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TEENAGE PREGNANCY RATES CONTINUE TO FALL

Teenage pregnancy rates have fallen by over 25 percent in teenagers aged under 17 in Northern Ireland, since the publication of a Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety strategy into tackling the issue.

The strategy, and ongoing work to address teenage pregnancy, will be highlighted at a major conference today, organised by the DHSSPS. The conference entitled 'Teenage Pregnancy – Where are we now?', will include two keynote speakers from the United States, Professor Michael Resnick and Professor Linda H Bearinger, recognised experts in the field of teenage pregnancy and its prevention.

Dr Miriam McCarthy, Chair of the Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood Implementation Group said today: "In the past four years, teenage pregnancy rates have dropped considerably, with the most marked decrease occurring in the under-17 age group. The numbers of children born to teenagers in this age group fell from 222 in 2000 to 155 in 2004.

"I believe this decrease can be attributed to the excellent work of the health, education and voluntary sectors working together in the community to provide advice, services and support, to both young people and their parents.

"Today's conference provides the opportunity to explore current practice in dealing with teenage pregnancy and to demonstrate the good work which has already taken place. I am especially pleased to welcome renowned experts in

this area, Professor Michael Resnick and Professor Linda H Bearinger, from the United States, and to learn from their experiences.

“There is still a lot of work to be done to equip young people with the knowledge and skills to inform their decisions, and their choices in relationships. We have however seen huge progress, and the efforts of all those involved in implementing the Strategy must be applauded.”

NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. The conference, ‘Teenage Pregnancy – Where are we now?’ is being held in the Hilton Hotel, Templepatrick at 9.30am. Interviews will be available with Dr Miriam McCarthy, DHSSPS and the two guest speakers from the United States, Professor Michael Resnick and Professor Linda H Bearinger.
2. Michael Resnick PhD is Professor of Pediatrics and Public Health, and directs the Healthy Youth Development Research Centre at the University of Minnesota. The Centre conducts research and evaluation studies on best practices in pregnancy prevention and provides leadership training to health professionals specialising in health and prevention services to young people.
3. Linda H Bearinger, PhD, RN, FAAN, is a Professor in the University of Minnesota’s School of Nursing, and Director of the Centre of Adolescent Nursing with joint appointments in the Schools of Medicine and Public Health. She has worked in Adolescent health for over 30 years, in schools, clinics and public health settings.
4. The DHSSPS Report on Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood was published in 2000, followed by the issue of the Strategy and Action Plan to reduce teenage pregnancy in 2002.
5. Rates of teenage pregnancy in Northern Ireland are among the highest in Europe and most often occur in areas of social and economic deprivation.
6. The department’s strategy had a number of key aims, in particular, to reduce the number of unplanned births to teenage mothers and to provide support and care for teenage parents and their children.

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