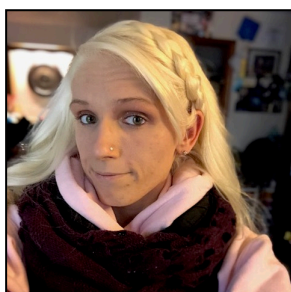
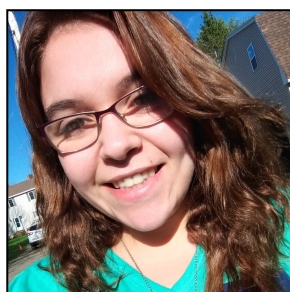


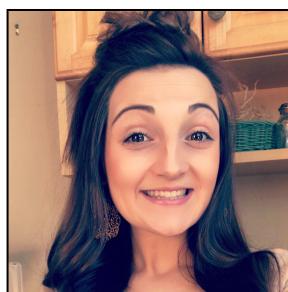
# Passages Press - Graduation 2019



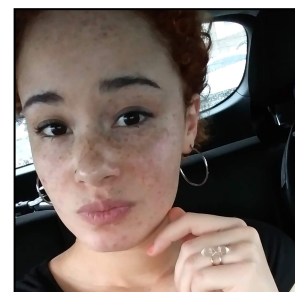
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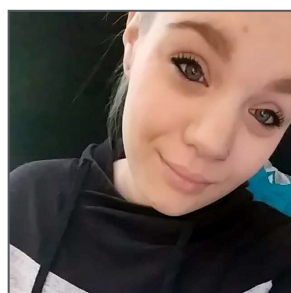
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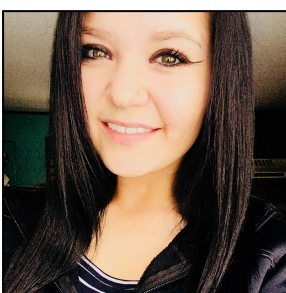
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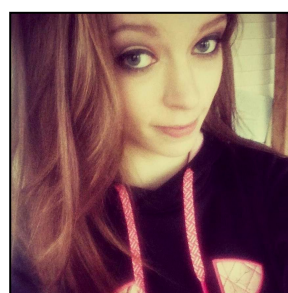
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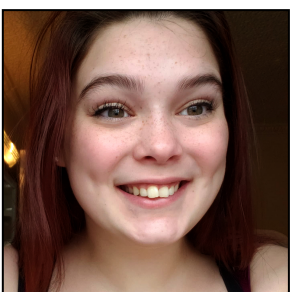
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**Rochelle Ann  
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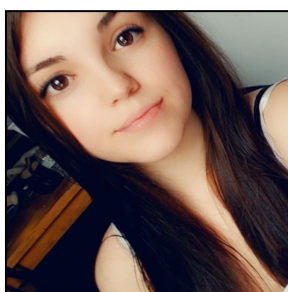
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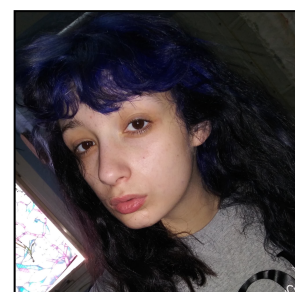
**Rebecca  
Phifer**



**Katelyn Ann  
Szustak**



**Emily Mae  
Wilcox**



**Ciera  
Williams**

## Dominique Carol Cestro *Lewiston*



I started Passages in August of 2018. This was my second time attending this program. I had attended years back when I had my first child and my mind was not in the right place to even realize how much education plays a big role in everyone's life. My experience the first time around with my teacher, Katy Finch, was really good even though I was living with hardship. She was there to understand and help me through life. I got a few core skills done and then had to walk away. I did not have a lot of time with her, but at that time it didn't work out for me because of what I was going through in life. I did attend playgroup with my kid, and it helped a lot for him to be more social. It also helped me at a rough time being able to be around other moms. I had very deep postpartum depression and being around them and a teacher that understood helped.

Years after dropping out and having my three children, I started to understand what education means and how much you need it to be able to build a good outline for your future. I really started to understand the meaning of having your high school diploma and what that really entails. So I tried to get my GED and that was a struggle. It was not one-on-one, and

it was more based on working by yourself with test after test. It was not for me. I needed a life skill program but with schooling too. I needed it to be more one-on-one than on my own.

