Authenticity and Accountability in Youth Partnerships

CALIFORNIA LATINAS FOR REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

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CLRJ is the only Latina-led organization in California committed to honoring the experiences of our Latina/Latino/Latinx communities to uphold our dignity, our bodies, sexuality, and families. We build power and cultivate leadership through community education, policy advocacy, and community informed research to achieve reproductive justice.
Reproductive Justice

Created by women of color, RJ looks at reproductive health (services) and reproductive rights (laws) through a human rights and social justice framework. We use an intersectional lens to understand the barriers our communities face that limit the choices we can make about our body, family, and community’s well-being.
Reproductive Justice equally fights for:

1) The right to have a child AND
2) The right not have a child AND
3) The right to parent the children we have in safe and healthy conditions regardless of AGE, race, gender, sexual orientation, immigration status, or economic condition.

Reproductive Justice cannot exist without self-determination
Reproductive Justice

Reproductive Justice exists when all people have the economic, social and political power and resources to make healthy decisions about our gender, bodies, sexuality and reproduction for ourselves, our families and our communities.

~Forward Together (formerly Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice)

- Remedies past and present erasures of women of color in reproductive politics
- Links reproductive rights, reproductive health, human rights, social justice
- Looks at the “whole” person - all the identities we carry
- Centers the lived experience of reproductive oppression in communities of color
Reproductive Oppression

The control and exploitation of women, girls, and individuals through our bodies, sexuality, labor, and reproduction.
Examples of Reproductive Oppression

- Control of Black women’s fertility during slavery
- Coerced sterilization of Black, Latinx, Indigenous, low-income, incarcerated, and disabled communities
- Shackling of incarcerated women during childbirth
- Public assistance policies that control poor women’s reproductive decisions
- Immigration restrictions targeting families
- DepoProvera and Norplant targeted toward poor and young women of color in the U.S. and global South
- Lack of education on sterilization from hormone replacement therapy for trans Latinxs
Reproductive Justice and Young People

All young people need respectful and loving acknowledgement of their whole selves - including their intellect, body, sexuality - as part of their right to develop healthy identities.
Discussion Questions

1. How do our organizations/how can our organizations invite young people to inform the services, policies, etc directed at them?

2. How do our organizations incorporate looking at the “whole” person in our work?
Discussion Questions

3. How does reproductive oppression affect how we tackle the social inequities young people face?

4. Do our organizations use punitive messages regarding youth sexuality, particularly young parents in publications, social media, etc? If so, how we shift to empowering/uplifting messages?
Discussion Questions

5. How can our organizations integrate a reproductive justice/intersectional analysis and agenda into our work?

6. How do we/can we center youth voices in our work? How do we hold ourselves accountable?

7. How can we overcome challenges in partnering with young people?
Justice for Young Families (#J4YF)

• J4YF is an initiative that champions young people’s rights to self-determination and bodily autonomy. This includes their decisions about whether or not to become parents and their right to parent their children within a supportive environment.

• J4YF calls for a shift in our culture, communities and society to uplift and improve the lives of all youth.
Beyond pregnancy prevention

- “Pregnancy prevention” perpetuates the negative stereotypes and language around pregnant and parenting youth.
- Policies must turn attention to addressing the multiple realities that surround youth’s lives, such as poverty, lack of quality education, lack of access to comprehensive sexuality education, lack of access to health care, amongst other issues, as primary indicators of adverse health, educational and economic outcomes rather than focus on individual behavior.
- Acknowledging that youth sexuality is a normal part of development and that youth have the right to bodily autonomy compels us to think beyond preventing pregnancy.
Pushing back on negative stereotypes

My daughter has brought out all of the love and nurturing qualities

THAT I WOULDN'T HAVE IMAGINED I POSSESS

Justice for Young Families (J4YF)

#J4YF #WeSupportYoungParents

clj.org
What defines a good parent?
Acknowledging Young People’s Sexuality

• Let’s support and commit to implementing curriculums and practices that destigmatize sex, and that acknowledge and respect young people’s sexuality.

• Let’s commit to working against employing shame as a tool to control young people’s experiences and decisions around their sexuality.

• Let’s commit to stop using all language that blames and denigrates young people for the conditions they find themselves in, both within and outside of our communities, families, organizations and institutions.
Thank you

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PUMP UP THE MIC: PREGNANT AND PARENTING LATIN@ YOUTH REPRESENT

Young mothers’ and fathers’ authentic voices are often absent in public health discussions of adolescent pregnancy and parenting. While pop culture has focused some attention on pregnant and parenting youth, their portrayal on so-called “reality TV” programs on the one hand trivializes their struggles and on the other, perpetuates negative narratives about pregnant and parenting youth. What these shows and other public programs have yet to do is engage in honest dialogue about the real issues that lead young women and men to become parents. CLRJ’s Justice for Young Families (J4YF) initiative aims to change that by working to ensure that the experiences of young parents are front and center in the discussion and creation of policies that address them and their needs.

In CLRJ’s debut J4YF Issue Brief, CLRJ raised the need to re-frame how society treats and portrays adolescent parents, particularly Latin@ mothers and fathers, and to move from punitive measures to more supportive policies that improve the outcomes of young families. CLRJ contends that the lack of a quality education and access to real opportunities for advancement are significant problems unaddressed through traditional strategies focused on preventing unintended adolescent pregnancies alone. In this second Issue Brief, CLRJ intends to raise the voices of the young parents themselves, to provide testimony of their experiences and to speak about their needs. To that end, CLRJ conducted focus groups with young mothers and fathers to collect their stories. These stories contest mainstream beliefs that pregnant and parenting youth are unfit caregivers, irresponsible and/or unproductive. This brief furthers CLRJ’s Justice for Young Families initiative, which challenges the dominant frame around teen pregnancy and brings in the experiences of teen mothers and fathers – the latter which are often secondary in the discussion of teen childbearing and child-rearing.

