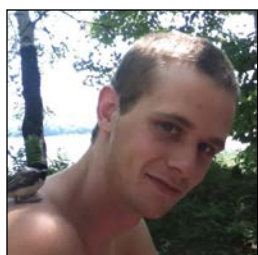




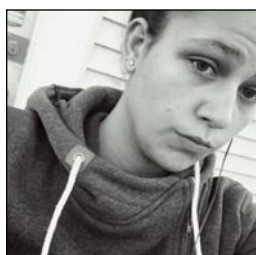
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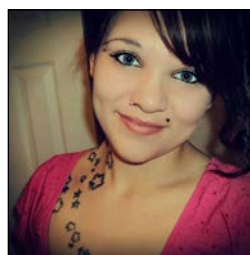
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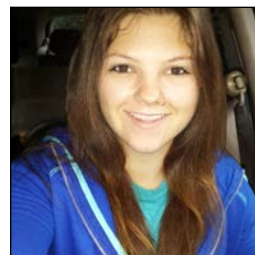
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Deserea Debrienza



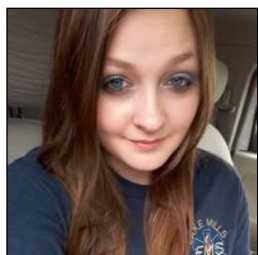
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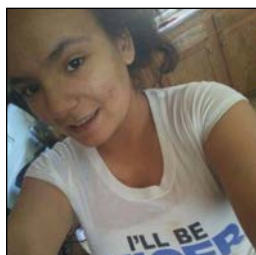
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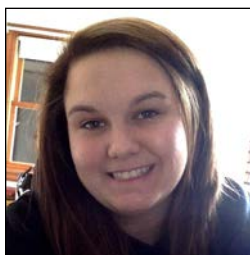
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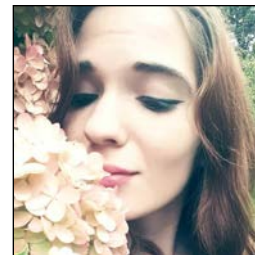
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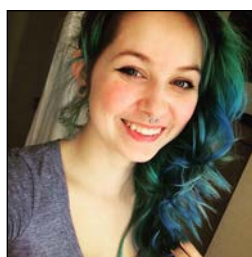
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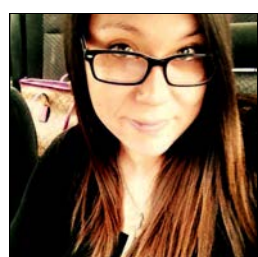
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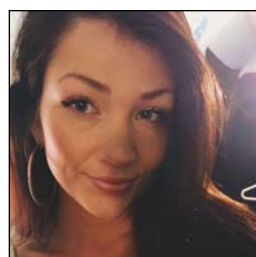
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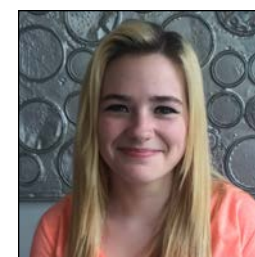
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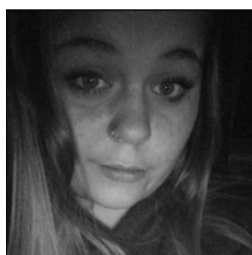
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Lacey E. Phinney



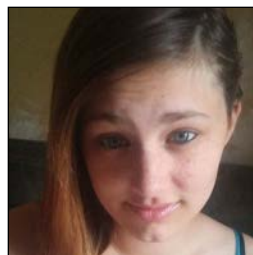
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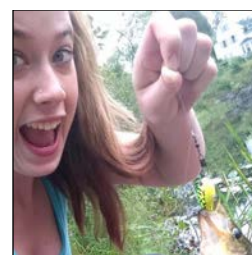
Jade Lynn Smiley



Barbara Turner



**Amber L.
Wahlstrom**



Kayla C. Wing



Nikiah L. Berry
Belmont

Being in the Passages Program has been an amazing experience. I was able to finish school and be a mother to my daughter. When I found out about this program I still thought it was going to be a while until I graduated because I didn't think I could do it, but I was wrong. It was a self-learning experience and I learned a lot about myself and how to be a better mother. I've achieved and amounted to so much this year that I had once thought was beyond me. This program isn't just school, it also teaches you a lot about life and skills you are going to need as a parent.



