

Nappies and NCEA exams normal for young mums

- The Dominion Post

- 10 Dec 2016

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Kim Edmonds, 21, and son Luca.

Ducking out of class to breastfeed your baby makes school work just that bit more difficult.

As the academic year wrapped up, two mothers went back to their old school to speak to teenage parents studying at Tawa's He Huarahi Tamariki.

These days Kim Edmonds, 21, is studying law at Victoria University, but it was at the school for teenage mothers that she did most of her learning.

"I've always wanted to be a lawyer and just because I've had my son doesn't mean I can't do that."

Edmonds started studying at He Huarahi Tamariki [a chance for children] after she got pregnant at 16 and had to leave her original school.

"It was hard trying to learn with a baby, but it worked out because we could have them with us."

Babies are cared for in the on-site preschool where parents can visit them, something the young mother found crucial to her ability to learn.

"Luca was 5 weeks old when I started here and I cried the night before I started because I was so worried about leaving him.

"But the staff were wonderful. I could leave class, go see him, feed him, and have a few cuddles then finish my work and get some more credits."

The school was the difference between having a future and "being a statistic on the benefit".

"When the mother is well educated it passes on to the child. I don't want to have people accusing me of being a leech on society.

"It's a normal school just with babies. There's drama and gossip. We're normal teenagers, but we just know how to parent."

As a pregnant 16-year-old, Amber Woods achieved NCEA level one at the Tawa school before baby Winter was even born.

Now 20, Woods is studying sociology and cultural anthropology at Victoria University and she puts her success down to the staff at HHT.

"They're not just teachers, they're carers and social workers.

"I felt like I was never given a chance before I came here and I got that chance here. These people are my family now."