

## Teen Talk FACTS

### The National Picture:

According to a recent article in the Daily News, October 31<sup>st</sup> of 2000, 7 million children are home alone nationwide says the U.S. Census Bureau. A survey of 30,000 homes found that 41% of the children home alone were between the ages of 12 to 14 years, that's 4.4 million. Self-care is much more prevalent among middle school aged youth and as much as 48% among 14 year-olds, often because children 10 and older protest having a sitter or having to attend an after school program. Many parents of teens find that if their teen is not involved in an extracurricular activity that school is the last place they want to hangout.

### Our Community Picture:

The following information is taken from Alfred Gabor Associates, Labor Base Analysis and Los Angeles County Children's Planning Council Report.

The Antelope Valley is approximately sixty miles from the San Fernando Valley. It is often recognized as fifty percent of North L. A. County. The Antelope Valley spreads out over two thousand five hundred sq.miles of desert and forest. Boundaries go north to the Kern County line, east to San Bernardino County line, the southern border is formed by the Angeles National Forest and the western border includes the Ventura County line. The Antelope Valley is located in the L. A. County Supervisorial District number five. The community has thirty rural un-incorporated communities along with two mid-size cities, Palmdale and Lancaster. The population of the Antelope Valley is based on the combination of Kern County and Los Angeles County figures. The current estimated population is four hundred thousand, two hundred and eighty-five.

The top employers in the Antelope Valley are Aerospace, Military, Government and School Districts. Current leadership in the Valley continues to strive towards diversifying the job base; however fifty-seven thousand people have an average commute of fifty-eight minutes daily or longer to the San Fernando Valley, Central Los Angeles and as far as the South Bay area. Commuter incomes are higher than non-commuters. Commuters are also more likely to be homeowners and are better educated. Twenty-six percent of commuters arrive home between 5 to 6 pm, fifteen percent between 6 and 7 pm. There can be a delay of parents returning home on time nightly, to their children. Thirty-one percent of the population is 17 years of age or less. Twenty-two percent are under age 6 with nine percent between the ages of 6 to 9 years old. Children under 10 are the primary users of childcare. The heaviest youth population is located in the cities of Palmdale and Lancaster. According to census tract information outlying areas with heavy youth population include Littlerock, Lake Los Angeles, Wilsona, High Vista and Sulpher Springs (adjacent to Santa Clarita).

Ninety-one percent of these children attend public schools. There are one-hundred and two public schools in the area. Sixty-three of the elementary schools; (50,000 children) serviced by our after school help line and eleven are high schools. (21,000) serviced by Teen Talk Line. Of these households fifty-five percent of working parents have both parents (and the single parent) in the labor force.

In an Antelope Valley Press article, "Juvenile Crime up In Valley," By Mary Beth Alexander, Sgt. Bobby Denham attributes thirty-five percent of this year's crimes are committed by youth. He goes on to say that the commuters' lifestyle is producing more "latchkey kids," leaving them more susceptible to bad influences. "We have thousands of kids in the Antelope valley that are unsupervised for six hours a day or longer." Denham said, "The chances of something occurring is very high."

Who are our troubled at risk children in our communities? Sometimes these children find a "home" with gang members, instead of their own families. Gang membership involves all racial and many ethnic groups and yes, girls too. How can we help? By supporting families and their children!

The Teen Talk Line supports teens with two parents working, along with commuting households and homes with a single parent heading up the family. The average age of a resident in the Antelope Valley is 45 years; the average income level is \$41,000 for a family of four. Many schools are in new housing tract areas. The affordable housing is still a factor which draws families to the Antelope Valley. This is reflected in the ranking of schools placing the most calls. A single parent heads up eight percent of the households in Lancaster and five percent of the households in Palmdale. The U.S.Census Bureau cites a national trend toward the largest population of children left home alone starting at age twelve. Our line reflects that 12, 13, 14 and 15 year olds are calling the line the most often, which supports the census data. There is still no correlation with Chapter One Welfare AFDC poverty level families utilizing our service more. Often this has been the case in other communities with such help lines.

