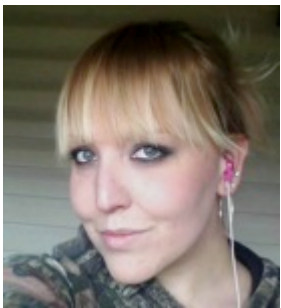




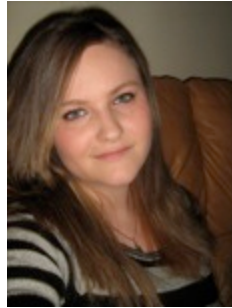
## *Passages Press - Graduation 2013*



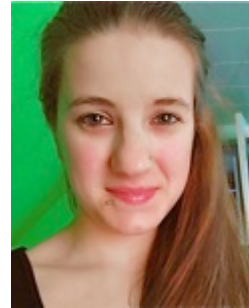
Erika Bishop  
Hope



Gabrielle Roberts  
Northport



Miranda Parsons  
Belfast



Lauren Mendez  
Thomaston



Mikayla Williams  
Warren



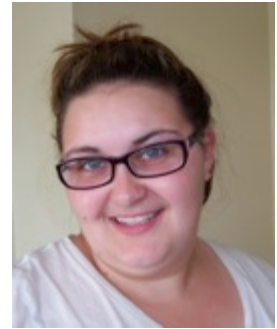
Kaila Gagnon  
Walpole



Katelynn McLaughlin  
Augusta



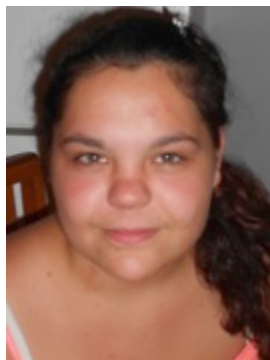
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Unity



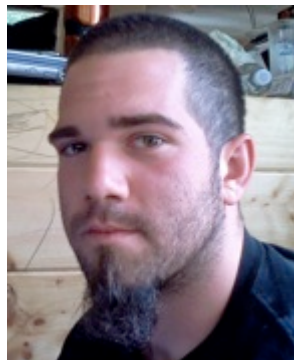
Molly Bechand  
Lewiston



Emma Luscombe  
Topsham



Shayna Mackenzie  
Lewiston



Robert Fusillo  
Raymond



Anna Ulrich  
Sullivan

*This year our graduates come from all over Maine. They are unified by their love for their children and by their determination and strength – a powerful combination.*

## Anna Ulrich



(l-r) Anna's mom Jackie, Niomi & Anna

For my senior year at Sumner High School I only needed nine more credits in order to graduate, one of them being a full gym credit. Being pregnant and trying to get a whole gym credit plus another eight different credits on top of that didn't seem realistic to me. My guidance teacher at the time told me she didn't think I would be able to graduate needing that many credits, so she found Passages.

Passages has made it so much easier for me. I didn't need another whole gym credit or have ridiculous homework every night. It was all self-paced work that I could do in the quietness of my own home. I have been able to stay in school and be with my daughter every day thanks to Passages.

There were times I didn't make it easier for my teacher, but she stuck with me and pushed me through to make sure I was going to graduate. I am so beyond thankful for the program and what it has done for me. It was awesome. Having such great teachers to help me... well, that was just a fantastic bonus.

## Emma Luscombe



Emma & Kyren

I can honestly say that being in the Passages program has changed my life. It has given me opportunities to advance myself and to take advantage of every opportunity that comes my way. Not only has it furthered my education in a fun and productive way it has brought me to multiple resources that I can use throughout my life. The work that you have to do is realistic and helps prepare us for what the adult world will be like. It teaches us things that we will need to know on a day-to-day basis when we are out on our own.

My favorite part of this experience though, was my teachers. I had the opportunity to work with two different teachers and both of them I have learned to love and cherish. The fact that there is absolutely no judgment in this program is amazing. Being in public high school we are known as something that we are not. In the Passages program, we are mothers that are fighting to prove to the world that we can do anything we want.

I am so blessed to have been given the opportunity to be a part of this graduating class of 2013! I will forever be grateful to all of the teachers and volunteers and my other peers for pushing me to fulfill this goal and continually showing me love and support. I couldn't have done it without all of you.

