

SPECIAL REPORT



Tracie Ransom (left), 17, and her sister Kelle, 12, belong to Best Friends in the District, where the growing abstinence program began.

Best Friends program focuses on girls

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The True Love Waits campaign isn't the only abstinence message gaining ground.

"Wait for Me," a video about teens saying no to sex, was introduced last fall by Concerned Women for America. Already, about 15,000 copies have been distributed, said Janet Parshall, special assistant to the president at CWA, a national women's organization with 600,000 members.

The video uses MTV-type camera angles and hip images and was "designed to counteract the 'do it' messages that teens are blitzed with," said Mrs. Parshall, the mother of four teens. She added: "We found that church kids struggled as much as unchurched kids."

Meanwhile, the Best Friends program for teen-age girls has expanded from its D.C. roots to sites in New Jersey, Virginia, Washington state and Wisconsin.

The program's growth and success "is far exceeding our expectations," Best Friends director Elayne Bennett said last week.

The Best Friends program is conducted in schools during the regular school day, with teachers and other school officials as volunteer "mentors."

So far, the program has focused on girls, as they have needed to know how to resist the amorous approaches of older boys, but a Best Friends program for boys has

FRIENDLY ADVICE

The Best Friends program conveys the following messages to elementary and junior high school girls:

- The best kind of friend is one who encourages you to be a better person.
- Friends help each other make good decisions.
- Boys and girls sometimes have different agendas in their romantic relationships.
- Without self-respect, it is difficult to say no to anyone or anything.
- Tomorrow is the first day of the rest of your life. Past mistakes do not mean that one must continue in the same pattern.
- Sex is never a test of love.
- The decision not to have sex in high school is a good one.
- The decision not to ever take drugs is a good one.
- The decision not to drink alcohol in high school is a good one.

Source: Best Friends program guide

The Washington Times

always been a goal.

"Now we've got to go to work to find the boys who are worthy of these girls," said Best Friends supporters Robert Woodson, president of the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise, and Mrs. Bennett's husband, Empower America Director William Bennett.

The program stresses abstinence as a part of self-respect and self-esteem. "We start out by saying, 'Girls, we're going to say no to sex,' but then we spend the next four years explaining how and why," Mrs. Bennett said.

Only one pregnancy has oc-

curred among the 440 girls who have been in the program, program officials say.

Amber Drummond, 14, has been in Best Friends since she was in the sixth grade. "Best Friends helps me deal with peer pressure and lines boys say," said the teen, who will enter ninth grade at Banneker High School in Northwest Washington this year. "Boys say things like 'If you loved me, you'd have sex with me.' I tell them I don't do that," she said, adding that she is known around school as a "Best Friends girl" and that she is respected because of it.

Teens who have "future inten-



Best Friends promotes self-respect and abstinence.

The program stresses abstinence as a part of self-respect.

tions" have the best chance to stay chaste, observed LeAnna Benn, founder and director of Teen Aid Inc., an abstinence-promoting program in Spokane, Wash.

"If you think there's life after age 15, you can find reasons to abstain. But if you think this is as good as it gets, you're less likely to listen," said Mrs. Benn, also the mother of several teens. "Every kid in True Love Waits," she added, "thinks they have a future."

— Cheryl Wetzstein