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## VISTA: Student works to help teen mothers

By Elena Cristiano - For the North County Times | Posted: Sunday, March 28, 2010 7:32 pm

VISTA ---- As Guajome Park Academy junior Michelle Alcantar watched a 14-year old friend in her quinceanera classes struggle to hide her "growing belly" from an unplanned pregnancy, she felt powerless to help.

She began volunteering at the Vista Community Clinic's Teen Clinic, but wanted to do more to make a difference for girls her age.

"Even though I was volunteering every Monday, I just didn't think I was contributing enough," Michele said.

"It's a bad situation for these young moms to be in," she said. "But if they can stay in school that is best."

So she petitioned her high school to let her do her senior community project a year early, and embarked on a single-handed mission to collect donations of food, clothing, diapers and toys for teenage mothers at Vista High School.

She teamed up with a local uniform supply business, So Scrubby, and placed a bin there, as well as one at her school.

"Seeing my friends and strangers go through this makes you realize how really life-changing it really is," Michelle said the day after her mother drove her to Vista High School to present the things she had collected.

"But when I saw all the faces of the young moms as they picked out items, I knew I had succeeded in helping just a little bit," she said.

And while she does receive credit toward her senior project, she said it is "absolutely not about the grade."

In fact, the project was turned in late February, yet Michelle has no intention of stopping the drive.

Jenny Jones, the spokeswoman for the clinic, said that abstinence and the prevention of unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease are always the first goals for the nearly 700 patients they see each month.

"At the teen clinic we are always coaching that it's OK to postpone the first time or next time," said Jones.

The young people, aged 12 to 19, that the clinic serves interact almost exclusively with their peers, and the "only adult they'll see is the nurse practitioner or mental health professional."

She said that this model promotes the young men and women to feel comfortable discussing about sex and birth control.

And while a recently released study by the Guttmacher Institute, a nonprofit that conducts research on sexual and reproductive health, shows that the teen pregnancy rates in California have hit an all-time low, Dorothy Lujan, director of patient services programs, said that Vista and Oceanside are still considered "hot spots" for teen pregnancy.

Michell said donations can be made at So Scrubby, 324 Main Street, in Vista.