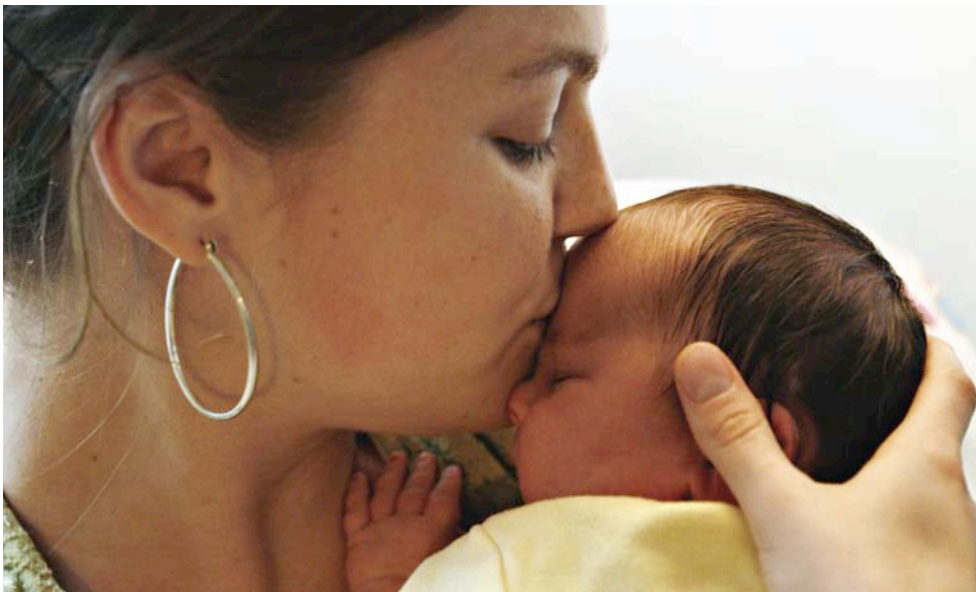




United Way
Toronto

Giving young children a healthy start



The years between birth and age six are especially critical to a child's future development and yet too many children are going without emotional support, nutritious food and proper stimulation. When two or more risk factors are present—poor care during pregnancy, low birth weight, family problems, addiction and neglect—a child is four times more likely to develop social and economic problems. Without a healthy start during these critical early years, children can suffer serious setbacks from which they may never recover.

There is clear evidence that good early child development programs that involve parents or other primary caregivers of young children can vastly improve outcomes for children's behavior, learning and health in later life. Parents' involvement with children at home also amplifies learning opportunities and emotional health. Quality early learning and childcare programs are proven ways to help parents become active, informed participants in their children's early development.

Early learning and child care lay the foundation for success in school by helping improve family nutrition and parenting skills, and connecting isolated families to critical support systems.

Did you know...

- *The GTA is now the child poverty capital of Ontario: 50% of Ontario's children in poverty now live in the GTA, up from 44% in 1997.*
- *The City of Toronto is a bellweather on poverty trends: its child poverty rates are the highest in the GTA and are growing.*
- *Toronto is home to 43% of children in the Toronto region, but 62% of poor children in the region.*
- *34% of all food bank users in the Greater Toronto Area are children.*
- *For every \$1 spent on quality early care and education, taxpayers save up to \$13 in future costs.*
- *Major reports conclude that the years from conception to age six have the most important influence of any time in the life cycle on brain development and subsequent learning, behavior and health.*

Teen moms radiate confidence

It takes courage and confidence to stand up in front of strangers and talk about being a teenaged mother.

Suzy Zajkowski, 19, has plenty of both, speaking recently to midwife students at Ryerson University about the facts of her life.

"I'm here because I want to give back to the June Callwood Centre," she said.

Zajkowski is among a dozen teen moms who are clients and volunteers with June's Community Education Project. They speak to students, doctors and guidance counsellors about their experiences and their messages are helping break down stereotypes.

Zajkowski recounted how, at 15, she met a boy "which led to an unhealthy relationship." About a year later, she became pregnant. "It changed my life forever. A baby is a whole new world. It's one I wouldn't give up for a second."

Though her then boyfriend warned she'd be on her own, Zajkowski decided very early in her pregnancy she would keep her baby. Determined to make a life for herself and her child, she moved in with her brother, who told her about June's across the street and suggested she go for help.

Zajkowski said she was welcomed at June's with open arms. She attended a prenatal group and nutrition program and when son Damian was 5 months old, she started picking up credits at June's high school.

With ongoing help from staff and counsellors, Zajkowski has made her way. She's finishing high school and plans to enrol in the journalism program at Ryerson.

Established in 1982, June's is a multi-service organization working with teens 18 and younger. Services are provided until the moms are 20, said Bonnie Tytel, program co-ordinator at the Parliament and Queen Sts. centre, formerly known as Jessie's.

Adapted from an article in Toronto Star, November 21, 2008, by Leslie Ferenc
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Your donation gives young children a healthy start by supporting:

- ▶ Pre-and post-natal care
- ▶ School-readiness programs for pre-school children, after-school programs and homework clubs
- ▶ Outreach to isolated families and parent/child drop-in centres
- ▶ Parent education, family support and counselling

United Way's work in the community

United Way Toronto funds 57 agencies with programs aimed at providing a healthy start for children. In one year, United Way support enabled 44,755 young children (0-6 years old) to participate in a school-readiness program, helping them to get their best start in life.



How your generosity makes an impact

\$80 sends the 'Children's Caravan' to a community location. The Caravan is a multipurpose prevention service that supports caregivers/families with pre-school children by lending resource and training materials to help children grow and learn.

\$250 provides a single parent with eight parenting support sessions to help her give her children a healthy start in life.

\$750 provides a child one month at a day camp where he can participate in swimming lessons, sports and artistic activities, helping him develop confidence and learn new skills.

\$900 provides a home visiting service for a family at risk and need of support, helping parents increase their parenting skills and enhance their children's growth and development.