

Meet Brenda

STORIES FROM THE adolescent family life program

Fresno County, California

Brenda's Baking Her Way to a Better Future

Tears fill Brenda's eyes as she looks across at her former case manager Iselda. "I feel like she was the only person that really cared about me. She made me feel wonderful. She made me feel special." Brenda smiles before she continues, "Once a month I would see her and it was the best day of the month."

When Brenda first learned she was pregnant, she wasn't prepared to be a mother. Her parents had come from Mexico to give their children a brighter future. For Brenda, becoming a mom at 17 threatened that dream.

After the initial shock of her pregnancy wore off, Brenda decided that she wouldn't let motherhood get in the way of her educational goals. She'd go to school, while being the best mom she could be. Brenda connected with the [Fresno Economic Opportunity Commission's Adolescent Family Life Program](#), which supports pregnant and parenting youth. The program provided the emotional support this young mom needed to navigate her new role. Says Brenda, "I knew there was someone in the world who would support teen parents, someone who didn't want us to fail." For Brenda, Iselda wasn't just her case manager, "She was my friend, my cheerleader."

After challenging her high school administration's attempt to have her attend a continuation school, Brenda returned to her traditional high school just weeks after the birth of her son. Through her economics class, Brenda was able to start a business. Brenda opted to sell baked goods, waking up bright and early to bake cake pops, brownies, cookies and mini pies. She'd sell the goods before school and during passing period, making upwards of \$50 to \$80 a day. She used the proceeds to help provide for her child. Brenda's baking talents didn't go unnoticed. Soon local businesses were reaching out to place orders. Brenda entered and won local and state baking competitions.



Brenda and her son, Adriel

Her success landed her at a national competition in New York City and while she didn't win, Brenda is incredibly proud of her tremendous accomplishment.

Iselda checked in with the young mom during their visits to make sure Brenda wasn't letting her economic success get in the way of her academic success. "She would always keep me accountable," says Brenda. Iselda would help Brenda organize her schedule, setting aside designated time to do homework and to study for upcoming tests. Now entering her junior year at Fresno State, Iselda's lessons still hold. When Brenda doesn't feel as eager to study, Brenda says, "I can hear Iselda behind me saying 'Brenda, you need to do homework, Brenda you need to study.'" And it works.

Brenda loves attending Fresno State where she is studying business and social work. On breaks she stops by the school's daycare to visit her son, Adriel. Her ultimate goal is to open a bakery that serves more than just baked goods, but the community at large by employing teen moms. "One of my passions is to help others," says Brenda. "I want to do what my case manager does, bring hope and light to someone's soul. I want to help those who were in my place. Teen moms that feel hopeless at the moment, that have been in bad relationships, that don't have anyone to go to in that moment to be their support system."

Brenda is no longer afraid of motherhood, she's embracing it. She's a busy mom who is achieving, thriving and loving her life.



Brenda baking with her son, Adriel

Meet the Adolescent Family Life Program

The **Adolescent Family Life Program (AFLP)** is a strengths-based case management program with integrated life planning. The program supports pregnant and parenting youth in building resilience strengths and skills to thrive. Case managers meet one-on-one with youth to establish a caring relationship, identify the youth's needs, and offer support accessing services, setting goals and building skills to manage life's challenges and to plan for the future.

PROGRAM GOALS: Improve pregnancy planning and spacing and increase educational and vocational attainment, access to and utilization of needed services, and social and emotional support.

WHO WE SERVE: Expectant and parenting youth up to age 19 who have custody of their child or are co-parenting.

SERVICE DELIVERY: Services are provided by county health departments, hospitals and community-based organizations.



Adolescent Childbearing in California

In 2015, over 24,000 California children were born to mothers aged 15-19.⁴ The California adolescent birth rate (ABR) declined to a record low 17.6 births per 1,000 females aged 15-19 – a 61 percent decline from the 2000 rate. Despite this success, the number of youth, families and communities impacted by early childbearing remains high.

California birth rates vary greatly by race, ethnicity, age, geography and other factors. For example:

- Latinas make up nearly three out of four adolescent births in California.⁴ In 2016-17, 73 percent of youth in AFLP were Latinas.
- The county with the highest adolescent birth rate (ABR) —Del Norte— has a rate 6.4 times greater than the county with the lowest ABR—Marin.⁴

In recognition of the variations in birth rates across the state, CDPH/MCAH developed the [California Adolescent Sexual Health Needs Index \(CASHNI\)](#) to target programs to areas in the state with the greatest need. AFLP operates through 20 local agencies in high need counties across the state.

Data Sources:

1. 2016-17 data from the Adolescent Family Life Program, Maternal, Child and Adolescent Division, California Department of Public Health.
2. Postpartum contraceptive use among adolescent mothers in seven states. *J Adolesc Health*. 2013 Mar;52(3):278-83. doi: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2012.05.004. Epub 2012 Jun 23.
3. CDC (MMWR) Vital Signs: Repeat Births Among Teens — United States, 2007–2010, April 5, 2013 / 62(13);249-255.
4. Adolescent Births in California, 2000-2015. California Department of Public Health, Center for Family Health, Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health Division, Epidemiology, Assessment, and Program Development Branch. November 2017.

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