

Organization to pay teen-age mothers not to get pregnant

The Associated Press

KALISPELL — A Kalispell organization is launching a new program that will pay teen-age mothers \$1 a day not to get pregnant again.

Susan Christofferson of The Nurturing Center, a nonprofit group that helps families, said 30 percent of the young mothers the center has served in the past two years have

become pregnant again before their first child's second birthday.

"That, to me, warrants paying attention," she said.

The program, which sponsors hope to begin by mid-March, will pay \$1 a day for up to 365 days to mothers between the ages of 15 and 19, provided that they attend weekly support group meetings and do not

become pregnant again.

"The group bonding and the group process make it work," Christofferson said.

The group is not a therapy group but may be confrontational as the girls work out whatever resistance they have to guarding against future pregnancies.

While the girls usually know how

to avoid getting pregnant, "they need to know why they should want to," Christofferson said.

The program's financial element "is critical to young people living in poverty," she said.

The program will accept a dozen girls. The Winter Classic Foundation of Whitefish has provided money for its first six months of

operation. Any young woman age 15-19, married or unmarried, who has had a verifiable pregnancy may apply for the program at The Nurturing Center.

A prevention program in Colorado, similar to this one, showed an 83 percent success rate over 10 years, Christofferson said.

The \$1 a day cost is a bargain,

based on state figures on the cost of teen pregnancy.

In Montana, 75 percent of all births to teen-agers are paid by Medicaid, Christofferson said. One such pregnancy and birth costs Montana taxpayers between \$13,000-\$18,000 annually, including Medicaid payments and other state support payments.