



Spartanburg's Approach to Teen Pregnancy Prevention

July 2020



Spartanburg County's success story related to teen pregnancy prevention is the result of many individuals and organizations over time. It is not possible to thank everyone who has had an impact, but, undoubtedly, the Community Advisory Board (pictured above), Youth Ambassadors, and Project Director Polly Edwards-Padgett have been critical to the collaborative work.

The reduction in the teen birth rate our community has experienced would not have been possible without the early vision and leadership of local philanthropy. The Spartanburg Joint Funders, along with many individual philanthropists, invested in the future of our youth and paved the way for the tremendous success that has resulted.

The Spartanburg Joint Funders:



THE SPARTANBURG COUNTY FOUNDATION
Your Community Foundation



The Mary Black Foundation would like to acknowledge Dr. Mark Macauda, Core for Applied Research and Evaluation, Arnold School of Public Health, who has led the research and evaluation components of this project (2015-2020).

We would also like to thank 1000 Feathers, LLC (Columbia, SC), which has helped the Mary Black Foundation publish this report and tell the story of Spartanburg's success over the years.



This publication was made possible in part by Grant Number TP1AH000119-01-00 from the Office of Population Affairs. Its content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the Office of Population Affairs.

Letter to the Community



Molly Talbot-Metz
President/CEO
Mary Black Foundation

In 2007, Spartanburg County had one of the highest teen birth rates in South Carolina and, by extension, one of the highest teen birth rates in the nation. This reality forced community leaders to face our challenges head on, and we ultimately took the bold step of identifying teen childbearing as a critical community indicator through the Spartanburg Community Indicators Project.

While we know many factors contribute to the health, social, and economic well-being of our community, teen pregnancy is inextricably linked to many of the indicators that we are seeking to improve. Children born to teen parents are more likely to become teen parents themselves, drop out of school, be involved in the criminal justice system, and receive public support. They are also less likely to be employed, own a home, and become productive and contributing members of society. Teen pregnancy is a multi-generational issue that not only affects people on an individual level, but also has ripple effects in communities and impacts all of us well into the future. Armed with the data and this knowledge, we had to take action.

In 2007, the Spartanburg Joint Funders agreed to invest together in the issue. They first engaged the South Carolina Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy (now known as Fact Forward) to conduct a needs assessment and develop a set of comprehensive, age-appropriate, and evidence-based prevention strategies. In 2008, a community-wide approach to teen pregnancy prevention was adopted to include schools, community-based organizations, healthcare providers, the faith community, key community leaders, parents, and young people. From 2008-2020, these funders directly invested over \$700,000 in the effort and helped to leverage over \$7 million in federal grants to enhance our local efforts—a true public/private collaboration.

One of these federal grants, managed by the Mary Black Foundation (2015-2020), led to the creation of the Connect initiative. Connect promotes adolescent friendly services, supports, and opportunities throughout Spartanburg County. Fueled by a Community Advisory Board of over 30 organizations and a group of Youth Ambassadors, Connect has taken teen pregnancy prevention efforts in Spartanburg County to a new level.

Remarkably, between 2008-2018, the teen birth rate in Spartanburg has declined by 66%. We should collectively celebrate this tremendous success while also recognizing that the work cannot stop.

As the current federal grant supporting Connect comes to an end, the Mary Black Foundation is excited to partner with Spartanburg Regional Foundation on the next phase of work. A new federal grant secured by Spartanburg Regional Foundation will offer more opportunities to support adolescent health and teen pregnancy prevention efforts. Since 2007, when teen pregnancy prevention was identified as a priority, there have been years with large grant funding and years with more modest resources, but what has remained consistent is Spartanburg's passion and commitment to creating a community that allows youth to reach their full potential. If we sustain that energy, together we will continue to improve the lives of young people in our community.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Molly Talbot-Metz". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional but personal style.

CONNECTING PAST & PRESENT

Efforts to prevent teen pregnancy in Spartanburg date back at least two decades. While there have been a number of individuals and organizations that have been committed to this critical work in the community, several necessary conditions fortuitously came together around 2007, and as a result, this is an important point in time in the Spartanburg story. First, data from the Spartanburg Community Indicators Project—a report on the key indicators of quality of life in the county—established an obvious link between teen pregnancy and issues such as poor birth outcomes, education, and poverty. This truth captured the attention of leaders and philanthropists in the community who encouraged and supported further action.

