

Spotlight on the Safety Net

A Community Collaboration
Kimberly Alexander-Bratcher, MPH

Alamance County Health Department

The Alamance County Health Department is an accredited local health department that is implementing best practices and providing innovative programs to women across the reproductive health continuum. The leadership and staff of the department feel that emphasizing programs designed to provide services and support to women from adolescence through the reproductive years are among the organization's strengths. This *Spotlight on the Safety Net* describes the Alamance Teen Outreach Program (TOP), the Targeted Infant Mortality Reduction Grant (TIMR), and the women's health, mental health, and maternity services that are provided in the department.

The Alamance County Health Department has a unique partnership with the Alamance-Burlington School System and the Alamance County Juvenile Crime Prevention Council that supports adolescent health through implementation of the Teen Outreach Program. The Teen Outreach Program is a developmental intervention that attempts to help adolescents understand and evaluate their life options and helps them to develop a positive self-image, effective life management skills, and achievable goals, all of which are important in addressing preconceptional health issues among adolescent girls. The program is based on the notion that a heightened awareness of their family planning and reproductive options, increased knowledge about those options, and enhanced and diverse experiences with various life options will lead to a more positive outcomes including reducing unplanned teen pregnancy. The program is offered to high risk students in middle schools in the county. According to the *Alamance County Health Assessment 2007*,^a the county averaged one teenage pregnancy per day in 2006. From the inception of the TOP program in 2003 to October 2007, less than 2% of participants have a reported pregnancy.^b Since its inception in 2003, TOP has served 1,683 diverse participants (40% white, 30% African American, 21% Latino, 6% multiracial, 3% other; 50% male and 50% female). TOP has been recognized both locally and with the GlaxoSmithKline Child Health Recognition Award.

In 2007, the Alamance County Health Department was awarded \$147,000 from the North Carolina Division of Public Health to carry out infant mortality reduction activities. Using the Targeted Infant Mortality Reduction Grant funds, the health department created the **Health Education for You, Ladies** program (HEY Ladies). HEY Ladies addresses health behaviors prior to pregnancy by providing one-on-one health education through motivational interviewing. Motivational interviewing is a client-centered method for enhancing intrinsic motivation for change among clients. This approach recognizes that change must come from the client, not the counselor, and explores reasons for the behavior, desire for change, level of confidence for change, and resolution of ambivalence toward the behavior. In the program's first two years, over 900 sessions have focused on nutrition, physical activity, smoking cessation, multivitamin use, contraception, and pregnancy planning. The health educator provides health behavior counseling, educational materials, follow-up, and referrals, if appropriate.

The Women's Health Clinic in the Alamance County Health Department offers family planning services, pregnancy tests, physical exams, Pap tests, STI screening and treatment, IUD clinics, and colposcopy to clients. Nurses and clinicians work as a team to provide efficient and thorough reproductive health services including education and counseling. Multiple changes have been made in clinic systems to ensure timely access for patients requesting birth control. Appointments are made available the same day whenever possible. The overall goals are to reduce unplanned pregnancies and optimize health prior to both planned and unplanned pregnancies. The clinic coordinates with other providers in mental health, health education, and wrap-around care to provide clients with needed resources and services.

a Available at <http://www.alamance-nc.com/fileadmin/alamance/Health/docs/CommunityAssessment2007sm.pdf>

