Avenue Scholars Foundation
Pregnant & Parenting Students

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Introduction


Purpose of Study: To answer the following questions...

• What are the experiences of being a teen/young parent in the Avenue Scholars program?
• What factors are leading parenting scholars to remain in the program?
• What factors have led former program participants to drop out of the program?
Methodology

Quantitative
- Demographic Data
- Questionnaire
- Hope Dispositional Scale
- Emotional Quotient Scale

Qualitative
- Focus Groups
- Individual Interviews

Visual Images
- Personal Photographs via Smart Phones
- Online Images

Mixed Methods
Methodology (cont’d)

All participants were voluntary and gave consent to participate.

Focus groups took place at Avenue Scholars or UNO. 
Individual interviews took place at Avenue Scholars or a location of the participant’s choice. 
• No staff were present for either type of interview.

All interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed verbatim. 
• Transcriptions were analyzed using MAXQDA software. 
• Multiple levels of analysis and thematic coding were completed within, and across, focus group transcriptions and individual interview transcriptions until four main themes emerged from the data.
Demographics for the Overall Study

Inclusion criteria:
Possible participants must have been active or inactive with Avenue Scholars, and were pregnant or had a child/multiple children at the time of the study.

- Most youth who met inclusion criteria were active in the program at the time of the study.
- Inactive, 23, 33%
- Active, 47, 67%
- Never started program, 1, 4%
- Dropped Program, 10, 42%
- Dropped out of High school, 2, 8%
- Personal/Family Issues, 2, 8%
- Transferred, 2, 8%
- No contact, 7, 29%
- Never started program, 1, 4%

Northwest 10%  
Northeast 41%  
Southwest 21%  
Southeast 27%  
72nd St.
Dodge St.
Most potential participants who met inclusion criteria were attending MCC. (Data was missing for 14 youth.)

Of the potential participants still in high school, most were seniors. (Data was missing for one youth.)

Only 3 of the potential participants did not graduate high school. (Data was missing for one youth.)
34 total participants

- (70 possible participants)

### Individual Interviews

- 14 post-secondary participants
  - 6 males (5 active, 1 inactive)
  - 8 females (5 active, 3 inactive)
  - Approx. 5½ hours of digital recordings = 88 pages of transcription

### Focus Groups

- 9 focus groups
  - 29 participants: 7 male, 22 female
  - 1 group of mixed gender high school scholars
  - 1 group of active males
  - 1 group of inactive post-secondary females
  - 6 groups of active post-secondary females
  - Approx. 8 hours of digital recordings = 184.5 pages of transcription

### Visual Images

- 145 visual images
  - From 13 participants
The majority of participants were female. Over half of participants reported their primary language as English. (Data was missing for 4 participants.) The majority of study participants were racial minorities.
Students from almost all cohorts participated; the 2015 cohort had the most study participants.

The majority of study participants were attending school or working at the time of study.

Of the 24 youth who reported working at the time of study, over half were working full time.
The majority of participants reported they financially support themselves by working.
Most participants had one child.

- Had one child: 27
- Had two children: 4

were expecting first child

Do you feel you had enough knowledge about sex and pregnancy prior to becoming a parent?

- Planned: 3, 9%
- Not Planned: 30, 91%

Were you using any form of birth control prior to becoming pregnant or a parent?

- Condoms: 5, 56%
- Birth Control Pills: 1, 11%
- Depo Provera Shots: 2, 22%
- IUD: 1, 11%

- Yes: 23, 68%
- No: 11, 32%

The large majority of participants reported their pregnancy was unplanned. (One participant was a step-parent.)
Participants scored highest on the interpersonal subscale of the EQI, and lowest on the intrapersonal and stress management subscales.

