

## Office of the Governor

PO BOX 004  
TRENTON, NJ 08625

### NEWS RELEASE

CONTACT: Jayne O'Connor  
609-777-2600  
Laurie Facciarossa @ DHS  
(609) 292-3703

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### **Governor Whitman Meets with Teen Mentors, Discusses Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention**

Governor Christie Whitman today applauded a group of 100 New Jersey teens for their work in mentoring younger teens at risk of becoming pregnant. The teen mentors gathered in Jamesburg for training and networking at a statewide youth forum sponsored by New Jersey's Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Initiative (APPI).

Governor Whitman launched the initiative last year, with nearly \$1 million in state grants, to help combat teen pregnancy in New Jersey. Administered through the New Jersey Department of Human Services, these grants are funding ten Youth-to-Youth projects, through which teens counsel their peers. They are also funding 11 Healthy Youth Development projects, through which adults serve as mentors to teens at risk of becoming pregnant.

"Talking more openly with our young people about the tough choices they make is exactly what we need to do," Gov. Whitman said. "We need to send the message that the best option for young people is abstinence. However, if teens are going to be sexually active, we have to encourage them to take responsibility and to take precautions against pregnancy and disease."

The teen mentors are recruited through their schools and are expected to serve as positive role models within their schools. Before being assigned to a student, each teen mentor is thoroughly screened and trained by his or her local APPI program.

Today's Youth Forum is the second statewide training session for the approximately 300 teen mentors in New Jersey. The forum's theme was "Rights, Respect, Responsibility ...Let's Talk." It addressed the need for better communication with teens about the risks and consequences of teen sex, and the responsibilities of sexually active teens. It also helped to educate the teen mentors on the public-health issues of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Human Services Commissioner Michele K. Guhl joined Governor Whitman in welcoming the participants and commending them for their efforts in helping to prevent teen pregnancy. "We all know that as teenagers we did not and do not always listen to parents, teachers or other adults. But we did listen to each other," said Commissioner Guhl. "The influence of friends is very powerful. You are the heart of this initiative."

The APPI Youth Forum is one of several events taking place statewide to mark Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Month in New Jersey.

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