



Dayzhanai Myrick, 11, listens during a recent open house for the new, nationally recognized teen-pregnancy program called Carrera that is scheduled to start with students from East Toledo who are in the fifth grade.

After-school program will be offered daily through the YWCA

By JULIE M. MCKINNON

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To help East Toledo youngsters avoid becoming parents as teens, the YWCA is launching a daily after-school program providing 100 fifth graders with age-appropriate sexuality education, tutoring, and other services for the next several years.

The nationally recognized program developed by a New York doctor works with boys and girls to discover interests and develop talents, as well as educate them about the consequences of sexual activity.

The free program emphasizes education and employment, both of which are key to helping youngsters avoid risky behavior, said Penny Tullis, program coordinator.

"It's very much a holistic model," Ms. Tullis said. "We're not just looking at one part of the child."

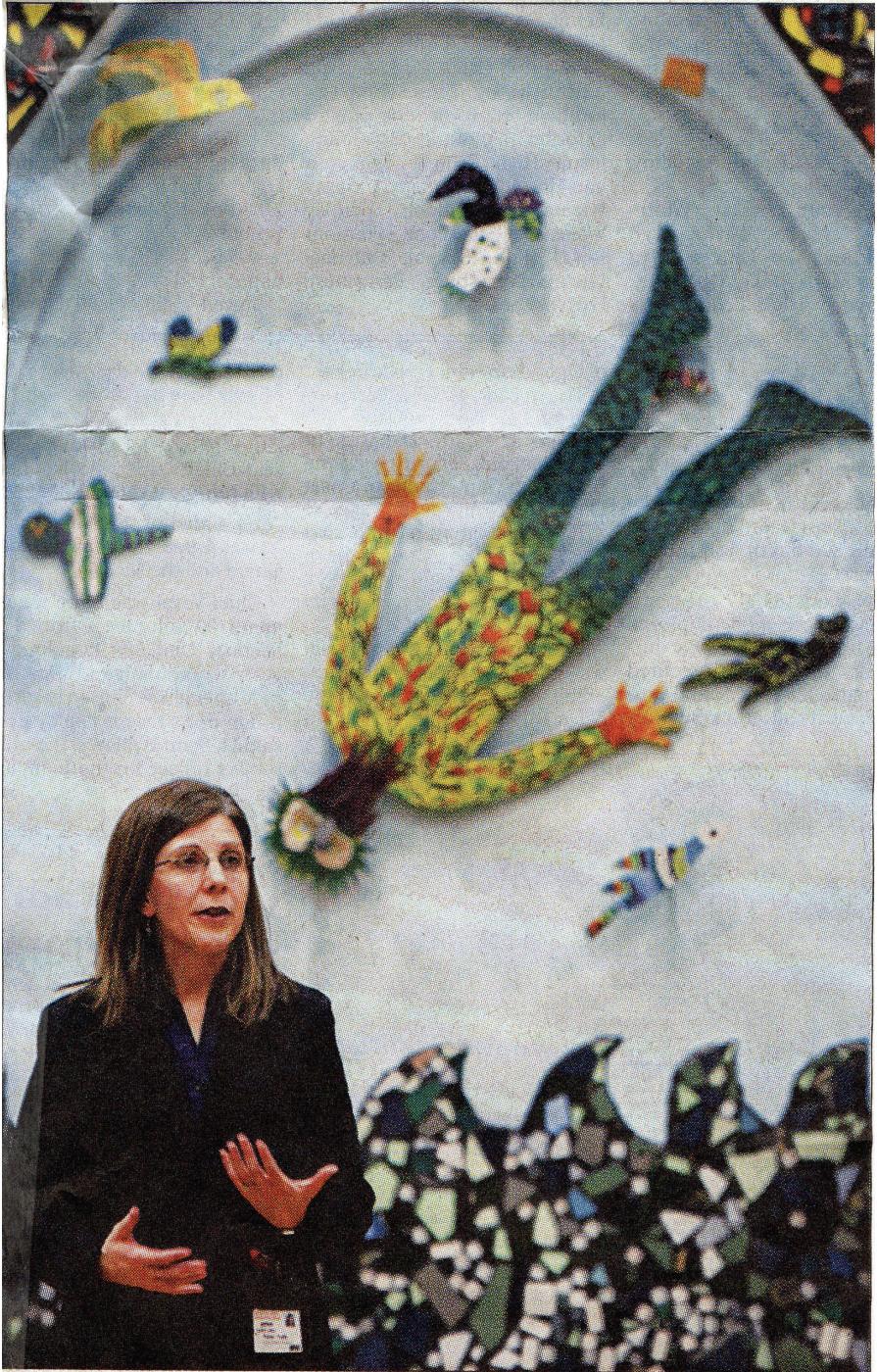
Said Shelly Ulrich, the YWCA's associate executive officer: "Ultimately, it's the kids who make the choice not to become a teen parent."

Lucas County has long battled high teen-pregnancy rates, which are most prevalent in Toledo's east, central, and north neighborhoods:

In all but four years since 1989, Lucas County has led the state

See PREGNANCY, Page 2

Battling teen pregnancy



Penny Tullis, Carrera Program coordinator, speaks during the open house at the old Franklin Elementary School. The daily, after-school program is being launched by the YWCA.

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Pregnancy

Continued from Page 1

in teen birth rates among urban areas annually. And Lucas County had an estimated 1,441 pregnant females aged 10 to 19 in 2006, the second-highest number among all counties statewide, the latest Ohio Department of Health statistics show.

The so-called Carrera program is one of three approaches the YWCA has undertaken to help decrease teen pregnancy rates, and they are among various efforts under way in Lucas County.

The organization received a two-year, \$400,000 grant from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services to get the Carrera program started, Ms. Ulrich said.

The YWCA is seeking 100 fifth graders and their parents in the 43605 zip code willing to join the program developed in 1984 by Dr. Michael Carrera, director of adolescent sexuality and pregnancy prevention programs for The Children's Aid Society in New York.

Elementaries include Birmingham, East Side Central, Garfield, Navarre, Oakdale, and Raymer. For more information, call 419-698-1230.

The Carrera program has been replicated nationwide, but East Toledo is the first site in Ohio.

"Above the waist" components dealing with employment, education, sports, arts, medical care, and mental health are at the core of the Carrera program.

In the Job Club, for example, participants will open bank accounts, explore career choices, and have summer and part-time jobs.

Weekly sexuality education sessions, which will be appropriate for the children's age levels through the elementary, middle, and high school years, are another core component,

Mr. Ulrich said.

"It's always been our philosophy that kids deserve accurate and honest information," she said.

The local Carrera program will have 14 staff members, including five full-time employees, and be housed in the former Franklin Elementary School, 310 Steadman St., in East Toledo.

Transportation will be provided daily from students' schools to the program, in-

The Carrera program will operate about three hours after school, and it will include parent meetings twice a month

cluding the six Toledo Public Schools' elementaries in East Toledo.

The Carrera program will operate three or so hours after school, and it will include parent meetings twice a month.

Dr. Carrera will be in East Toledo to give an orientation session on the program at 6 p.m. Jan. 29 at the former Franklin Elementary.

A couple of informational open houses have been held at the former Franklin Elementary, including one last week, and interest is increasing, Ms. Tullis said.

The program will begin Jan. 31, and hopefully all students will have joined in within a couple of months, she said.

"We're hoping to bring them on board as a group and then follow them all the way through high school," Ms. Tullis said.

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