While data and community interest are important, they alone cannot solve problems without funding to support purposeful and strategic initiatives. In Spartanburg, this funding came from a unique partnership of the Spartanburg Joint Funders that came together to make an intentional investment in the issue. This investment gave the community an ability to dedicate time and resources to a broader, community-wide focus on teen pregnancy rather than relying on the efforts of individual organizations and people.

“ ...taking programs that maybe were successful on their own but can be that much more impactful together. I think that will be one of the greatest legacies of Connect.

- Polly Edwards-Padgett, Connect Project Director

”

Initial investments by the Joint Funders supported the work of the South Carolina Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, which conducted community assessments, hired staff, assisted in the identification of funding needs, and ultimately provided oversight of efforts in Spartanburg County. This partnership eventually led to Spartanburg being one of two counties in the state that were part of a joint federal grant focused on community-wide teen pregnancy prevention initiatives between 2010 and 2015.

As the first federal grant was ending, the Mary Black Foundation (the Foundation) stepped forward to apply for additional federal funds to strengthen the work. Efforts to prevent teen pregnancy fit squarely under



the Foundation's existing investment in early childhood development. This alignment with mission, combined with a high level of community readiness and capacity, positioned the Foundation—and community—to secure a federal investment.

In July 2015, the Foundation was one of 84 grantees across the country funded by the Office of Adolescent Health (now Office of Population Affairs). A five-year, \$5.3 million grant supported the development and creation of the Connect initiative. Connect was established to promote adolescent friendly services, supports, and opportunities throughout Spartanburg, but especially among youth facing the greatest inequities, with the goal to improve overall adolescent health.

The purpose of Connect is to link organizations together, provide a greater understanding of the collective knowledge and resources in the community, bring awareness of adolescent issues, and improve outcomes for teens, especially those who are most vulnerable.

Two fundamental approaches have made the work of Connect particularly unique and impactful: community involvement and data-driven decisions.

A wide variety of community stakeholders are engaged including healthcare providers, schools, faith communities, nonprofit organizations, state agencies, funders, law enforcement, and teens. From the beginning, it was decided that intervention efforts would be overseen by a representative Community Advisory Board (CAB). The CAB has included more than 30 agencies and 55 members of the community.



A focus on communities with the greatest need and a desire to reduce health inequities has driven all decision-making. From the beginning, Connect took a data-informed approach to identifying the community's most vulnerable youth, including those residing in zip codes with high rates of teen childbearing (29301, 29303, 29306), as well as older youth, youth in foster care or juvenile justice, and youth who were already parents.



Connect's focus on community involvement and data-driven decision making set Spartanburg on a path towards long-term success and a lasting impact, one that will be felt well beyond the grant funded period.

Spartanburg Teen Pregnancy Prevention Council leads community efforts.

2000-07

After Council closes, Joint Funders make combined investment in assessment, planning, and capacity building.

2007-08

Spartanburg receives first federal funding via SC Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.

2010

Mary Black Foundation selected as one of only 84 federal grantees across the country. Connect is formed.

2015

Spartanburg Regional Foundation secures federal grant to sustain Connect.

2020

A LASTING IMPACT

It has been well documented that making progress on an issue as complex as teen pregnancy requires a multifaceted, coordinated, and long-term investment. Recognizing this, the Connect initiative evolved over time to be more holistic in its approach to adolescent health by engaging and listening to the youth voice, offering a variety of evidence-based interventions tailored for the unique needs of youth and the adults in their lives, promoting positive youth development, providing an online resource guide, and coordinating public awareness through a website and social media outlets.

“ We’ve been able to have so many diverse partners that have come on board in support of adolescent health...it’s so much more broad...people have been more powerful together than they would have been if we were talking about sexual health only.

