

## Learning Together Profile – Cassandra



### ***"Now I Feel I'm Worth Something"***

Cassandra dropped out of high school when she got pregnant with her son, at 17. Three years later she had her second child, a daughter, by a man who was both emotionally and physically abusing her.

"I had a lot of hopes and dream," she recalls. "But I got pregnant, and I kind of let it all go away."

After her daughter's father went to jail, Cassandra moved to Springfield, where her mother lives and where she heard about Learning Together at the Parent Child Center. A program for teen parents, Learning Together brings young mothers together 5 days a week for mutual support, to provide childcare as needed, to build workplace skills, and to set and meet educational goals.

"I told myself I was going to go check it out," Cassandra says. "And you know what? I love it. It's the best thing ever. I had never heard of anything like this before."

When the center staff asked about her goals, Cassandra said she wanted to earn her high school diploma. She began the high school classes that Learning Together provided at the center. She also took parenting classes, and started working with Heidi Melbostad, the center's mental health clinician.

"Now it's easier to express how I feel," she says. "I used to always be so testy, but they've taught me different ways to discipline my children. Instead of saying no, you redirect them. I feel like I'm a better parent now."

Cassandra is working toward her high school diploma, and thinking about career options. She's interested in becoming an ultrasound technician, or working with special-needs children.

"I feel much better about myself," she says today. "I used to always feel I was worthless – now I feel I'm worth something. I'm a mother, and a woman who deserves to feel loved and be treated like a woman should be treated."

