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February, 1989

Dear Neighbor:

As children, when we played with dolls we pretended they were real. We fed our baby, dressed her and cuddled her. But when we grew tired of playing with her, she suddenly wasn't real anymore. And we ran out to play with our friends without giving baby another thought.

As we entered adolescence, we put our dolls away. And eventually we came to grips with whether to have a real baby in our lives. But by the time we made that decision we were no longer babies ourselves.

Today, hundreds of thousands of young girls make that choice at the tender ages of 12, 13 and 14. But while their bodies reproduce like a woman's, their thoughts and feelings are those of a child. They're only children themselves. Children having children.

They're not ready for the 2a.m. feeding. They're not ready to forfeit their friends. And they're certainly not ready to lose their only real chance for a future by dropping out of school.

But the teen mother doesn't think those thoughts as she carries the baby to term. Instead she thinks how wonderful it will be to have someone who will love her. Someone who will think that she is the most important person in the entire world.

Someone who will give her a reason to live.

We know her. We understand her. Because YWCAs have worked with tens of thousands of teen girls like her in over 3,000 locations across America.

We also know things she probably doesn't know. We know that only one out of two teen mothers complete high school. We know that without a high school diploma (at the very least) she and her child are doomed to a life of poverty. We know that her income (if she manages to break out of the cycle of welfare) will be half the income of women who postpone motherhood.

That is why the YWCA has developed programs to help beat these odds. But we need your support in order to reach her with these programs.

Programs like the learning center in New York City where a young mother can study for her High School Equivalency diploma, learn about vocational options and acquire parenting skill -- all while her child attends an infant/toddler daycare center down the hall.