To my beautiful daughter Kyren Rose, this is all for you. I want to prove to you that you can do anything you set your mind to, no matter how difficult the circumstance. You can be a strong independent woman, just like your mommy. You will forever have my love and support.

Thank you all!

## Shayna MacKenzie



Shayna & Sammantha

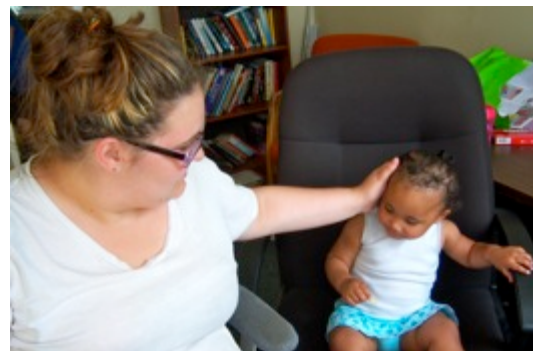
My name is Shayna and I am a teen mom. My daughter is going to be three in October. When I found out I was pregnant I was fifteen years old and all I could think was, "How am I going to be able to raise this child? I can't afford to have this kid," but when I saw the baby in the ultrasound I knew I wanted her. I cried for days upon days.

My parents treated me differently after I told them I was pregnant. They started leaving me alone more and walked out of my life faster. I knew then I had no chance to live my teenage years, so I had to live with it. I felt like everywhere I went I was being looked at and people would always talk about me. My life felt different. I thought I was going to be with Sammantha's father forever. We had already been together three years so I thought he would have really been there.

The day I had Sammantha on October 18, 2010 I knew that my whole life was about to change and I had to take care of this angel I created. I was scared of losing her. Once I saw her it was like my whole life changed. I lost all my friends and respect from a lot of people for being a young teen mom. Someone had called DHHS on me when Sammantha was four months old. They placed me in a group home called St. Andre's group home. I lived there for a year to keep my daughter. I never realized how much work it was to be a single teen mom.

I am eighteen now and still raising my daughter on my own and it is one of the biggest things in life that has challenged me. I turned to The Community School when I knew I was never going to make it in a public school. I couldn't focus when I didn't have my daughter with me and there were too many struggles for me. I have been in this program for two years now and my teachers have helped me come a far and long way. I had Lisa as a teacher for a long time and she was a great person and always gave me advice when I needed it. Lisa left and I got a new teacher - Stephanie. She also has helped me come a very long way. This program has helped me and worked with me when I felt like giving up. I wouldn't be where I am today if it wasn't for my daughter and the teachers I had. Life is not an easy road when you're doing it alone. Having those people in my life made my struggles a lot easier.

## Molly Bechand



Molly & Kamillah

This year in Passages I have learned to push myself and overcome my obstacles. Passages made me realize with a kid, life can be possible. When I had Kamillah I never thought I would ever get my diploma, but now I am about to graduate in June. I learned during my year in Passages if I push myself hard enough I can accomplish what I need to with the help of my teachers. I liked Passages because it was like high school, but with a kid and no drama. I learned a lot and was able to still be home with Kamillah and do school. My teachers showed me how to push through my problems and keep working towards my goal. I would recommend Passages to anyone; it is a great school.

## My Life, My Story, My Struggles

It has never been easy for me. By reading this you can picture how it is to walk in my shoes. It all started on May 14th, 1991. I was born in a hospital in Troy, New York but lived in an apartment in Albany, New York. We moved to Maine when I was three months old because of domestic violence. We had family in Maine so my two sisters, my brother, and my mom and dad packed up and moved to Maine. My mom and dad did their best. I remember being little and me and my father would pretend to play karate. He would dress me up and we would play fight.

Suddenly, my world crashed on me. It was so hard to know my father was dead.

I don't really remember him, but I do have memories. I remember an ambulance always at my house. My dad could barely get out of bed without hurting himself. I remember the cops and ambulance always at my house. When the ambulance and cops came they would give me toys and treats to help me not see my father like that. Over the next few years our mailman, Ed, would bring me presents on my birthdays and holidays to help with the pain. I don't remember everything but when I see pictures it brings back memories. Scared. Sad. Hurt. Lonely.