All new parents face challenges when raising a child. The families and parents who thrive – at any age – usually depend on support networks, community resources, public investments and the confidence of being able to ask for help, without feeling guilt or shame. Unfortunately, many young parents are treated
as social pariahs, deemed undeserving of assistance, and punished for their “bad” decisions or choices. But the reality is that being a teen does not make one an irresponsible mother or father and being a teen parent is not incompatible with educational attainment or with being successful. In fact, contrary to the social and political understanding of teen parenthood, for many young parents the demands and responsibilities of caring for a child inspire them to reconnect to or reinforce their educational goals. However, these stories often go untold, sometimes due to false assumptions that they may “encourage” teens to want to become pregnant, or more accurately, promote youth to have sex if they do not view pregnancy and parenting as a negative consequence. These assumptions minimize the complexities of both teen parenting and sexuality and take away from the reality that once a young person is a parent they need familial, social and educational support. As such, instead of perpetuating the overwhelming stigma that pregnant and parenting youth generally face, it is imperative that as a society, we foster a positive and encouraging environment, where young parents are given the tangible support that all youth need to reach their full potential.

**FLIPPING THE SCRIPT**

When pregnancy and parenting are motivating catalysts for a more positive future

Many pregnant and parenting students reevaluate their focus and educational attainment goals, regardless of their earlier attitudes. Indicators of increased school focus include improved grades, a resolve to graduate, and a new interest in further education. Both the young mothers and fathers in the focus groups illustrated this and in addition to inspiring educational attainment goals, the vast majority of the young parents expressed that caring for their children changed their life for the better. One young woman stated: “I just didn’t like school, I would ditch. My baby changed my life.” One young father of twins stated: “I feel proud of myself. I remember I used to just ditch and I wasn’t even at school… the kids keep me off the streets. I am home most of the time now instead of doing what I used to do.” Another youth describes having even bigger aspirations because of her daughter:

“I could hear little messages coming from her, for me to take care of her, for me to be there, she is just pushing me more and more to do more than whatever I wanted before I was pregnant. She is just more of a big motivation for me.”

The importance of nurturing and encouraging this motivation cannot be overstated. Although teen mothers commonly report college aspirations, teachers’ low expectations of them, expressing disappointment and the lack of college advisement often undermine these goals.

**Pregnancy discrimination is sex discrimination**

Unfortunately, even the most motivated pregnant and parenting students may be deterred from continuing their education because of how they are treated by their peers, teachers and school administrators.
The young Latin@ mothers and fathers stated that pregnant and parenting students were belittled and humiliated by teachers and classmates alike. In one instance, a teacher scathingly told a pregnant student in front of her class: “I think it’s wrong that you guys have childcare at school. If you guys get pregnant, you should be kicked out of school.” Another young woman was forced to go to a “pregnancy school” because she didn’t “fit into her desk.” And another young woman was called a “slut” by other students.

These discriminatory actions are not only unjustified but they are also against the law. Federal Statute, Title IX, prohibits discrimination or harassment by fellow students, teachers, school administrators, and counselors, or any discriminatory school policy or practice.5

“I feel like telling them, you know I didn’t ruin my life – that is the wrong word to use for that. Like a storyline, I just took a chunk out of my life and stuck a baby in [the middle] and everything that I was supposed to do then is going to happen, just later on.”

Additionally, under Title IX, schools must give all students who might be, are or have been pregnant (whether the student is a parent or not) the same access to school programs and extracurricular activities that other students have.6 In blatant violation of the law, a young woman describes how she was forced off her basketball team:

“When I tried to go back to basketball, coach said he wasn’t going to play me because I had a child. He knew I was going to be on varsity and he said he needed people to be there every day. He said he wanted to put the team that wins and not the team that loses. So because of that I can’t play basketball.”

This type of discrimination and stigma is rampant and it takes a toll on the young mothers in particular.7 The primary reason most of the young women who participated in a focus group cited for choosing to enroll in the Pregnancy Minor Program (PMP) at their school was to not be judged as much. As one participant stated:

“I chose to come here [PMP] ‘cause I don’t want people judging me out there [regular campus]. ‘Cause I know that when you’re around pregnant girls, they can’t judge you because they’re the same way as you. They’re just like you because they’re a mom too. So they can’t say nothing. But out there, people criticize like, ‘Oh, look! She’s pregnant.’ And I just came out because I didn’t want to be judged.”

Other types of discrimination the participants described included teachers stating they “feel sorry” for them, expressing disappointment and low expectations, stating they have “ruined their lives” and that they are “a waste of talent.” This young women’s positive outlook was met with disdain:

“I don’t even know how to say how my teacher made me feel because when I told him I was pregnant and I told him that it’s giving me a motivation to actually like to do better and to graduate and stuff, he was like, ‘Oh so you needed a baby to motivate you?’ Like trying to say that I wasn’t going to be able to do it on my own - that I needed to get pregnant in order to do something. So it made me feel like ‘No, it’s not that.’ It’s just now I have a reason to actually do better.”
The demeaning way in which pregnant and parenting students are treated and the biases and discrimination they face at school represent a significant educational barrier, tantamount to pushing them out of school. According to a survey conducted by the Gates Foundation, those who left school to care for a family member or because they became a parent, more than any other group who left school, were “most likely to say they would have worked harder if their schools had demanded more of them and provided the necessary support.”

**Being a Good Student and Good Parent are Not Mutually Exclusive**

The lack of reliable child care often represents another insurmountable barrier for young parents and more specifically young mothers’ high school completion. While many young mothers qualify for subsidized child care, the demand for services far exceeds available resources. One solution has been to locate day care programs within schools. Studies have found that student mothers receiving school-based childcare and support fared better than peers who did not receive these supports, as they represent a positive way for educational institutions to encourage young mothers to return to or stay in school, and acquire accurate information about child development and parenting practices. One young woman described this positive impact: “Pretty much you just like concentrate more in school because you know your baby is safe at daycare.” Other participants agreed and also pointed to other types of benefits including being able to check on their children throughout the day, as one participant discussed:

> It’s [school daycare] just really helpful. Like I have my son there and like I feel more safe having him here ‘cause if there’s an emergency I can just go over there quick. And I can see him whenever I want to—during lunch, my nutrition. It’s just a lot better.

Some participants in the Fresno area also indicated that they had participated in a school-based childcare program called PACE (Parent and Child Education) lab. Unfortunately, due to budget cuts, this program was eliminated. When asked what would happen without this program, one young father responded that: “moms wouldn’t go to school as much, since they don’t really have anybody to take care of them [their children], and so they will take care of them themselves.”

These responses indicate the great responsibility and love these young women feel for their children. Although they expressed wanting to continue their education, they also understand that their children need to be taken care of and safe. Rather than assuming young parents are no longer invested or interested in their education, we should take a deeper look at the conditions they are in and what drives their decisions.

