

The Clarion

News from Catholic Charities

WHATEVER BECAME OF BRIDGET ANDERSEN?

Bridget Andersen, 2006



At 15, Bridget found herself pregnant, frightened and overwhelmed. Then the school nurse introduced her to ECHO (*Education Creates Hope and Opportunity*), our program for teen moms that helps them continue their education. With our assistance, Bridget discovered her true self: a young mother determined to fight for herself and her new family by pursuing the education vital to their future. Turn to page two to see just how far she's come.

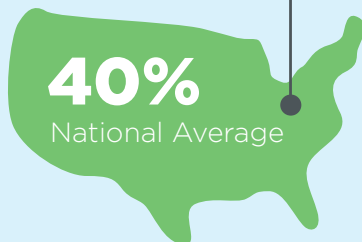
ECHO'S BIG *IMPACT*

90+%

ECHO Graduation Rate

40%

National Average



...see more details on pages 6 & 7

...continued on page 2



**Catholic
Charities**
Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend

ECHO has helped Bridget Andersen reach her potential.

When Bridget discovered she was pregnant, she confided in the school nurse, who put her in touch with the case manager from ECHO – Education Creates Hope and Opportunity – a program begun by Catholic Charities to help keep teen moms in school.

It was clear with Bridget early on. She was going to raise her baby and complete her high-school education. So she met with the principal, her parents and others who would play a role in discussing her future. With their assistance, Bridget made a plan to finish high school and eventually go on to college.

“I really feel a need to be there for other moms who are struggling so maybe working in the NICU or at a doctor’s office is in my future.”

Bridget Andersen

Meanwhile, Bridget found that being pregnant as a freshman was a great social challenge. Her friends were well meaning, but failed to understand the difficulty of her circumstances.

“I remember my friends thought being pregnant was really cool, but it wasn’t,” says Bridget. “I was feeling the weight of being a mom at 15 and it was really scary.”

But Bridget found the support she needed from her parents, the administrators at school, her boyfriend Damon, and her ECHO case manager. With their help, she found the confidence and resolve to see it through.

“Bridget was an ideal client,” says Liz Flaherty, one of her former ECHO caseworkers. “She was always focused on her goals, always fighting for her family and her future.”

Her son, Damon Jr., was born the following August and, soon after, Bridget began her sophomore year. However, the following March, her son became seriously ill and required constant attention so Bridget dropped out of school to care him.

She never waived from her goal of getting her HSE (formerly GED).



Family Photo: l to r, Bridget, Damon Jr., Elijah, Damon Sr.

Bridget had extraordinary support for someone in her position, including her boyfriend Damon, who came nearly every day to visit their son. Bridget and Damon eventually became a family and had another son Elijah.

ECHO stepped in and found a program with flexible hours so she could continue her studies. Bridget persevered through her son’s illness and remarkably graduated at 18 with her peers.

She didn’t stop there. Today Bridget is working to complete her associate’s degree in nursing at Ivy Tech and plans eventually to attend IPFW to get her bachelor’s degree.

“I’m not sure where I’ll end up in my career, but I really feel a need to be there for other moms who are struggling so maybe working in the NICU or at a doctor’s office is in my future.

Damon Jr.’s father, Damon Sr., visited Bridget and son nearly

every day. Over time, they formed the bonds of family and eventually had another child, Elijah, who is now four years old. Bridget and Damon Sr. are both continuing their education to build a more secure future for their family.

What advice does Bridget have for other young moms in her position?

“Don’t drop out of school,” she says. “A lot of girls are scared and don’t know what to do, but don’t be afraid to ask for help. And course I would tell other girls to go to ECHO. They helped me a lot.”

...for more about ECHO go to page 6

CATHOLIC CHARITIES

Service Highlights for 2015



GLORIA WHITCRAFT - CEO

In 2015, we were blessed with the financial and human resources to serve many of those most in need in our diocese. As always, we strive to make the most of every dollar entrusted to us and to serve in a manner befitting Christ and his Church.

Gloria



FOOD PANTRIES

Catholic Charities provided food to **10,091** individuals through our food pantries.

FOOD PANTRIES

10,091



VITA TAX

VITA tax program provided **765** low income individuals with free tax preparations.

VITA TAX

765



PACK-A-BACKPACK

Pack-a-backpack provided **743** low income children with backpacks full of school supplies.

PACK-A-BACKPACK

743



ASSISTANCE

Resource and referral provided **314** individuals with emergency clothing, utility and rental assistance, food vouchers, and transportation assistance.

ASSISTANCE

314



JOB TRAINING

SCSEP provided **120** low income seniors with subsidized job training.

JOB TRAINING

120

STUDENTS

98



STUDENTS

ECHO served **98** pregnant and parenting students.



CLIENTS

Total number of clients served in calendar year 2015 (unduplicated): **14,240**.

CLIENTS

14,240



Catholic Charities
Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend

Why ECHO is so important in the fight against poverty.

According to the national average, only about 40% of teen parents graduate from high school. Compare that figure with the 90+% graduation rate for ECHO participants. This basic level of achievement has a profound effect on earning potential, which in turn helps keep many above the poverty level.

According to 2015 Bureau of Labor statistics, the average unemployment rate nationally for the non-high-school graduate is 8.0%, compared with 5.4% for a high-school graduate. Similarly, the average weekly income for someone without a high-school diploma is \$493, \$678 for the high-school graduate and \$1,137 a week for the person with a bachelor's degree.

"One of the best things we can do to address poverty is to prevent it," says Gloria Whitcraft, CEO of Catholic Charities. "ECHO is the most effective program we have for reducing the risk of single mothers falling into poverty."