- Community Partner

”

Equally as important, Connect and the CAB changed the way the community thought about preventing teen pregnancy. Through Connect, there was a broader focus on addressing the social determinants of health and zeroing in on health inequities. The community grew to understand that for youth to be healthy, they needed more than just sexual health information. They also needed positive connections with supportive adults; safe and secure places to live, learn, and play; access to high quality, teen friendly healthcare; opportunities to engage as learners, leaders, team members, and workers; and coordinated, easily accessible adolescent friendly services.



Evidence-Based Programs in Schools

South Carolina has a state law requiring sex education in all middle and high schools. The law emphasizes local control and requires the formation of comprehensive health education committees. Decisions on the what, when, and how to implement sex education lies with individual school districts. In a county like Spartanburg, where there are seven independent school districts, uniform implementation of evidence-based programs was a big challenge.

Even with roadblocks and challenges to overcome, community leaders were steadfast in engaging superintendents, administrators, teachers, and students in conversations and relationship building that ultimately led to action. The process focused on the intersection of compliance with state law and providing the evidence-based instruction that was needed to make an impact.

Connect supported all seven school districts in providing evidence-based interventions to students. The instruction has now been institutionalized and remains one of the most significant impacts of the federal funding. Achieving this outcome required multiple strategies: aligning and integrating sex education requirements with other adolescent health requirements (i.e. sexual abuse and domestic violence prevention) to help districts meet several mandates with a single approach; offering free materials, training, and continuous quality improvement; building trusting relationships with administration; and engaging students and parents to accelerate progress in each district. This work will continue through the Spartanburg School District Consortium, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

As the Connect initiative became more about holistic adolescent health and systems-level thinking, a number of successes were achieved.

Improving the Delivery of Sex Education in Spartanburg County Schools

- ✓ All seven school districts received training and materials to implement evidence-based programs (nu-CULTURE and Love Notes) in 6th–9th graders.
- ✓ Conversations about teen pregnancy prevention have expanded to include preventing sexual abuse and domestic violence and have shifted to a focus on improving the whole school environment by including guidance counselors, school nurses, and other support staff.

Increasing Access to Healthcare

- ✓ Spartanburg Regional Healthcare System launched a Best Practice Alert in its electronic medical record system to screen youth for risk of teen pregnancy. This universal screening, plus screening at federally qualified health centers and Title X facilities, led to an increase in referrals for family planning services and to evidence-based programs in the community.
- ✓ Through its CAB, Youth Ambassadors, website, and social media platform, Connect has increased awareness of and referrals to youth-friendly family planning services, such as Choose Well and the “No Drama” text line.
- ✓ A dedicated Community Health Worker is now available to older youth to provide education, referrals, and linkages to family planning services through authentic and trusting relationships.

Creating Continuity Across Youth Services

- ✓ Through its involvement in the CAB, the Spartanburg Academic Movement saw a need for more accessible, high quality opportunities for youth in middle and high school, which has led to the creation of the Out of School Time Collaborative.
- ✓ Community-based organizations have institutionalized programming (high-quality, positive youth development and evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention curricula) to meet the various needs of youth.



Taking It to Scale

The Connect CAB saw a need to provide training and capacity for youth-serving providers and partnered with USC Upstate’s Child Protection Training Center to develop a 30-hour certificate program called the Fundamentals for Youth Service Providers. The program trains adults who work with youth in social determinants of health, understanding of adverse childhood experiences and trauma-informed care, youth engagement, and effective positive development models. The certificate program is an important component of sustainability because it provides continuity across youth services and will provide ongoing training and capacity building to ensure high quality provision of services at scale.

Ensuring Meaningful Youth Engagement

- ✓ Connect has ensured young people’s voices are heard and that they have ownership in program development. Through listening campaigns and other outreach, youth have been instrumental in guiding the work.
- ✓ Connect’s brand now includes a dedicated website and youth-driven social media channels.
- ✓ Young people have created RIZE—a one-day summit where youth take on social issues.

