

Teen parents find help through CCFI

By Joy Hampton Senior Staff Writer | Posted: Sunday, September 27, 2015 7:15 am

Dominique and Jake are young parents with a hopeful future, but things could have gone differently for both of them and their children without help from the Center for Children and Families Inc. Teen Parenting Program.

Dominique became a mother at age 15. Instead of becoming a statistic on a downward spiral, she got active in CCFI's teen parenting program through her local high school. Now she and her 6-year-old son, E.J., are an ongoing success story. Dominique graduated in the top 10 percent at Westmoore High School and was also at the top of her junior college classes before heading to the University of Oklahoma.

As a single father, 19 year-old Jake was the primary parent for his 1-year-old son, Tyler, whose mother had been in and out of treatment for substance abuse and was no longer a part of her son's life.

Though Dominique and Jake gained help through the teen parenting program, CCFI offers a number of programs and services to assist and educate families coping with abuse, neglect, divorce, separation, teenage pregnancy, a lack of quality out-of-school care or other adverse experiences.

"We also have the Boys and Girls Club of Norman," said Executive Director Katie Fitzgerald. "It serves children six to 18 years old who are in Norman Public Schools."

The afterschool program runs until 7 p.m. and includes a free meal, homework time, and many other activities including arts, dance, music and fitness.

"The three goals of the program are academic success, good character and citizenship and healthy lifestyles," Fitzgerald said.

Every family has strengths and challenges that impact the lives of their children. Sometimes, the successes are small but life-saving for the individuals involved and CCFI has a mission to help families achieve those goals together.

Small successes can be important beginnings — a truth Dominique and Jake have lived. Dominique was recently selected as a MacNair Scholar and was recently honored as OU Student Mother of the



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Dominique and her 6-year-old son, E.J., received help through the Center for Children and Families Inc. teen parenting program.

Year and Outstanding Transfer Student of the Year.

“Poverty is a cycle, and I wanted to break that for me and my son,” Dominique said.

Jake has also awakened to new dreams for himself and his son Tyler. When he came to CCFI, Jake felt alone and was unsure of how to raise Tyler by himself.

Like Dominique, he was caught in the cycle of poverty that often plagues teen parents. Jake didn't have the support he needed to finish high school and work a full-time job to provide for Tyler. Through CCFI's Teenage Parenting Program, Jake found the support, confidence and resources to make a new start.

Weekly home visits helped Jake learn parenting skills. He made it a priority to attend weekly educational parenting groups where he was encouraged by CCFI staff and other parents.

Jake is now enrolled in a GED program and works full-time at a grocery store. With the help from CCFI staff, he applied for assistance from local and state services to help make ends meet.

Jake now has dreams for a bright future for himself and Tyler that includes further education to become a mechanic and earn a living wage that can support his small family of two.

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