

I HAVE a new hero, his name is Tyler, and he’s a babyfaced teen from a broken home who got his girlfriend pregnant. He’s one of the real-life stars of the MTV series “Teen Mom,’’ and he defies the image of teenaged dad as lugnut ne’er-do-well. He encourages adoption, wanting his daughter to have a better life than he can provide. He sticks by his girlfriend through the birth, the goodbye, and the emotional aftermath. He looks like he’s 12, but he might be the most mature man ever seen on TV.

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Teen pregnancy has a way of forcing maturity on you, and that’s the big theme of “Teen Mom,’’ which ended its season this week. It’s a parade of woe, from a teenager’s perspective: how a baby gets in the way of your God-given right to go clubbing, but also how hard it is to study around a crying kid, and how many teen dads aren’t an eighth as mature as Tyler turned out to be.

The series ought to be required viewing for 13-year-olds nationwide, especially since a report released this week by the Guttmacher Institute showed a slight uptick in teen pregnancy rates after a decade-long drop. Many have leaped to blame abstinence-only education, which increased substantially in the Bush years, and that’s surely part of the picture; the study shows that 46 percent of 15-to-19-year-olds have sex at least once, and the more they know, the better.

But warning teens about the perils of unsafe sex, even giving them easy access to contraception, clearly isn’t the only solution. Just ask Keyla Lugo, 21, who gave birth to her son at age 18, when she was a student at Madison Park High.

Judging by statistics, Keyla is a more typical teen mom than the kids on MTV: She’s Latina, slightly older, and with far less family support. Raised in the Dominican Republic by her grandmother, she came to Boston at 15 to live with a mother she barely knew, then got caught up with a 26-year-old man who pressured her into sex. Her family offered no help. The baby’s father was deported. So Keyla gave birth while living in a shelter, and now lives in an apartment in Dorchester, where she and her son share a bed because she can’t afford a separate one for him.

I asked Keyla whether more education would have kept her from getting pregnant. She doubted it. “The schools do a lot of things. They talk about sexuality,’’ she said. “You know how many people told me, ‘Don’t get pregnant’?’’

She knew girls from high school who were happy to be pregnant, thinking this would help them keep their boyfriends. “They forget about everything, just the boyfriend and the pregnancy,’’ she said. “They forget about their own life.’’

That means there might be some nugget of sad truth in the popular Lifetime movie “The Pregnancy Pact,’’ based loosely on the spike in teen pregnancies at Gloucester High School in 2008. (The existence of a pact was actually debunked, but facts seldom get in the way of a sellable screenplay.)

The movie portrays the boys as innocent victims of scheming girls, when it’s clear they had some role in that whole conception thing. But it’s also a wake-up call about the limits of sex education, the failures of some parents to communicate, and - most disturbingly - the idea that some girls may have missed the message about goals and dreams, and think that achieving some facsimile of family life is a sign of maturity instead of a dead end.

That’s why Keyla is one of my heroes, too - for sharing her story, and for wanting more. Lucky enough to be a citizen, willing to make the most of public aid, she got her GED and now studies English at community college. She plans to train as a radiation technician. Without her son, she told me, she might still be drifting, partying. Now she’s not having fun, but she has goals.

“I am still young, so I still hope that God gives me a lot of time to do what I want,’’ she said. “My life is going to change.’’ Maturity, however it’s thrust upon you, can be an incredible thing.

*Written by Joanna Weiss of The Boston Globe*