



The Connection

NEWSLETTER FROM TEEN PARENT CONNECTION

UPCOMING EVENTS

- **Festival of Friends**
Sunday, October 25th
Medinah Country Club
- **Holiday Shopping Room**
December 14th – 15th

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Illinois is Failing its Most Vulnerable Residents

Illinois is now entering a fourth month without a state budget. Children and families continue to suffer as the budget impasse has taken its toll on the programs and services that help them find solutions and strength to overcome life's challenges.

For pregnant and parenting teenagers, these challenges can be especially overwhelming and difficult. Over the last three decades, Teen Parent Connection has been providing young mothers and fathers with the support, education and resources they need to successfully navigate both their own adolescence and early parenthood. In the past year, with the support of grants from the State of Illinois, our home visiting programs, parent groups, counseling services and Parents Pantry have served more than 500 young families.

Unfortunately, despite strong evidence for the value of these programs, this stalemate has created a great deal of uncertainty about the future of their grant support. The situation worsens with each passing day that no budget is signed. Rather than watch and wait, the time to take action is **now**. Let us speak as one and reach out to our Illinois legislators on behalf of the children, families and communities we serve, urging them to come together to find a solution that works for our state *and* for its people. Prioritizing the work of empowerment programs like Teen Parent Connection is critical to the long-term health and wellness of our community, and impacts each of us. We must give a voice to the tiniest and most vulnerable among us before it's too late.

For more information on how you can join our advocacy efforts, please contact me at beckyb@teenparentconnection.org. Thank you.



Becky Beilfus, Executive Director



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STAFF SPOTLIGHT: Kara Venchus, Family Support Specialist



Teen Parent Connection's nationally-accredited Healthy Families Program seeks to promote positive parenting, enhance child health and development, and empower parents to reach self-sufficiency. Such critical goals are accomplished via individualized home visits conducted by trained Family Support Specialists like Kara Venchus.

Kara's initial interest in social services was piqued during college, when she had the opportunity to intern for several programs providing services to women and children. Kara discovered an affinity for teenage moms and realized she had the chance to make the strongest impact in the lives of these young women via home-based visits for Teen Parent Connection.

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Our Legacy | A Teen Mom's Story

CELEBRATING **30** YEARS
EMPOWERING young families OUR LEGACY. OUR FUTURE.

Formerly a participant in one of Teen Parent Connection's Young Parent Support Groups, Emily Marsden served as a Peer Educator in our Peer Prevention Program, sharing her journey as a young mother. Here is some of her story.

My name is Emily, and I became pregnant at the age of 17, as I was entering my senior year of high school. Suddenly, all of the future plans I had envisioned and all the goals I had set for myself seemed to be out of my grasp. I was experiencing many changes and struggling with the emotional impact of being an expectant teenage mother and was relieved when I found out about Teen Parent Connection.

I was overwhelmed, scared, and felt completely isolated, so I began attending one of their Young Parent Support Groups when I was 6 months pregnant with my daughter, Ava. Immediately upon walking into group, I felt welcomed and accepted by the other young moms. I realized I wasn't the only pregnant teenager in all of DuPage County... even if my parents thought I was. My family, while very supportive, did not understand exactly what I was experiencing or how I was feeling. But each Tuesday, I had somewhere to go, a place to be open and honest, to share my concerns and my challenges...I knew that I was not alone. While our stories were each a bit different, we all shared similar struggles. The sense of camaraderie was strong and the knowledge that we served as a support system for each other, to help ensure that our children were healthy and safe and that we felt better equipped to be responsible parents, formed the foundation of many friendships that are still in place today.

My group facilitator Ali was also such a huge support. She constantly provided us with valuable information regarding our child's developmental milestones, important parenting topics, and available community resources, like local clothing swaps, job fairs, or anything else that could help. Ali's support was not limited to the 90 minutes per week we attended our group meetings. Anytime I had a question about Ava's development, insurance, child support, etc., or if just needed to vent to someone, Ali was there for me. The encouragement I received not only benefited me personally but allowed me to help other young women, to show them that teen pregnancy was not the end of the road and that programs and resources were available.