These candid statements portray a different picture as to why we must invest in programs for young parents that provide child care access, money assistance, job opportunities and other resources that would help support them to reach their academic goals.
Educational disadvantage and poverty often precede, rather than result from, pregnancy

Although pregnancy has been cited by many studies as a reason for students “dropping out” of school, other studies suggest the majority of teen mothers leave school prior to pregnancy. As shown in the previous J4YF Brief, studies have shown that many teenage parents were poor to begin with – meaning that they not only lack in material possessions or money, but also lack or have limited access to information, health care, political power and education. And as a result of the current recession, the number of Latin@ families with children in poverty has increased, as Latin@ workers earn much less than their counterparts. Young people themselves understand the few opportunities before them, as they are the ones living that very reality. While employment opportunities for young people are dismal in general, it is a problem further exacerbated when a young parent is trying to provide financially with limited options available to them. Thus, they understand that without finishing their high school education, future opportunities for themselves and their children become scarcer. When asked what supports would help them while in school, young parents pointed to a need for flexible work and the consequences of not having that option. Specifically, the young parents expressed a need for job opportunities that did not interfere with school hours and that were flexible and close by to their schools. As one young woman stated, “[We need] job opportunities for moms, because we can’t find jobs. Like after school or during the weekend.”

That’s what my mom told me when I got pregnant. She’s like, “You’re life is over. You’re not gonna do anything.” I was like, ‘Um, I think like half of the people who are professors and all that or like you know high [achievers] – I think they had kids at a young age.’ You know there’s a lot of people who succeeded.

Adults: Quit the blame, shame and judgment. All youth — pregnant, parenting, or not — need personal and emotional support.

Although material support is important, it is significant to note that when asked what they needed from the adults in their life, the vast majority of the young parents expressed the need for emotional support. Their statements towards the adults in their lives included not “giving up” on them, “underestimating” them, “judging” them and to “stop being negative” and let them “learn from their mistakes.” As one young mom put it, “Don’t think that we can’t raise our own babies because we’re teenagers” and another: “…don’t think less of us just because we’re having a kid and don’t think we’re not gonna be able to go out there and be who we want to be.”

Adults involved in the lives of youth, whether as parents, guardians, teachers, coaches, etc., are supposed to provide guidance and support. While feelings of concern are understandable given that parenting brings upon a set of additional challenges, becoming pregnant or a young parent does not merit losing the support of the adults around them – especially at a time when logically they will need more support. Young parents need support just like any other person going through a life transition would.

One young man gave the practical advice of inviting the expectant youth father to the baby shower so that “he can be involved” from the beginning. One young woman stated that they should not be given “a harder
time than what it already is,” another voiced the need for the adults in their life to be “more open-minded about sex,” and another pointed that many teen parents were responsible – even more so than those teens and/or adults who did not have children.

Like we’re responsible more than some of those [adults] ‘cause some of those don’t even have kids. So, we’re more responsible in some things than them...because sometimes they think, ‘Oh, she’s young. She’s not gonna know nothing... They think we’re not ready, but, it’s like, you are.

Like all of us, young parents need social support and encouragement from people – particularly the adults in their life – to believe and encourage them to pursue their goals.

**CONCLUSION: FOLLOWING THEIR LEAD**

Having a child as a teenager is undeniably difficult—but some of the challenges young parents face could be alleviated when provided with resources such as financial assistance and child care in order for them to have more time and energy to focus on school. Additionally, honoring their right to quality education and fostering a positive and supportive environment in schools is imperative for pregnant and parenting students given that for teenage mothers in particular, both school-related and personal support were found to be of importance in their journey toward high school graduation.

12 It is also extremely short-sighted to contend that poverty and or limited educational attainment could be avoided by simply delaying teen sex or by sanctioning teen mothers and fathers. Furthermore, by treating teen pregnancy only as a “personal choice,” without taking into consideration the external factors that may be leading to this choice, we fail to appreciate how parenting for some youth is not so much a failure of planning and “good-decision making” but a tacit recognition of the limited possibilities available to them. Rather than vilifying teen sexuality, teenage pregnancy and its challenges – these issues should be addressed by focusing on changing broader social determinants, such as investing in low-income communities and creating viable economic and educational opportunities to combat the staggering numbers of continual economic disparities for Latin@s.

The young mothers and fathers who shared their stories are showing us how to follow their lead when it comes to ending stigma and getting to the real issues. All young families need support from family, schools, institutions and society in general who can impact their future opportunities. All young families deserve recognition and respect because they are valuable - let us not forget that when young parents do well economically, educationally and socially, their children do better and so do all of our communities.

**RECOMMENDATIONS: ADDRESSING LATIN@ ADOLESCENT CHILDBEARING THROUGH A REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE LENS**

On a broad community level, we can all immediately begin to shift our thinking about youth sexuality and refrain from blaming youth for society’s shortcomings. Advocates, school teachers, counselors and administrators, service providers, political leaders, and families can:

- Stop using punitive messages towards Latin@ youth sexuality, particularly young parents.
- Invite young people to inform policy decisions and program development that reflect their lived experiences and uphold their dignity.
• Support policies that improve educational outcomes for all Latin@ youth, pregnant, parenting or not
• Invest resources in programs that offer both comprehensive sexuality education and support young parents.
• Support community-informed research to better elucidate the sexual, reproductive and overall needs of young Latin@s and improve approaches that normalize human sexuality.

Additionally, future policy work needs to tackle the extensive health, educational and systemic inequities many low-income youth are facing, such as access to comprehensive sexuality education, information and access to contraceptives, educational and economic opportunities, and poverty. J4YF will be working with young parents and stakeholders to develop a proactive policy agenda. Of immediate concern, though, are the repercussions of California’s recent fiscal reforms. In 2013, California included a “Local Control Funding Formula” for education in its state budget that effectively eliminated the California School-Age Families Education (Cal-SAFE) Program, which served as a national model for providing school-based support services to help students complete school. Over 73% of teen parents enrolled in Cal-SAFE graduated from high school, compared with the national graduation rate of teen parents of 38%. This policy development requires advocates to work diligently at the local and state levels to ensure that young parents also receive the resources they need to thrive.

Interested in championing the rights of young families? For more information on CLRJ’s Justice for Young Families (J4YF) Initiative and Campaign please visit us at www.clrj.org!