My teacher has been amazing. She helps me with everything, explains when I don't

understand, and she is great with my daughter and my needs. I feel that leaving this program and going off on my own will be a lot easier because of everything Erica has taught me. My teacher wasn't just my teacher, but my friend through my experience at Wayfinder, and that is something I admire a lot.

I feel like this program was far better than going to regular high school. I would recommend this to any teen parent because honestly it's the best option in my opinion.



My Passage: Baking for a Diabetic

My Passage was baking. I chose this because I have always wanted to be an owner of a restaurant, but haven't been a good baker. To have a restaurant I think that you need to have baked goods as well as regular food. There's one catch to my project: I am baking for a diabetic, so my recipes are sugar-free and they have to taste good. I choose to do diabetic recipes for my grandfather because he loves to eat sweets but needs to watch the sugar. My expert Megan helped me through my Passage and taught me a lot of new things that I didn't know about baking. Learning how to bake has been a wonderful experience, because I can use what I learned at home as well. Without the Passages program I wouldn't have had this experience and wouldn't have learned everything that I did and I am very thankful to have this.



Shane Callahan

Rockland

When I first started in Passages I thought it was going to be like getting into the GED program. After going through the program, I realized that Passages is way better. I am getting my actual high school diploma, which is a bonus, while being able to work and do other things around my school work.

During the program I attended many of the workshops. I enjoyed these workshops mostly because I got to bring my son Brayden,

and he got to play with other kids while I was doing school stuff. I like how the program focuses on life skills and not just educational school work.

For my final Passage, I am working with Drew from Midcoast Music Academy to learn to play the drums. One thing I have always loved is music. I have always wanted to learn to play the drums and guitar. Drums have been an underrated instrument and I thought it would be a perfect fit for me - plus I can jam sometimes with Brayden. If it wasn't for Passages I wouldn't be able to afford lessons on my own, plus I don't think I would have been able to fit it into my schedule if it wasn't for my teacher helping to motivate me.





Deserea Debrienza

Lewiston

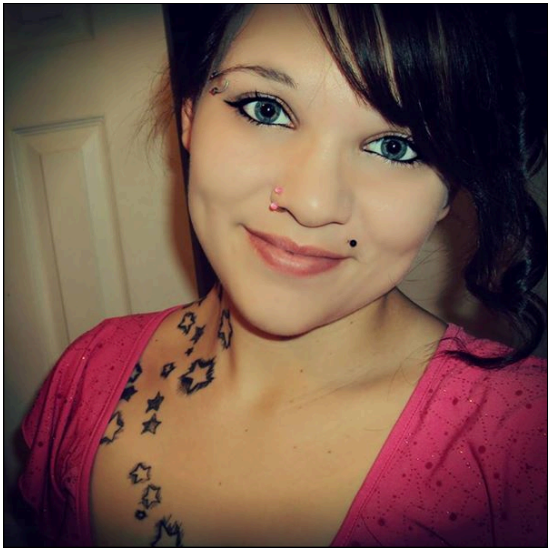
As everyone knows, being a young mom isn't that easy; it's a little rough! As a young parent, I was trying to finish high school, find a job, and take care of the baby. Thanks to Wayfinder Schools, young parents have a second chance at opportunities they thought they'd lost. The teachers help us students in any way they can. Teachers will try to make it happen, and they are with you every step of the way, even at your own pace! The one special thing that I noticed about being in Passages is that they are not only focused on us students, but they also focus on our kids as well. I thought that was really cool because it made me more comfortable knowing that I have that other person helping me raise my baby; the teachers build a bond with us as much as with our kids!

When I got accepted into Passages I was nervous and scared at the same time, but I overcame all my fears! It was the best choice I have ever made. We go on trips like apple picking, and have special events at the school. I enjoyed myself because they focus on you, the baby, but also your education, and how to use

the resources around you. They help you pursue what you want to do in life, even after you graduate.

My experience in Passages has been such a journey for me, and it's one that I wasn't expecting. They have so many good opportunities before you graduate and after you graduate. Here I am today taking one step closer--even if it's tiny steps--to my dreams, all thanks to Wayfinder Schools. Before I was shy, closed up. I was an isolated girl that took a month to say 'Hi, how are you?' to one person coming through the door. Now I am saying, 'Hi, how are you!?' to everyone I walk by, even if they don't say it back! It makes me feel better and stronger inside emotionally and physically to be able to say I can do this!!! I am overcoming my fear of being shy. I want to Thank Katy and Dana for helping me reach my goals.





Heaven Lee Dow

Lewiston

My name is Heaven Dow. I have a fearless 4 year old daughter and a sweet 8 month old boy. I've been in the Passages program for about three-and-a-half years. When I started Passages I was completely lost. I felt like I just started my journey in motherhood and I was failing already. As I completed each core skill, I had more and more faith in myself not only as a mother but as a person.

