

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 lives.

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 advised 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 have sex.

"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 chance.

"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 to her bed.

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



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 responded.

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 wants.

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 support. The state goes after delinquent fathers, she said, but they don't necessarily get them.

And if the father isn't working, she added, there won't be much child support to collect.

"I know 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.

One expense Aguirre especially bemoaned is the cost of diapers.

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

Conde said she has her husband's 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 waited."

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 her GED, and then go to the Northwest Kansas Technical College.

"She's trying to establish her identity," Lovington said, "rather than just be Izaiahs' mom or my niece."

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 said, "because we don't want to 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 own to qualify. Izaiahs' father is coming around, Lovington said, and may have decided he's ready to be a father.

"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, "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 Advisory Board of Sherman County, the Sherman County

Health Department and the Regional Prevention Center of Northwest Kansas.

Club members wanted to have prizes, Lovington said, to draw students to the program, since it was voluntary.

At the conclusion of the program, Lovington drew names for the 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 Lopez, Jeeny Lopez, Melissa Lazo,

Olivia Lovington, Romelia Fuentes, Illiany Araujo, Elizabeth Ruiz, Crystal Hernandez, Arely Hernandez, Idaly Hernandez and Nancy Aguirre.

The club needed \$500 for the program, Lovington said, and Kiwanis Club contributed \$250 of it. 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."

Sunflower Contest

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- Do not use proper names
- Bring your completed list to The Goodland Star-News office at 1205 Main or at our booth at the Fair by 12:00 p.m. by Monday, August 9th

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