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# **teen parent** **programs**

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**eliminating racism**  
**empowering women** **ywca**

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# Sheila C. “Skip” Nowell Leadership Academy Class of 2014

*photos courtesy of Scott Kingsley Duo Pictures*



# Trailblazing an Educational Path for Teen Parents

Dear Friend:

A little over one year ago, a new charter school opened with locations in Providence, Central Falls and cyberspace.

It's the Sheila C. "Skip" Nowell Leadership Academy Charter School, and it combines the best of the "old school" format of classroom instruction with the advantages offered by 21st century online education.

The organization behind it: YWCA Rhode Island.

This might sound like a new role for the YWCA, but in truth, it's a natural outgrowth of what YWCA Rhode Island has been doing for years.

Twenty-nine years ago, Sheila "Skip" Nowell, the executive director of what was known as YWCA of Northern Rhode Island, saw a need and filled it with a program she called Parenting In Progress (PIP). It was geared to teenage girls who were likely to drop out of school because they were pregnant or already mothers.

Participants took classes leading to a GED diploma, but they also were taught life skills, like how to take care of their babies and themselves, how to handle finances, and how to think about their futures. Moreover, one of the biggest stumbling blocks to continuing education was removed: PIP provided child care when the mothers were in class. Graduation exercises were big events that celebrated these students' significant accomplishments.

While this program has been ongoing, YWCA has expanded and diversified its programs surrounding teen pregnancy. Most recently:

- 2009: developed a HIV/AIDS risk assessment for teen mothers.
- 2010: sponsored a year-long series of community conversations on raising sexually healthy children.
- 2012: hosted the influential "Children of Children" exhibit, a collection of photographs and audio stories reflecting the hopes, regrets, frustrations and rewards experienced by people affected by a teen pregnancy.
- 2013: working on ways YWCA and its partners can use social media to share information and good ideas on reducing rates of teen pregnancy and supporting young families.

The Nowell Leadership Academy, however, is the most ambitious and long-range undertaking. The idea developed after YWCA Rhode Island took the lead three years ago in researching and developing a statewide plan to reduce teen pregnancy and to support young families. Many agencies were involved, including the State Department of Health, but headquarters were at YWCA Rhode Island. Initially called the Rhode Island Teen Pregnancy Coalition, the group now is simply The Rhode Island Alliance.

Along with statistics such as one out of every 10 births in Rhode Island was to a teenager, and that the state ranked eighth in the nation for highest percentage of repeat teen births, this group also found that in 2009 more than 56 percent of these teen mothers did not have a high school diploma or GED.

On an individual basis, that means a lifelong limit on employment, income and opportunities. Those Rhode Island statistics bear this out: 70 percent of the births to girls age 15 to 19 were in the six communities with the highest child poverty rates.

At the very least, teen childbearing adds to the drain on social services. One study put the cost to Rhode Island taxpayers at the federal, state and local level at some \$35 million – in 2004 dollars. That doesn't begin to quantify issues like self-esteem and the bigger issue of contributing to society at large.

Rather than being overwhelmed with the data, however, YWCA Rhode Island honed in something it already had tackled: Changing that high school graduation rate. Months of planning went into the concept of a school that would offer its students the flexibility of online classes, which they could access from home via school-provided computers, as well as classroom instruction, 15 hours of each per week.

Academic progress would be measured as it is in all public schools, through exams like the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) and the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). Like its forbear, the PIP program, this new school would offer support with things like health and nutrition workshops, family planning services, preventative health care for infants and young children – and that crucial on-site

day care during classroom sessions.

All those ideas have become real in the Nowell Leadership Academy. The State Department of Education has signaled its approval. A board of directors was organized under co-chairs Dr. Patricia Flanagan, chief of clinical affairs at Hasbro Children's Hospital and an expert on teenage parenting and adolescent medicine, and myself, Deborah L. Perry, CEO of YWCA Rhode Island. Jodi Timpani, formerly a vice principal at Central Falls High School, was named head of school. Two campuses were secured and 160 students enrolled in the school. This past month 23 students graduated and received a high school diploma. The five-year strategic plan for the school envisions doubling the number of physical locations and increasing the student population to 320.

YWCA Rhode Island has given birth to its own baby and now, like any parent, can watch it grow.

Very truly yours,

*Deborah*

Deborah L. Perry  
YWCA Rhode Island  
President/Chief Executive Officer

## We invite you to help support YWCA Teen Parent Programs.

Name:

Address:

Phone:

Email:

Enclosed is a donation in the amount of:

\_\_\_ \$750 will provide four months of childcare

\_\_\_ \$150 will provide one month of transportation to and from YWCA programming for parent and child

\_\_\_ \$50 will purchase one case of diapers

\_\_\_ Other

Thank you for your kindness!

Mail to:  
YWCA Rhode Island  
514 Blackstone Street  
Woonsocket, RI 02895



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# YWCA Parenting In Progress Graduation 2014

*photo by Deborah L. Perry*



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**It has taken 30 years of commitment, community building, advocacy, and financial resources from YWCA members and donors such as Rhode Island Foundation to level the educational playing field for some of Rhode Island's most at risk youth.**

And we are not done yet.

**1984 - ongoing**

*Parenting In Progress (PIP)*

– Created under the leadership of Sheila C. “Skip” Nowell, YWCA Northern Rhode Island executive director 1973-1993, PIP is a program for teen mothers and contains a comprehensive set of services including GED education/external high school diploma tracts, case management, childcare, transportation, and access to social services.

**2009**

*HIV/AIDS/STD Risk Assessment/Survey*

– Conducted by YWCA with pregnant and parenting teens.

**2010**

*Woonsocket Community Dialogues*

– YWCA Raising Sexually Healthy Children year-long community conversation series held in Woonsocket.

**2011**

*Rhode Island Alliance*

– YWCA Rhode Island serves as the lead support agency for The Rhode Island Alliance (RIA). A collaborative effort of over 60 individuals and organizations, RIA views teen pregnancy and childbearing as a complex issue requiring a comprehensive approach.

**2012**

*Statewide Comprehensive Plan*

– RIA completes and launches a statewide comprehensive plan to reduce the rates of teen pregnancy and support young families.

*Children of Children Exhibit*

– YWCA Rhode Island sponsors Michael Nye's Children of Children Exhibit which is hosted by Rhode Island First Lady Stephanie Chafee and DOH Director Dr. Michael Fine. Over 600 people view the month long exhibit, a powerful installation of 52 portraits and audio-stories of lives touched by early parenting.

**2012 - 2013**

*Barbara Sokoloff Associates (BSA)*

– BSA is hired to determine charter school feasibility and becomes principal author of application to create a public school which will reach underserved youth, including those who are pregnant and parenting.

**April 2013**

*Sheila C. “Skip” Nowell Leadership Academy*

– School becomes first blended virtual model charter school high school in Rhode Island and is granted a 5 year charter to serve 320 high school students by the year 2018. – YWCA members are majority minority board members of the new charter school thus ensuring long-term fidelity to original intent of school creation and mission.

**September 2013**

*Jodi Timpani*

– Hired as Head of School and provides day to day leadership.

**2014**

*RIA Statewide Communications Plan*

– RIA plan completed detailing ways partners can use social media to share information and good ideas to reduce the rates of teen pregnancy and support young families.

**August 2014**

*Sheila C. “Skip” Nowell Leadership Academy*

– First commencement ceremony held.