

Sherry Betts Wins Koffler Award for Public Service/Outreach

By Susan McGinley

Margaret Harishorn/ UA Biomedical Communications



Sherry Betts goes straight to the heart of tough problems among youth: dating violence, teen pregnancy, substance abuse intervention, and other critical issues. Her strategies for solving these problems are to listen, conduct research, develop programs, and work with community members, agencies, university faculty, graduate students and members of the youth audiences she ultimately hopes to serve.

As a professor and family life specialist in Arizona Cooperative Extension, Betts has spent 13 years developing numerous

outreach programs based on the needs of communities in Arizona counties and Indian reservations, and has worked on similar programs in Zimbabwe and Jamaica. She is honored this year with the Henry and Phyllis Koffler Award for Public Service/Outreach.

"All of my work deals with one central theme: young people in the community and how families, schools, the justice system, faith communities, businesses and other organizations support them," she says. "This theme applies whether the child is in Globe, Arizona, the San Carlos Apache reservation, or Goromonzi, Zimbabwe."

In her nomination letter for the Henry and Phyllis Koffler Public Service/Outreach Award, Betts' colleagues note that "her innovation, initiative, and leadership, combined with her strong research and grant writing skills, and her commitment to prevention programming for children, youth and families have resulted in nearly seven million dollars in external funding during the past 12 years."

Betts joined the Family Studies and Human Development Division of the John and Doris Norton School, part of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, in 1992. Since then she has

directed outreach programs based on the land-grant university model of research, instruction and outreach that have made a difference in the lives of thousands of children and families, particularly among those residing in rural, Native American and Mexican-American communities in Arizona.

The Arizona Teen Pregnancy Prevention project in particular has made a difference. Arizona has one of the highest birth rates in the nation among adolescents. Through the project young people learned skills to resist pressures to become sexually involved. Evaluations show that the program demonstrated a significant increase in the perceived ability among youth in five communities to postpone sexual behavior, to identify its risks, and to resist peer pressure.

"My award is really an affirmation of the role and importance of Cooperative Extension — locally, nationally and internationally," Betts says. "That's the most exciting part for me. I think the honor is really for Extension and our team, which have provided me the platform to do this outreach." ❖

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