ENDNOTES

1. Latin@ is used to reflect the full spectrum of identities in our communities.
4. Some school districts have alternative schools that are exclusively for pregnant girls.
6. Ibid.
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Justice for Young Families uplifts a broader national agenda to ensure every family has the rights,
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Young fathers have traditionally been largely cast aside by society and continue to be targets of harmful stereotypes that depict them as irresponsible young men who carelessly get their partners pregnant, callously abandon them and their children and eschew financial responsibility. While research on young fathers is limited, these negative societal depictions contradict data that shows that most young fathers have a genuine desire to be proactively involved in their children’s lives¹ and their involvement in playing with and caring for their children is not significantly different from adult fathers.²

Furthermore, while adolescent parenthood is vilified as a whole, the success stories we hear from time to time only feature young mothers, and completely dismiss the many young fathers who are actively involved with their children, and who are invested in their children's future. CLRJ’s Justice for Young Families (J4YF) initiative, which promotes the health, equity and dignity of young families, intentionally includes young fathers and their experiences in the discussions around adolescent pregnancy in order to re-frame how society treats and portrays adolescent parents. As part of the J4YF Issue Brief series, CLRJ conducted
What does it mean to be “involved”? What makes a father a father?

Many of the Latino young fathers in our focus groups face incredible challenges. Similar to research among young Latina mothers, these challenges—poverty, substandard education, limited job opportunities, immigrant status, being incarcerated/formerly incarcerated—impacted young fathers before they became parents, not because they became parents. And while these challenges are not unique to young fathers—the Latino community as a whole experiences these inequities—they present even bigger hardships when a child is in the picture.

And yet despite these challenges, similar to young mothers, ALL of the young fathers expressed refocusing on school and establishing goals to prepare for their future and the future of their children. Many said that they stopped “hanging with the wrong crowd” and became more responsible by reassessing their priorities.

Although they expressed frustration and feeling stressed at not being able to provide for their child financially, they pointed to other ways of being actively involved—both emotionally and physically. The young fathers recognized that being involved meant “being there” for their children and included nurturing activities like loving their children, spending time with them, changing diapers, preparing meals, reading, taking them to the park and playing, as well as other child rearing responsibilities.

Additionally, many young fathers demonstrated various forms of support prior to the birth of their children. One young man stated he “was present through all the pregnancy, the nine months, the appointments, everything…” An expecting father shared this exchange with his dad: “Just sometimes like when I tell my dad I’m going to go the hospital to go with her, he’s like ‘Well, at least you’re doing something it’s better than I was.’ My dad didn’t get to do anything ’cause he was just working all the time, so he said that’s something good for the relationship between me and her.” Additionally, the young fathers all stated they were present when their children were born—even if they were/are not in a relationship with the mother and/
or in spite of strained relationships with their children’s mother’s families. The majority of the young men felt that the family (mostly the mothers) of their children’s mom did not want them to be present at the birth.

The scant research on young fathers rarely shows how they felt when they learned they were going to be fathers or how they felt when they saw their child for the first time. We found that their emotions, feelings and hopes for their children were not that different from older parents.

In fact, many displayed a sense of vulnerability. Their reactions ranged from “scared” and “surprised” to “excited.” One young father even expressed feeling embarrassed. And some young fathers expressed also wanting to make their parents proud.

“\nFor me, when I found out...one thing was how am I going to provide for my child but also to make sure that my mom and dad are still proud of me for being a young father and making sure I become a successful man for my child. But I was also kind of stuck too, the first couple of months [not knowing what to do].”

“I remember that day like it was yesterday, man. I will never forget.”

Interestingly, the findings of a study comparing adolescent fathers with adult fathers indicate that young fathers report feeling more attached to their child than adult fathers in terms of both talking and thinking about the child.⁴

Financial responsibility and being pushed out of school

The majority of the young fathers felt pressure to drop out of school since they felt they needed to provide financial support. This pressure to provide financially, however, can be detrimental in the long term, given that if they are able to find a job, it will most likely not be steady and will be part-time and/or a low-wage job⁵ due to their limited schedule as students or because of their low educational attainment. This is not only true for young fathers – 38% of men between the ages of 16-19 in California’s civilian labor force are unemployed.⁶

As we consider the financial picture of young Latino fathers, it is imperative that we recognize that many Latino men in general—particularly if they are poor—have limited educational opportunities, which in turn limits their income and earning opportunities. In 2014, 23% of high school graduates in California were Latinos.⁷ Furthermore, for Latino men age 25 and older, 42% did not have a high school diploma—only 26% had a high school diploma or GED.⁸ Given that the ability to secure quality jobs hinges in large part on the level of educational attainment and the quality of the education Latinos receive, it is not surprising that in 2014, Latinos were more likely to live in poverty (0-199% FPL) at 59% as compared to Black men (39%), Asian men (28%) and white men (18%).⁹ While we need to make certain that Latinos, including young fathers, gain and maintain steady employment and economic stability, it is important that this job pays a living and thriving wage.
For many of the students who plan to stay in high school, the negative attitudes of school officials as well as classmates may serve as catalysts and end up pushing them out eventually.

“There’s teachers that bring you down sometimes. They see you differently while you’re in class…They treat you differently sometimes from other students… Like if you’re not paying attention in class, they’ll just bring that up. They use it against you and there’s some dads out there that feel embarrassed, you know. They feel embarrassed from the criticism they get from other students. Other students find out [about the pregnancy] and they just start talking. They’re saying stuff that isn’t necessary and just bring the young dad’s hopes down.”

“Yeah, and sometimes it can be the counselors. Because as teachers find out, they send you to the counselors. And then the counselors start talking to you and they start thinking of ideas of what you should do or when my counselor found out that I was going to be a dad, as soon as he found out, I was moved schools... He felt I should be at a home school. I’m guessing he knew I was going to get criticized, and he thought I’d get bullied. He just made that choice...At that moment I didn’t know what to do, so I just agreed with him. Once I was at the homeschool, I was like, man, this is really hard. I wish I was back at my regular school...I think...even before, I was having problems with the vice principal, as they found out, they used it as an excuse, they used the kid as an excuse to literally let me go.”

“Instead of the school trying to help you out, they don’t really understand the fact that you’re going to have a kid...Yeah, some teachers do and then there’s some that just criticize you and don’t see you for who you are and what you’ve been doing. I think if they did really support me, I’d still be in regular high school, but unfortunately, I didn’t get that help.”