School has always been important to me, but with my home life being so crazy and stressful I couldn't focus on my work. That's what this program is for though, to help us young parents who don't have "normal" lives. Not only is the curriculum fantastic but the student-teacher bond is one of a lifetime.

My teacher Megan has guided me, supported me, and pushed me to do my best more than most adults in my life have. She's been there for me when it comes to school and when I've needed extra support in my home life as well. My fiancé is a recovering addict and I was hit by a car last March, moved twice, and had a beautiful baby this school year. This

has been the hardest year yet. I wouldn't have been able to graduate if Megan wasn't in my corner supporting me in any way she could. Sometimes she helped by leaving ginger tea outside my door when I had morning sickness, or helping me start easing my way back to school after my accident, sometimes even typing for me when I couldn't. Some days she just sent me an encouraging text message. She also helped me learn how to parallel park, she took me to get the papers to apply for my permit, and not only watched my children while I did schoolwork, she played with them and built a bond with them that they can hold onto.

This program has changed my life in more ways than I could ever tell you and has changed so many of us young parents lives that wouldn't have been able to get an education if it wasn't for Passages.



Lateesha R. Emmons

Springvale

(Editor's note: Lateesha is working on her memoir; this is a small excerpt.)



Imagine being 20 years old, married, a mother of two, having your own place and your own car, you work and life isn't so bad, but there is one

downfall . . . you haven't finished high school. Believe it or not, it made me feel ashamed that I was still in school at my age. It made me feel like a child, which I clearly am not.

Wayfinder Schools is a great school. The teachers are wonderful people, you make your own schedule, and do the work on your own time. This school does more than just teach you schoolwork, it teaches you about real life problems. They help you break out of your shell and become the person everyone knows you can be.

Being a mother is hard. Being a mother that goes to school is even harder. Many moms usually just give up on school, but I would tell any young parent that hasn't finished school to try Passages at Wayfinder Schools. In two short years I finished all my school work, all the community service hours, and here I am getting ready to graduate!! For once in my life I can say I am proud of myself all thanks to the staff of Wayfinder Schools. Thank you!

Life's tough. You have so many things to learn about. Sometimes it will be really hard to even open your eyes, never mind go into the world and have to learn about everything under the sun. As a young child if you have a dream never stop fighting for it. I have always wanted to be a singer, but I let my dream pass. Now, from time to time, I find myself sad, knowing I have a good voice that could have been heard and now is just stuck in the closet forever. Nothing is ever out of your reach. If you work hard and keep a positive mind you will make it.

Every day is a new chance for you to start over or better yourself. A positive lifestyle doesn't happen in one day. You have to work on yourself and your life every day. Not every day will be easy, nothing that is good comes easy. Just have faith, and hope - never lose hope. Giving up isn't an option; life is what you make it. Make it a good one.





Ryan Alexander Flanders *Rockland*

Traditional schools rarely offer students the chance to be self-reflective, or to do something truly meaningful for themselves. As any student in Passages knows that in order to graduate you need to complete your Passage Project. Paraphrasing the Passage Guidelines, it states the project must be something personal, and meaningful.

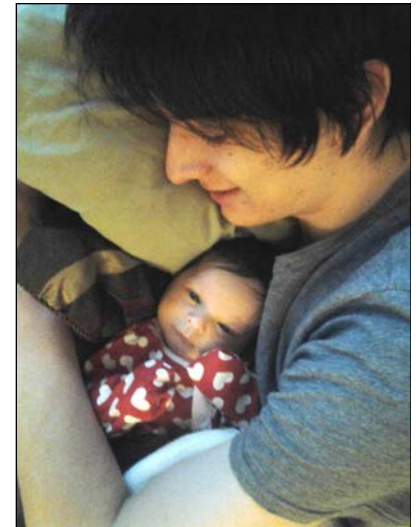
I have an intense fear of water. I chose to focus on learning to swim for my Passage project. At first I imagined that I was being too self-indulgent, too greedy. I thought that to choose something personal was to take advantage of the program for personal gain. While technically, that's not wrong, now that I've started, I understand an entirely new side to this project, and its importance. I chose a fear. It has ruled my summers, time at pools, and prevented many good experiences. I enrolled in a 6-week swimming class as part of

my Passage and until I entered the water, I doubted myself completely, but I was very pleasantly surprised. I was nervous, but I had fun. Which hadn't happened in many years and I was able to push myself, just a bit farther than I expected and that's incredible.