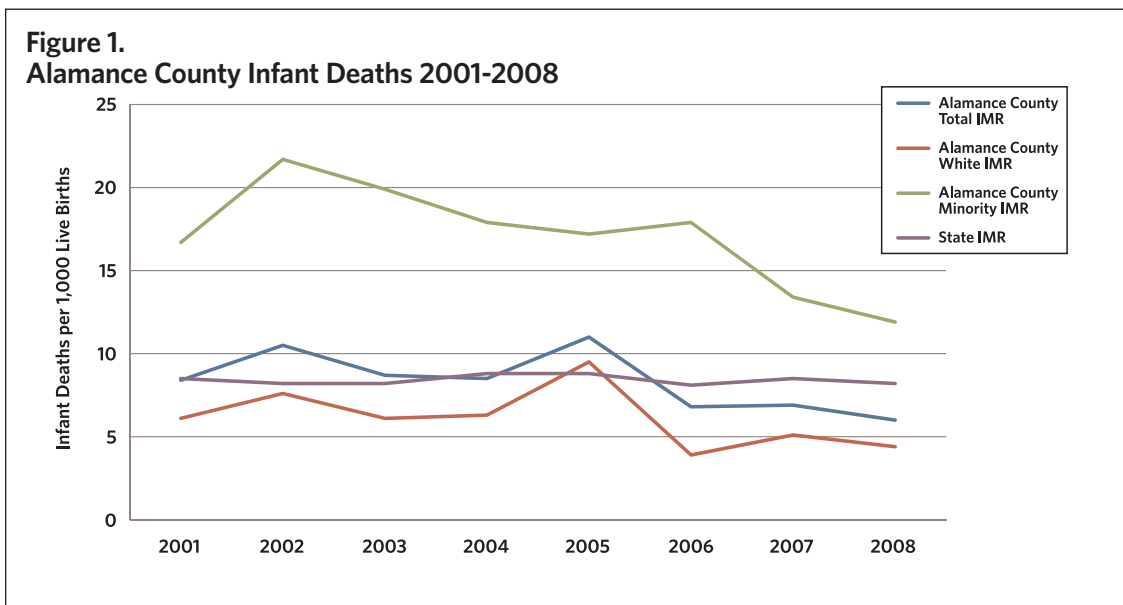
b Rosters for TOP participants were compared with school rosters to determine the percentage of participant pregnancies.

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The Mental Health Program at the Alamance County Health Department was established in April 2007 through a community health grant to address the comprehensive health needs of patients. In the department's maternity clinic, a licensed clinical social worker assists clients in dealing with stress and mental health issues during a particularly vulnerable period of time in a woman's life. The social worker serves clients who are working on both long- and short-term mental health concerns and has seen many clients successfully address these concerns, repair relationships, and heal from difficult life circumstances. An interpreter is available to assist the social worker with Spanish-speaking clients. Patient feedback reports that both English- and Spanish-speaking clients have a great sense of relief from discussing their mental health issues with their medical provider as well as the social worker who may give them an opportunity to explore issues in greater depth. The mental health program continues to strive towards the goal of "reattaching the head to the body" by providing positive collaboration between physical and mental health care. The program has established itself as an essential part of the overall clinical services provided through the health department.

The Alamance County Health Department continues to seek evidence-based approaches to improving the care and health of clients. One example is the newly implemented CenteringPregnancy prenatal care program. CenteringPregnancy alters prenatal care by bringing women out of individual exam rooms and into groups for their care. Women have their initial obstetrics visit in a traditional setting and then are invited to join 10-12 other women with similar due dates in meeting together regularly for prenatal care, health education, and social support. Women monitor their own health, review provider assessments of their progress, and are offered refreshments and time to socialize. Afterwards, participants gather for provider-facilitated group discussions regarding various prenatal topics. The Maternity Program offers a comprehensive package of services for pregnant women from conception to the immediate postpartum period. The all-female program staff includes two physicians, two certified nurse midwives, and one certified physician assistant.

From preconception through motherhood, the Alamance County Health Department is initiating innovative programs and using best practices to serve the mental and physical health care needs of women. As a result of these programs, the minority infant mortality rate for the county has fallen (see Figure 1). While the Alamance County Health Department cannot take all the credit, the organization is certainly making a great contribution to the women of Alamance County.



Joseph "Barry" Bass, MSW, health director; Kathleen Shapley-Quinn, MD, medical director; Amanda Marvin, MPH, health educator/program manager; Stacie Turpin Saunders, MPH, health educator/program coordinator; Eric Nickens, Jr, MA, CHES, health education supervisor; and Aimee Vandemark, LCSW, Alamance County Health Department; all contributed to this article.