

WAGGGS' Initiative on the Prevention of Adolescent Pregnancy

Campaign Guidelines

In many parts of the world, late adolescent childbirth is culturally acceptable and traditionally normal. Older adolescent mothers are still at risk socially and physically, but often to a lesser degree. WAGGGS' position addresses the issue of pregnant adolescents under the age of 15, whose health and development are particularly at risk.

Why an advocacy campaign?

Tackling a problem on the scale of adolescent pregnancy may seem like an impossible task. 17 million adolescents become pregnant each year. How can you or I make a difference to such a huge and global problem?

The answer lies in the power of a movement of people to change society. Individuals alone can achieve something. Thousands together can achieve more. And as the world's largest voluntary organization for girls and young women, we have a special responsibility to speak out about a problem which affects the lives of so many young women and their children.

WAGGGS believes that our best chance of making a difference on this important issue is by running a worldwide advocacy campaign. This is a departure from our usual focus on community based projects. For some Member Organizations, this may mean learning new ways of working. We hope you will find the challenge stimulating and rewarding.

What is an advocacy campaign?

We have a great influence on girls and young women. All our activities help girls develop self-esteem and decision-making skills, the very qualities that will reduce their chances of becoming pregnant while still very young themselves. In some countries, Girl Guides/Girl Scouts run projects which talk directly about sexual activity and pregnancy. These projects are enormously valuable.

But we can never hope to reach all the girls at risk of early sexual activity and the health risks and other disadvantages it brings. So we need to enlist the help of the experts...

The world's young women need youth-friendly health services. They need suitable education programmes in schools on sexual and reproductive health. And they need opportunities to earn money, so they can participate more equally in decision-making. These things we can't deliver ourselves. So we need to make sure that governments and key opinion formers do.



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Advocacy means putting pressure on those who can bring about change. Our aim is to push the issue of teenage pregnancy to the top of decision-makers' agendas. To do that, we need to raise public awareness and drive the debate forward. We need to press for real changes in policy and practice, internationally, nationally and locally.

Over the next two years, the World Bureau will be coordinating an advocacy campaign worldwide. We hope that many of our Member Organizations will choose to deliver the campaign nationally and locally.

It is for each national Association to decide whether, and how far, it should take part in this initiative. Adolescent pregnancy is not a big problem in all countries. Some Associations may already have decided what issues and projects they will work on over the next few years. However we hope that many organizations, especially those in countries where adolescent pregnancy is widespread, will join the campaign.

These guidelines are intended to help you plan and run a campaign in your country. They contain suggestions for campaigning both at a national level, and locally.

Planning your campaign

The first stage in planning a campaign involves research and thinking. You need to identify:

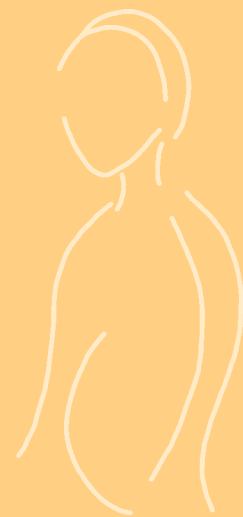
- what needs to change
- who has the power to change it, and
- what will make them do it.

What needs to change?

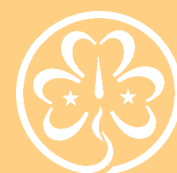
Adolescent childbirth is a global issue.

The underlying reasons why young girls become pregnant are largely the same worldwide: lack of information, advice or preventative measures; lack of power to say "no"; cultural traditions and practices. You will need to understand the exact mix of circumstances which apply in your country. What attitudes do you need to challenge? Why is necessary information and advice failing to reach the people who need it? How can existing services better respond to the crisis?

At this stage, you may find it helpful to contact and compare notes with other organizations working on sexual and reproductive health, or in girls' and women's rights, and compare notes. This pack contains a list of useful contacts and you will almost certainly be able to find other organizations working locally.



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Who has the power?

WAGGGS' Position Paper on Adolescent Pregnancies (WB 3093, February 2000) sets out the key objectives of our campaign. WAGGGS urges Member Organizations to lobby governments and relevant individuals, national and international organizations, on a number of points.

Having decided which of these objectives are relevant in your country, you need to identify who needs to act to make them happen.

Is there a Minister for Women, or for Youth? Who sits on any relevant committees, and when do they meet? Is there any legislation that is not being fully implemented, or that could be amended to better tackle the problem? Is your Government already moving in the right direction? What barriers are there – are they political, cultural, or to do with resources? Who are the officials in health, education or employment services that need to take action to make these aims happen? Which non-governmental organizations play important roles in providing services?

What will make them do it?

Once you've identified your campaign targets, you need to build relationships with these people. They need to understand that you are well informed and that you speak on behalf of thousands of girls and young women. If they know and respect you, it will be much easier to challenge their policies and practices and demand changes.

Some things will be easier to change than others. It may turn out that informed argument is all it takes to get a health clinic to vary its opening hours. Other things are harder. You may have to raise public awareness in order to create public pressure for change. You may have to become expert in the complex details of United Nations agreements. But if you keep your objectives firmly in mind, and always consider the position and interests of your campaign targets, you can make change happen.

Planning a campaign can seem a huge and scary task. Our aim is nothing less than to change the policies and practices of politicians and health and education service providers worldwide. But we can be confident that we will make a difference. Throughout the centuries, when people have joined forces to change society they have often succeeded.

South Africa's apartheid regime once seemed invincible. The white minority held power, and efficiently stamped out their opposition. But on 27 April 1994, the first democratic elections were held in South Africa. The end of apartheid came about not because of one powerful individual or institution, but because of the efforts of thousands of people around the world who believed that it was wrong and must be challenged.



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How to use this pack

Statistics and Quotations

Use the statistics in your press releases, letters, presentations, speeches, publicity material and discussions.

Use the quotations to support your own arguments in presentations, press releases, speeches, letters and publicity material.

Use appropriate statistics and quotations to inform Girl Guides/Girl Scouts about the issue.

Model Speech

Change the model speech so that it is specific to your country and your association.

Contact Details

Contact any of the organizations listed that operate in your country to see if you can work with them on the prevention of adolescent pregnancy.

Campaign Guidelines

Use the campaign guidelines to run a successful campaign in your country.

Press Release

Adapt the press release for national use. Give the story a national slant by including national statistics, information about your activities, and quotes from national leaders or Girl Guides/Girl Scouts.

Statement of endorsement

Ask key celebrities, opinion formers, leaders to sign the statement of endorsement, and use it to promote the issue.

Let the World Bureau know who has signed the statement.

Can you eat a whole elephant?

Yes, if you cut it up and eat it one piece at a time*

Please remember, you don't need to do everything at once! WAGGGS will campaign on this issue for the next two years – and there is no reason why you could not continue for longer. So don't try to do everything on your wish-list at once. Far better to set smaller goals, which you have a good chance of winning. Once you have won these, you can build on your success by setting new goals.

(*African saying)



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