



By Andi Fischhoff

When Sheryl, 19, asked her new boyfriend, Todd, to take care of her eight-month-old baby while she went shopping, he agreed, hoping that the baby would sleep while he watched a football game on television. The baby was getting over a cold, however, and was fussy that afternoon. Todd found it impossible to calm the baby and watch the game. Exasperated by the crying, Todd grabbed the baby and shook him, yelling, “Stop crying. I want to watch the game!” When Sheryl came home an hour or so later, she found the baby in his crib, unresponsive and, as it turned out, very badly injured.

Too often we read newspaper stories like Sheryl’s, about parents who have

classes at a local hospital and who were participating in parenting classes in Pittsburgh Public Schools.

We also asked teens and young adults who were aging out of the county’s child welfare system for their perspectives and their ideas about which radio stations we should use for the campaign’s public service announcements. Some of these young people served as spokespersons for the campaign in radio interviews and at a City Council hearing. The radio and television public service announcements were developed and produced by youth with the help of a local organization called Hip Hop on L.O.C.K., a youth-focused mentoring and arts educa-

radio stations, government, and other human service agencies. Each year the focus of the campaign is on a different aspect of child abuse prevention. Over the years, we have learned how to elicit input from our target audiences and how to test messages to increase their impact. Examples include:

- ◆ A campaign detailing how to soothe a crying baby—and stay calm yourself—that employed public service announcements (including radio ads that began with the sound of a wailing baby), bus advertising, local radio and television programming, magnets that were distributed through hospitals and physicians’ offices, and a web site at www.hushlittlebaby.org.
- ◆ Broadly disseminating a series of five posters, each depicting a child or teen, with a message to parents or guardians who might be having trouble coping with a child’s behavior. The posters were displayed, through a partnership with Allegheny County Health Department, in restrooms, in restaurants, sports stadiums, museums, and other public venues.

For more information about our Child Abuse Prevention Month campaigns, please contact Karen L. Blumen, deputy director of the Office of Community Relations at the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, Karen.Blumen@allegheny-county.us or visit the web site at www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/capm-overview.aspx.

Andi Fischhoff was the development director at Family Resources, the region’s largest private nonprofit agency dedicated to preventing and treating child abuse, a position she held for almost 20 years until May 2011.

Your Baby is Counting on You: A County Child Abuse Awareness Campaign

left their infant or small child in the care of someone poorly equipped to care for that child. Too frequently the baby or child is horrifically injured, or even dies.

Because of this incident and others like it, in April 2011, the annual Child Abuse Prevention Month campaign in Allegheny County (southwest Pennsylvania) focused on raising awareness about the importance of choosing a partner carefully and being thoughtful about the person in whose care you leave your baby or child.

The campaign, “Your Baby is Counting on You,” adapted materials (with permission) from similar campaigns implemented by partners in child welfare systems in New York and Ohio. Our aim was to reach a target audience of young parents. To help ensure that the campaign resonated with the target audience, we asked for feedback on the content and visual elements from pregnant and parenting teens and young adults attending

tion program that teaches leadership, organizational skills, cooperative economics, and knowledge of the music business.

The message urged parents of young children to: “Choose your partner carefully. Your child’s life depends on it. Never leave your child with someone you don’t trust to keep your child safe. Many children are harmed each year by unrelated adults who just don’t know how to take care of a child. Your baby is counting on you to make the right decision.”

Family Resources, Allegheny County Department of Human Services, A Child’s Place at Mercy at Pittsburgh Mercy Health System, and UPMC begin planning in September every year for the following year’s campaign in April. Our partners include UPMC Health Plan, United Way, the Center for Minority Health, COMCAST, Pittsburgh Children’s Hospital, police departments, neighborhood-based health care facilities, businesses, local sports teams, universities, schools,