Before my mom got sick we would do a lot of stuff. She would play with me and spend

time with me. Because my dad died I was so angry and mean to my mom. I remember my brother touching me and giving me hickies. I remember my siblings running and chasing each other with pans and knives. It was always chaotic. I remember going to see Moe in prison. Moe was my mother's fiancé. It was awful for me sitting in the prison room with a lot of convicts just staring at me like they were going to rape me or kill me.

I will always remember my mother as a caring, loving, strong, joyful and BEAUTIFUL woman. Out of nowhere my mom got really sick. I found out she had cancer. My sister told me she got cancer from going on a coffee diet. She would only drink coffee and smoke cigarettes. My mom was a big girl. She lost all her weight when she was on her deathbed. She was nothing but skin and bones. Seeing my mother like this was so hard. My mom was so happy, outgoing and fun and now she was in a bed, sick and not herself and it killed me to see her like that.

On October 7, 2000, Moe came over to Allison and Ken's across the street where I would go to chill with them or their grandson. This was like a home away from home. It felt good to have some attention. Moe asked me to go to Missy's with him. Missy was my oldest sister. I could feel something was wrong. Missy and my Aunt Tanya were crying. They looked at me and said, "Mom has passed away." I broke down and started to cry because I knew my life was over.

I knew my life was over and I was about nine years old. I was trying to figure everything out. I was living with my sister, Missy. She was about twenty-four years old when I moved in with her. I was so out of control I split my nephew's head open with a toy. He was really little when I did this to him. I would throw things at my sister, call her names and try to fight her. I remember one day my sister told me DHHS was coming to get me. I was so happy. I waited hours for them to come get me. Well, they never did. Missy came to me and cried and told me they weren't coming. I broke down. I wanted to get away. I remember my sister telling me I set her tree house on fire and

set a church on fire from smoking weed and drinking. My sister Janice couldn't have me around either. I was rude and mean to her and her friends. I spent a lot of time alone in my room because no one wanted me. They were always mean to me but when the holidays and birthdays came we got everything we wanted. My sister would only buy me stuff. She wasn't affectionate. As I got older, having no affection made me turn to older men and bad choices.

Finally, my life got a little bit of light when I went to Opportunity Farms. I remember going to Dunkin' Donuts or getting a surprise when I did good all week with no negatives. I worked with mentally challenged kids. I really loved working with the kids because I grew up in a prejudiced family. It felt good to bring hope to the kids and my self-esteem improved a lot. I enjoyed going to the Olympics with them and seeing them compete and seeing their happiness after they won. Unfortunately, I got in a fight with Lacey, one of the staff members after work one day and got kicked out of Opportunity Farms. I ended up losing it. I didn't know how to control myself when I got mad. It hurts me and pisses me off 'til this day. I gave my opportunity up over something dumb like saying, "Thank you for the ride."

Lacey then drove me back to Auburn to my sister Missy's at three in the morning. My sister Missy wasn't impressed with me. My sisters told me I killed my mother from stressing her out and that the only reason I was living with her was because it was in my mom's will. It hurt and I was really scared. I felt lost in the world. After a few weeks of living back home, I moved out. I ended up staying with Jenny and her mom and her grandma for a few weeks 'til I moved in to the TLP, Transitional Living Program. I lived at the TLP for almost a year but I got kicked out because I didn't want to go to rehab. The TLP staff told me I had a choice to go or to move out. Well, I decided to move out and go live with my sister Janice. I had just turned seventeen and it didn't last long. I moved in with my friend Alison to my sister's. When Janice went away for the weekend, I wasn't supposed to have people over partying. Alison and I had extra people

over anyways and the carpet got stained from drinks and smoking, and the animals shit and pissed on the carpet, also. When Janice came home, she yelled at me and screamed and told us to get out. Alison and I ended up bouncing from place to place for a while 'til she got pregnant with Khameron. I really didn't have any feelings. I felt like I was just dead. I just had questions: how am I going to eat, sleep, live, survive?

Right when I thought things couldn't get any worse. I became homeless, sleeping in condemned buildings, hallways, couches, and crack warehouses. I let my guard down and eventually moved in with Mary and Mona. I think they used me for the survivor benefit check that I was receiving. Alison and I lived with them for over a year. They were very persuasive and got me into stealing, hustling, selling drugs, and doing them. I finally hit rock bottom, the lowest I could ever in my life imagine. I was seventeen and heavily into drugs. I was stealing to get money or I was selling Alison. I was pimping her out. Life was so bad I never thought I would get out.