When I started Passages again last August, I gave myself a goal of one year to graduate. I put my mind to it. My teacher, Julia, has helped so much and has shown me everything I have learned today. I have attended eleven workshops, I have my community service done, and I am graduating in under a year. I got to experience things I never have before. I got to job shadow at my future job, go on college tours, and I learned so much, like how to fill out a FAFSA for college financial aid. I got to build my career while I am earning my high school diploma. This program not only helps you get prepared to be an adult and get you to be able to live in the real world, but it also helps you build your education even further towards college.

During my time in the Passage Program, and I attended a workshop at the D'Youville Pavilion where we got to spend time with women and men that have served our country.

The little time we had made their day, and seeing their smiles made my whole day better. Sophia, my daughter, made one lady so happy to the point where she will remember us. Sophia got to help get drinks and food to celebrate them serving our country. She also got to help hang all their notes on the Christmas tree and got to make their day. They deserve everything and I would love to just go spend time with them. She loved the time, and she treasured every second. That whole day made Sophia and me happy. I did not want to leave. That was the best workshop. I still have pictures of Sophia hanging the notes on the tree for everyone that made them. Thank you for such a perfect day. The other workshops were great, too.

I never thought I could have come so far in life. I am ready to hit college in the fall and I have not even graduated yet. I have learned so much, and I have met so many new moms and other people. I learned to see new things that I would not have done and I have been pushed so far for a good cause. I have learned how to better my writing, math, the way I talk, how I communicate, and other skills to bring along to my next path in my education. I feel so confident in going to the next path to keep building my education to better my life and my kids' lives. Thank you, Julia, for being the best teacher and role model you can be. I would not change a thing about this program. Keep building education for people. This really helped me so much and I can't thank you enough. Thank you for everything you guys offered me and gave me. I will never forget this educational experience. I will be back to visit, hopefully with my RN degree.



## Eliza Debrienza *Lewiston*



I first started back in 2016 when I was six months pregnant with my daughter, Oceanna. I wasn't going to school and I knew that my education is what mattered most. My sister, Deserea, told me to apply to Wayfinder Schools. I applied and was accepted into the Passages Program for young parents. I told myself that I was going to complete all my work and I would graduate that same year.

I was wrong because here I am three years later, getting ready to finally graduate high school. Becoming a mom has been the best gift God has given me. These past three years have not been easy. There were times when I felt like giving up and not doing any school work. I have thought, "What if I just quit and wait and do it online?" I knew that I wasn't going to find another school that was going to meet my needs. Wayfinder has accommodated me in every way they could so I could stay a student. Wayfinder has never given up on me. My teacher, Erica, pushed me to push myself and to keep going and not give up.

Oceanna is the reason I chose to go back to school. I knew that I wanted to be a role model for her. I want Oceanna to be able to tell me that she wants to be just like me someday. Oceanna

has impacted my life. The times when I felt like giving up and throwing all my hard work away, I always looked at her and remembered that I am not only doing this for myself, I am doing this for her too.



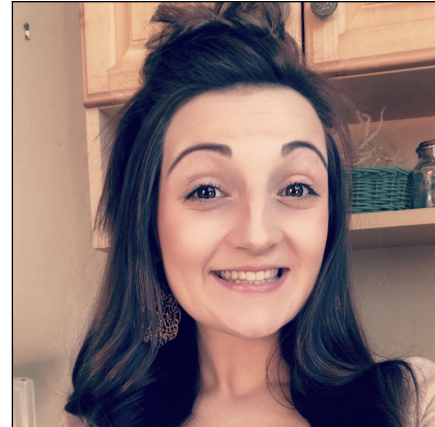
These last three years as a Passage student wouldn't have been possible without all the support from the teachers. There has been flexibility to work around my schedule, and a lot of rescheduling times to meet with me. It's not easy being a teacher to a student that changes their school meeting times, doesn't stay on track, and doesn't have their work completed in a timely manner. The heart of Passages is that you can go at your own pace and graduate with a high school diploma. I can say it is the biggest accomplishment and feeling I have had.

