

PAST RECIPIENT OF TEEN PREGNANCY COALITION AWARD FINDS SUCCESS

A single line was all it took to change my life. Ten years ago, when the at-home pregnancy test I clutched in my shaking hand revealed a “positive” pink line, I was terrified. I was also 17 years old. I’d dropped out of high school my junior year and was spiraling down a black hole of risky behavior – the culmination of which was finding myself unwed, out of school, and pregnant before my 18th birthday. Yet rather than using my young pregnancy as an excuse to completely abandon my dreams of a prosperous future, the unborn child and my concern for its welfare propelled me to make positive changes in my life. I re-enrolled in school and, through a combination of summer school, traditional classes, and night school I was able to graduate on time with my class at Albuquerque High.

My educational goals did not end with a high school diploma. I was determined to use higher education as a means of providing a better future for my child. I noticed a flier in my counselor’s office advertising scholarships for teen moms and pregnant teens, offered by the New Mexico Teen Pregnancy Coalition. I spent weeks working on my personal statement and collecting letters of reference, and was delighted to be selected as a recipient for the 2000/2001 New Mexico Teen Pregnancy Coalition scholarship. Although the funding itself was a blessing, it was also a very symbolic triumph for me: it represented the idea that there were people out there who had faith in my capabilities, and who did not simply cast aside a young girl as a failure because she was a teen mother.

That was more than a decade ago. With the help of my scholarship from the NM Teen Pregnancy Coalition, I enrolled at the University of New Mexico and obtained a baccalaureate degree in Mass Communication & Journalism. I am now professionally employed by the University as a Recruitment Specialist, and it is my job to outreach to high school students and make post-secondary education a goal and a reality for them. The unborn baby that turned my life around is now a rambunctious 10-year-old boy on the verge of starting junior high. He was in the audience the day I stepped forward to accept my college degree, and seeing his proud face in the crowd was the ultimate reward for my efforts and the support I received along the way.