Well I ended up meeting Josh. Mary and Mona introduced me to him. When Josh and I were together, he had a drinking problem and he got really mean when he drank. Unfortunately, Josh became my rock, my drug buddy, and my first love. Josh was great sober, but when he drank he would beat on me. It got to a point where I ran because he tried to kill me.

I ended up meeting Kamillah's father, Ernest, when I moved in with Alison and her baby's daddy. Living with them was always drinking, partying, and drugs. We stayed up for days. Ernest was like our chef and our slave. Ernest would help me with money, drugs, alcohol, and anything I needed. On Thanksgiving of 2010 Ernest raped me and then Kamillah was conceived. I didn't find out I was pregnant until I was six weeks along. I knew who Kamillah's dad was, but I told everyone it was ten different people. I was embarrassed, scared, and lonely to tell people the truth. When I found out I was going to have KK I

broke down and asked the nurse, "Is my life over?"

Well, the weeks went by and the more I fell in love with Kamillah. I was two months pregnant and had her name picked out, and I would rub my belly and call her Kamillah without knowing she was a girl. For the first few months I had been doing adoption planning to give her up. The day I found out she was a girl and I felt her first move, I knew I had no option to give up on her because she was all I had left.

Kamillah and I have been fighting together for twenty months to stay together. I went to a DHHS group home for seven months to learn more about parenting. All through my pregnancy I wanted to learn everything. I remember her growing, her development, her heartbeat, her FEET! and her movements, her playing with me while I tapped my belly, and I remember reading and singing to her. I had DHHS involved for thirteen months, but I fought and strived to do everything they wanted me to, just to keep KK with me and safe.

We came home and now we are still doing everything and we have a great bond. I have always held her and read, sang, kissed and hugged her all day, every day. Kamillah and I have a bond I never in my life thought I could ever find, but KK has taken the pain of my mother's death away, because on holidays and certain days I just want to die because of my mother not being here with me. Every day I know my mother is watching over Kamillah, and that is why every day I fight to survive and live.

If this shit in life didn't happen to me, I don't know where I would be today. I am thankful every day I have Kamillah, and I pray to God to let us keep fighting and for me to stay clean and off the streets for Kamillah because she deserves the best Life!!!!!!

## Lauren Mendez



The Passages program has been an awesome and rewarding experience. Although it took me longer than I had hoped, not once did the staff give up on me.



Without them this is something I would have never accomplished.

I'm very thankful for having such a great teacher to push me into reaching my goals. Not only did I get my high school diploma so I can further my education, but I got a life lesson - a lesson that with hard work you can achieve anything you set your mind to. I hope when my daughter is older she will see all the hard work I did and will do the same. I'm very thankful and proud to call myself a graduate of the Camden Community School.

## Cobalt

I started out as a volunteer at the Pope Memorial Humane Society of Knox County. I would work with the cats, cleaning their cages and their community room. Whenever I was done cleaning I would sit down on the bench in the lobby. One day when I sat down for a break this big, fat, orange and white cat with a mustache sat on my lap. I didn't think much of it, until the staff said, "Oh, be careful of her!" They warned me that she can be moody. I wasn't too worried about it, as she seemed like a friendly cat to me. As I sat there petting her she turned around and whacked me on the arm! She jumped out of my lap and walked away with her *cattitude*.



Every day I went in to volunteer she would come sit with me and I found myself trying to figure her out. I couldn't understand why this cat would seek out my attention and then turn on me when she received it. The more time I spent with her the more I realized what she would tolerate, what she liked, and what she didn't like. It was like she spoke her own language.

She didn't like many people so I felt privileged that she liked me. I grew to understand and love her as if she were my own pet. When I was upset or angry about something I would come to the animal shelter to visit her. It made me feel so good knowing that this cat trusted me and wanted my attention.

Eventually I was lucky to become a staff member at the shelter and I got to see her every day. After doing all my work you could find me in the lobby with her on my lap. It was almost like we had become a pair; you didn't see one without the other. We loved each other.

One day when I came to work I found out she was put into foster care. I was so happy for her - so happy that someone else loved her and wanted to give her a chance. She went home with a lovely couple that has their own animal rescue group; it was perfect for her.