However Lancaster has a large number of apartment dwelling families. These multifamily dwellings are more prone to a higher vacancy rate and influx of new tenants. In addition, as residents in older neighborhoods begin to move up to larger homes in new housing tracts, there is a trend for the owner to keep their old home as a rental, especially if home prices are reduced during a real-estate downturn. Many of these rentals qualify for Section 8 tenants. These are also more prone to a higher vacancy rate and an influx of new tenants. We appear to be serving these families as well with our help line as reflected in the ranking of schools calling the most.

Other trends reflected in our quality exchange examples are frequent calls from special needs students who spend more time at home. We also have a number of calls from children who live in Foster Family households. A community with affordable housing also seems to attract such housing options because there are budgetary advantages. These children have many issues that they need to talk out with our volunteers.

The Antelope Valley has had a high rate of child abuse and domestic violence reports. During the year of 1996 over 169,000 reports were made for child abuse and over 72,000 were reported for domestic violence. Factors that contribute to these situations are: ....Periods of rapid growth when services can not keep up with the needs of families.

....An influx of new residents from LA metropolitan areas who sometimes seek to escape

The negative influences of gangs and drugs.

....The geographic isolation of our community.

....The lack of efficient and effective public transportation.

....The availability of drugs and manufacturing that occurs in the community.

....The commuting lifestyle and the lack of job opportunities locally that can support a family.

....The boom and bust economy common in a young and developing metropolis.

....A higher incidence of teenage pregnancy.

Teens need a safe and confidential place to call and talk. Some teens cannot or feel they cannot talk to their parents about controversial subjects. Teens do not wish to be judged by adults and lectured. Many feel they have no trusted adult in their life. For these reasons peer helping is a good tool for assisting teens with issues and crisis that are common to their age group. This means that when teens call our line they talk to a fellow teen that has been through our communications training. There are several contributing factors that create the need for teens to call a support line here in the Antelope Valley. Many teens live in outlying rural communities; once they take the bus home from school they are isolated at home. Many teens live in households with two working parents and/or parents that commute 60 miles or more daily. This can mean they are unsupervised for six hours or more. There is a lack of activities in which teens can participate. Most Parks and Recreation programs stop at Jr. High age, and school activities are limited by the teen's ability to qualify, such as making the team. Even when activities are available or a teen has a part time job; reliable public transportation is limited.

For what reasons do teens call the line? Many teens call just to talk to help pass the time or to feel supported, "not alone" with the various issues they face daily. Issues are often relationship oriented, because now is the time teen's practice how to form lasting healthy relationships. Frequent callers have placed 607 calls over the last year.

These callers are often isolated geographically or socially and use us as their daily friend. While we do not advertise ourselves as a crisis line we do get our share of crisis oriented phone calls. Some of these may include death/grieving, sexuality, addiction, pregnancy, rape, and suicide, runaways and HIV testing. Most of these calls cannot be solved over the phone, so we listen empathetically and give a local resource from the A. V. Youth Services Red Book, for on going help. A major lack of services exists in mental health for teens. There is no 72-hour crisis lock up facility locally for teens that may be attempting to hurt themselves. There is also a lack of Psychiatrists available during a psyche emergency that can evaluate children and teens. For these types of emergencies youth are referred down below, (60 miles or more). While it is not our purpose to do mandated reports we will report when we find out a teen is in a situation where adult intervention is needed such as; physical or sexual abuse, neglect or psychological/emotional abuse.

How do most teens hear about us? The majority of teens see our ad on local cable TV, some are referred by friends and some through posters and plastic cards distributed at school sites.

Teen volunteers benefit from their participation in several ways, the first would be through our communications training. Teens learn problem-solving skills, how to provide comfort, support and encouragement, participate in mentoring and learn what community resources are available. An MRCC Intern or Adult Supervisor keeps the teens company nightly. The opportunity to talk with fellow teens or the Adult Supervisor about issues is available to volunteers. Participation in Teen Talk also provides future employment skills, positive role modeling, and opportunity to work with teens of various ages, gender, ethnic and religious backgrounds towards a common interest and contributes to the development of healthy families and responsible youth in the Antelope Valley. We also believe that participation in our program promotes empathy and caring for others, instilling a commitment to participate in one's community.