

# Parenting project raises tears, fears

For the last month Lincoln County High School students have been able to get an inkling of what life with a baby is like. While 12 girls and two boys participated in the class project, many other students, teachers, and parents were affected.

Suzy DeShazer, the child psychology teacher, was asked by Susan Christofferson, Kalispell Nurturing Center, if her class would be interested in using the "Baby Think It Over" in conjunction with her flour sack babies. The Nurturing Center then wrote a grant to help aid in the prevention of teen pregnancy that included the purchase of two "Baby Think It Over" dolls at about \$200 each for LCHS.

These baby dolls are programmed to cry at regular intervals, including the wee hours. The only way to stop the wailing is to insert a key that is attached to the student's wrist with a hospital band. The key must be pushed, turned and held into place until the baby signals it is ready to be put down. This time simulates tending times for feeding, diapering, bathing or other chores. If the student is too far away to hear the crying, the baby will record neglect and total minutes allowed to cry. The baby also responds and records abusive events. There is a tampering device in the baby that records if the student tries to remove batteries or reprograms the memory. The students in Child Psychology not only cared for the "Baby Think It Over" for 48 hours, but also hauled around an overstuffed diaper bag and car seat.



From left, front: Jamie Hogan, Jackie Hawkins, Troy Truman, Lisa Frost, Gordon Wilke. Back row: Aimee Watts, Amanda McDonald, Ana Nesbitt, Tara Totten, Tara Roose, Kizzy Bowers, Lana Lane, and Jessica Caffee.

Besides carrying the "Baby Think It Over" the students also were responsible for taking care of a sack of flour for one week. When the flour sacks are given heads and bodies they look like a doll but the five pounds is distributed only in the center. Although it is true flour sacks don't cry and they are easy to pawn off on "babysitters," they are still effective in showing the students responsibilities, the attention and admiration from peers that turns quickly to sympathetic feelings and embarrassment, DeShazer said.

The students were asked to keep a daily journal and write a final paper on their discoveries of teen parenting. Almost all of the students agreed that it would have been much easier if a partner were involved. They felt the rewards of parenting included "giving purpose and meaning to a life"

and "being needed by someone," but then said that teens can find easier ways to receive those rewards. The list of challenges was endless, including how to carry a baby, diaper bag and lunch tray in the cafeteria.

One student became very concerned with the amount of stress a teen parent felt, wondering how a teen parent can love and care for a baby under such stress. Many students commented on how people would whisper, roll their eyes or frown at them, when they didn't realize it was a doll and class project, DeShazer said.

Although most of the students tried not to go anywhere with the dolls besides school and home due to embarrassment, a few did take the babies into the community.

Jackie Hawkins tried to watch a movie at the theatre and ended up

missing 20 minutes while she held the key for the baby out in the car. Troy Truman took his baby with him to order his tuxedo for Prom. "Baby Think It Over" went with Kizzy Bowers for a job interview. Amiee Watts had to learn to drive strategically around the pot holes, because the baby would respond to the bouncing as child abuse and start crying uncontrollably.

All of the students had stories to tell and how it affected their lives and the people around them. "We are very grateful to the Nurturing Center for writing the grant to get the dolls," DeShazer said. "It goes to show that a little technology does make a big impact on the students' lives. I wish we could have all students participate in this class project, but sometimes watching others struggle is second to the best way."