



Teen pregnancy film carries strong message

Goal is to get people to talk openly about safe sex, values

By **CRYSTAL LEE**

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Dalila Ochoa, 16, addresses the Woodland City Council, speaking of concerns about teen pregnancy as Alphonso Ramirez, 16, and Kimberly Balog, Teen Pregnancy supervisor look on. (Deo Ferrer/ Democrat)

"Hear the truth, speak the truth and see the truth."

That's the message from a group of Woodland youth who made a documentary about teen pregnancy that was released Wednesday in Yolo County and eventually be used as an educational tool in the community.

The 20-minute film, "Open Your Eyes: Teen Pregnancy," is a product of hours of collaborative research on teen pregnancy in the local community and its impact on the children, their young mothers and the mothers' parents.

The goal is not to bombard the viewer with statistics or promote birth control or abstinence, but to encourage parents to talk openly with their teens about safe sex and their personal values, said Reyna Madueno, program manager for the school district's grant-funded Teen Pregnancy Prevention Campaign.

Madueno, whose program is one of the lead agencies in the documentary project, said the young filmmakers interviewed local teen mothers, parents, teachers, church leaders and elected officials for their individual takes on teen pregnancy.

The film primarily targets Latino families, where the majority of teen pregnancies in Yolo County occur, Madueno said.

In 2007, there were 214 babies born in Yolo County to teen mothers, 75 percent of whom were Latina, Madueno said.

In California, the likelihood of unplanned pregnancies among women between the ages of 15 to 19 was twice that of women age 35 and older, according to a 2002 report by the California Department of Health Services.

The same report stated that women with a low sense

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of control over their lives, particularly in adolescence, were at a higher risk of having unwanted pregnancies.

Communication and education on the topic can help. By the time the project wrapped up, Madueno said, the teen filmmakers found that many of the community's youth are willing to talk to their parents about sex and pregnancy, if their parents are also open to communication.

"We understand that the problem starts at home, but the solution is also at home," Madueno said. "They're just asking the community to come together by practicing their morals and their values and having more communication with their youth."

The project involves teens from the school district's Teen Pregnancy Prevention Campaign as well as the nonprofit Woodland Youth Council. The project was headed by the UC Davis School of Education, funded by Sierra Health Foundation.

UC Davis staff provided the creative and technical support to bring the documentary to reality, said Claudia Morain, UC Davis spokeswoman. UC Davis and Sierra Health Foundation have collaborated on three similar documentary projects around the region and all four documentaries were recently screened in Sacramento.

The Woodland agencies plan to show the documentary at several future private screenings -- for example, at parent-teacher conferences or in classrooms -- with the long-range goal of lowering teen pregnancy rates in Yolo County, said Izabelle Ponce, youth engagement leader with the Woodland Youth Council.

"The goal of the documentary is to start the conversation," Ponce said. "Whether the moral at home is abstinence or if it's going to be whether

you're going to practice safe sex ... it's the parents' ultimate responsibility."

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