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Missouri Volunteer Resource Mothers

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Missouri Volunteer Resource Mothers (MVRM) is a mentoring program for pregnant and parenting teens that was piloted, field tested and evaluated by MU Extension in three counties in Missouri from 1994 to 1997. It has since been implemented in numerous communities in Missouri, as well as nationally.

Q What are the goals of MVRM?

A The goals of the pilot project were to: (1) improve the health of the teen mother and her infant, (2) reduce child abuse potential, (3) reduce parenting stress, and (4) support positive decision-making. Communities are encouraged to set specific goals that relate to local needs, including increasing school completion, reducing low-birth-weight babies, reducing smoking and substance abuse, and supporting adolescent fathers.

Q How does MVRM operate?

A Pregnant teens are matched with trained volunteer mentors who agree to spend a specified amount of time each week providing information, support and friendship until the baby is at least



one year old. Teens are referred to the program by various organizations and service providers in the community. Once referred to MVRM, teens receive a home visit by a MVRM staff member in order to assess their interest in the program and their specific needs. Potential mentors are recruited by word of mouth and local media. Teens and mentors are interviewed separately and then matched — based on their interests, preferences, lifestyles and schedules.

Q What kinds of activities do the teens and mentors do together?

A Teens and mentors plan their own activities based on each individual situ-

ation. They may attend parenting classes, access community services, prepare for childbirth, participate in recreational activities, etc. In addition, the pairs are invited to periodic group meetings for all MVRM participants. The group meetings are planned to provide educational information and social support through group bonding and individual friendships among teens and among mentors.

Q How large are MVRM programs?

A The number of teens served in an MVRM program depends on many factors, including the size of the community, the resources available to support the project and the level of local interest. The pilot project served 96 teens over a three-year period. Beginning MVRM projects are encouraged to start with a manageable number of pairs, often as small as five or six.

Q What were the evaluation results from the pilot project?

A Compared to a matched group of teens who did not receive mentoring,

the MVRM teens showed: (a) significantly reduced child abuse potential, (b) significantly reduced feelings of distress and social isolation, (c) fewer hospital visits for their infants, (d) more commitment to breast feeding, and (e) fewer repeat pregnancies.

Q Where can I get help and information about starting a MVRM program?

A Human Development and Family Studies Extension at the University of Missouri-Columbia can provide consultation and technical assistance to beginning MVRM programs. In addition, an MVRM training manual, video and evaluation report are available for purchase, using the order form on the back page of this publication. Additional information is available from the Center on Adolescent Sexuality, Pregnancy and Parenting at (573) 882-6687.

Visit our MVRM web site at:
<http://www.outreach.missouri.edu/hdfs/mvr.htm>

Q How does a community begin to establish an MVRM program?

A The following Community Assessment Form was developed from experience with the pilot project, as well as from lessons learned from helping numerous communities establish MVRM programs. It is an example of the kind of assistance that is available from the Center on Adolescent Sexuality, Pregnancy and Parenting.

Quotes from mentors describing some of the services they provide

"After taking her to her WIC appointment, I took [participant] to the Family Services office so that she could obtain written information about her parental rights. The regional director ended up

talking with her and answering her questions for about an hour. She feels more comfortable now with the issues of child support, child custody and establishing paternity."

"We talked about [participant's] relationship with her boyfriend as we shopped at the mall for toys for the baby. We talked about developmentally stimulating toys. She wore her baby in a 'snuggli' while we shopped, and we talked about the positive effects of closeness between mother and baby. We planned to begin driving lessons when the weather is better so she can obtain her driver's license."

"[Participant] and her boyfriend moved into a new apartment. While I helped her move, we talked about the importance of staying on top of financial obligations. Our discussions went well, and I offered to help them organize a budget. We also discussed some job possibilities and did some job interview role playing."

"When I reached [participant] today she was very upset. She and her room-

mate have not been getting along. We spent all day together, talking about those problems, family problems, her future educational and career desires, and social services available to her. I took her to look at two different subsidized housing complexes and we picked up an application at one of them."

"During this visit we went to the Division of Family Services to get some public assistance for [participant] and the baby. We then went to her high school to pick up her homework, and I praised her for her efforts to stay in school and keep up with her educational goals. Late that evening she called and said she did not have any formula for the baby. I went to the store with her and purchased baby formula. We talked about the importance of planning ahead so she wouldn't run out of supplies for the baby."

