

## **Progress in the Development and Continuing Involvement of Medical Professionals With an Abstinence Education Program**

### **Overview of Progress**

National attention has been focused on the high rate of adolescent sexual activity and associated sequelae. Interventions with expanded medical services for STD treatment and contraception do not address all of the medical and social consequences of early sexual activity. Inaccurate information and reckless messages from media and peers reduce the potential benefits of abstinence education programs aimed at prevention. We have initiated an abstinence program in association with a century-old medical establishment in central Texas to address the need for improvement in abstinence education. The program, Worth the Wait<sup>®</sup>, was developed and is continually updated (maintained) by medical professionals. The program trains medical professionals, parent and community groups, and middle school teachers to provide the curriculum. Then the program staff and these prepared instructors delivers the curriculum to students. In a previous five year interval ending in 2001, the Worth the Wait<sup>®</sup> program of Scott & White has expanded its consumer base from three middle schools in the Temple Independent School District with an enrollment of under 2000 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> graders to 17 schools in six districts with combined enrollments in excess of 10,000 middle school students. In the current academic year (2001-2002) the involved schools extended beyond Bell County with student enrollments double those of the previous year. The need to provide this program to middle school students has been documented by survey results in our service area that demonstrate an increase in previous sexual activity from 7% of 6<sup>th</sup> graders to over 20% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders a group of students predominately between 11 and 13 years old. Tools for measuring improvements in knowledge and teaching have demonstrated a consistent increase in scores after training sessions of adults and after presenting the curriculum to students. Equally important has been the documented shift in attitude associated with participation in the training sessions and school curriculum. Adults and students indicate a higher preference for teens delaying sexual activity after the program. Survey instruments used for these measurements have also evolved during the past six academic years to forms that are readily scanned for automated data entry and toward questions that address both programmatic and sponsor interests while minimizing parent concerns. While much progress have been made, the goal of producing measurable decreases in public health statistics especially in 15 to 17 year olds can not yet be documented. The program needs to continue to expand the number of middle school students and needs to move into the 9<sup>th</sup> grade (high school level) to reach this segment of our population. The program also needs to expand its interaction with media outlets to address another major element that promotes teen sexual activity.

In summary, an abstinence education program developed and delivered by medical professionals for teachers and middle school students can increase knowledge, alter attitudes, and experience rapid growth in its consumer base. More time is needed to detect affects on public health statistics, more support is needed to expand the program to older adolescents (9<sup>th</sup> graders) and more school districts, and more support is needed to counter the media messages that promote teen sexual activity. The full copy of this report can be obtained by contacting the Scott & White Worth the Wait<sup>®</sup> Program office at 254-724-7359.