-term baby is about \$2,900-\$3,000, whereas a premature or unhealthy delivery cost them about \$42,000. May continues that “by educating pregnant moms and dads on healthy labor and delivery... it could potentially be saving not only lives, but also saving so much money for the community and the hospitals”.

This program is critical to the Frederick Community in many ways. May thanks United Way of Frederick County for this as “if it wasn’t for United Way, this program really wouldn’t have ever gotten off the ground.”

This is not the only grant that the MHA has received from United Way over the years, as they have been the recipients of Live United, Community Impact Partner, and Laughlin Family Foundation Grants from United Way. All of these have funded numerous critical programs offered by the MHA. They also house 2-1-1, a 24 hour call center for people in need of support, resources, and assistance in crisis situations.

United Way of Frederick County is confident that supporting services such as the MHA holds a lasting impact on the Frederick Community. Just look at the grant for the Childbirth Education Class- it initially funded a program that is still being held today.

None of this is remotely possible without the kind donations and support given to United Way of Frederick County. Just as their funds went straight into the Frederick Community through giving to the MHA, each donor of United Way can be confident that funds of their own would be going straight into the Frederick Community as well. When you give to United Way, you are saving more than money for the community- you are potentially saving lives.