**"It does not matter how slowly you go as long as you do not stop."**

*Confucius*

## Nicole Guerrette

### *North Haven*



Throughout my time in the public school system, I struggled. Middle school and high school were very hard for me because I wasn't getting the one-on-one teaching that I needed. I remember sitting at my desk and listening to the teacher while she explained our next lesson. When she finished telling us what to do, I remember looking around the room and everyone starting to work on the assignment or project with no hesitation. I was just sitting quietly confused. I've always known I had some kind of learning disability, but having to go up to my teacher's desk to ask her to explain it to me again didn't make me feel good about myself.

After failing most of my high school courses because I didn't have the right instruction nor the motivation to ask for help, I thought I would never graduate.

I finally lost all hope when I found out I was pregnant my junior year. I began to think to myself that now there was no way I could graduate. When it was time for my class to walk down the aisle and receive their diplomas, I felt so much sadness because I couldn't be up there with them, that I fell into more of a depression.

Having lost all hope of getting my diploma, I found out about Passages at Wayfinder Schools from a graduate. She explained to me what it was all about and said how wonderful it was. At the time the Passages Program was just for teen parents who needed that extra help to push them to get their diploma, so I thought it might be a good fit for me. I gave them a call, and sure enough, they brought me in with open arms knowing all my struggles. I got assigned to Cindy, and I'm so glad that she became my teacher. I finally had that one-on-one instruction that I've always known I needed.

I had my first daughter, Adelynn, on September 8, 2016, two weeks before I became part of the Passages Program. As excited as I was to start Passages, life was a struggle, and it was hard to adjust to a newborn baby and balancing out all my emotions. Cindy made it very easy for me to get work done by taking the baby, and if I had any questions she'd be right there if I needed her. I started the program with full force, but unfortunately, life got the best of me and it became too overwhelming so I fell out for a while.

In November 2017 I met Kaleb and my life started to even out and get a lot better. I was finally stable and started to conquer my schoolwork again. By working very hard and having the support from my teacher and my loving family, I finished all my core skills just before my second daughter was born.

Briella Grace Campbell was born on February 19, 2019. While being pregnant with my second child, my personal goal was to get all my core skills done before she was born, so that I could focus on my final Passage Project. It has

taken so much weight off my shoulders because I know how hard it is to get school work done with one child - let alone two.

During my time in Passages, I have met so many wonderful people and met other moms that were going through the same stuff I was. I have done things in this program that I thought I would never get a chance to do, such as getting CPR certified. I am grateful that the core skills are based on things I need to know and learn rather than things I won't use in my daily life. Being in this program has made me a better mother by learning about the different stages of childhood development and parenting skills. I

feel very prepared for my future with two daughters, knowing what is normal and knowing how to talk to my children about personal things when the time comes.

The workshops are awesome because they let us connect and learn from each other. It is also great to get everyone together so the children can play. One of my favorite workshops was going to Hope Orchards and picking apples. It

is also awesome that the school is able to provide meals during the workshops knowing that we have hungry children. The program makes sure every meal and snack they provide is nutritious and we are always provided with the recipe after the workshops. Recently, Wayfinder School's midcoast hub has become a food pantry for Passages students in our region. We are given a box of food every month and it has helped my family out a lot. Everything they give us is healthy!

I am so grateful for this program and my amazing teacher, Cindy. Cindy not only is my teacher, but we have developed a relationship



on another level beyond school. She has been such a big part of my life and my kids' lives for these past three years. She has been so patient and understanding with me and it has helped me through this whole process in many ways. Her support is beyond amazing!

Without this program, there would be no way I would have received a high school diploma. If I were to change one thing, I wish I hadn't taken a break, because I would have finished in two years, not three. Graduating makes me feel great about myself because it's honestly the first important thing I have accomplished in my whole life.

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### **Letter to My Girls**

My two girls, my two, sweet girls,  
This letter is my wish for your future.

*Adelynn Marie*, You are my special girl in the way that you made me a mommy. You taught me everything about being a parent. You taught me patience, understanding, and how to forgive. It is so crazy how a simple hug from your little arms can mend anything. You don't know this, but you have been through some tough times with me and at the end of the day YOU were the one to wipe my tears. You were there for me when I thought no one else was. You helped me not feel alone most nights when things were hard. I miss those days when it was just me and you. I mostly miss mostly cuddling with you and falling asleep next to you



every night. You were my rock and the glue that kept me all together.

