Teens say life as a mother is 'no picnic'

By Sharon Corcoran

The Goodland Star-News From books and pens to diapers and bottles, the life of a teen mother is no picnic.

Goodland High School students got a close-up look Wednesday from two of their friends on how having a baby would change their

Arlene Aguirre, 17, and Crisy Conde, 18, mothers of Izaiahs, 7 months, and Javi, 8 months, told the students teen motherhood is tough. They talked about how it has changed their lives during a program coordinated by the Girls' Rights and Accountability to their Culture and Education (GRACE) Club in the school's vocal classroom.

The girls' situations are different: Aguirre's boyfriend of 1 1/2 years left rather than face fatherhood, while Conde married her son's father. But both girls said raising a child is hard and that they wish they had waited until they were older.

Even though they love their sons, the girls say they are at the wrong time in their lives for raising children and have had to sacrifice many opportunities.

Conde broke down in tears when she told the group she always had a dream to be an anesthesiologist but can't fulfill it now because her baby comes first. Aguirre said many students take school for granted, and she doesn't understand why so many drop out who are not having a baby. They quit "for no good reason,"

she said. Both girls said they had been ad-

vised not to have babies, but they didn't listen. Now they know why they should have.

"I didn't listen," Aguirre said. "I had to learn the hard way." She encouraged the students to

use birth control if they are going to

"If you don't use protection," she said, "the next wake-up call you get may be changing diapers at 3 a.m." Although Aguirre encouraged

birth control, Cris Lovington, community prevention consultant and her aunt, asked her if she would abstain from sex if she had another

"Yes, oh, yes," she replied.

Aguirre said she got horrible morning sickness during her pregnancy and missed about three weeks of her junior year because she was too sick to go anywhere. She said she slept with a bucket next

Pregnancy is hard, she said; guys have it easy — they don't go through the physical changes.

And it's easier for the guys to flee the situation.

"If the guy's not going to be there for you, what are you going to do?"

Aguirre asked. A student asked if it guys didn't

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Olivia Lovington, a GRACE member, watched Izaiahs, her cousin's child, during the drawing at the club's teen pregnancy event Wednesday at Goodland High School.

Photos by Sharon Corcoran/The Goodland Star-News

have to pay child support.

"Money is nothing compared to what you have to do," Aguirre re-

She said Izaiahs has bad colic, and she gets only three hours of sleep a night. Then there's changing diapers, feeding the baby and not being able to just go where she

Aguirre said she misses just being a teen-ager and being with friends. Friends without babies don't understand that she can't just go to places like they can, she said.

Lovington said that by law, fathers are required to pay child supfathers, she said, but they don't necessarily get them,.

she added, there won't be much child support to collect.

"Iknow one woman who gets \$25 per month," she said.

When asked how much it costs to raise a child, Aguirre and Conde both said the extra cost is well over \$200 per month for just one infant. said, "because we don't want to One expense Aguirre especially bemoaned is the cost of diapers.

"They are at least \$15," she said. "There aren't any cheaper than

support financially but not much

help with the baby. "I have my husband's support," she said, "but he's always working.

It's really hard."

Her husband doesn't even realize how hard it is for her to raise their son, she said. Crisy's husband wants to have another baby, Lovington said, but he wouldn't if he had to do everything she does.

"I don't regret getting married," Conde said, "but I wish I would have waited. I don't regret having Javi, but I wish I would have

Conde went to Goodland High School through her junior year and went elsewhere her senior year and graduated. Aguirre plans to go to the Goodland Learning Center to earn port. The state goes after delinquent her GED, and then go to the Northwest Kansas Technical College.

"She's trying to establish her And if the father isn't working, identity," Lovington said, "rather than just be Izaiahs' mom or my

> Lovington said Aguirre does not have her mother's support but does have hers. She lives with Lovington, but it is a balancing act. "It's hard to help," Lovington

> make it so easy she thinks she can have another." Aguirre can't collect child support until she turns 18, Lovington

said, and then she has to live on her Conde said she has her husband's own to qualify. Izaiahs' father is coming around, Lovington said, and may have decided he's ready to be a father

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Göodland Star-News

"Arlene will always have a con-



Arlene Aguirre told students at Goodland High School on Wednesday that single teen motherhood is hard, showing a range of emotions during the discussion.

nection with him," Lovington said, Health Department and the Re-Olivia Lovington, Romelia "whether she likes it or not; he has rights."

'I'm hoping this will make the kids rethink, "Lovington said later.

'Those girls are awfully brave coming forward," Principal Harvey Swager said, "and I think they captivated the kids."

The program was sponsored by the GRACE, the Goodland Kiwanis Club, Harvest America Target Area Council, Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, the Hispanic Adviβπsory Board of Sherman County, the Sherman County Lopez, Jeeny Lopez, Melissa Lazo,

gional Prevention Center of Northwest Kansas.

prizes, Lovington said, to draw students to the program, since it was

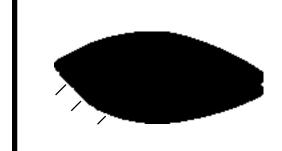
At the conclusion of the program, prizes. Jeeny Lopez won a DVD player, and Arely Hernandez won a compact disk player. Other students won SpongeBob Squarepants candy and cameras.

Members of GRACE are Claudia

Fuentes, Illiany Araujo, Elizabeth Ruiz, Crystal Hernandez, Arely Club members wanted to have Hernandez, Idaly Hernandez and

Nancy Aguirre. The club needed \$500 for the program, Lovington said, and Kiwanis Cluib contributed \$250 of it. The Lovington drew names for the program would not have been possible without the sponsors, she said, or without Swager.

> "He's awesome," she said. "He's really supportive of what GRACE is doing. It wouldn't be possible without him."





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