Mean EQI score was 69.14 out of the possible 96 (n=22).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Characteristics of People with High Scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intrapersonal Scale</td>
<td>These individuals understand their emotions. They are also able to express and communicate their feelings and needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Scale</td>
<td>These individuals are likely to have satisfying interpersonal relationships. They are good listeners and are able to understand and appreciate the feelings of others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability Scale</td>
<td>These individuals are flexible, realistic, and effective in managing change. They are good at finding positive ways of dealing with everyday problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress Management Scale</td>
<td>These individuals are generally calm and work well under pressure. They are rarely impulsive and can usually respond to a stressful event without an emotional outburst.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total EQ</td>
<td>These individuals are generally effective in dealing with daily demands and are typically happy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Impression</td>
<td>These individuals may be attempting to create an overly positive self-impression.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Compared to 2015 Avenue Scholars norms, these participants had higher EQI scores in all areas but “stress management.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Pregnant &amp; Parenting</th>
<th>ASF Norm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intrapersonal</td>
<td>14.82</td>
<td>14.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td>21.18</td>
<td>19.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress Management</td>
<td>15.14</td>
<td>17.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>18.00</td>
<td>16.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Impression</td>
<td>15.32</td>
<td>14.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Hope Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can think of many ways to get out of a jam.</td>
<td>6.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I energetically pursue my goals.</td>
<td>6.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are lots of ways around any problem.</td>
<td>6.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me.</td>
<td>6.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even when others get discouraged, I know I can find a way to solve the problem.</td>
<td>6.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My past experiences have prepared me well for my future.</td>
<td>7.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I've been pretty successful in life.</td>
<td>6.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I meet the goals I set for myself.</td>
<td>6.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The mean total hope score for participants was 52.31 out of the possible 64 (n=32).

Green text = lower score  
Blue text = higher score
Participants’ hope scores were very similar to 2015 Avenue Scholars norms.

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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
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<th>ASF Norm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Get out of a jam</td>
<td>6.22</td>
<td>6.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energetically pursue goals</td>
<td>6.56</td>
<td>6.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ways around a problem</td>
<td>6.47</td>
<td>6.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get important things</td>
<td>6.88</td>
<td>6.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solve the problem</td>
<td>6.34</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepared for future</td>
<td>7.28</td>
<td>6.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Been successful in life</td>
<td>6.22</td>
<td>6.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet goals I set for myself</td>
<td>6.34</td>
<td>6.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Qualitative Results: 4 Major Themes w/ Subthemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 1: Avenue Scholars Defined</th>
<th>Subtheme 1: Staff’s role at Avenue Scholars</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subtheme 2: Avenue Scholars’ Impact on Scholars’ Lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 2: Life as a Young Parent</td>
<td>Subtheme 1: Positive Parenting Experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subtheme 2: Stressful Parenting Experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 3: Program Strengths</td>
<td>Subtheme 1: Staff Strengths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subtheme 2: Programming Strengths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 4: Participant Suggestions</td>
<td>Subtheme 1: Suggestions for Programming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subtheme 2: Suggestions for Staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While Avenue Scholars’ primary focus is assisting students with academic achievement, most participants defined Avenue Scholars in a more holistic manner.

“Avenue Scholars’ program is, in my opinion, a program that picks certain individuals to help them succeed and it gives them the right tools in order for them to succeed...connections, resources, support...any type of support you could think of.” -Active Female-

Most participants defined the program through the lens of the staff’s role.

“It’s a program to help young students and young parents get through college and there’s people there that will push you through it. Even if you don’t want to go and you don’t think nobody in your life wants you to go to college, there’s always somebody that does and someone that cares about you.” -Active Male-
Theme: Avenue Scholars Defined

The majority of participants spoke passionately about the role of staff and described their roles in a variety of terms from “confidante” to “father-figure.” Most participants described staff using the terms “mentor” and “family.”

“I would describe it as having a whole, real family...I went through a lot in high school and they didn’t care even when I talked back to them. They stood by my side no matter what. So it felt really good to have, like a real family.” -Active Female-

Participants made the following observations regarding staff:

“I know they love what they do and that’s what I love about Avenue Scholars. They hire people that actually love doing their jobs...they care for you and what you’re going through.” -Active Female-

“You’re not here for the money. You’re there because you enjoy what you’re doing and you feel like you’re make a difference.” -Inactive Male-
Participants also spoke passionately about the impact that Avenue Scholars has had on their lives. The most common statements among those interviewed were that they did not believe they would have attended college without the program’s assistance, and that they take academics more seriously now.