Now, almost three years later, I have watched you grow into the most beautiful little human with a humongous personality. You are so outgoing and you can light up a room with your tiny little voice. I can't believe how outgoing you are. You don't have a shy bone in your body and it surprises me because Mommy was the complete opposite. You bring so much joy and happiness to my life.

I love watching you being an AMAZING big sister. I am beyond proud of you. It took mommy a little while to adjust to having two children, but you made it so much easier for me. I love watching you smile at your sister and talk to her. You don't realize it, but she loves you more than anything. I can't wait to see you guys grow together. I am so happy I got to give you the blessing of a sibling, something Mommy didn't have for a very long time. Every time I would see a shooting star, I would pray for a sibling. You don't know what it's like not having a sibling so you might take it for granted some days, but I will always be right there to remind you of the importance of it.

I love how silly you are and I love watching you become passionate about things and people. You are the little girl who made me a mommy and kept me together in my tough days. I am so grateful for you because I'm not 100% sure I would be here right now without you. I just want you to know that no matter what, you will always be my first. You have taught me more than anyone. I love you my little Addie Bear forever and ever.

*Briella Grace*, You are my second blessing from



God. You are six weeks old on Tuesday and already I'm starting to see what a wonderful little human you are. You light up my whole day when you smile and even though you keep Mommy up all night long, I wouldn't trade it

for the world because in the end, it will be all worth it.

It's so funny to see how much hair you have compared to your sister. You already love her with all your heart. Whenever your sister comes into the room you instantly turn your head to her voice.

I was so excited hearing that you were going to be a girl. You made me a mommy of two girls! I'm so grateful for you because I have always wanted more than one child and I was blessed with you! When I found out I was pregnant with you I was scared. I was scared because I had no idea how to raise two children. You have made it so easy for me because you are such an easy baby. You only fuss when you are hungry or when you want a diaper change. Recently, you have attached to mom's chest! Some nights when you have had a bottle and a clean diaper you won't let me put you down.

I love you more than anything in the world and I promise I am going to do my best for both of you girls! It's so funny because motherhood has made me so strong, but so fragile at the same time.

My wish for you girls is to grow up with no doubt in yourself and so much confidence that

you can do anything you put your mind to. I want you to know that you are your own person and nobody can change that. I want you to always know your worth and never let anyone invalidate your feelings. Be courageous and remember you cannot trust everyone. That was Mommy's downfall.

You will always have family and Mommy and Daddy will always be here for you - just know that. I can't wait to watch you both grow and see the people you will become in this world. I will be so proud of you no matter what. It will be hard, but you, my girls are strong enough to get through anything! I wish you guys will always take care of each other and be there for one another. Just always remember, "We aren't step, we aren't half, we are just family."

I love you so much Adelynn and Briella forever and ever. You will always be Mommy's little Boogie Nose and Mommy's little Addie Bear <3 . I will always be here for you until my last breath. Never forget that.



# Kiara Hunter Saco



My time in Passages has been an eye-opener to me. I saw that there wasn't an end to my learning, and it was in a friendlier environment than what I had

been used to when I was pregnant with my daughter. Passages definitely isn't your everyday high school.

Everyday high school was going to class and an irrelevant curriculum (like history... there's so much in the world to learn!) I took digital layout and design, some of us didn't have physical education class and, some did. Health class wasn't interesting to me.

When I found out I was pregnant, I took a month off of school and missed a lot. I have generalized anxiety disorder also, and I didn't feel comfortable being around everyone. Being in the hallways made me cringe. I panicked after I had Rebekka. I felt like I didn't have any options.

My case manager told me about Passages. My first teacher was Katy Kerry. She came to my house after I applied. She was very high energy and had pep-in-her-step. I connected well with her. I felt like I was given a second chance, which was awesome. It was so important to me to get my high school diploma and to further my career options if and when I decide to get a career.

During the time I spent in Passages I gained knowledge about everyday situations, including parenting. Passages calmed me down about parenting. I learned about the different stages that babies go through regularly. If I followed my parents' parenting skills, I would have messed her up!

I enjoyed being able to work at my own pace. I completed the tasks that I needed to graduate. One minor problem was not making it when I was sick. I always tried to take on more assignments than what was given to me because I liked the challenge. I do well with one-on-one teaching.

