

# Baby puts teen back on track

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INSPIRED BY BABY: Shawnee Ormsby-Ryder, 18, found her daughter, Ree-anne Ryder, to be a trigger for education.

Without her baby, teenage mum Shawnee Ormsby-Ryder would have gone off the rails.

The Johnsonville mother of 1-year-old Ree-anne said she didn't have much going for her when she fell pregnant at 17 and gave birth last year.

Having a child dependent on her was the trigger she needed to get back on track.

Research by University of Canterbury's Jenny Hindin-Miller backs up teen parents' motivation to go back to school and defy society's perception that teen pregnancy is "a personal and social disaster".

Miss Ormsby-Ryder thought her life was over when she discovered she was pregnant but was overwhelmed by a desire to learn and set goals when her baby arrived.

"I was wagging school every afternoon and didn't know what I wanted to do and didn't really care.

"That's different now. After I had Baby I was determined to get as much education as I could to go and do nursing," she said.

Having a child has enriched her life and, without Ree-anne, she doubts she would be studying at Wellington's teen parent unit, He Huarahi Tamariki, in Tawa.

"I wouldn't be here, I wouldn't be getting my credits. I don't know what I would be doing but this is definitely life-changing."

This year the 18-year-old is studying NCEA level 2 and plans to do a Gateway course next year before enrolling to study nursing. "I'm proving people wrong by being here."

Dr Hindin-Miller said that, despite the stigma around teenage parents, her research showed childbirth was often a trigger for these women re-engaging in education.

"The attitude is that these women are children themselves and too young so they can't be fit parents. None of the women I interviewed had regret about becoming a teen parent."

There are about 4000 babies born to New Zealand teenage mothers each year and about 600 mothers are studying at teen parent units across the country.

"Becoming a parent in your teens can be an opportunity rather than a problem, as long as there's the right support," Dr Hindin-Miller said.

He Huarahi Tamariki teacher-in-charge Helen Webber said the honours board at the school showed what could be achieved by teenage parents.

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