



## **Links – North Shore Youth Health Service The National Day to Prevent Teen Pregnancy is May 4**

The United States teen birth rate declined 6% in 2009 and is now at a record low, according to The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. Despite this progress, it is still the case that 3 in 10 girls get pregnant by age 20.

The National Campaign has organized National Teen Pregnancy Awareness Day to help teens think carefully about sex, relationships, contraception, the possibility of pregnancy, and the lifelong challenges of being a parent. On May 4, teens nationwide will be asked to visit [StayTeen.org](http://StayTeen.org) to participate in a number of online activities - including the popular National Day Quiz (appropriate for age 13+) - that delivers teen pregnancy prevention messages and challenges them to think carefully about what they might do "in the moment."

Links – North Shore Youth Health Service was founded in 1973 to address these “in the moment” issues - teen pregnancy and other reproductive health concerns. Its mission to empower young people to make informed, responsible decisions about their health, well-being, and sexuality continues today.

Access to reliable information about sexuality and sexual health is critical for adolescent girls. A sexually active teen who does not use contraception has a 90% chance of becoming pregnant within a year. Last year, 56% of the chlamydia cases and 41% of the gonorrhea cases in Illinois occurred in young women ages 15-24.

Links’ Clinic fills the need for confidential, affordable access to routine gynecological care, birth control, pregnancy testing, and testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) for youth ages 13-25. Links’ counselor is always available during the clinics to provide additional support related to unplanned pregnancy, a positive STI test, or relationship concerns.

The Women’s Clinic is offered Monday and Thursday evenings, plus one Saturday morning per month. Suzanne Hales, Clinic Supervisor for over 10 years, talked about the Female clinic, “In addition to our volunteer doctors and nurses, we have over thirty volunteers from the community who know how to relate to young people. Many of our younger clients come in a little scared. Our volunteers put them at ease, offer them non-judgmental support and educate them about STIs and birth control choices. Our motto is ‘Prevention Through Education’ so we always try to educate a little with every visit.”

Suzanne pointed to a note from one young woman, who recently wrote about her clinic experience. The client wrote, “Links has changed my life because it made me realize how important protection is and that it is so important to make smart choices in life. The counselors are so supportive and friendly here. I am so happy I found this place.”

Traditionally, Links' clients have been high school age women who prefer not to use their family health insurance because they want their use of reproductive healthcare services to remain confidential. For the last two years, Links has seen an increase of uninsured clients in the 19-25 age group. Most of these young women are working part-time or in entry-level jobs with no health insurance benefits. While Links charges nominal fees for medical care and birth control, no one is ever turned away due to an inability to pay. Without Links, these young women would be unable to get the gynecological care – and the access to birth control - they need.

While about 95% of Links' clients are female, the Clinic serves young men as well. The Male Clinic is offered the first and third Tuesday evening of each month. Suzanne explains, "We have two wonderful volunteer urologists who come in to see the young men. At our Male Clinic, we always talk about condoms as being an answer for both birth control and STI prevention. The use of condoms is so important, and they are available just about anywhere."

One couple, who has utilized the services of both the Female and Male Clinics, recently wrote, "We have been a couple for almost seven years and Links has helped us in so many ways. You are all so friendly and the confidentiality is greatly appreciated. The cost is very helpful too as we're both college students."

Teen pregnancy and unplanned pregnancy among young adults is at the root of a number of public health and social challenges. Links is pleased to support the National Day to Prevent Teen Pregnancy and will continue its work on the front lines of the effort to reduce unplanned pregnancy right here in our local community. Loren Hutter, MD, who has served as Links' Medical Director since 1995, adds, "Despite the progress that has been made in lowering the teen birth rate the past few years, we need to continue to help young people to postpone pregnancy until they are truly ready to be parents. I'm happy to be a part of the solution here at Links."

Last year, Links served 724 young people in its clinics and responded to 674 requests for information and referrals about sexuality issues. More information about Links and its Clinics is available at [www.linksyouth.org](http://www.linksyouth.org), or by calling 847.441.6191 ext. 1. More information about the National Day to Prevent Teen Pregnancy is available at [www.thenationalcampaign.org](http://www.thenationalcampaign.org).