“They’ve helped me dramatically. Like I probably wouldn’t even be in college right now...I’m thankful for them.” -Active Male-

“I probably tried harder in school because there was somebody there to help me, and my parents weren’t really there at that time.” -Inactive Female-

“They made me feel so special about who I was. They were people who allowed me to see that there’s some worth in me...that really brought my self-esteem up as far as who I could be in life and what I could do with my life.”
-Active Male-
The importance of supportive staff in academic achievement of parenting students: Brosh, Weigel, & Evans, 2007; Slater, Mitschke, & Douthit, 2011
Theme: Life as a Young Parent

When reflecting on how their lives changed once they became parents, participants shared an equal number of positive and stressful experiences. While one may assume that life as a young parent is full of stress, the participants often spoke of the deep love and commitment they have for their children. Other common positive themes included increased motivation and maturity, along with repaired relationships with family members.

“I couldn’t even explain the type of love that I have for her because she’s my daughter. I’m very protective now...Being a dad, it teaches you to wise up real quick.” -Active Male-

“The second that baby comes out of you, you’re no longer a child. You’re an adult. You have to make hard decisions. You have to be able to cope with the sacrifices that come along with having a baby because you may be able to fend for yourself, but a baby, a newborn can’t fend for themselves. They depend on you for their lives like you’re their life source. You should take pride in that.” -Active Female-
“It grew us closer, my mom and dad. It grew us closer and they’re there to support me.” -Active Female-

“It’s changed me for the better, too. Now when I look at going to school, I look at careers that will benefit me and her, instead of benefitting just me. And careers that I can get into in other fields to provide for her. It’s all about her now.” -Active Female-

“The only thing I would say is that while there is a lot of talk about the negative impact of having a child young, nobody ever talks about the things that are positive about it.” -Inactive Male-
Correlations with Published Studies

Increased academic motivation: Mollborn & Jacobs, 2011; Schrag & Schmidt-Tieszen, 2014; Zachry, 2005;

Increased maturity: Zachry, 2005


Young fathers’ desire to actively parent their children: Paschal, Lewis-Moss, & Hsiao, 2011

Unconditional love of child: Brown & Amankwaa, 2007
In spite of the positive side effects of parenting at a young age, numerous stressors do exist for this cohort. The most common stressors mentioned included financial stress; loss of friends; difficult pregnancies; having to extend academic goals; and juggling school, work, and parenting.

One male explained why he dropped out of UNO,

“I wanted a life juggling everything, but you know, life happens. I just thought I could juggle it all, and I was probably overwhelmed. I should’ve just chilled out and pushed through it and got done with it (school), but it seemed as soon as I lost my job, things went downhill.”

“I’ll work from 8 until 4 or 5 and I have class from 5-10. And after that, I’ll study until about 12 or 1am and do the same the next day...so by the end of the night my brain is just drained. Not physically tired. I’m mentally drained.” -Active Male-
“I lost friendships. A lot of them.” -Active Female-

“I have a soccer team and the team is mainly guys that I went to high school with, but they see me as a dad...and I honestly don’t feel my age. I feel older because I’m not into the same things. Like even when I hang out with them, just things that they would talk about...I mean, we’re just in different places.” -Active Male-

“I had to be in bed rest since I was five months until my due date.” -Active Female-

“You really are too sick to come to school.” -Active Female-

“I would say that it has impacted the timeline of them [academic goals]. The goals themselves haven’t changed, but I’ve accepted that it’s probably going to be a few more years out than I would’ve hoped.” –Inactive Male-
“Money is definitely my biggest stressor. Other things are stressful, but money is number one.” -Active Female-

“Not being able to support her (daughter). I know I will, but that’s just a big stress. Like, what if something happens? What if I lose my job? Those are just constantly things I think about.” -Active Male-

“We do not make enough money to afford day care. We pay rent, we pay our bills, we pay the car, we pay insurance, we pay all this and like we barely have $100 for food.” -Active Female-

“When you try to get more money to like help yourself, the state shuts off your benefits. It’s like, ‘No, you make too much.’ I’m like, ‘I’m trying to survive here.’” –Active Female-

“I have to go to Paycheck Advance now.” -Active Female-
Correlations with Published Studies


Stress of juggling multiple roles: Brown & Amankwaa, 2007; Zachry, 2005

Desire (and stress) of young fathers to financially support their children: Paschal, Lewis-Moss, & Hsiao, 2011


Study participants considered Avenue Scholars’ staff as the program’s biggest strength, followed by specific services/programming. Often participants cited the value of staff randomly “checking in” on them.