"Today [participant] had her baby. I visited her in the morning and we talked about how her labor was progressing. I came back in the afternoon just after the baby was born. We talked about her delivery, complications and what she had been told to do for follow-up care."



She was lonely, tired and in pain. I was glad I could be there for her.”



“[Participant] and I went shopping and took food for dinner to the Shelter for abused women. She and I then went

over *A Child is Born*, a great book although she thinks some of it (i.e., birth photos) is ‘gross.’ She discussed employment opportunities with my husband. He helped her fill out her application and set up an interview time with her.”



“[Participant] and I attended our weekly Lamaze class together. We went out for dessert afterwards and discussed what she was going to do after the baby is born and once she graduates from high school. She really wants to attend college.”

Community Assessment Form

Should we start a Missouri Volunteer Resource Mothers Program for pregnant/parenting adolescents?

Here is a series of questions to consider when thinking about starting a mentoring program for pregnant/parenting adolescents in your community. *This is only an example and should be adapted to your local needs and characteristics.*

I. Basic Decisions

- A. Goals? Objectives?
- B. Who? What? Where? When? Why? How? How Many?
- C. Philosophy concerning adoption? abortion? adolescent fathers?

II. Community Reaction

- A. Do you have evidence that there will be
 - 1. support?
 - 2. ambivalence?
 - 3. opposition?
- B. From whom?

III. Community Need

- A. What are your county or regional rates concerning the following
 - 1. adolescent pregnancy?
 - 2. low birth weight babies?
 - 3. child abuse?
 - 4. school completion?
 - 5. welfare?

IV. Project Administration

- A. Staffing
- B. Recruitment of adolescents/mentors
- C. Retention of adolescents/mentors
- D. Mentor training
- E. Evaluation
 - 1. process
 - 2. outcome
- F. Sustainability

V. Curriculum/Intervention

- A. Use established curriculum?
- B. Develop your own curriculum?

VI. Resources Available

- A. Projected costs
- B. Community assets
- C. Externally or internally funded?

Quotes from the participants describing how they feel about their mentors

"She is an understanding person."

"We are just a really great match."

"When I need something she is always there for me. She is like a sister to me. I wish I had her as a sister."

"She is nice, treats me good, and I feel I can trust her."

"She's nice and fun to be with."

"I can talk to her any time I need to."

"She is someone I can talk to and get comfort from and have fun with."

"I can talk to her and she understands me."

"She listens to me no matter what and accepts me as I am."

"She is an easy person to talk to."

Testimonial letters from mentors

"What an incredible experience the last 3 years has been! I have learned so much about the issue of teen pregnancy, about the process of coordinating a project like this, about mentoring, and about myself. It has been great to watch the young moms endure pregnancy and blossom into responsible, caring mothers. I've really enjoyed developing a relationship with both the young moms and the mentors. I'll take away from this experience memories and knowledge that will stay with me forever."

"Resource Mothers has been one of the most rewarding volunteer programs

I have ever been involved in. It has been a fun, educational, challenging and rewarding experience over the two years I've been a mentor with the program. One of the most important things for me has been the wonderful (I feel lifelong) friendship I have developed with my mentee. It has been very fulfilling for me to watch her development from a young, pretty, scared, pregnant teen to a young mother, very dedicated and knowledgeable. She has done what she had to do through some pretty difficult situations. She has just finished her sophomore year at college and wants to do something in special education. Being a mother, a student and a part-time worker is very challenging but she is determined in her goals. I have seen growth in independence and good decision making in the past two years. Susie is also very interested in being a very good mother and really knows a lot about how she wants to raise Ruth. And Ruth is a very happy, bright, engaging 2-year-old. Quite a talker, too. We have learned from each other (Susie and I) and maybe that's a little bit of what mentoring is all about."

"Resource Mothers has been very rewarding, as a project, for me and I am hopeful it was rewarding for Amanda and Tiffany. Tiffany was certainly worth our 'wait' and a real joy to behold. It was joy to me to see Amanda 'grow,' acquire her own car and make advancements in her job over several months, besides seeing her mother instincts kick in.