While the exact number of young fathers is not readily available, it is likely that school officials will encounter a pregnant or parenting youth, if not several. As such, school officials must become more knowledgeable about the experiences and perceptions of all young parents—including young fathers—to assist them during this critical time and encourage them to stay in school. School counselors in particular play a vital role in ensuring that the young father is focused on graduating from high school and in pursuing post-secondary education and/or securing stable employment.
CONCLUSION

“Like me, I didn’t know how to be a dad, but I’m here being a dad, I’m doing whatever I can. And I’m doing it my way because it’s the only way I can do it.”

While our sample is small, it is very rich in information. The narratives of these participants provide insight into what some Latino young fathers are going through. Although young fathers hear loud and clear the punitive messages that society as a whole is sending them, they show incredible resilience. Without generalizing, these findings illustrate that contrary to stereotypical portrayals—these young fathers expressed enthusiasm about being actively involved in their children’s daily lives and expressed renewed focus on educational attainment to provide a better future for themselves and their children.

Our findings also reveal reasons that deter or discourage young fathers from being involved. While young fathers express a strong desire to be actively involved with their child, the pressure to provide financial support may lead them to check out completely. These findings support prior research, which indicated that a predictor of young father involvement lies in his ability to provide financial support. Additionally, the hostile relationship with their children’s mother’s family can also lead to severed involvement as discussed by a number of young fathers.

“Like me, I didn’t know how to be a dad, but I’m here being a dad, I’m doing whatever I can. And I’m doing it my way because it’s the only way I can do it.”

“I guess my thought is the mom is going to think, “What? You haven’t been here for a while and you just show up trying to see your son?”

Finally, while there are young fathers who are not involved, our findings are supported by prior research that indicates that the majority of young fathers not only express the desire to take on the role of being a father and be responsible for their child, but they are actually doing it. As such, we as a society must do better to ensure young fathers thrive and that we shift how we speak of and depict young fathers. It is time to stop casting young fathers aside.
RECOMMENDATIONS:

“Yeah, sometimes we don’t understand how coming from someone like a mentor who hasn’t experienced it versus someone who has experienced it and they’re stepping up and you’re seeing how they changed their life. So when you look up to him you’re like, ‘Damn he’s a young dad and he changed his life...you just see it and say I want to be like him, or I want to step it up like he did.”

As a reproductive justice policy organization, we strongly believe our government plays a critical role in addressing the needs of all youth, including young fathers. Traditionally, most school-based and/or agency-based programs for young parents either offered more services to young mothers than to young fathers, or did not offer any services to young fathers at all. And while young mothers and fathers face similar challenges, services for young fathers cannot just be added onto existing programs for mothers—they must be tailored towards the needs of young fathers. The recommendations provided here, though not comprehensive, are based on the needs expressed by the young fathers in the focus groups and aimed to help schools, government officials, agencies, service providers and funders to improve and expand efforts to support these young men in their role as parents.

- Provide information, educational options counseling, and support to complete high school or obtain a GED.
- Provide workforce development such as vocational education, job readiness training, and job placement;
- Create public-private partnerships that incentivize the hiring of young people, including young parents;
- Provide parenting education, including providing information on parental rights and skills-building around improving co-parenting relationships and healthy relationships in general;
- Ensure access to health care services and information, including access to sexual and reproductive health services;
- Ensure full implementation of comprehensive sexual education through Education Code 51930-51939;
- Facilitate peer support groups and provide adult mentors;
- Facilitate and ensure access to childcare services; and,
- Ensure access to housing and transportation services.

Additionally, California must reinstate, continue to invest and increase funding to programs that benefit young fathers, including Male Involvement Programs and Information and Education Programs. ¹¹

Just as important as providing services and resources is the need to move away from harmful biases towards young fathers and commit to supporting them. For young fathers and their families to thrive, we must all shift how we speak of and depict young families.
ENDNOTES


6 U.S Census Bureau, 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.


8 U.S Census Bureau, 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.


11 Information and Education programs provide youth with comprehensive, medically accurate sexual health education and clinical linkages to sexual and reproductive health services.
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Justice for Young Families (J4YF) is a long-term initiative that champions young people’s rights to self-determination and bodily autonomy, including their decisions about whether or not to become parents, as well as their right to parent the children they have within a supportive environment. J4YF promotes the health, equity, opportunity and dignity of young families and is directly informed by the experiences of young parents as well as by the individuals that serve them. This initiative raises the most pressing needs for young mothers and fathers and acknowledges that young people’s ability to determine how they parent and sustain their families is directly linked to the oppressive conditions they face in our communities – racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, classism and xenophobia, among others. J4YF calls for a shift in our culture, communities and society to uplift and improve the lives of all youth. By working alongside parenting, pregnant, and non-parenting youth, J4YF works towards policies that promote the health, equity and dignity of young families.

California Latinas for Reproductive Justice (CLRJ) is a statewide organization committed to honoring the experiences of Latinas to uphold our dignity, our bodies, sexuality, and families. We build Latinas’ power and cultivate leadership through community education, policy advocacy, and community-informed research to achieve reproductive justice.
OVERVIEW

Latina/o adolescent pregnancy and birth rates are oftentimes an unwanted reminder that adolescents have their own sexuality. Societal expectations are such that Latina/o youth sexuality is neither acknowledged, nor viewed in any semblance of normalcy. This skewed approach is fueled by and perpetuates the image of Latinas as “hot,” “spicy” – in other words, hypersexual – and young men as “irresponsible” partners, even from a young age. As a result, Latina/o youth reproductive and sexual health issues have been circumscribed to a punitive framework that blames youth for their “choices” and their “conditions.” This is reflected in the narrow focus placed on the “teen pregnancy problem” and the social and economic “costs” of youth sexuality and teen pregnancy often touted by the same institutions aiming to assist youth. As part of California Latinas for Reproductive Justice’s (CLRJ) work to advance reproductive justice for Latina/o youth, it presents this issue brief as the first in a series aimed at shifting the approach to address adolescent childbearing in a manner that is de-stigmatizing and holistic. In this first issue, CLRJ examines how the current approach to Latina/o youth sexuality, pregnancy and parenting falls short; demonstrates the systemic factors failing our youth; and proposes a new paradigm to address the issue at its roots to ensure justice for young families.

