

The Newsletter of Planned Parenthood of Northern New England
Serving Maine, New Hampshire & Vermont

PORTLAND IS TALKING AND SO IS THE NATION!

By Skeek Frazee,
communications director

Sexual activity in middle schools is a difficult and often emotional issue for many of us. While we know that young people are deluged with sexual images in movies, music, advertising, and online, our culture is still uncomfortable talking openly about sex. In October, the school committee in Portland, ME, took the issue head-on when it voted to make prescription contraceptives available to students whose parents have given them written permission to use services at the King Middle School health center, which has been providing a variety of services (including

treatment of sore throats, acne, and muscle strains, as well as testing and treatment of sexually transmitted infections, psychiatric evaluations, and follow-up) since 2003. This decision lit a fire storm of controversy — that spread far beyond the borders of Maine — and turned the national spotlight on statistics that show there is a growing number of teenage girls having intercourse at 14 or younger. While northern New England fares better than other parts of the country when it comes to rates of sexual activity and teen pregnancy, we know that more than 1 in 10 middle school students in our region are sexually active. Such statistics should serve as a wake-up call that the facts and the needs they imply cannot be ignored.

For the past several years, Portland has been a Real Life. Real Talk.[®] (RLRT) community — one of just three select pilot projects in the country. Along with a strong and active coalition of 26 other members, PPNNE is working to improve teen health by increasing open, honest, and balanced talk about sex, love, and relationships.

The Portland School Committee's vote highlights the reason this small Maine city was chosen for this national project — residents are engaged and willing to have the hard conversations, willing to be innovative, and willing to deal with conflicting views in the best interest of young people. From *Dr. Phil* to the *Today* show — and even conservative pundit Bill O'Reilly — there has never been more talk on this issue, as



extensive national media coverage and “teachable moment” opportunities have sparked talk within families everywhere.

Portland health professionals made a bold decision when faced with 17 middle school pregnancies over a four-year period. By seeking to expand health care options to these kids, they turned the focus on the health needs of a minority of teens, the information and communication resources sought by a majority of parents, and the education needed by all teens.

Community dialogue about teenage sexual activity isn't always easy, but it's necessary — sort of like talking with your kids about sex. So, even though the news vans have left their posts outside King Middle School, people are still talking about teen sexuality in Portland, ME. Log onto www.realliferealtalk.org for a listing of events, resources, and RLRT community partners. Portland won't be having just one “talk” — and neither should you!

New Studies Prove Abstinence-Only Programs Are Ineffective

In early November, two important studies concluded what research and anecdotal evidence have suggested for years: abstinence-only programs don't work.

Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA) President Cecile Richards praised the reports saying, “We ask our teens to be responsible, but then we take away the tools they need to make responsible decisions about their sexual health. It's time for Congress to stop wasting money and start putting teens and parents first by funding comprehensive sex education programs that include messages about both prevention and abstinence.”

Teenagers need to know how to protect themselves against unintended pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, and other sexually transmitted infections. As a health care provider, PPNNE knows firsthand the power of education to help teens make responsible decisions about their health. Need some help getting the conversation started with your teenager? Contact our education department at 1-800-488-9638. Or send an e-mail to education@ppnne.org.

GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT PPNNE'S SERVICES AND LOCATIONS AT
WWW.PPNNE.ORG OR **CALL 1-800-230-PLAN**
TO REACH THE HEALTH CENTER NEAREST YOU.

Short Takes

Spot On

Check out our newly redesigned website! This change isn't just cosmetic, it's about making it easier for people to find what they're looking for online, whether they need health information, want to locate a health center, or wish to take action on an advocacy issue. So take a look around the new ppnne.org and let us know what you think — you can still reach us at webwizard@ppnne.org. There are more changes to come, so stay tuned.

Calling All Cars!

Did you know that PPNNE staffers drive hundreds of thousands of miles each year to provide services across Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont? If you're thinking of selling or trading in your car, why not donate it to PPNNE? Passing on your gently used, low-mileage car will provide you with a tax deduction and help us save precious resources. To learn more about how to donate your car, e-mail supportus@ppnne.org or call Bev Shadley at 603-225-2925, ext. 3.