Without Passages I probably wouldn't have ever faced my fears and I never would have had the support network that the school offers. It's a small thing, but in a few moments I proved more to myself than anyone or anything before had. I'll be forever grateful to Passages for this. It's just another testament to the fact that this isn't just a high

school. Yes, I completed my credits, and there was work, but the teachers, the personal experiences, the workshops, and the Passage is worlds more meaningful than any other school could ever hope

to be. I, like my peers, was going through a very tough time when I enrolled in Passages, but the teachers never gave up on me, they were never unsupportive, and the message that has been driven over and over into my head by this program is that, "I can." That's a big thing.



Final Thoughts

If there is ever one thing I could share with people, it would be the following passage from one of my favorite people, comedian Bill Hicks. Life is scary, and ever changing, and I like the

idea of hope. I like dreams of peace, and I strongly believe that nothing should be taken TOO seriously. This speech encompasses that feeling well:

*“The world is like a ride in an amusement park, and when you choose to go on it you think it's real because that's how powerful our minds are. The ride goes up and down, around and around, it has thrills and chills, and it's very brightly colored, and it's very loud, and it's fun for a while. Many people have been on the ride a long time, and they begin to wonder, "Hey, is this real, or is this just a ride?" And other people have remembered, and they come back to us and say, "Hey, don't worry; don't be afraid, ever, because this is just a ride. And we can change it any time we want. It's only a choice. No effort, no work, no job, no savings of money. **Just a simple choice, right now, between fear and love.** The eyes of fear want you to put bigger locks on your doors, buy guns, close yourself off. The eyes of love instead see all of us as one. Here's what we can do to change the world, right now, to a better ride. Take all that money we spend on weapons and defenses each year and instead spend it feeding and clothing and educating the poor of the world, which it would pay for many times over, not one human being excluded, and we could explore space, together, both inner and outer, forever, in peace.” -Bill Hicks*



Desiree Foley

Washington

It's More Than Just a Diploma

My name is Desiree Foley. I'm 20 years old. I've been with Passages since 2015. I really like the Passages program because it has given me an opportunity I never thought I was going to have - which is to graduate. Having an actual high school diploma rather than a GED is a significant accomplishment. When I found out I was pregnant with my son, my life was already going in a downward spiral. I wasn't in school, and I wasn't really striving to become anything. My son Landon, even at 2 years old, has been my best cheerleader. He reminds me of why and who I am doing this for.

Thanks to Passages, I've found myself. I'm a lot happier and healthier. The school has so much love and compassion for their students. I really like that Passages has given me a chance to still succeed at my job, while being able to work towards my diploma - all with a helping hand along the way. Passages has shown me that I am more than just a statistic. Just because I'm a young mom, doesn't mean my life is over. They've given me so many

opportunities I wouldn't have found on my own.

My teacher Cindy, is an amazing teacher. She's so passionate, genuine, and understanding. She's helped me with so much more than just school. She's helped me with my daily outside life, she pushed me to become a better person, and made me realize that I can do anything I put my mind too. She also taught me that everything gets better in time, and I just need to take everything one step at a time. Everything will work out when it's supposed to. I really enjoyed being able to have one-on-one meetings with her, and she was so flexible with the scheduling. I'm sure I was a headache for her, but she never lost her patience and never gave up. She's been the best motivator.

I'm so thankful for my experience with this school. I have so much more in life to look forward to now, and my options are endless. My son now has a mother he can be proud of, I can now say that I have a high school diploma, and that I never gave up. Thank you Wayfinder Schools!



His Life, My Gift

At first, being a single mom was the most terrifying thought I could have; especially a first time mom. How am I going to raise a little human, when I barely have a stable life myself? How am I going to keep him safe and healthy? Going into this alone was hard. I was constantly scared that I was messing up and that I wasn't giving him the life he deserved. I was scared that I wasn't giving him enough



attention or that I wasn't making him happy or that I wasn't helping him reach all his milestones accurately. I was going into this completely blind.

Being a single mom has turned out to be the best experience ever. I've gotten to bond with my son on a much higher level because I'm there for all his wants and needs, and I'm all he wants. He's the happiest baby I've ever met. He's so healthy, and even though he was a preemie, he's exceeding his milestones. His laugh can make even the greyest days brighter. His smile melts my heart. I'm HIS mumma, and he makes it known. I couldn't imagine my situation being any different. He's my absolute sunshine. He's given me so much strength and courage because everything I do, I do for him.



