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## OPINION COLUMN

# Heart of the City: Supporting pregnant teens



By Rayanne Forbes

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For a teenager — when life is offering unlimited choices for the future — an unplanned pregnancy can be an overwhelming and life-changing experience.

Terra Centre in Edmonton is a non-profit organization that has been moving mountains in the lives of pregnant teens by offering unparalleled support services in the community since 1971.

Terra helps more than 600 young people a year cope with the issues surrounding teen pregnancy.

Welcomed with open arms and a warm smile, pregnant teens are offered a non-judgmental environment where they can explore their pregnancy options and determine their needs for support.

Some 97 per cent of Terra clients choose to parent or are already parenting, therefore the majority of Terra's programs is focused on helping teen moms and young dads develop the skills they need to be self-reliant individuals and successful parents.

Offering a wide variety of opportunities for successful parenting, Terra prides itself on providing profound support in three key areas: family outreach, educational support and housing.

Executive director of Terra Centre, Karen Mottershead says, "These teens have tremendous potential and they turn their challenges into successes. Becoming a parent gives them purpose & motivation.

"They take setbacks and make it a comeback and reposition themselves into a positive new direction. "

Unique to the organization are the vast options available to ensure young parents reach optimum success with their children.

Prenatal classes are offered to women up to age 21, with the option of bringing along one support person.

Course materials target teen moms in a comfortable environment and topics include what to expect during labour and delivery, comfort measures, and after-care.

Expectant parents can also ask questions and address concerns during these classes.

Terra encourages group parenting activities and plans monthly outings for the teens to share tips and interact in a fun family setting.

Participants discuss what life is like as a teen parent and learn techniques to handle their new responsibilities while socializing with their peers.

Considerably the most beneficial element in solving the puzzle pieces of parenting is the educational partnership between Terra and Braemar School, that offers babysitting while parents continue to achieve their potential as both students and parents.

Braemar serves a junior and senior high school student population of teen mothers up to 19 who are pregnant or parenting.

The school aims to help them achieve their education goals by hosting classes on financial literacy, and offering youth leadership programs and caring emotional support within the regular curriculum.

Another issue young parents face is securing safe and affordable housing.

Many have not lived independently, lack references, are under-age and face discrimination from landlords.

Terra provides housing options that help develop independent living skills and connects tenants to community resources.

They continue to be committed to being the solid foundation in the rebuilding of a teen parent's dreams by working with Hope Terrace and Braemar House in Edmonton, both offering affordable housing options to those in need.

Volunteers are welcome at their facilities and Terra is currently recruiting for their next bingo fundraiser happening on February 10th and 11th.

A wish list of their most-needed items is kept up to date on their website. Monetary and new or gently used children's clothing donations are accepted year-round.

Their most frequently needed items include formula, diapers, wipes and gift cards.

More information about the organization is available at [www.terracecentre.ca](http://www.terracecentre.ca) or by calling 780-428-3772.

Terra Centre has been offering a safe, supportive environment to teen moms and young dads for the past 40 years.

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