Encouraging Innovation

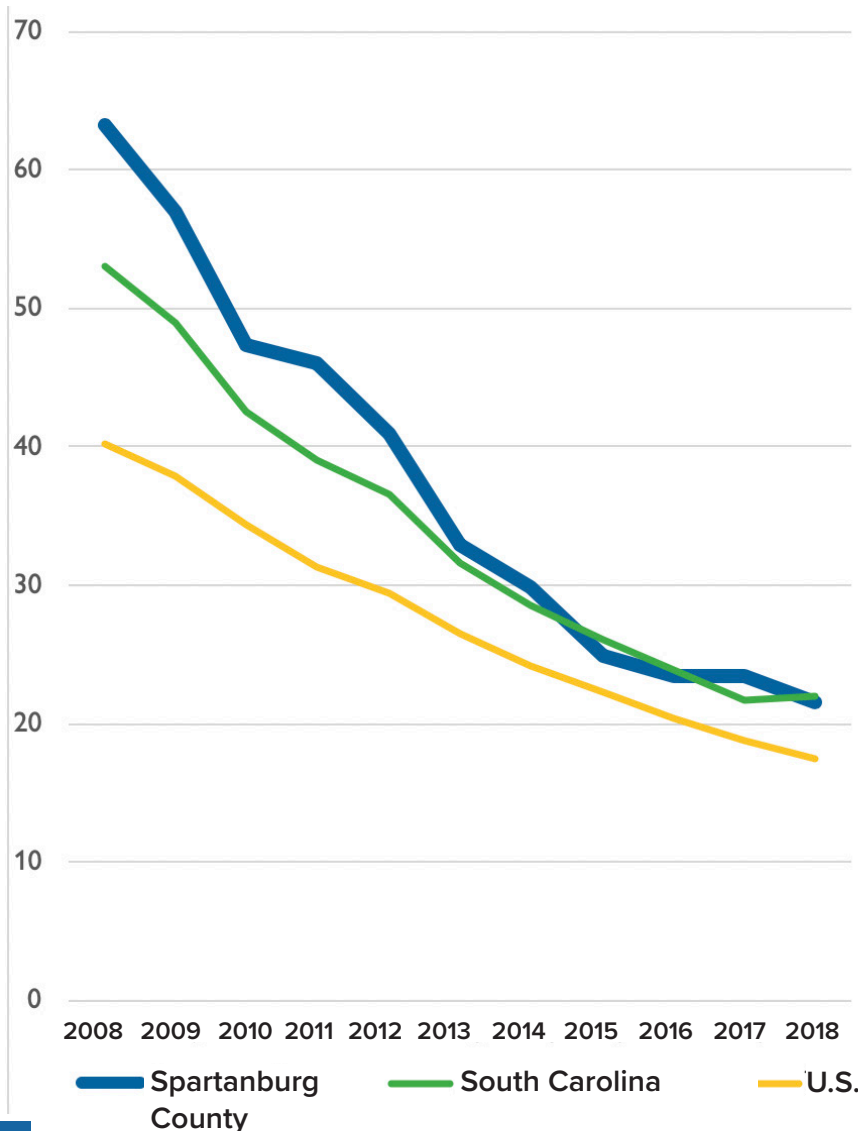
- ✓ The City of Spartanburg Parks and Recreation Department has changed their service model to focus more on positive youth development and investing in the future of young people.
- ✓ A partnership with My Brother’s Keeper has allowed mentors to use Aban Aya—an evidence-based program for young men of color.
- ✓ Building on an existing framework of evidence-based parent education, a partnership with Hope Center for Children has introduced Teen Triple P to support parents of teens.

OUR SUCCESS

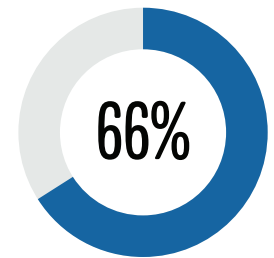
Since its peak in 1991, the teen birth rate in the U.S.—and in South Carolina and Spartanburg—has decreased upwards of 70%. However, this well-documented progress in reducing teen birth rates across the country has masked the fact that in some communities and populations there are still very high rates. Spartanburg County is a perfect example of a community that saw decreases in the teen birth rate throughout the 90s and early 2000s, but still lagged behind state and national declines. That is, until intensive and focused work began in 2008. **Since 2008, decreases in the teen birth rate in Spartanburg County have outpaced decreases at the state and national level!**

Progress on such a complex issue does not happen by chance. It requires leadership, vision, and strong collaboration—all things highlighted throughout this report. The success story in Spartanburg shows what a community can do when it stays committed to an issue for the long-term and understands where and how to concentrate its efforts and resources. The community has also benefited from Connect’s laser focus on health inequities. While taking a universal approach through school-based interventions to all youth in Spartanburg County, considerable effort was made to ensure youth who were at highest risk and most vulnerable for experiencing teen pregnancies received the targeted and more intensive services they needed.

