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## **Teen Mother Choices Makes Financial Sense**

*Not-for-profit celebrates 20 years, keeps teen mothers off welfare*

GURNEE, Ill. (Feb. 23, 2009) – At the 2008 Oscar awards, host Jon Stewart listed contenders for Best Picture: “‘No Country For Old Men,’ ‘Sweeney Todd,’ ‘There Will Be Blood.’ All I can say is: Thank God for teen pregnancy.”

Stewart was referring to the Oscar-nominated movie “Juno,” but in reality teen mothers often face grim odds.

- Teenage mothers are less likely to complete high school and only one-third receive a high school diploma. (*familyfirstaid.org*)
- Nearly 80 percent of unmarried teen mothers end up on welfare. (*familyfirstaid.org*)
- Within two years, more than 31 percent will have a repeat pregnancy. (*teenshelter.org*)

Teen Mother Choices ([www.teenmotherchoices.org](http://www.teenmotherchoices.org)) works to reverse those statistics. Celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, the not-for-profit organization serves the teen mother holistically as she raises her child. It focuses on the five roles teens typically play – as a teenager, mother, student, employee and seeker of God. In each of its locations, it uses a network of nearly 100 volunteers, from doctors and lawyers to mechanics and financial planners, to guide the struggling teen mother into a healthy and rewarding lifestyle.

“Teen Mother Choices uses a simple model that any church and any community can do,” said Christa March, founder and executive director. “What we’ve done in 20 years is show 450 graduates of the program that they have a wonderful community of support, they don’t have to go on welfare, and they’ve made the right decision to give birth to their child.”

Pure economics bear out the success of TMC. According to [plannedparenthood.com](http://plannedparenthood.com), experts estimate that the annual cost of births to teens totals about \$9.1 billion. A teen mother in TMC only costs \$6,500 per year.

March began the program after running into a group of teen mothers at a mall. “Why aren’t you in school,” she asked them. She subsequently learned that teens who choose to keep their babies often face isolation, undeveloped parenting skills and a lack of support and money for child care.

Today there are three TMC programs in northern Illinois, and more than 45 organizations in 14 states have copied the TMC model. In 2005, Teen Mother Choices International was created. TMC keeps overhead costs low by using office space donated by area churches. Churches are also the most fertile source of volunteer mentors and donations to the program.

March credits some of TMC's success to the fact that it is a faith-based ministry. "We have a tough-love approach that can't be done through the schools," she said. "We demand that TMC students cannot get pregnant while they're in the program, and they must attend school or work full time. The schools can't do that."

A 20-year reunion will be held from 7 to 9 p.m. March 14 at the Village Church of Gurnee, 1319 N. Hunt Club Road in Gurnee. All are welcome to attend.

To learn more about Teen Mother Choices, call (847) 599-8135.

### **About Teen Mother Choices**

Teen Mother Choices empowers teenage mothers to become independent, functioning members of society while giving their children the best possible life start by addressing their physical, emotional and spiritual needs within the local community. Since 1989, it has offered child care, mentors, weekly life skills workshops, guidance in setting goals and referrals as appropriate.