



City hall photo exhibit aims to break stereotypes of teen parents

'There is a lot of judgement, especially from older moms, thinking that we're not good moms'

By Rick Bremness, CBC News Posted: Jul 30, 2017 8:00 AM

Bria-anne Blanchard had just turned 18 when she gave birth to her son Grayson.

Almost instantly, she said, she began to understand the stigma attached to being a teen mother.

"We've had struggles right from the start," Blanchard, now 23, said.

"He ended up getting really sick and he almost died. It's hard when you are going through something like that," she said.

"There is a lot of judgment, especially from older moms, thinking that we're not good moms."

When Grayson does something that makes people uncomfortable, they are quick to judge her skills as a parent, she said.

But her son has been diagnosed with a number of conditions, including Tourette syndrome, she said.

"It seems like every couple of months it is a new diagnosis. OK, I got this one thing figured out, but how do I figure out this new thing? How do I be the best mom I can be?"

"Then I am still dealing with people judging me because I am still figuring it out," she said.

"I've actually gone to Walmart and a lady said, 'See honey, that's why babies don't have babies.' People don't know your side of the story, they just see what they see."



Grayson, 4, struggled after birth to survive. (Courtesy Bria-anne Blanchard)

'Stereotypes are largely unfounded'

Melissa Tremblay, a doctoral student with the community-university partnership for the study of children, youth and families at the University of Alberta has been working with Blanchard and seven other families on a research project.

"We often have some stereotypes of what a teen parent looks like or what a teen parent parents like in comparison to older parents," Tremblay said.

"What they have shown us through this project is that those stereotypes are largely unfounded."

The Terra-Brentwood photo-voice project asked participants to document their experiences as young parents.

The photo-voice project is a research method focused on social action.

"We were looking for photos that were meaningful in terms of answering our research questions," Tremblay said.

"These participants are incredibly resilient," she said. "They have a lot of success that people don't know about. They have been brilliant, really articulate and have lots to share about their experiences."

Blanchard, who is planning to become a special-needs teacher, said the project has really affected her.

"I finally got the chance to speak up for myself and other teen parents," she said.

"I feel this project gave us our outlet to say, 'Hey look, this is our side of the story,' and giving people an understanding that we are just like every other mom," Blanchard said.

"It doesn't make us any less of a parent just because we are younger."

The photo-voice exhibit is on display until Aug. 3 at Edmonton city hall.