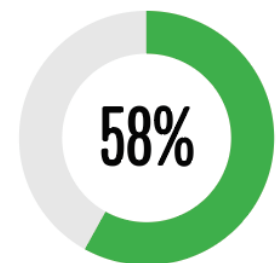
Teen Birth Rate (15–19): 2008-2018



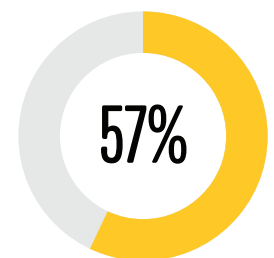
Teen Birth Rate Decline ('08-'18)



Spartanburg County



South Carolina



U.S.

\$4.2

**MILLION INVESTED IN PROGRAMS
AND SERVICES BETWEEN 2015-2020**

32

community
organizations
involved in
the effort

480

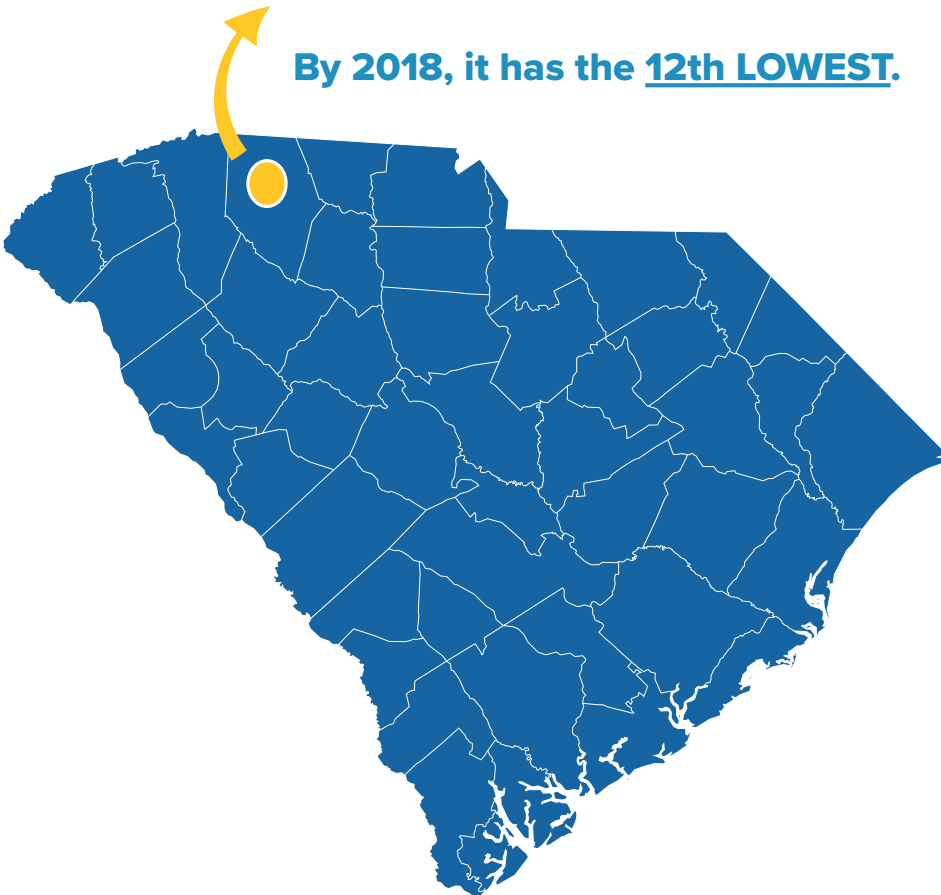
local providers
trained in best
practices and
approaches

7

evidence-
based
curricula
implemented

In 2008, Spartanburg County had
the **18th HIGHEST** teen birth rate
in the state.