A few months went by and then something terrible happened. As I walked into the building where we keep the sick cats, I saw a bottle of pills with her name on it. My heart sunk and I remember thinking to myself, "No, that can't be right, it has to be old." I went to look in the cages and sure enough, there she was. I couldn't believe my eyes.

There she was. She didn't look like herself. She had lost so much weight and she looked awful. She stopped eating and her liver was failing. It wasn't looking good for her. I wasn't ready to give up yet.

I got online and researched what I could do to help her. Every morning and every night I came into work to force feed her, give her fluids and give her the medications she needed. After a little bit of time she looked a lot better. We took her back to the vet to see if anything had changed. Her liver had improved! I was so happy that I actually helped. But then things got worse. Although her liver had improved, she was severely anemic. I wasn't sure exactly what this meant other than her red blood cell count being low. Theresa then explained that the vet thought it may be cancer related. We gave her a few more days to see if she would improve at all.

She wasn't getting better. The decision came - we had to put her out of her pain. I went to the vet with her when we had to let her go. It was one of the hardest things I've ever done. I can't begin to explain how much I loved this animal. My heart was broken, but I knew it was for the best. May she rest in peace and forever in my heart.

Her name was Cobalt.

## Mikayla Williams



Mikayla & Kacy

I think that Passages is a remarkable program. I loved meeting other moms my own age and going to workshops, especially Music Together with Jess Day. The best part was I did not have to sit in a classroom all day while Kacy was with other people watching her do new things when I wasn't there. By meeting with a teacher one-on-one I feel better off because I was able to get to know my teacher and talk with her more openly than if I had been in public school.

I am graduating a year earlier than my former classmates. If I didn't do Passages I would have probably graduated through Medomak and missed too much in my daughter's life. In order to graduate I had to get my permit which I wouldn't have done for awhile if it wasn't a requirement. And I am starting college this fall for early childhood development, which I wouldn't be doing if I didn't have a child of my own.

## Erika Bishop



Erika & Isabella



Hunter

During my time in Passages I learned more about myself than I ever thought I would. When I came into the Passages program I was a young, pregnant eighteen-year old. When I say young, I mean naive, selfish, immature and unmotivated. Thankfully, I was accepted into the Passages program and was given a chance to grow and learn. It wasn't immediate; it took me three years to come to this point, but during those three years I learned with the help of my amazing teacher, Andrea, that I was worth more and was capable of more than I had ever given myself credit for. She helped me find myself and for that I will be forever thankful. I was shown that I was getting in my own way, learned that there's plenty of people who are going to try to tell you that you can't or won't and that I need to be the one saying I can do this, and the more I tried the more I realized I can and will be successful.

I believe if it weren't for the Passages program and Andrea there's a good chance I'd still be where I was three years ago -

depressed, broke and unable to take care of myself. Although I won't say it was simple - I fought her hard sometimes and I wasn't always the easiest student. I tend to make things harder than they need to be.

For me, Passages wasn't about the papers you have to write or the outings you have to go on; it was about finding who Erika is and all that I am capable of. For the first time in my whole life I like myself, I'm proud of how far I've come and I am happy with the woman I'm becoming.

## Miranda Parsons



Miranda & Adilynn

My experience with the Passages program has been wonderful. There are many great teachers and also students - everyone is very welcoming and friendly. The teachers at the Community School are not ordinary teachers; these teachers meet with you one-on-one and make sure that your learning needs are met so you can succeed. They go out of their way to help you learn and go to activities. I am very pleased with all of the effort that the teachers have made to make sure I get everything out of learning that I possibly can. Passages has been a good learning process for me. I have learned so much about both my child and me. My child has enjoyed the program, too. It has been a long process through the rough times I've had in my life and the good times. My teacher has been very supportive throughout.



My teacher, Andrea, is not just a teacher; she's also an amazing, caring person who has done so many things to show how she cares and show how she really loves her job!

