

METROPOLITAN

BUF tackles rise in teen pregnancies

BY Lanita Duke

GRASSROOT NEWS, N.W.—The women's section of the Black United Front has launched a Teenage Health Care project which is aimed at pregnant and sexually active teenagers, both male and female.

According to Linda Johnson, Western Regional Coordinator for BUF, every chapter of the national Front will institute similar projects throughout the country. "We are now working to put meat on the bones of our project by seeking volunteers to assist in counseling, health care and nutrition."

The project will identify agencies in Portland, refer the teenager to the appropriate agency and provide a direct follow through. "It is important to make sure the link on the chain is not broken," Johnson added.

The birthrate for unwed white teenagers has risen by 45 percent while the birthrate for unwed Black teens fell 3.5 percent. Although they fell, Black teen birthrates are still disproportionately high.

One out of every four Black babies born is born to a teenaged mother. More than half are under 15. It is this national and local reality which led to the creation of BUF's project.

Johnson said she wants to ensure the race has healthy babies for the

future. But teenage mothers are giving birth to less healthy babies than their older counterparts.

Barbara Taylor, Multnomah County Health Educator, said the pregnant, Black teenage population suffers physical and social risks. "They have low birth rates, complicated labor and a higher rate of miscarriage. The mother may also be involved with cigarettes, alcohol or drugs."

Because of the pressure of increased responsibility, financial setbacks and educational interruption, teenage mothers may not have the where-with-all to raise their babies without support.

"Their special social needs and financial pressures may make a teenage parent more susceptible to child abuse because of the lack of parenting skills," Taylor added.

She sees BUF's teenage health project as extending a helping hand to those who need it most—our youth. Earnestina Celestine, a member of the project, said, "We cannot give our teenagers birth control pills and expect that to be a solution. That is too much responsibility for a teenager to have. How can we expect them to take a pill every day when we have a hard enough time getting them to go to school every day? This project will let our youth know that we care and we are here to help."



(l-r) Jean Vessup, Linda Johnson, Venita Merrick and Ernestine Celestine discuss the launching of the Black United Front education and referral project to help teenagers.

(Photo: Richard J. Brown)

on Black males. "We recognize the male's responsibility in teenaged pregnancy. If I find a young man with idle time, my first question would be, 'How many babies do you have?' This way the male will see that having babies just to have them is not good for the mother, him, that child or our community."

The project will also distribute a questionnaire to determine what teenagers are thinking and what services they might need. "We will go

to the churches, the pool halls and the schools to let our youth know that we are here for them."

Celestine said, "We are getting back to helping each other and bringing our community together as a family." Johnson is seeking volunteers and would like parents with teenagers in their households to participate. She can be contacted at the Urban League Youth Service Center at 288-6708. "Our future depends on us."

Black women gather for support building

by Lanita Duke

GRASSROOT NEWS, N.W.—The second annual Black Women's Gathering will occur Saturday, May 12th at the Matt Dishman Community Center, from noon until 5:00.

But just what is the Black Women's Gathering? Committee member Avel Mayfield answered, "It is a time and place to network and build support structures for Black women in Portland. Providing support for each other is important with all the pressure on us as women and on our community."

Mayfield said she viewed this support-building network as a time for healing and relaxing. This is the second annual gathering and last year, Matt Dishman overflowed with information, entertainment and food. This year, Mayfield and the committee expect information to be just as vital and at least 500 sisters, young and old, to participate.

"This event will destroy the myth that Black women cannot work together. We can and will continue to do so."

The event will celebrate "Our being, spirit and survival" organizers said. Free male babysitting will be provided and entertainment will include the million-dollar Grandmother and performances by Sojourner Truth Theatre and female members of the Jazzmin Community Marching Band.

The unique aspect of the Black Women's Gathering is the open mike. "It provides an opportunity for new ideas, businesses and women in the community to introduce themselves. We think of it as the perfect avenue for networking," Mayfield stated.

The Black Women's Gathering is free and the committee encourages women to bring a dish. The theme



AVEL MAYFIELD

for this year's gathering is summed up in the words, spirit and meanings of a 1980 poem by James Siler:

*The first line is your soul
And your beauty
Your compassion
Your warmth
Your love
Your endurance
Your fortitude
Your pride
You*

*Mother of my people
Daughter of my tribe
My divine sister
Ten thousand African queens
Black women I love you*



Jack Burns, left, and Dave Johnson, behind, put extra effort on communication as they train Mien and Hmong refugees in the Portland area for light industrial manufacturing jobs through a special Portland Community College class.

Refugees learn skills

An innovative program to train Mien and Hmong refugees in Portland area for light industrial manufacturing jobs may put 60 people into jobs who could not otherwise manage the work.

The project at Portland Community College, funded by a \$90,000 state grant, was written specifically to prepare people for jobs.

"We think the project is the first of its kind," said Merrily Osborn, project director.

A refugee placed into the program will spend eight hours a day for eight weeks to learn the required skills. Two of those hours are spent in an English class and the remaining six are practicum hours where they learn about the tools and simulate an assembly line approach.

The magic of the program, according to Osborn, rests with the instructors. "Both instructors have put in a lot of time and effort to make the training relevant," she explained.

The English classes, for instance, use a curriculum to teach the people from the Highland/Lao areas how to enunciate clearly when applying for a job. Ann Blackham works hard to get every student familiar with job related English.

At the same time, a job developer

is working with the students to start preparation for an actual job search. The first five to complete the program now have the individual assistance of job developers for placement purposes.

Back in the assembly area of the project, located at the college's Stadium Center, instructor Jack Burns and his assistant, Dave Johnson, put extra emphasis on Communication. They start with explaining the construction of the product, then draw it as a class.

Students learn about shapes as they work through an assembly line production of planter boxes. At the same time, they learn how to work with sheet metal, wood, plastic and formica.

In addition to the assembly line production, Burns took the class to the college's Southeast Center for a week of work and they constructed some cabinetry.

When a student completes the program, PCC assembles a folder of information. It includes polaroid shots of the student at various machines, a letter explaining the tools used and skills learned, and a certificate of completion.

Local 16 of Sheetmetal Workers provided the work benches and all the sheet metal equipment to help the students learn a trade.



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