Our goal with ECHO is to provide support to young parents so they can stay in school and create a better future for themselves and their children. Many teen moms feel their dreams of college and a career vanish when they become pregnant.

ECHO can help them keep those dreams alive.

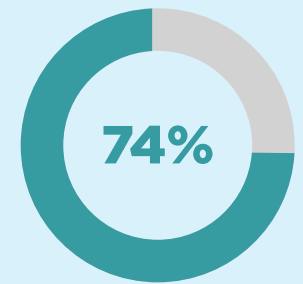
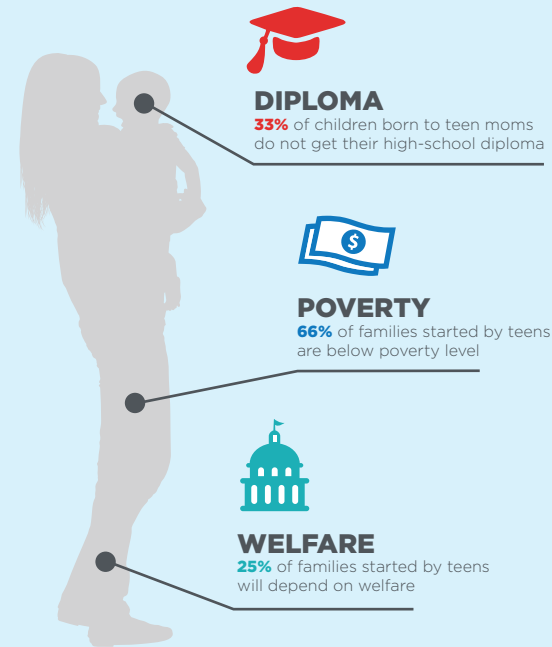
Through Catholic Charities, young women and men receive school and home-based management services, which include monitoring school attendance and grades. ECHO case managers help the students set goals, and provide them with the support and resources necessary to achieve them. ECHO staff also work closely with parents, administrators, teachers, and guidance counselors to keep these teens in school so they can graduate.

ECHO case managers generally start with finishing their HSE (formerly GED) or high-school diploma. They also help them find a job, and even obtain scholarships and grants for college. Our staff works in cooperation with officials in Fort Wayne Community and East Allen County school districts, and in South Bend with the South Bend Community Schools Corporation.

To read more about ECHO, please go to our website: <http://www.cfwsb.org/our-services/pregnancy-services/>



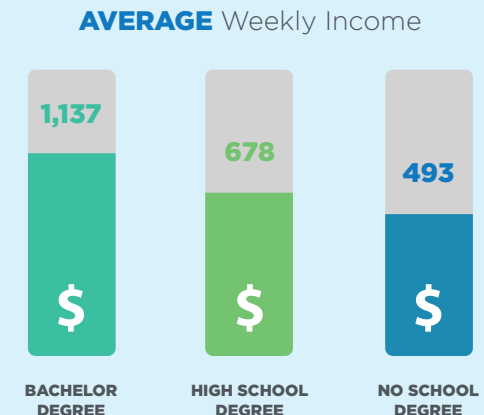
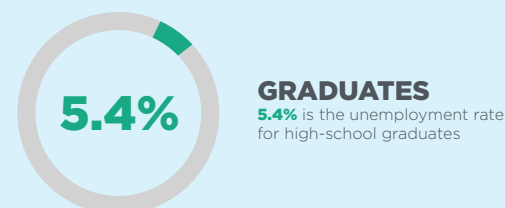
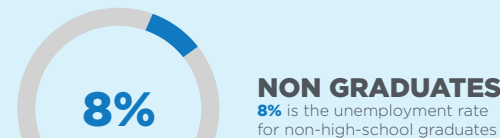
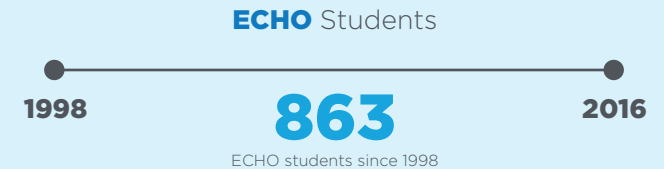
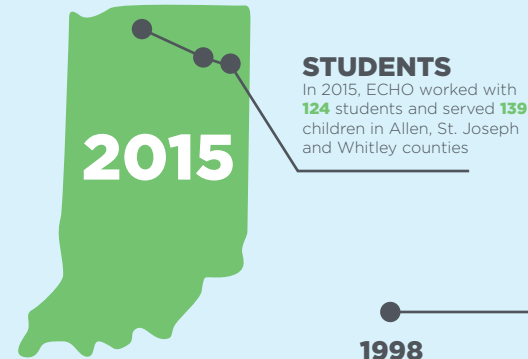
ECHO'S BIG IMPACT



POVERTY ODDS
If a person doesn't finish high school, doesn't marry, and has a baby before the age of twenty-one, his or her chance of becoming poor is **74%**



PRENATAL CARE
100% of mothers receive care so their babies are healthier and have higher birth weights





HELP US KEEP MORE TEENS IN SCHOOL

Please consider the following:

- **\$125** provides a month of one-on-one educational and emotional support for a young parent.
- **\$75** provides one young mother with transportation to prenatal medical appointments for the duration of her pregnancy.
- **\$25** provides one month of curriculum to educate young parents on child development, safety, relationship building, and more.
- **\$10** buys diapers for a week.

Please use the enclosed envelope or go to our website: ccfwsb.org

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Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend

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