For my Passage both my teacher and I thought it would be great to do pottery. This is something I have done in the past in school in New Hampshire and was very interested in. Art is a very unique and personal thing to me. I feel as if it may also be relaxing at times and can express how you

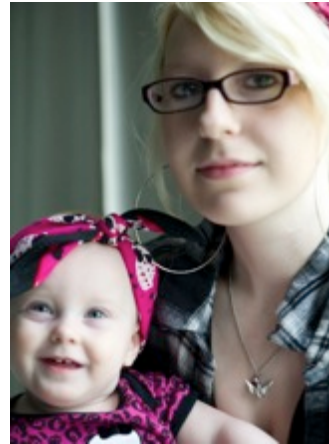


are feeling. The thing that I mainly wanted to do was use the pottery wheel, but unfortunately right before I started the classes with my professional I broke my hand and am still healing from it. So what I have done instead is made a pot in a different sort of way. I used the slab roller and rolled out clay and shaped it the way that I wanted and draped it over a bigger circular pot so it could form its own shape. I thought that this could also be a lot more expressive and unique than using the pottery wheel. Before draping it I got to do my own design on the inside of it with whatever I wanted to do.

My expert, Linda Stec, is really great. She has coached me along the way and taught me a lot of things I did not know about pottery. I think that she does a wonderful job and all of the art she does is very creative. I've basically learned to have fun with art and be creative.

This has been a wonderful process for me and I have learned a lot, but I am also so happy to just be done with high school. Now I want to move on and go to college. The career I would like to pursue is being a dental assistant. It would be great for me and I would love doing it. I am hoping to start school this fall!

# Gabbie Roberts



Gabbie & Gracie

Passages was a great experience. It made it so I could still be around my daughter and work at my own pace. I was told by a lot of people I wouldn't graduate high school; Passages gave me a chance to better my life. I have now completed Passages and am going to start college in the fall. Even when things seemed stressful and I was ready to give up, my teacher helped me and encouraged me to finish. I really enjoyed it.



*Gabbie is a strong believer in attachment parenting, natural foods and herbal remedies. Her Passage was a study of herbal medicine. Earlier in the year she wrote this very convincing editorial on co-sleeping...*

## Co-sleeping

An issue I feel strongly about is co-sleeping. Pediatricians will tell you not to co-sleep; they say it is unsafe. Many people believe that co-sleeping is irresponsible, unsafe and increases the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

My daughter has slept with me since I gave birth. She slept on my chest in the hospital. One of the nurses tried to tell me she wasn't allowed to sleep with me, so the nurse put Gracie in her own sleep area. She wouldn't sleep until she was back on my chest. The entire time she was in her own sleep area she cried. I put her back on my chest and we slept amazingly well. I feel safer knowing that she is in bed with me.

Co-sleeping benefits the baby and the mother. Co-sleeping helps regulate the newborn baby's breathing. Co-sleeping increases breastfeeding, making it easier to breastfeed and sleep. The baby does not have to cry to get the mother's attention.

According to Joanne Crawford, "Co-sleeping appears to promote confidence, self-esteem, and intimacy, possibly by reflecting an attitude of parental acceptance." There was a study done in England that showed children who never slept in their parent's beds were harder to control, not as happy, had more tantrums and they were more fearful than children who slept in their parent's bed. Mothers who co-sleep have showed five times the number of "protective" behaviors (such as adjusting the infant's blanket, stroking or cuddling) as mothers who don't co-sleep.

Another study that was done in 2006 showed 93% of children in India co-sleep. I didn't like the idea of putting my daughter in the crib. Cribs are like cages in my mind - you have been carrying this baby inside of you for nine months and then you are supposed to put your baby into a cage-like sleeper, just doesn't seem right to me. While she is in bed with me I am able to make sure she is safe and breathing. My baby has been an amazing sleeper ever since she was born. She takes naps and sleeps through the night. She doesn't really have to fully wake up to eat; she moves a little bit while she's still sleeping to search for the breast. I don't have to be fully awake either to breastfeed her. We can both sleep peacefully through the night and during naps.

My views may affect others in many ways. Some people may think I'm totally wrong and a bad parent. They may be very

unhappy with my point of view. Some people may agree and think, "Wow, that's great, a teen mom has done her research and does what's best for her daughter." A lot of people in my family disagree with the way I raise my daughter. They say that she will never sleep on her own if I co-sleep, but studies show that kids that co-sleep are more independent and will go to their own bed when they are ready. Everyone has their own opinion on things. Research can be done but there will ALWAYS be people who disagree with you and think you are wrong. Parent how you feel is right. Mothers really do know best.

