Workshop 4B
Engaging Teens in Your Community Healthy Marriage Project

Moderator: Janice King-Dunbar, MSW, PHR, Administrative Officer, ACF Region X, Seattle, WA

Presenters: Francesca Adler-Baeder, PhD, CFLE, Associate Professor and Extension Specialist Director, Auburn University, Auburn, AL
Charles Jackson, Community Public Relations Coordinator Center for Children, Youth and Families, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, Auburn, AL

Dr. Francesca Adler-Baeder, PhD, CFLE, provided background on the Alabama Community Healthy Marriage Initiative/Teen Advisory Board project. She likes the fact that AAMI links research to practice. Her research indicates that talking to teenagers about healthy relationships is important. Young people are more teachable and relationship models and habits acquired early in life are very likely to be carried forward. Child well-being is strongly linked to parenting practices, peer well-being, father involvement, and dating relationships. Some research indicates that healthy dating relationships can be a protective factor against a negative home environment. AAMI recommends working simultaneously with both the parents and the teen. Peer-to-peer learning helps others make good choices, improves self-esteem, improves self-efficacy, and increases the likelihood of higher education. The project also includes experiential learning, not just dyadic interaction with the teens. Research indicates that programs that emotionally engage teens increase the teens’ likelihood of memorization and skill acquisition.

Charles Jackson said teens are actively involved and help market the program. Engaging youth can help stop the pipeline of failed marital relationships, start better communication, and dispel myths and misunderstandings. Mr. Jackson showed a brief video, “Be Real TV,” that demonstrated negative behaviors among parents and children. The video conveyed how children model their parents’ behavior. Later in the workshop teens acted out real-life situations they face. During a spirited question and answer period, several youth asked probing, timely and relevant questions. Adults in the audience were supportive and encouraged the youth to continue to participate in similar programs. Strong opinions and passions were expressed but in a civil manner.