By 2018, it has the **12th LOWEST**.



13,000+

YOUTH SERVED

7,000+

REFERRALS

2,000+

SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS

15,800+

WEBSITE VISITORS

Spartanburg County has a history of bringing individuals, funders, and organizations together to solve tough issues. Efforts to reduce teen childbearing are a perfect example. Moving forward, the groundwork laid by Connect, along with a strong commitment from partners, have the community poised for even greater results. So, the real questions become, *what's next?; how does the community dig even deeper?; and how do partners build on success?* To better understand the community's strengths and ability to sustain teen pregnancy prevention efforts, the Mary Black Foundation engaged 1000 Feathers to conduct an assessment and planning process that included conversations with the Community Advisory Board, surveys with youth and adults, listening sessions, and interviews with key stakeholders.

WHAT'S NEXT

In total, more than 100 partners and over 250 young people provided input on the path forward.

The recommendations that follow emerged as key themes from these voices. They are meant to celebrate the great work that has already been done while inspiring future action among past, current, and future partners, all of whom remain committed to preventing teen pregnancy, addressing social determinants of health, and improving adolescent health holistically in Spartanburg County.

Build on the current community momentum.



Even without the promise of continued federal funding, leadership and staff of community-based programs voice a strong willingness to continue group and individual-level interventions (i.e. evidence-based programs, youth development programs) in a substantive way. When asked, “how likely is your organization to continue teen pregnancy prevention work over the next 3-5 years?”, 89% say VERY LIKELY.

This represents a significant cultural shift in Spartanburg over the last two decades and speaks directly to the efforts of local funders and partners to ensure teen pregnancy prevention is positioned as a priority.

To build on this momentum will require a continued investment of the community's time and resources to ensure a high performing leadership structure; a cadre of well-trained, high-quality educators; and a diverse network of coordinated, community-based providers.



2 Keep teen pregnancy prevention top-of-mind.



Success too often brings complacency in communities, but something unique has happened in Spartanburg. Community norms around teen pregnancy prevention have shifted dramatically, and partners now suggest that doing work to prevent teen pregnancy is quite simply *“who the community will be from now on.”*

There is a confidence in the community that good work will continue. At the same time, intentionally folding this issue into larger community conversations and efforts around adolescent health and community health seems important and appropriate. Partners, advocates, and funders must **continue to look for opportunities to intertwine the issue of teen pregnancy prevention into any number of community conversations**, especially those focused on economic mobility, building resilient children and families, and education.

3 Maximize the strength of the Connect brand.



Those who know Connect—as an initiative and a brand—and are a part of the work, love it, speak highly of it, and want it to continue.

However, outside of those actively involved, there is little to no brand awareness. This reality, among both youth and adults, presents an opportunity to identify the appropriate target audience and strengthen the brand among that audience over time. **Moving forward, time and energy must be dedicated to 1) clarifying the longer-term purpose of Connect as a brand and 2) ensuring the brand remains a youth-driven informational platform.**

4 Emphasize convening and collaborating.



Teen pregnancy prevention efforts in Spartanburg have taken many shapes and forms over the years, but none as intensive and structured as what resulted from the creation of Connect. By far, the most common asset of Connect mentioned by partners and community members is that the effort has truly been a transformative connector for youth-serving agencies in Spartanburg.

The energy around convening and collaborating makes Spartanburg’s efforts unique and should be harnessed moving forward. **With additional federal funding now secured by Spartanburg Regional Foundation, key partners of the collaborative have an opportunity to continue a necessary community conversation through meaningful collaboration.** This may include re-crafting some of the multiple work groups, advisory committees, and youth groups that currently exist in the community.

Like all effective community health collaboratives, the teen pregnancy prevention work in Spartanburg continues to evolve to meet the needs of youth and build on strengths of the community. By keeping a long-term commitment to the issue and prioritizing the collaborative, multifaceted approach, Spartanburg will continue to see success in preventing teen pregnancy and ensuring holistic adolescent health.



www.connectspartanburg.com

 [connectspartanburg](https://www.instagram.com/connectspartanburg)  [Connect Spartanburg](https://www.facebook.com/ConnectSpartanburg)

P: 864-573-9500