Amber Marie Gabriel

Pleasant Point

My experience with Passages was great. When I first started the program I didn't know what to expect, but when I got more into the schoolwork I realized that I could do the work at my own pace. That was great. It was nice being able to do the work when I wanted to and I didn't have to do the work in any special order. I liked that I was able to do whatever core skill I wanted to and when I wanted to. I also liked being able to stay at home and do my schoolwork. I liked having a teacher come here. My kids enjoyed seeing Fern every Tuesday. I may have slowed down at one point, but Fern never gave up on pushing me to get it done.

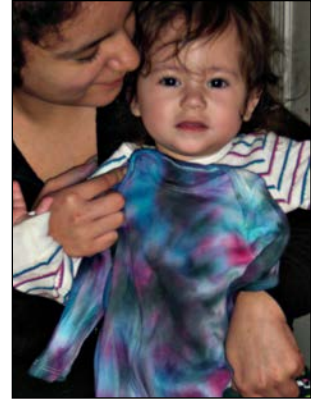
Some of the things I remember the most are:

- 1) A science experiment I did called, "Plastic Milk."

- 2) The time I tie-dyed shirts with my sisters and my kids and it counted as school work.

- 3) The CPR class was fun, even though I already knew most of what she showed us.

- 4) Last year's Christmas party was great because I had both of my kids with me and they had so much fun. My kids decorated plates for my mom as a Christmas present and together we made little rice-stuffed snowmen.



"A bird doesn't sing because it has an answer, it sings because it has a song."
- Maya Angelou



Deidra Marie Gagnon

Sabbatus

I began the Passages Program four years ago. I had an eleven-month-old named Kaylynn and was due with my second daughter, Evelyn, that month. While being in Passages I learned a lot about myself that I didn't know before. I learned that I could get through everything that was thrown at me. I also learned a lot about my kids. They have grown up watching me do whatever it takes to make a better life for them and myself.

One of the challenges I faced was juggling school and work, while being a mother to two little girls. Self care has also been a challenge for me because I'm so focused on what my children need that I often don't stop to think about what I need for myself.

Passages has taught me that just because you're a young parent doesn't mean you can't finish your schooling. I knew that I'd always wanted to be the first one in my family to graduate and I was going to do what it took to get there. This spring, I came close to not doing my final Passage project. After my first expert

was unable to work with me I had to find a new one.

During this program I had a few major setbacks, but I wasn't going to let that get in my way. I took a six week leave due to health issues and I still pushed through even though I needed to focus on getting better. I wasn't going to let anything bring me down. When I came back from my six week leave I did better than ever. I knocked out assignment after assignment.

My teacher, Joy, pushed me to do my best because she knew what I was capable of and just what I needed to do to pick myself back up. She definitely showed me what the meaning of support was when I felt so alone. I feel honored to be one of her first students in Passages. We grew to find a system that worked for both of us no matter what happened in the process.

Joy is a very caring person and I couldn't be happier to have her as a teacher. Passages teaches you a lot about self care because if you don't take care of yourself you won't be able to provide for your loved ones.





Kelly May Glidewell

Calais

I loved having a great school. It's not only great school, but I had great teachers, too. They are all sweet, kind, and caring people. I loved working hands-on rather than in a book because it's easier for me to learn this way. I also liked learning with a one-on-one teacher. Working around other people in public school made it hard. All the students in Passages were nice and we all got along, plus the other kids and babies were cute. I loved all the workshops we did all together and all the crafts we made. Not only that, but we got to do homework about self care and about the safety of our child. We had to get our First Aid and CPR certification, and our driver's permit to graduate, which is amazing because getting to places for your child and work is hard sometimes. I'm going to miss going to school, but I'm so happy I chose this place, and I'm happy I got to meet new friends and amazing teachers.

My Passage : *Hiking the Dream*

Hiking is not only just for the health of my body, it's what calms me and alters my hormones to a more relaxed, less-stressed state. I like seeing what's really there, and capturing that in images to share.

My first hike was at Cobscook Park in Edmunds with friends. It was an amazing place to go - really beautiful. We took pictures together and we ended up getting lost, but finally found our way out. A few months later we went there again. We all went for a walk to the beach and around the trails, then we went back to the campsite and we cooked hotdogs and s'mores. It was quite the trip.



Next, Blaine and I went to Reversing Falls in Pembroke with my teacher. I was so amazed to see how nice and beautiful it was there. Blaine and I went to the broken boat on shore. It was so gross and muddy. We followed the trail and ended up finding the way to the huge rock where the tide was switching. When we finally got there and I was so happy to go look and just be with nature - seeing the tides