

Broome senior spearheads teen abstinence program

Young leader unveils 'Worth the Wait?'

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Concerned about the risks sexually active peers face, Broome High School senior Joni Ware is spearheading a program to promote abstinence.

The event is called "Worth the Wait?" It's from 2 to 4 p.m. Saturday in the District Three Community Auditorium at Broome High School.

Ware, Broome student body president, was among the students selected to participate in the 2010-11 Emerging Public Leaders at the Riley Institute at Furman University. Students live on campus for a week, attend lectures, learn about leadership, visit agencies and the state capital, said Alexis Sprogis, assistant coordinator of Emerging Public Leaders. Sprogis said students can request \$300 for a project.

Ware wanted to do a community project to promote "teen purity" because she thinks it is "much needed."

There are about 10 pregnant teens and 10 teen moms at Broome, which has a student body of around 900 students, said Eric Levitt, assistant superintendent for instruction.

He said the school provides support to expectant and teen moms. Staff meet with them to resolve issues and also hold monthly meetings. Levitt said the school has better-than-average success helping teen moms receive diplomas on time.

Ware's mother, Vera Ware, said her daughter's passion is trying to prevent teen pregnancies.

Joni also is concerned about the number of teen pregnancies in Spartanburg County.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 409,840 infants were born in 2009 to teens age 15 to 19.

"The U.S. teen birth rate fell by more than one-third from 1991 through 2005, but then increased by 5 percent over two consecutive years. Data for 2008 and 2009, however, indicate that the long-term downward trend has resumed," according to the CDC's website.

The number of teen births is highest in Southern states, compared with other regions.

In 2008, there were 707 reported pregnancies — 3.84 percent of girls ages 10 to 19 — in Spartanburg County. That same year, there were 164 reported pregnancies, or 4.47

percent of girls ages 10 to 19 in Cherokee County and 84 reported pregnancies in Union County — 4.62 percent of girls ages 10 to 19.

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“Worth the Wait?” is open to everyone but geared to teenagers.

Ware said there will be a speaker, Faith Grant, from Charlotte, N.C., and question-and-answer session. A purity ring also will be raffled at the end of the program.

“This is something that needs to be talked about,” Ware said.

She wants youth to “make smart decisions” rather than possibly contract a sexually transmitted disease or become pregnant.