The dominant perspective on youth sexuality has failed to consider the broad context of young Latinas’/os’ lives as it centers on changing individual behavior and erroneously leaves out the role of their social, economic and political environments. Placing the blame...
for adolescent pregnancy solely on the behaviors/decisions/choices of youth is not only unjust, it fails to tackle the systemic health, educational and economic inequities that may lead to such outcomes. This focus also paints a hetero-normative picture of Latina/o youth sexuality that excludes lesbian, gay, transgender and queer youth altogether. It is time to discuss Latina/o youth sexuality in the context of the many factors in their lives with the goal of strengthening families and communities.

CLRJ recognizes that the issue of adolescent childbearing in the Latina/o community is much broader and complex. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to shift the way society – policymakers, community members and leaders, adults involved in teenagers’ upbringing, service providers, advocates and youth themselves – thinks about and addresses Latina/o youth sexuality, particularly in regards to pregnant and parenting youth. CLRJ’s overarching goal is to broaden the conversation around Latina/o youth sexuality and effect community-informed policy change. Policy work needs to prioritize supporting Latina/o youth in navigating their sexuality and health so that they can make the best decisions for themselves, with access to the information, resources and opportunities to facilitate making those decisions. To that end, CLRJ developed its Justice for Young Families Initiative (J4YF) to challenge the dominant frame, account for the inequities experienced by Latina/o youth and address the root causes to ensure Latina/o youth who are pregnant and/or parenting can thrive.

**LATINA/O ADOLESCENT CHILDBEARING:**
Isolated and Inadequate Approaches Ignore Youth Sexuality and Socioeconomic Realities

Preventing adolescent childbearing among Latinas/os garners considerable attention and resources, as Latinas experience a substantially higher adolescent birth rate than any other racial and ethnic group in California. Paradoxically, it is important to note that Latinas are also driving the state’s teen birth rate reduction.1 Despite reduced Latino pregnancy and birth rates, funding for youth sexuality programs continues to focus on this singular issue which further exacerbates the individual “blame” frame. This frame, adopted by policymakers, researchers, advocates, media and the public alike, deems adolescent childbearing as a grave “social ill” and carries a strong message about the “costs to society.” Among these “costs” referenced by the dominant frame are: the poverty rate among Latinas; the rate of public assistance sought by Latina young mothers (assuming absentee fatherhood); and the low levels of educational attainment of Latina young mothers. Ironically, the very programs designed to support youth are also part of what is measured and factored into the social costs of adolescent childbearing. All of these figures build an argument to falsely conclude that these conditions were caused by adolescent pregnancy, ignoring that young women who give birth tend to have pre-existing disadvantages compared with those who do not. Nearly 60 percent of adolescent mothers are already living in poverty at the time of giving birth.2 Furthermore, new research demonstrates that in many circumstances, the life course for parenting teens may not be substantially different from that of their socioeconomic peers.3 And contrary to popular opinion, many
adolescent parents, children, and families do equally well compared to their peers, particularly when provided with strong social and functional support.\(^4\)

Blaming youth has also led to a great deal of stigma as it labels young Latina/o parents as unsuccessful, irresponsible, unfit caregivers and failures of society. This stigma is demonstrated and exacerbated by educational institutions that segregate pregnant and parenting students, thus diminishing their opportunities to graduate, prepare for higher education and improve economic conditions.\(^5\)

While funding for sexuality education is absolutely necessary, the frame continues to place “personal responsibility” as its hallmark, blaming “high-risk” youth (mainly youth of color, formerly incarcerated youth, youth in foster care) for their sexual and reproductive health outcomes as if they occur in a vacuum. Unless intervention programs aimed at supporting youth desist from stigmatizing pregnant and parenting youth and labeling them as “irresponsible,” addressing adolescent childbearing will remain inadequate.

The dominant frame also fails to acknowledge the fact that half of Latina youth pregnancies are planned.\(^6\) Considering this data, it is clear that the stereotype of youth as “irresponsible” is a false premise and it is important to examine the reasons why some young women would delay childbirth, such as preparing for a career, going onto higher education, or having tangible educational or economic opportunities.\(^7,8\) While this issue requires more exploration, it further demonstrates the need for programs to address adolescent childbearing through holistic and interdisciplinary approaches that empower youth rather than those that intend to prevent a singular behavior that is deemed “socially inappropriate.”

Social norms need to expand to include youth sexuality and health needs from a perspective that acknowledges young people’s rights to education, access, autonomy and opportunities.

Unless intervention programs aimed at supporting youth desist from stigmatizing pregnant and parenting youth and labeling them as “irresponsible,” addressing adolescent childbearing will remain inadequate.
CALIFORNIA SEVERELY REVERSES EFFORTS TO PROTECT AND SUPPORT YOUTH - PARENTING OR NOT

As a leader in advancing reproductive freedom, California has created broad policies and invested in programs and services that have made great strides in increasing adolescents’ access to family planning and reproductive health education and services and support (See Figures 1 and 2 below). Despite these important legal protections and investment in programs, access to comprehensive, confidential, culturally and linguistically appropriate reproductive and sexual health services and information continues to be lacking for the most disenfranchised youth in California. This has unfortunately created barriers for youth to be equipped with vital information and services, such as preventing unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STI), and using contraceptives more effectively.

**FIGURE 1: CALIFORNIA’S YOUTH REPRODUCTIVE AND SEXUAL HEALTH SERVICES AND PARENTING SUPPORT PROGRAMS**

- **Information and Education Programs (I&E)** provide adolescents with sexual health education and linkages to clinical health care. These programs also support the parents and other adults involved in teens’ lives.

- **Family Planning, Access, Care and Treatment (Family PACT)** program provides a package of contraceptive and related reproductive health services at no cost to California adolescents and adults, with incomes up to 200% of the federal poverty level.

- **Adolescent Family Life Program (AFLP)** funds programs in county health departments, schools, hospitals, and community-based organizations to help pregnant and parenting youth have healthy babies, graduate from high school, and delay subsequent children until adulthood.

- **California School Age Families Education (Cal-SAFE)** program is designed to help pregnant and parenting youth improve their academic achievement, build their parenting skills, and provide quality child care and development opportunities for their children.

- **Cal-Learn** program helps pregnant and parenting youth attend and graduate from high school by providing case management to help youth obtain education, health, and social services; payments for child care, transportation and educational expenses; and bonuses and sanctions to encourage school attendance and good grades.