## Robert Fusillo



Rob at work

My experience in Passages has helped me realize that I can do anything I wish to even when I face challenge after challenge. Before I joined I had dropped out of school twice and didn't think I would ever go back and finish. Passages changed my mind with their amazing program and the drive and care that the teachers carry towards their students.



Cami at work

# Kaila Gagnon



Kaila, Andrew & Brailee

I woke up my first day of my junior year in high school excited that I was one year closer to graduation. I remember it clearly because the weather still felt like summer. A month and a half into school, I discovered I was pregnant. My first thoughts were: "What is everyone going to think - my parents, my boyfriend, my friends? What did I get myself into? I'm not going to be able to graduate and my plans for after high school are ruined. I started to become extremely nauseous and tired from morning sickness and could hardly drag myself out of bed to go to school. I missed a total of a week and a half and had informed my principal I was pregnant. The principal then let me know that my condition was not accepted in his school. He then recommended the Passages program at the Community School. Even after he suggested I wasn't welcome, I still tried my hardest to stay. I knew I could do it. The school and teachers refused to work with me, so I finally consented to leave. I then applied to the Passages program.

My beautiful daughter, Brailee Karilyn Longe, was born June 20th 2012, while I was

on the waiting list. I started classes with Passages at the end of August. My teacher, Heather, was a great match for me. She was awesome to work with and helped me through everything. She came to my house once a week. My ideas about myself and my future gradually started to change. I gained my confidence back and realized that after having a baby at seventeen my life could still go on. The Passage program consisted of twenty-four real life lessons. Not only did it encompass traditional subjects, but parenting, budgeting, and just how to deal with life itself. I began to socialize with other teen parents at the monthly workshops that Passages offers. My daughter got to experience different types of music with Music Together and she also got to meet other babies.

I finished all my core subject areas in five months and began to imagine college after all. Before I was a part of the Passages program, I never dreamed of college with a baby. As part of my graduation project I began to tour colleges and really narrow down what I wanted to do with my life, other than being a great mom, of course. I have now taken the college nursing entrance exam. As I stand here today, my eleven-month-old daughter has now taken her first steps as I will take my first steps to go to college in the fall. Nothing is impossible.

## Paige Rich



Paige & Mackenzie

### My Passage

I decided for my Passage to be about getting my ducks in a row, which is different

for every person. For me, it's more about the big steps in my life, which seem to be hard for me to take. What I consider to be big steps are: going to college, getting my license back, getting a car, and then being able to get my own place with my daughter. It's not so much that I have a problem with taking these steps, it's that I end up failing myself and not following through with what I actually want to do. Every one of these steps is very important to my life. That's why I wanted it as my Passage. I want to see myself finish these goals and also be happy with the way it all turned out.

### What I Learned...

Throughout this project I learned many things - mostly that I just need to slow myself down. Take one step at a time. Don't overload myself with everything. Also, when times start to get rough, I just have to take a break instead of just giving up on myself. Now I've realized I don't just give up on myself, but my daughter as well. I have to be the best I can be for her! She is my inspiration in everything.

## Katelynn McLaughlin



Katelynn & Lilly

Becoming a student in the Passages program was one of the best things I could have done in my life. I stopped going to school five or six years ago when I was fourteen years old. I just wanted to hang out with my friends and have a good time. Then

a couple of years after that, I had Lilly. I was seventeen years old. I never thought that I was going to get a chance to finish my education.

My home counselor recommended the Passages program to me. I finally got a second chance at getting my high school diploma along with being a mom. I learned a lot about life and that things don't always go well but that I just have to try. I would have never succeeded, if I hadn't had Heather for a teacher. We have been through some awkward, rough times but we pushed through and I think our relationship now is stronger than it ever was. I know after I graduate, I will still be calling Heather. The Passages program was not like going to a regular school. I liked how everything was organized. The curriculum was about life and those were the things that I needed to learn. It was very convenient to have my teacher come to my house. I love the program and I am thankful that I had the opportunity to get my high school diploma while staying home with my daughter.

### Loud and Clear

*Advice from your editor*

Shout from the rooftop  
Whisper in my ear  
Make sure  
you're heard  
loud and clear

Stand up straight  
with a flexible spine  
Don't be cowed  
Let yourself shine

Be the star  
Don't allow strife  
to block your way  
from a brilliant life  
a brilliant life  
A Brilliant  
Life.