

# “I Know My Son is in Good Hands”

**Agency:** Volunteers of America-Dakotas

**Program:** Teen Parent Program

**Service:** Provides nurturing care for both parents and children enrolled in the Sioux Falls School District. It is designed to provide quality childcare, parent support and education while parents complete their high school education.

**Need:** In South Dakota, 9% of births are to teenage parents. Birth to mothers who have received less than 12 years education is up to 16%. The percentage of teen mothers who were already mothers is 18%.

**What does that mean to me?** The program had over 20 participants in 2008, serving over 45 children. Young parents can continue their education and receive affordable, quality care for their children.

The pitter patter of little feet, light giggles, and soft music escape from a small room in the middle of Joe Foss High School; this is not a regular daycare. It's the Teen Parent Program run by the Volunteers of America-Dakotas.

Any day of the week the sights, sounds, and scents of over 20 children will be drifting through the halls of Joe Foss, home of the Teen Parent Program. The program provides a safe and affordable childcare option to teen mothers and fathers who are enrolled in school.

“It's extremely important that these parents have somewhere to bring their child,” said Teen Parent Program supervisor Stephanie. “When they feel comfortable with where their child is they can concentrate on class.”

That feeling of comfort and reassurance is vital in keeping the teens in school and on track.

Only about 64% of teen mothers and 39% of teen fathers graduate from high school. Teen parents that drop out of high school are moving toward a tough future. Adults without a high school diploma earn 42% less than adults with a diploma.

“It may take them longer, but these teens do make it through,” said Stephanie. “We have five girls graduating by the end of this semester and more by the end of the year.”

Currently, over 20 parents were enrolled in the program in 2008. Without it many of these teens wouldn't have the option to finish high school.

“Childcare is expensive,” said Susan, a 17 year-old mom. “There is no way I could afford to pay for daycare and go to school.”

Thanks to support from Sioux Empire United Way combined with state childcare assistance, Susan only has to pay \$15 a week.

Now she can concentrate on finishing high school and providing for her 17 month-old son. “I know my son is in good hands and I can concentrate on doing what's best for both of us.”