Choice Shopping

Tell the world how you feel about Planned Parenthood! Visit our new online store — www.cafepress.com/choicethreads — for T-shirts, hats, and all sorts of items with pro-choice and pro-Planned Parenthood graphics on them. A portion of all sales supports PPNNE's services and programs. So, you can look good and feel good knowing that your purchase(s) will help further our mission!



Choice Remarks

As a parent, I know that parents worry about their teens. We worry about their health, the risks they take, the friends they choose, the values they embrace, the pressures they face to experiment with drugs and alcohol, and the things they're exposed to on the Web and in the media. When they begin exploring romantic and possibly sexual relationships, a whole new set of parental concerns and responsibilities emerge.

Adolescence has long been seen as both exciting and challenging — a significant developmental period and a time of transition and self-discovery. In recent years, our education and medical staffs have redoubled their efforts to support both teens and parents in establishing critical communication skills and positive health habits. The availability of a vaccine that helps protect against cervical cancer — ideally administered to girls in early adolescence — has created new opportunities for conversations about sexual health with younger teens. New recommendations from the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists suggest that teenage girls have an initial reproductive health visit between ages 13 to 15 as a means of developing a relationship with a trusted medical professional before they need to seek care for a specific health issue. And, finally, emerging

research on the adolescent brain and understanding of the many factors contributing to resiliency among teens are helping guide more changes in our health assessment protocols.

In the past, PPNNE's initial teen interview dealt primarily with sexual health, helping our younger patients negotiate decisions about relationships, sex, contraception,

Instead of just focusing on potential risks, the screenings offer girls ages 12–17 “strength-based” assessments, which help them see and feel good about the healthy and positive aspects of their lives.

and sexually healthy practices. We are now concentrating more on supporting the development of specific skills and assets that help guard against risky behavior or poor health choices. We're using the American Academy of Pediatrics' guidelines for taking extensive medical and social histories, including questions about diet, drugs, friends and family, suicide risk, alcohol use, physical activity, academic achievement, etc. Instead of just focusing on potential risks,

the screenings offer girls ages 12–17 “strength-based” assessments, which help them see and feel good about the healthy and positive aspects of their lives.

In early pilots of this new tool, our medical team has reported it opens the door to deeper conversations and the development of even more trusting relationships. During adolescence, young people are learning about their bodies, how to take responsibility for their health, and eventually, how to become informed health care consumers. With these new assessments, as well as our expanded focus on support for parents, we're working to lay the groundwork for a lifelong relationship with PPNNE as a resource for health care, education, and advocacy for the policies that enable all of us to live healthier lives.

I'm proud of PPNNE's new focus to help adolescents respond to the myriad influences in their lives. Our support for the personal and social assets of our young patients will better facilitate their successful transition to adulthood — helping them to not just survive the teen years, but thrive.

A handwritten signature in cursive that reads "Nancy".

Nancy Mosher
President/CEO

Lisa MacDonald



BE ONE OF US

By Lisa MacDonald,
employment specialist

In my position as a staff recruiter for PPNNE, I have the privilege of hearing from the broader community about people's appreciation for and support of PPNNE's mission. I read about it every day in cover letters and listen to it being described with tremendous passion — often through personal stories — in countless interviews. For so many people, the work we do is absolutely fundamental and life changing. We could fill pages with supportive quotes, but here's just one shared by a job candidate:

“As a longtime supporter of Planned Parenthood, I have often wished I could give or do more. I would relish the opportunity to put my skills and ideals to work for PPNNE.”

Comments like this remind me that I am lucky to have a job that fits so well with my personal

values. Reproductive health choices are very personal, but they're also tied to our impact on the environment, our economy, and the overall health of our society. In addition to providing affordable reproductive health care, PPNNE teaches about — and fights hard to protect — these choices.