*California State Department of Public Health

**FIGURE 2: CALIFORNIA STATUTE ON SEXUALITY EDUCATION**

California State Education Code 51930-39 (California Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS Prevention Education Act) and Health and Safety Code 151000-03 (Sexual Health Education Accountability Act) established curriculum guidelines for school-based and other state-funded sexuality education programs to be comprehensive, age-appropriate, medically accurate, objective, equally available to English learners and appropriate to students of all races, genders, sexual orientations, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and students with disabilities.
Moreover, these already limited state-funded teen pregnancy prevention efforts have been severely decimated. California’s fiscal troubles have steadily dismantled every program aimed at providing youth the tools to make the best decisions for themselves. In 2008, the Governor completely eliminated funding for two of California’s five major Teen Pregnancy Prevention Programs (TPP), the Male Involvement Program and the Teen SMART Outreach Program, and reduced funding for the Information & Education Program by approximately forty percent. During the 2011 fiscal cycle, $20 million were redirected from TPP, eliminating the Community Challenge Grants. Currently, the state allocates a mere $2 million in funding for one program on sexuality education, a 93% reduction in state funding for sexuality education programs since 2006.9 During that same period, programs supporting pregnant and parenting youth were reduced by nearly $44 million.10

The federal landscape for funding programs targeting youth sexuality is not any better. Despite an initial investment in evidence-based sexual health education programs and the elimination of the previous administration’s wasteful financing of abstinence-only programs in 2008, the recent appropriations bill provided $5 million to refund these ineffective programs.11

**Dismantling the Myth of the Latina/o Teen Pregnancy Problem**

Up to now, the majority of laws and interventions intended to solve the issue of adolescent childbearing are focused on the individual and do not address the systemic factors in the lives of Latina/o youth that might have led them to become young parents. The fact is that Latina/o youth – pregnant, parenting, or not – are experiencing extensive health, educational and socio-economic inequities that must be tackled in order to ensure all Latina/o youth can thrive.

Poor health outcomes are a concern for both the young mother and father and the child. It is often cited that adolescent mothers have high rates of premature births. The factors causing premature births are complex, however, and for young Latinas, access to health care is a serious barrier. Latinas are the most uninsured in California; approximately 6 out of 10 uninsured women are Latina.12

**The fact is that Latina/o youth – pregnant, parenting, or not – are experiencing extensive health, educational and socio-economic inequities that must be tackled in order to ensure all Latina/o youth can thrive.**

Lack of a quality education and access to real opportunities for advancement are significant problems unaddressed through traditional strategies focused on preventing unintended adolescent pregnancies alone. Educational outcomes for Latinas/os, parenting or not, are dismal. Whereas Latinas/os comprised 45% of ninth graders in 2004–05, four years later they were only 38% of graduates. Among 18-24 year olds, 33% of Latinas/os have not completed high school, compared to 11% of Whites.13 As California demographics continue to shift, it is especially important to pay close attention to Latina/o youth’s educational attainment. The majority of youth in grades K-12 in
California are Latinas/os. Moreover, Latina/o youth live in neighborhoods where the quality of education is subpar due to under-resourced districts.

In the case of pregnant and parenting youth, educational institutions are creating systemic conditions that prevent youth from graduating and preparing for college, both unintentionally and intentionally. In CLRJ’s previous research, a rising theme was the discriminatory practices by school officials that included forcing pregnant youth out of their educational settings or providing subpar instruction. Even in cases where a school’s intentions are to support parenting youth, the effect of isolating pregnant and parenting Latinas into separate educational settings or providing a different standard of instruction, is wrong, biased and illegal. Pregnant and parenting youth have a constitutional right to continue their education and extra-curricular activities as stated in both U.S. and California State Code.

The unacceptable graduation rates for Latinas/os are a call to action; addressing the reasons young parents are not finishing high school is paramount. Oftentimes, the catalyst for young mothers and fathers to continue their education rests upon their ability to obtain childcare. Just as with adult parents, lack of affordable child care is a major impediment for completion of work or schooling and thus a barrier for economic advancement. Focus groups with young parents conducted by CLRJ reaffirm this obstacle. Youth cited lacking child care services as a problem both for attending school and for obtaining employment. In the same focus groups, CLRJ also found a different narrative that is rarely raised in the public. Young mothers and fathers discussed how becoming a parent motivated them to continue their education and in some cases stated that their children “changed them for the better.” The educational rates, thus, tell a broader story that must be explored and addressed. Research shows that many adolescents drop out of school before they become pregnant; their academic difficulties predate and perhaps contribute to their pregnancies. Educational outcomes, as expected, are better when academic achievement was higher pre-pregnancy and high levels of family support exist. Furthermore, the “cycle of poverty” stems from long-term inequities, which leave almost half of Latinas between the ages of 25 and 64 who lack a high school diploma unemployed, and for those who are employed earning an average annual income of only $15,030.

Access to comprehensive sexuality education continues to be inconsistent despite California’s robust Education Code 51930-39, which outlines what components comprehensive sexuality education must include. Many school districts are not adhering to the law, and the state does not have sufficient resources to enforce it. The California Department of Education currently has one staff charged with reviewing health and sexuality curriculum. With over a thousand school districts, one staff presents an obvious problem for enforcement.

Access to reproductive health information and services beyond sexuality education is also a factor. Access to contraceptives plays a major role in preventing unplanned pregnancies. Sexually active adolescents who do not use a contraceptive have 90% chance of becoming pregnant within a year. Despite California’s progress in making family planning and reproductive health services widely available to low-income youth and adults, youth continue to face challenges in both consistently obtaining and using effective contraceptive methods.
California’s progress in making family planning and reproductive health services widely available to low-income youth and adults, youth continue to face challenges in both consistently obtaining and using effective contraceptive methods. Youth have a harder time accessing contraceptives for many reasons, such as stigma associated in trying to purchase them, lack of knowledge and misinformation about contraceptive methods, or they do not know how and where to obtain them. In some cases youth are deterred by: 1) adults who mistakenly deny the purchase of condoms by minors and 2) the locking of condoms behind glass cases at drugstores. California’s family planning access program, Family PACT, has played an important role in ensuring that youth have access to contraceptives and other reproductive health services, such as STI screenings. Fifty-five percent of youth (19 and younger) who used Family PACT in 2009-2010 (fiscal year) were Latina/o and 87% of the youth served were women. The higher utilization rate by young women also points to the little attention that males receive in the reproductive health realm. Ignoring the needs of young men is not only unfair, it continues to place an undue burden on young women. Young men need as much access to education, access to confidential services and de-stigmatization of their sexuality – whether they are young fathers or not.

