

Zontians and PACE explore their service partner relationship

December 16, 2008

At our last speaker meeting, we were privileged to see first hand the fruits of our 2008 grant to PACE Center for girls. A packed room at Beachview Country Club learned and met the Executive Director, Debbie Webb, the teacher of the “Babies Can Wait” program, Carly Moorman, and Chelsea, a student who demonstrated and described how the program impacted her and her peers. The program is teaching the girls how NOT to get pregnant, and is part of the Spirited Girls initiative to build self-esteem and self image.

I had the opportunity to visit the school and observe the classroom delivery of the module, “Understanding Prenatal Drug Exposure curriculum. The course includes modules with prepackaged discussion and worksheets that stress the importance of sex education and pregnancy prevention. The girls, in addition to the classroom portion, have the opportunity to take a healthy baby home with them for the weekend, which is monitored by their teacher on an electronic monitor inside the baby. The girls in the classroom expressed some of their positive and negative experiences with their weekend guests after class. They are graded on the score they receive for their child care behaviors. There are 3 other babies, aside from the well baby; drug-addicted, SID abused, and alcohol withdrawal, who are wired differently, have tremors, and cry incessantly, etc .

Debbie Webb, Executive Director gave an overview of the history of PACE, as they are the middle of their third year of operation. PACE includes education and counseling in a non-residential setting. In remarking that PACE addresses, not only “schooling” but personal development she stated, “PACE offers an opportunity for the girls to heal emotionally. We stress social skills also that the girls can be productive and successful in the community.” When talking about inappropriate language and behavior, she said, “We counsel them to see that PACE is safe and then help them understand what drives their behavior. We become the girls’ family. We ask them ‘what are you going to do with your life?’ and then become their support system.

Carly Moorman, as teacher of the Spirited Girls program helps them find their voice. “The focus is on healthy decision-making and learning how to say ‘NO’ . “There is a computer chip in the baby that tells the times and dates when it cries and what response was made. If you don’t feed, burp, rock or change the diaper- and the percent of timely response falls below 40%, the babe shuts down”, Carly explained. Spirited Girls is all about being a PACE girl; focusing on sex education, choices in boys and men, taking care of yourself, honoring the female spirit, not abusing their bodies, and making good choices about who they associate with. In addition, to foster career goals, they practice interview skills, what to wear, how to write resumes, and they

bring in speakers to talk about career options. As Carly explained; "It's all about building self-esteem and self-confidence."

Chelsea loved the experience of taking care of the baby when she had it for the weekend, but learned that "I have a lot of things to do. I don't want to have a baby right now. I want to have a baby when I can give it my full attention. Carly noted that Chelsea will be finishing the program 6 months early in December and that PACE is planning to help her get enrolled at Edison State College.

PACE provides proper medical care, dentists, childcare, and eye exams, if there is no insurance available. When asked about by Zontians about their future needs in 2009, Debbie answered, We could use more babies, more educational materials for the 51 girls enrolled at the school. There is little public funding available for their health needs and the transportation costs. Also, "every month we have Level Ceremonies to celebrate the girls moving up to the next levels; orientation to PACE, self-issues, friends, family giving back to the community, and career orientation." They would like to give the girls a token gift or small reward at each level which becomes costly.

Zonta is presently in the last phase of allocating grant funds to our Grantees for 2009. PACE's outstanding and informative presentation made the Club aware of how much they had achieved in '08, and what expanded needs and goals they have for 2009. If you are interested in learning more about PACE and how you could help, please email; debbie.webb@pacecenter.org.

Submitted by Cyndy Lorry, Chair, PACE Center for Girls