We have gotten out of touch for the past few months, as both of us lead busy lives and I have started my own business which has pushed (pulled) my



resources elsewhere. But I believe both Amanda and I have grown from the experience and we will keep in touch probably 'forever.'"

"Thank you for a positive life experience. It has meant a great deal to me to be involved with the Resource Mothers Project. My mentee and I shared a rather unusual perspective as we are also mother and daughter. We have grown closer because of our involvement with the project. I have gained a new respect for my daughter as a woman, mother and, no less importantly, as a daughter. I have watched her grow in ways that would not have been possible without this experience. I am grateful for her pregnancy, her daughter and for the opportunity to participate in the project with her.

I have observed a similar strength of spirit in all the girls and mentors who participated. Your enthusiastic leadership and consistent support of the girls and mentors, your dedication to the project, and your willingness to carry the project to others in the state, speak



volumes for your professionalism and your caring manner. Your ability to remain involved with the girls and mentors, yet keep your distance and allow the pairs to grow together must not have always been easy. I am sure there were time when, having the background of knowledge that you do, you felt it would have been easier to just step in and take charge. It is not always easy to 'detach with love' but you carried it off well. What you have begun will continue, thanks not only to your ability to make others see its importance, but also to the fact that this project meets a need — pairing young mothers with women who can come together with them and accept them as intelligent, important individuals.

Not to forget the meetings/parties/activities — I know the amount of work that goes into planning. It always paid off beautifully! You brought us all together, taught us something and showed us a good time — what more could anyone ask for? Thanks!"



"I have learned so much about myself from the project. I have fallen in love with commitment between mentor and mom. I wasn't aware of what I had to offer and hadn't really noticed how far I'd come in life's challenges. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to be part of such a caring and beneficial project. The project not only helps the mom but the mentor as well."



"Resource Mothers has given back to me much more than I have given. Being involved in the life of my teen and her child has provided a special opportunity for developing relationships and friendships. It's been rewarding to see my mentee mature, both as a person and as a mother.

It has been rewarding to see the support and encouragement given to these young moms. So different than 30 years ago!

Thank you for the opportunity to be involved."



"I always knew the need was there for caring people. I searched for a while to find a project that I thought really needed me, one that I could give something of myself to. I found that in Resource Mothers. My heart breaks each time I think of the struggles that these young ladies have had to overcome. Many of them have reached their goals and for that we should be proud! Without Resource Mothers they may not have. Never again will I think that my life is so terrible — my struggles are nothing. It makes me have a warm feeling to know that the babies born to young women of Resource Mothers might "make it" because of caring mentors! How wonderful! Hopefully friendships have forged between mentors and mentees that will last a lifetime and help these young ladies thru their journey of life."

Testimonial letters from teens

"I joined the Resource Mothers program about two ago when I was pregnant. When I got pregnant, I was very

scared and confused. I had no idea now I was gonna make it and how I was gonna get through. When I first joined the program I was optimistic, but once I went to the first meeting and got to know my mentor, I was really surprised. I really thought the program was neat and I couldn't believe how much I related to the other girls in the program. It was also unbelievable how much I related to my mentor and how much she understood, and how she had gone through so much of the same when she was my age. Well, after I got to know more about the program and my mentor, the more excited I got. I looked forward to going to the monthly meetings. Seeing and being around girls in the same situation gave me hope. It

showed me that if they could make it, then I could too. It also gave me hope when I was around so many people that wanted to help me in anyway they could. I have become very close to my mentor, she is like a best friend to me. I want you to know that this program really helped me make it through. Without all of you, I couldn't have done it and I wouldn't have had my own apartment. I thank you all for all your help, love, strength, and most of all, thank you for giving me the opportunity to become a stronger, better person."



"When I first started, I was very pregnant and had no idea of what was going to happen next. I spoke to you at the

baby fair in 1994. You talked to me — even asked me about my personal life. Then I received the best thing that could even happen to me — support! I received a mentor. With the help of a mentor I made it through the hardest moments in my life. I overcame the fear, regret, sadness and the rest of the thousand and one emotions that hit you like a brick during and after pregnancy. With the help of a mentor, I understood that the most important thing in my life would always be my children. The only way to properly care for them would be to make sure I took the time to take care of myself physically and emotionally, and group meetings help me do that."



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