Poverty is at the center of the factors previously described in this section. In the dominant framework, poverty is often described as an effect rather than an underlying cause. Low-income youth make up approximately 38% of all young women (ages 15-19) and account for 73% of teens who give birth. Thirty-five percent of Latina/o youth (ages 12-17) in California are already in poverty. Whether parents or not, the current economic outcomes for Latina/o youth are bleak. For Latina/o youth to succeed, California must seek ways to educate and support all youth to reach their full potential. Pregnant and parenting youth must be treated with respect and dignity, recognizing that they too form part of our state’s future.
INTRODUCING A NEW PARADIGM ON LATINA/O YOUTH PARENTING – JUSTICE FOR YOUNG FAMILIES!

The Justice for Young Families Initiative seeks to address and shed light on this misrepresented aspect of Latina/o youth sexuality. For Latina/o youth that choose to become parents, whether planned or unplanned, systemic conditions often condemn them further to a life of poverty and poor health outcomes. Latina/o youth who are pregnant and/or parenting need and deserve support to ensure there is a path for them to thrive. Recent CLRJ research demonstrated that while Latina/o adults generally expressed negative feelings toward adolescent childbearing, the majority overwhelmingly conveyed a need to support young parents.28 The dominant framework also chastises Latina/o parents as being permissive in welcoming their teen’s pregnancy and thus, are another culprit in the high rates of adolescent childbearing among Latinas/os. The fact is young parents are part of many Latina/o families’ reality, and providing family support does not equal enabling. This support is critical, considering that nearly one-half of female adolescents who dropped out of school stated becoming a parent played a role in their decisions to leave school, and an additional one-third said it was a major factor.29 The disproportionately high birth rate among adolescent Latinas, coupled with the fact that only 59 percent of Latinas graduate on time with a standard high school diploma (compared to 78 percent of young White women)30 challenges us to find better, more culturally relevant approaches to support all Latina/o youth.

Aside from trying to prevent adolescent pregnancies, CLRJ challenges policymakers, advocates, and providers to consider what happens to youth that fall through the prevention framework. Half of youth pregnancies are unintended, similarly as adults. Acknowledging that youth sexuality is a normal part of development and that some youth will become sexually active as adolescents compels us to think beyond preventing pregnancy. Information on and access to all contraceptive methods, comprehensive sexuality education that includes exploration of sexual and gender identity, sexual orientation, and healthy relationships, and providing meaningful pathways to delay parenthood, are issues to be thought of as part of healthy youth development, not merely “pregnancy prevention.” California policies must turn attention to addressing the multiple realities that surround youth’s lives, such as poverty, lack of quality education, lack of access to comprehensive sexual health education, lack of access to health care, amongst other issues, as the primary indicators of negative health, educational and economic outcomes rather than focus on individual behavior.

The long-term goal of Justice for Young Families is to reframe current messages that place individual blame on youth for “teen pregnancies,” yet offer little or no support by way of policies and access for young parents. Through Justice for Young Families, CLRJ intends to initiate policy advocacy to promote the health, equity, and dignity of young parents by partnering with pregnant and parenting youth, organizations and individuals that work with young families to change the way young mothers and fathers are perceived and treated.

Acknowledging that youth sexuality is a normal part of development and that some youth will become sexually active as adolescents compels us to think beyond preventing pregnancy.
RECOMMENDATIONS:  
Addressing Latina/o Adolescent Childbearing through a  
Reproductive Justice Lens

It is clear that future public policy work needs to tackle the extensive health, educational and systemic inequities many low-income Latina/o youth are facing, such as access to comprehensive sexuality education, information and access to contraceptives, educational and economic opportunities, and poverty. On a broader community level, though, we can all immediately begin to shift our thinking about youth sexuality and refrain from blaming youth for society’s shortcomings. Advocates, service providers, political leaders, and families can:

- Stop using punitive messages regarding Latina/o youth sexuality, particularly young parents.
- Support policies that improve educational outcomes for all Latina/o youth, pregnant, parenting or not.
- Invest resources in programs that offer both comprehensive sexuality education and support young parents.
- Support community-informed research to better elucidate the sexual, reproductive and overall needs of young Latinas/os and improve approaches that normalize human sexuality.
- Invite young people to inform policy decisions that reflect their lived experiences and uphold their dignity.

AFTERWORD

While this issue brief sheds light on many of the overlooked facets of Latina/o youth sexuality in regards to pregnant and parenting youth, there is still much more to explore and discuss. In the coming years, as a part of the Justice for Young Families Initiative (J4YF), CLRJ will continue to examine and uplift the diverse experiences and needs of young families and develop a policy agenda in partnership with organizations and individuals that work with young families. Areas for future examination include but are not limited to:

- Amplifying the definition of and approach to young parenting to include the discussion of youth as caregivers for their own siblings and/or other family members.
- Exploring both the various roles young fathers play and ways to provide support systems.
- Identifying the unique needs of incarcerated youth, parenting or not.
- Understanding intersectional layers influencing high birth rates amongst youth in foster care.
- Examining experiences of coercion and violence and stark partner age difference.
- Including diverse narratives of adults who were young parents.
- Analyzing connection between school “push out” and young parenthood.
- Investigating reasons why young people plan to become parents at a young age.
ENDNOTES


7. *Study of Latina Teen Childbearing*.


10. *Ibid*.


14. California Department of Education. Educational Demographics Unit Data Quest, Enrollment by Ethnicity for 2010-11, Enrollment by Gender, Grade and Ethnic Designation. See: http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/


18. *Helping Teens*.


27. Ask CHIS.


29. Listening to Latinas, at 24.

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Justice for Young Families is part of a broader agenda to reclaim “family” values to include all our family structures as part of the Strong Families Initiative (reproductivejustice.org/strong-families).

California Latinas for Reproductive Justice (CLRJ) is a statewide policy and advocacy organization whose mission is to advance California Latinas’ reproductive health and rights within a social justice and human rights framework. CLRJ works to ensure that policy developments reflect Latinas’ priority needs, as well as those of their families and their communities.

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