

Young parent opportunities program underway

New program offers more than academics

by Jennifer Soper
News Editor

Spending an hour at the Young Parent Opportunities Program (YPOP) can be likened to being surrounded by a sea of support. Not only do the parents involved have the help of the program staff, they have one another.

The program, which is located in the Linsley House on the CCC campus, began full operations on Jan. 2. There are presently 15 young women enrolled and day care services are being provided for 12 infants and toddlers.

"I was a teen parent so I've always had a special interest in helping people be successful in their education and their parenting," explained Alternative Programs Department Chair and YPOP coordinator Rene' Rathburn. "It's really delightful to see that they have an avenue to be successful."

YPOP began with a grant from Great Start Funds. It is also funded through Adult and Family Services (AFS) Welfare Reform monies, CCC, and Employment Training and Business Services revenue.

The program was formed because of a lack of services for teen parents in Clackamas County, said Rathburn. It is the only program in the county that offers teen parents an opportunity to gain high school completion credits or their general equivalency diploma (GED), child care, transportation to and from school for both the parent and child(ren), pre-employment training, and parenting/life skills classes.

Barbara McDaniel, a 17 year old mother of two, hadn't been in school for three years. She was



Young moms are finding a place to learn, share common concerns, and spend time with their toddlers through the college's new Young Parent Opportunity Program. From left are participants Shari Thompson, Wendy Butler, Rae Pudwill, Kim Burkenbine and Michele Edwards.

spending her days with her three year old daughter Crystal and eight month old daughter Patricia. She learned of the program through her AFS case worker.

"I think it is a good program," began McDaniel. "I don't know if I would have gone back to school without it."

"I couldn't afford the day care if it weren't for the program," continued McDaniel.

McDaniel is one of two parents enrolled in YPOP who just passed the first of five tests needed for her GED.

Students attend the program Monday through Thursday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. The majority of them are single parents and live on their own. They are between 15 and 19 years old.

The program is designed for up to 20 teen parents and will be housed in the new Family Resource Center. Half of those involved with the program are receiving monthly cash grants from AFS.

The program has a full time case manager and counselor provided through the Mt. Hood Council of Camp Fire in addition to two full time instructors.

Toni Krummenacker is responsible for screening applicants for the program.

"There are an awful lot of people who need this service," Krummenacker said. "We could double this easily."

One point she made was all the young women are in the program because they chose to be.

"We can't force them to come here," said Krummenacker. "They have to want to."

There is a waiting list for those who want to be in the program.

"This is not a program for someone who needs to just work on one GED test," said Rathburn. "This is for those people who need the greatest number of services we offer."

Eighteen year old Lisa Long has a four month old son, Nicholis. She is in the program to earn high school completion credits.

"The program is fun. It makes me feel good to know that I can go back and get my high school diploma without wondering where Nicholis is going to be or if my day care is going to be reliable," said Long.

The academic program is designed as individual instruction.

"It's an alternative approach to education," explained Instructor Linda Durham.

"It's really rewarding to see these girls come in here and then they go and pass a test and they're jazzed!" said Durham. "It's like it turns on a light they hadn't expected of themselves before."

Instructor Mike Brady views the support the girls receive from one another as vital in their learning process.

"The most important thing that is happening is these young women are networking with each other in forming social relationships," said Brady.

Lorraine McGee, who is an 18 year old single parent, is involved with YPOP to get her GED. Her two year old son Marcus attends the day care center while she is in classes.

"It's nice to have friends who understand what you're going



Rae Pudwill and son Bobby take a moment to relax during a recent day's events in the Young Parent Opportunity Program.

through," said McGee. "Sometimes you just want to hear what they have to say."

McGee said the young women are like a support group to one another because the friends they had before becoming parents don't understand issues like baby sitters and transportation problems.

Kimberly Burkenbine is an 18 year old single parent to 13 month old Lannicca. She is planning on getting her GED and hopes the pre-employment training offered through the program will help her decide what kind of job she will look for in the future.

"I'm thinking about college; I'm not sure though," she said. "I might wait a couple of years until my daughter is in school."

"Everyday I learn a little bit," Burkenbine explained. "Today I passed one of my GED tests. I only have four more to go!"

Durham is not surprised by the successes of her students.

"I really see them as serious students. They are working hard," said Durham.

"I think that they're looking more into the future. They see they have this child," continued Durham. "I see them really paying more attention to how they live."

Part of the day for YPOP includes group discussions. Issues such as health care, case workers and day care are mentioned.

"We're not just cramming the

academics," said Durham. "We offer parenting and life skills, too."

All of the students involved seem to echo their support of the program.

"I feel lucky I got into it. There are a lot of people waiting," said McDaniel.

"My daughter loves it," McDaniel continued. "It's like school to her here. They are teaching her the a-b-c's."

"They try to do the best they can on taking care of our problems," she said.

"As soon as I'm done here I am going to go to school and try to be a medical assistant," McDaniel said.

Others have more short term hopes.

"I can't wait until he gets old enough to walk and talk and make his own decisions like 'yes' and 'no,'" said Long of her son.

McGee is waiting for her son to be talking more, too.

"There's one thing I can't wait to hear him say: I love you," McGee said.

This is one program many people hope will not see the impact of Ballot Measure 5. College President John Keyser said the program is one of the new program initiatives the colleges hopes to continue.

"It's a really good school," said Burkenbine. "I hope it makes it."

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