“Having that emotional support that you can call one of your TAs and they’re not gonna judge you or punish you. They’re just going to listen to you and try to help you out as best possible.” -Active Female-

“They’re very supportive. They don’t necessary tell you what to do, but they help you figure out what you need to do.” -Active Female-

“You know they’re just a phone call away.” -Active Female-
Theme: Program Strengths

The most frequently mentioned service appreciated by study participants was the job leads given to them by staff. This was followed by staff’s willingness to find resources for pregnant and parenting scholars.

“They would send me jobs left and right and was like, ‘Just keep your options open. Don’t settle.’” -Active Female-

An active male shared Avenue Scholars’ reaction to learning he was going to be a father:

“They told me that they’d do anything to help...I was hoping that they would be there for me and just not give up on a teen parent.”

“They probably don’t understand what we’re going through. I don’t think you can ever understand somebody’s situation and what they’re going through unless you’ve been through it...but now I see she (staff) was there even though she didn’t understand. And that’s what people need. You ain’t gotta understand me, but just be there for me.” -Active Female-
Correlations to Published Studies

The importance of verbally and emotionally supportive staff: Keating-Lefler, Brage-Hudson, Campbell-Grossman, Ofe-Fleck, & Westfall, 2004; Slater, Mitschke, & Douthit, 2011
Theme: Suggestions

Study participants did offer a number of suggestions for Avenue Scholars to consider. Their suggestions focused on the unique needs of those scholars who are pregnant or parenting. Most suggestions fell into the category of programming changes or additions. Suggestions regarding staffing came in a distant second.

The most common programming suggestion was the addition of a parent support group, followed by parent/independent living skills classes, and childcare run by Avenue Scholars.

“I think that (a support group) would be really beneficial because you know we need to talk to other parents who are on the same path as us. I don’t see many people my age who are going to school, working, taking care of the kid, and not going out every weekend. Like I want to meet more people who are in the same boat as me because they know how hard it is to do everything that you’re doing. Playing all these different roles.” -Active Female-

“I can’t count how many times I’ve be thinking, ‘Man, I should go to a parent group, get some advice’...I’ve never been to a group, but I can only imagine. It’s probably like older people there...but it’s easier when it’s people your age group, and not only that, but Avenue Scholars deals with minorities and the lower income populations, so you know for a fact that everybody who is in Avenue Scholars are in some of the same similar situations, so that’s nice.” -Active Female-
Theme: Suggestions

“I’ve never had my child watched by anyone who wasn’t a family member or a close family friend. I’m scared to take him to daycare. I know if it was Avenue Scholars’ (daycare), I’d feel safe and secure.”  -Active Female-

“Offering childcare at the school (Metro) so the students could bring their child to school with them and just drop them off while they are in class. They could check up on them, if they needed to.”  -Active Male-

From an Active Female focus group:

“I think they need an Avenue daycare...in the basement of the Avenue Center.”
“I know there is me, and three or four other Avenue students who are doing early childhood degrees. They could end up with their own team of Avenue graduates running their daycare.”
Theme: Suggestions

Participants offered ideas for a wide variety of topics they would like taught in the parenting/independent living classes: understanding infant and child health, choosing and locating quality childcare, budgeting, understanding credit and credit management, buying and maintaining a car, understanding how to buy a home, understanding insurances, stress management, successful co-parenting, and healthy discipline.

Many participants wanted parenting classes that offered interactive learning opportunities. As one Active Male participant explained,

“Sometimes I feel as though the programs that they do have could be a little more hands-on...versus just verbally telling you, “Oh, things are going to change.” They can actually show you.”
Theme: Suggestions

Suggestions for staff focused on two themes: having staff increase communication with their assigned scholar and educating staff about the needs of pregnant and parenting scholars.