They say kites fly highest against the wind. We can certainly take pride in how we've stood strong in these past years of political pressure and financial insecurity. Going forward, we will be working to more fully engage those who are inspired by us and aligned with us by inviting more people to commit — and recommit — to our mission and our movement. I hope you'll join us!

Be an advocate and a patient. Be one of us — because health care should be for all of us.



LOOKING AHEAD TO THE 2008 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

By Emily Blistein, *VT director of public affairs*

As winter begins, PPNNE's public affairs staff is preparing for when legislators return to our state capitals in January.

We expect some anti-choice activity with each session, but last April the bedrock of reproductive freedom shook when the U.S. Supreme Court issued its decision in *Gonzales v. Carhart*, upholding the federal abortion ban and indicating that it would tolerate more sweeping legislative intrusions into women's lives and providers' care.

To date, **New Hampshire** has already seen 16 potential bills that would limit access to safe and legal abortion services — over five of which are aimed at minors' access. **Maine's**

bills do not directly impact choice, but several will be monitored for unintended consequences. In **Vermont**, parental notification and refusal clause bills were introduced last year, but we hope that our supportive legislature will not move either bill.

Our pro-active legislative efforts will highlight the importance of our prevention services. We will spearhead efforts to help parents and teens communicate and ensure that teens receive accurate sexuality education because we know — as numerous recent national studies proved — that abstinence-only programs have failed our teens. We will continue to work to increase access to affordable reproductive

health care and contraception, because access to contraception is sound public policy and barriers to care hurt women.

GET ACTIVE!

Legislators listen to their community members! Please work with us to advocate for reproductive health in your state. Contact: Chris Quint in ME at 207-510-2201, ext.105; Ann Larney in NH at 603-225-2925, ext.1; or Emily Blistein in VT at 802-288-8419. Or, join the Planned Parenthood Action Network and reach decision makers with the click of a button. Learn more at www.ppnne.org.

Short Takes

Your Support is All Tied Up

Earlier this fall, Planned Parenthood health centers across the country began seeing an increase in anti-choice activities. Here in northern New England, we experienced our own share of anti-choice harassment, including vandalism, suspicious mail, and picketing at a number of our sites. In response to monthly protests at our Barre, VT, health center, our grassroots staff launched a ribbon campaign, inviting community members to show their support for our patients, staff, and services by tying a pink ribbon outside the health center. Over 150 people participated and some took the opportunity to write personal messages to PPNNE staff:

“I am deeply grateful to each and every one of the people who work at the Barre health center for their help and their support over the years, and I am very sorry for the difficult times they face in order to provide me, and others, with compassionate reproductive health care.”

At press time, we're planning another ribbon campaign in Burlington, VT. Check out our website — www.ppnne.org — for more information.

Skill Set

Be on the lookout for PPNNE's upcoming trainings. Highlights include topics such as adolescent brain development, strategies for memorable presentations, teen sexuality and relationships, and more. Learn more at www.ppnne.org/trainings.

NEWS ⁰⁷ SOURCE

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ABOUT US...

We welcome your ideas, contributions,
and questions. Please write to us at:

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Visit us on the Web:

www.ppnne.org

Personal Care. Personal Choices.

YOUR DONATION TODAY WILL HELP SOMEONE TOMORROW

Thanks to supporters like you, PPNNE provides vital reproductive health care services at an affordable cost to over 60,000 patients annually. And, an additional 20,000 people turn to our community educators for the knowledge and skills to make responsible decisions.

Our services change lives by promoting healthy choices. With your help, we can continue to provide the highest quality services and programs to those in need. And, with your help, we will continue to work in our region and in the courts to protect a fundamental human right — the right to choose when and whether to have a family.

As we go to press, we must still raise \$750,000 by December 31, to meet our annual fundraising goal.



PPNEA 2006

To ensure that we can continue to reach all those who depend on us for quality health care and honest education, please make your most generous gift today. You can use the enclosed envelope or make your tax-deductible gift online at www.ppnne.org/donate.

**WISHING YOU GOOD HEALTH
AND HAPPINESS THROUGHOUT
THE NEW YEAR!**

