

TUCSON WEEKLY

TQ&A: Ariana Parrish

A 15-year-old junior at University High School, Ariana Parrish was recently selected as one of 17 teens in the nation to serve on the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy's Youth Leadership Team. According to its website, the campaign "seeks to improve the lives and future prospects of children and families and, in particular, to help ensure that children are born into stable, two-parent families who are committed to and ready for the demanding task of raising the next generation." Last week, Parrish spent three days in Washington, D.C. for the team's first meeting, and will continue to serve on the team for 18 months. Parrish is also a member of the youth advisory council for the Grrrls Project, run by her mother Marie Fordney, and is the treasurer of Kindness of Humanity. She started a blog at letslearntoloveourselves.blogspot.com.

Tell me a little about yourself.

I really like to bake and sew and read, and I really love yoga and hanging out with friends. I went to Basis for middle school, I was born in Tucson ... I have two brothers and two sisters. My mom is probably my favorite person. I dive and I used to swim.

What prompted you to become involved in the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy?

My mom has been working as a program director to prevent teen pregnancy for several years now, and so I just would talk to her about it all the time, and in Tucson (teen pregnancy) can be a problem. It's very widely publicized by new TV shows like Secret Life of the American Teenager, Teen Mom and 16 and Pregnant, and I just thought that I have a lot of ideas and knowledge about it that I can put that to use, and hopefully ... make a difference.

What was the selection process like?

We had to submit ... a lot of questions about yourself, like what TV shows do you watch and why, and we had to submit blog post samples. And then they chose, I guess, based on that, who would get accepted.

Why is this issue important to you?

I have known people who have gotten pregnant very young, and I can see how it affects their life, both positively and negatively, but I know that if they would have waited a little more, then they might have had more opportunities in life. And I just think that I can help more people prevent ... having something bad happen to the kids of a teenage parent because they just weren't ready to have a kid.

What kind of work will you be doing for the next 18 months?

Well, I will be contributing blog posts on the national campaign's website (thenationalcampaign.org). It addresses all types of teen issues, from love and relationships to sex to school—every kind of conflict teens would face. So there will be that, and working with the program and congressional members, and reaching out to the community and making a difference there as well.

What kind of message do you hope to share with other teenage girls your age?

Of course my stance is ... you should not get pregnant this young, because you never know what will happen later in life. We should teach everyone about, you know, safe sex and sex (education), but really it comes from a more personal issue. If you don't have self-esteem to say no or to make the best decision, then it doesn't matter how much education you have about it, it's going to happen anyway. I would rather instill self-confidence in teen girls so they can make the best decisions.

How will you spread this message to teens in Tucson?

I am working with the Grrrls Project, which helps a lot, and I hope to get involved in other teen pregnancy prevention programs. I have a blog about regular teen issues. But teen pregnancy and self-confidence is definitely one of them.