

'Strive showed me that I didn't have to give up': St. Catharines program helps young moms finish school ^[1]

This year's graduating class had 14 students

Author:

Source: Niagra this week

Publication Date: 25 Jul 2022

AVAILABILITY

EXCERPTS:

Amy Marconi's life has come full-circle, helping young women today who are in a very similar situation she was 25 years ago.

The St. Catharines resident is a social worker for Strive Niagara, a program aimed to help adolescent parents finish high school.

She is also a graduate of the program herself.

With bases in St. Catharines, Welland and Niagara Falls, Strive provide young women with an environment where they can finish their schooling, and have their children nearby.

"They can be with their peers and get that peer-to-peer interaction and share that common sort of bond of being a young, new parent," Marconi said.

"Sometimes that will mean taking a nap on the couch at the back of the classroom because they were up all night feeding their newborn or maybe leaving class to nurse a baby. The child care centre is right adjacent to the classroom so that mom can feel comfortable that baby is nearby."

They work with the District School Board of Niagara and the Niagara Catholic District School board to provide proper education, while also caring for the kids. There are also educational elements focused on life skills, mental health and healthy relationships.

Marconi had her daughter when she was 16 years old and was one of the first to graduate from Strive.

"Because of Strive, I've been able to go on to pursue a career in social work, and I've worked in domestic violence, child protection, mental health. I don't know where I would have been, and because of Strive I've been able to go on and be able to help and empower women," she said

Tracy Belcastro, Strive's executive director, said she's been with the program for 28 years. She said this year's graduating class has about 14 youths.

Niagara Falls resident Shawna Leigh is one of them. Before finding Strive, Leigh said she was struggling.

"In 2019, I was diagnosed with borderline personality disorder, which caused me to do some things that weren't very nice to my parents and I would skip out from school," she said, adding continued bullying led her to drop out in Grade 8.

When she was 16, Leigh got pregnant. A nurse recommended she check out Strive and the rest is history.

Now, she has bright hopes for her future.

"I had pretty much given up on everything and Strive showed me that I didn't have to give up," said Leigh, who will be taking Child and Youth care at Niagara College this fall.

She hopes sharing her story will help other girls in her situation seek help.

A lot of the moms in the program come from backgrounds like Leigh's, said Marconi, so a lot of the staff are trained to help in some of the more intense situations.

"(Childcare staff are) trained from a very trauma-informed lens so that they actually build relationships with the mom," Marconi said. "A lot of our moms come from high levels of poverty. There's a lot of domestic violence, mental health sometimes, you know, they haven't had that role model for that most of the time."

A significant portion of what Strive can do is funded through donations and fundraising events. As Marconi also owns Be Fresh Flower's Subscription Service, she's decided to use her business to help out.

Strive's next fundraiser, a flower sale, will take place Saturday, July 30 at the Sven H. Dohnberg Centre at 535 Lake St. from 10 a.m. to 3

p.m.

Marconi said all proceeds made that day will go back into Strive.

“The main goal is helping these young families be successful, not only get their Grade 12 education, but also to be empowered to be the best parent they can be,” she said.

Region: Ontario ^[2]

Tags: childcare ^[3]

early childhood education ^[4]

mother labour force participation ^[5]

Source URL (modified on 26 Jul 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/22/07/strive-showed-me-i-didnt-have-give-st-catharines-program-helps-young>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/22/07/strive-showed-me-i-didnt-have-give-st-catharines-program-helps-young> [2]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7856> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/childcare> [4]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/early-childhood-education> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/mother-labour-force-participation>