“They do an all right job, but they could do a little better. They could just, ‘Hey, what’s up? Whatcha been up to?’...Just staying on it. Staying consistent.” -Active Male-

“I don’t see them very often at all. I mean, maybe three times in 2015.” -Active Female-

“I mean, they could tell you when more parenting classes are going on.” -Active Male

“There’s certain people that understand your situation and would do anything to help you and there are other people who don’t understand and don’t care. There are people like that in Avenue Scholars.” -Active Female-
Correlation to Published Studies


Importance of providing parenting classes that teach a variety of skills (parenting and non-parenting life skills): Keating-Lefler, Brage-Hudson, Campbell-Grossman, Ofe-Fleck, & Westfall, 2004; Rowen, Shaw-Perry, & Rager, 2005

The value of peer support: Rowen, Shaw-Pery, & Rager, 2005
**Visual Images**

**Purpose:** To capture visual images of the lived experience of being a teen/young parent.

**Method:** Use of a smart phone or digital camera.

**Prompts:**
1) Best part(s) of being pregnant or a parent.
2) Most stressful part(s) of being pregnant or a parent.
3) Who and/or what support you through the stressful times of being pregnant or parenting.
4) Your hopes for your future academic goals.
5) Your hopes for your future career goals.
6) Real or potential barriers to your future career and/or academic goals.
Prompt 1: Best part of being pregnant or parenting

Finding joy in day-to-day activities with their children was the most common theme, followed by sharing special occasions with their children.
Prompt 2: Most stressful part of being pregnant or parenting

Having an ill child was the most prevalent theme, closely followed by financial stress.
Prompt 3: Who and/or what supports you through the stressful times...

Significant other was first, closely followed by a parent.

*Note, “significant other” may or may not be the child’s biological parent.
Prompt 4: Your hopes for your future academic goals

Completing their Associates Degree at Metro Community College outnumbered any other theme, 3 to 1.
Prompt 5: Your hopes for your future career goals

Having a career that required post-secondary education outnumbered any other theme 3 to 1. Most career images only required an Associates degree, though.
Prompt 6: Barriers to your future career or academic goals

Lack of money was the most common theme, 3 to 1.
Final Thoughts from the Participants

“If I’m going to owe it to someone, or to multiple people, for my degree and my accomplishments, it’s going to be Avenue Scholars.”  -Active Female-

“I’m very grateful for them and with God putting them in our paths.”  -Active Female-

“Thank you isn’t even enough...they’re there like nobody else has ever been there for me.”  -Active Female-
What are the experiences of being a teen/young parent in the Avenue Scholars program?

A. Participants shared an equal mix of positive and stressful life experiences associated with being a young parent.

B. Positive experiences included increased motivation to obtain an education, increased maturity, love and commitment to their children, and repaired relationships with family.

C. Stressful experiences included financial strain, juggling the role of parent/student/employee, taking longer to meet academic goals, difficult pregnancies, losing friends, and having an ill child.
What factors are leading parenting scholars to remain in the program?

A. Having emotional support from Avenue Scholars staff that is non-judgmental of their life experience as a young parent.

B. Working with staff who are consistent and frequently communicate with their scholar even if via a random “check-in.”

C. Having stable employment that provides financial stability (often via job leads by staff).

D. Being able to access needed community resources that meet their basic needs so they can focus on school.

E. Having consistent social support from others outside of the program (significant other, family).
Summary of Findings

What factors led former program participants to drop out of the program?
A. Financial strain (Typically debt or inability to afford quality child care).
B. Juggling work/school/parenting.
C. Compounded stressors in personal life (not related to school).
D. Personal illness related to pregnancy.
Limitations

Difficulty contacting inactive program participants which led to limited representation of this population in the study.

Limited number of male study participants.

Study represents a snapshot in time (October-December 2015) and results cannot be generalized to represent all pregnant and parenting Avenue Scholars (active and inactive).

Half of those who qualified to participate in the study volunteered to participate (34 out of 70).
Recommendations

Avenue Scholars’ staff are its biggest asset.
A. Educate staff on the unique needs of pregnant and parenting scholars.
B. Increase contact with pregnant and parenting scholars (check-ins for emotional support and to inquire about needed resources).

Expand programming to include:
A. Parent support group (mixed gender).
B. Parenting classes (mixed gender).
C. Independent living classes.
D. A day care center run by Avenue Scholars graduates or partnering with a community daycare to provide reduced rate quality care to Avenue Scholar program participants.
E. Utilize emergency funding for pregnant and parenting scholars.


References


