

METRO & STATE

A lesson in reality of teen parenting

'We are not sex educators. We try to focus on the responsibilities of a parent and try to avoid questions that would discuss that subject.'

Russell Smith
YouthLaunch executive director

In No Kidding program, Austin students learn about issues such as costs, care, rights through personal tales

By Isadora Vail

AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

At 16, Alicia Davis thought she had bad gas, but she was actually seven months pregnant.

"I didn't know what being pregnant was supposed to feel like. When the doctor told me and my mom, I just sat there and cried and cried and cried," Davis told Bowie High School students Friday afternoon.

She can laugh about it now, four years later, and uses her story about becoming a mother as a teaching tool in a program called No Kidding: Straight Talk from Teen Parents.

It was created as a pilot program two years ago through a partnership between the Texas attorney general's office and YouthLaunch, an Austin-based organization that provides the Austin school district with programs that focus on things such as

alcohol awareness, organic gardening, environmental services and scholarships.

Davis, now 20, told the students that when she was pregnant, she hid her "pooch" with a sweater but is proud of her daughter now. She and her fiancé, Chris Jones, who is the child's father, have been part of YouthLaunch for three years.

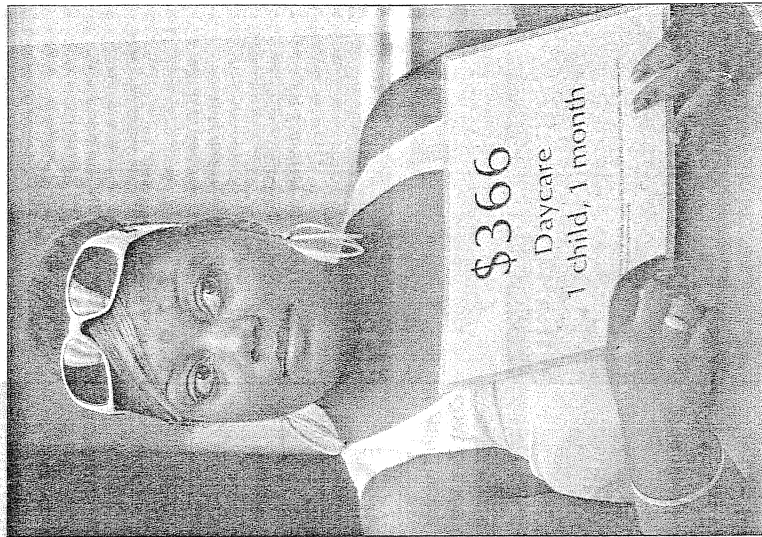
Fifteen interns range in age from 16 to 24 and are paid for each time they tell their story to students. The presentations follow a strict curriculum for grades 6 through 12 in Austin district schools.

During the three-day program, students learn how much diapers and day care cost, discuss issues relating to child support and paternity and are advised about the rights of teen parents.

The program does not discuss birth control, abstinence or other ways to prevent pregnancy. Instead, to avoid controversy, it focuses on the realities of being a teen parent.

"We are not sex educators," YouthLaunch Executive Director Russell Smith said. "We try to focus on the responsibilities of a parent and try to avoid questions that would discuss that subject."

See **BABIES**, B3



Jay Ianner AMERICAN-STATESMAN
Bowie High School students learned about the costs of having a baby from Alicia Davis, 20. She found out that she was pregnant when she was 16.

BABIES: Dad says he wishes he'd known 'all the bad parts'

Continued from B1

No Kidding has district approval because it covers areas of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills curriculum guidelines such as sociology, psychology, government, English and health.

Rudy Alvarez, a health teacher at Bowie, said he was impressed with the No Kidding speakers and hoped that they would come back next semester. The interns were in his class from Wednesday to Friday, and he said the students responded positively.

"A lot of students will come up to me after class and say that the presentation means a lot to them," said Katie White, another No Kidding intern. "All of our stories are heartfelt, blunt and eye-opening. But what I want them to learn are ideal conceptions of who they want to be before they even think about having kids."

Janece Rolfe, spokeswoman for the attorney general's office, said the program's progress is measured after each three-day session through pre- and post-session tests to evaluate what the students have learned.

"They are interested in this. A lot of the students come from divorced families," Alvarez said. "Plus, they are the first group to discuss teen pregnancy and parenting. Usually we get groups with underage drinking or sexually transmitted disease



Jay Janner AMERICAN-STATESMAN

Young mom Katie White, speaking at Bowie High, says many students tell her the presentation about teen parenting 'means a lot' to them.

discussions."

The interns received national attention when they performed in Dallas at the 2006 National Child Support Enforcement Association conference in August. The group has been invited to other states to help install their own programs.

That's a major accomplishment, said program coordinator Jenifer De Atley, adding that the program tries not to glorify teen parents.

Juan Villavicencio, 17, has a 4-month-old daughter and said he is still getting used to being a dad. Although he enjoys the perks of having a child, he said, he works for No Kidding to tell other students "all the bad parts."

"It is fun and all, but I wish someone would've come to my school and let me know what was going to happen," Villavicencio said.

ivail@statesman.com; 445-3634