

Teen moms role models

Pair of young mothers who have overcome tough challenges among 16 youths to be awarded

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Chantelle Willier, 18, left, and Kayla Lamouche, 20, holding daughter Teanna, 11 months, are both volunteers for the Terra Centre for Pregnant and Parenting Teens.

Photograph by: Chris Schwarz, The Journal, The Edmonton Journal

A good life is simple, says a teenage mother who pulled herself out of an unhealthy relationship and is to win an aboriginal youth achievement award today.

"A good life is just when you're in a space where you're comfortable and happy with what's around you," Chantelle Willier says.

"I just want my kids to be able to go to karate classes," says fellow award winner Kayla Lamouche, 20. "Making my kids happy. That's what I want to be doing. If I didn't have children, I'd probably be dead."

Willier and Lamouche are two of 16 winners, identified as role models for overcoming tough challenges in life. Both are graduating from high school in June.

Willier, 18, grew up among drug and alcohol abuse on a northern Alberta reserve and met her son's father at age 14. When she got pregnant nine months later, they were living in a home that rarely had food in the fridge.

"When we needed supper, we'd have to go bounce around from house to house," she says. They would hit his aunt's, his mom's and his sister's. "I didn't want that."

The child's father was 17 when his son was born. Willier was 16 and the two of them would argue and come to blows, she says. When her son was eight months old, she moved out. "After I left him, everything started to get positive."

She signed up for high school correspondence courses, then went to Edmonton's Braemar School for pregnant and parenting young mothers. "I don't know where I'd be now if it wasn't for my son," she says. She has applied to the University of Alberta for September.

Lamouche was born in Edmonton and started using drugs and abusing alcohol in her early teens. She got pregnant at age 14 and had an abortion. She got pregnant again at 16.

"As soon as I found out I was pregnant again, I just made the choice right off the bat to straighten out my life. I couldn't handle another abortion."

Lamouche went back to school and slowly ended an abusive relationship -- though not before a boyfriend gave her two black eyes. His six-month term in jail gave her the chance to really get away, she says.

Lamouche plans to go to the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology for a two-year diploma in chemical engineering technology.

"The awards are pretty scary," Lamouche says in a coffee shop on Friday afternoon, playing patty cake with her second child, 11-month-old Teanna. She folds up a creased copy of the thank-you speech she's been practising for Saturday night.

"Positive thoughts, positive thoughts," says Willier, elbowing Lamouche in the ribs.

Both women have been volunteering with the Terra Centre for Pregnant and Parenting Teens.

"We didn't plan for this, we don't just go out and get pregnant and do drugs, you know," says Lamouche.

"When people see a young teen mother you get stereotyped, like, 'Oh she's just a ...' "

" 'A dumb little girl,' " Willier says, ending the sentence.

"Even catching the bus," Lamouche says. "We get stared at, we get called down."

"They don't get it," Willier says. "We're trying to make the best of what happened."

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