Teen Parent Connection also gave me the opportunity to provide for myself and my daughter. At their Parents Pantry, I could purchase diapers, formula, and many other necessities via the "Baby Bucks" I earned through program participation. I was attending school and working, trying to provide for Ava and do as much as possible on my own ... it helped so much to know that I had the assistance of the pantry accessible to me.

However, trying to be both an adolescent growing into adulthood and a parent raising a happy and healthy child brings new challenges each and every day. I wanted to do what I could to encourage other teenagers to make smart life decisions, as well as prevent my situation from happening to someone else. I became a part of the Teen Parent Connection Prevention Team as a Peer Education Specialist, traveling to middle schools and high schools throughout DuPage County to tell my personal story of being a teen mom. It was an amazing opportunity to communicate with fellow teens regarding my journey and the impact of teen pregnancy. Through speaking in schools, I discovered that I wanted to make community health education my college major and my career.

In the end, the strength, support and knowledge I received helped me be a better parent to Ava, and that is the most important legacy of Teen Parent Connection.

The mother of a happy and healthy six-year-old, Emily has continued working to overcome the challenges of teen parenthood and realize her full potential. With Ava in tow, she began attending Illinois State University, and graduated in May of 2015 with a 4.0 GPA and a degree in Community Health. She now works for a local health center as a health educator, teaching area youth and continuing to share the experiences, wisdom and passion she gained as a young mom and Teen Parent Connection participant.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

BOARD MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Teen Parent Connection is pleased to welcome Marie Raffl to its Board of Directors



Marie Raffl is a retired paralegal and former teacher, now active in local philanthropy.

Marie, who lives with her husband in Western Springs, was initially drawn to Teen Parent Connection after she had the opportunity to hear one of our teen participants speak at an outreach event to a local community organization. The impact of the young woman's story led to the selection of Teen Parent Connection as that organization's charitable recipient, and Marie facilitated the donation of diaper bags filled with essential baby items to our expectant moms.

She is excited for the chance to continue to share her time and talents with the development and event component of Teen Parent Connection, working to increase outreach and support for our mission. We thank Marie for her interest and passion, and we welcome her to our Board!

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Marie Raffl
Retired Paralegal and Teacher

Molly Salisbury
*Owner
Salisbury Interiors
& Retired Non-Profit Director*

Please Join Us at Festival of Friends

Sunday, October 25th
11:30am - 2:00pm
Medinah Country Club

This delightful gourmet luncheon includes wine, entertainment and a raffle, as well as a chance to hear from a Teen Parent Connection participant speaker.

Proceeds from Festival of Friends will benefit the young families served by Teen Parent Connection's comprehensive programming.

Visit www.teenparentconnection.org/FOF now to attend!

Don't forget to buy your raffle tickets!

The Festival of Friends

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2015
MEDINAH COUNTRY CLUB

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Visit our website: teenparentconnection.org

2015 Participant Picnic

On August 19th, Teen Parent Connection hosted its 27th annual Participant Picnic at a local splash park and playground. Despite some uncooperative weather, both current and past participants and their families braved the elements to join our staff in an evening of fun and friendship!

Everyone enjoyed a delicious meal generously provided by Chick-fil-A and had a wonderful time reconnecting with friends, chatting with staff and playing in the park.

Each year, this event provides us the opportunity to celebrate the extraordinary accomplishments of our program participants, who are working hard to overcome tremendous challenges and lead lives full of promise. We look forward to next year's event!



Kara Venchus *Continued from cover*

After earning a Bachelor's Degree in Social Work from Illinois State University, Kara began volunteering with one of Teen Parent Connection's Young Parent Support Groups as an assistant group facilitator. She later transitioned to the Healthy Families program, and brought along an engaging enthusiasm and immense passion for her work.

The ability to directly interact with families in their own home or other place of comfort for years at a time (from before birth to the age of 5), discussing their needs and concerns while providing them with the essential education and resources that will enhance health and create stronger bonds, is something Kara truly enjoys, stating "Just knowing that you were blessed enough to be a part of [this family's] journey [...], to know that you can help them and be a part of their life is a very humbling experience".

After two years with Teen Parent Connection, Kara has had a tremendous impact on the lives of the young parents and children she serves. Our staff and board thank Kara for her dedication to our mission and for working each and every day to empower our families to become self-sufficient and live to their fullest potential.