I believe that I can further my career into something I'm passionate about, and that's why I continue. I don't know what I will do after graduation. There is talk about traveling with my dad. I'd like to work on getting a job and getting Rebekka into daycare and become more independent.

I would recommend this program to others. There needs to be more programs just like it. On



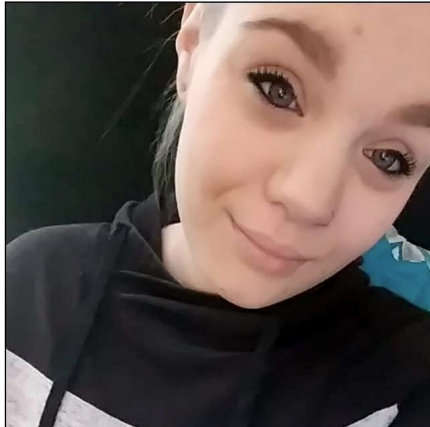
average, when you're teaching so many kids, you don't know their learning skills. A lot of students need one-on-one help. Everyone is not the same. It's a lot of stress to have a kid. The support is great. I even

made some friends! I don't feel alone now.



# Lei-Ann Marble

## Waldoboro



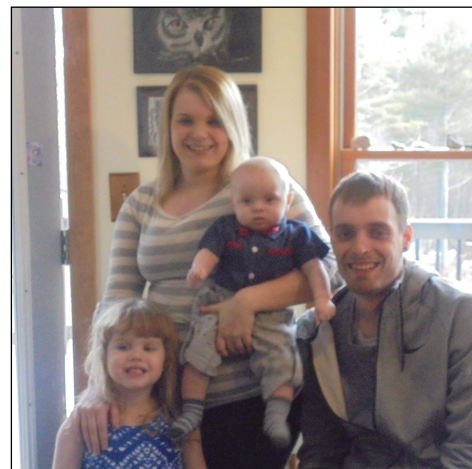
My time at Passages/Wayfinder Schools has been extremely helpful. Being part of such an amazing group and having Cindy as a teacher and someone to guide me along the way has been great. I honestly wouldn't be where I am today without this amazing school! It has shown me that I can live up to my dreams and achieve all my goals as long as I try and do the work.

Having the chance to be part of a great community like this one is a chance I didn't take for granted my second time around. I tried my very best to show up for all my classes and attend the workshops. I've tried to get my courses done in a timely manner and honestly, I think I did great this year. I really grew up and I want my kids to know their momma did it!

Cindy Stevenson really pushed me to make sure I would graduate, and if not for her I would have given up a long time ago! I wouldn't have gotten as far as I have if she hadn't given me many pep talks. She pointed me in the right direction this whole school year, whether it was having to do with school or me just needing someone to vent to. Aside from my mother, Cindy has been my BIGGEST supporter and cheerleader even when I went into labor with Leighton during our class on Friday, April 19. I

sat through my contractions and got as much work done as I could. As every contraction hit she would ask, "Are you ok?!" She was concerned and asked if I wanted to meet another day. I kept saying, "No, I can work through the contractions." I could see she was proud of me and knew I wanted to keep going and pushing through the pain and getting some school work done!

You can see that if not for the caring and the "Yes YOU can do it!" talks I wouldn't be getting a diploma and I wouldn't be hearing my family say, "I'm SO proud of you." If not for this school's program, I can honestly say I would have ended up in a not so good situation. I want to thank my mom, Cindy, and all the other teachers at Passages for making graduation possible for me. I will never forget any of the help I have received and everyone making me feel welcome! Thank you, everyone, for helping me accomplish so much this last school year.



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## Lullaby Project

When I first heard about the Lullaby Project I was interested in it and decided, “You know what, it’s time for me to get out of this apartment and do something different, even though nowadays I’d rather stay at home in bed where I’m most comfortable.” So I got the workbook for the Lullaby Project and filled out everything I could.

My first lullaby class was interesting! I got to meet someone new named Lizzy. She was the musician I was paired with and she helped me write my lullaby. At first, it was hard to think of anything, but once we got a thought and wrote down the words we were on a roll and we ended up finishing my lullaby on that first day. Then I had to think of what type of music I wanted for my lullaby and I decided to have the guitar and the piano play on the soundtrack. Writing the song for my children was a little easier than I thought. Some people only have one child, but I got to write to all three of mine.

Lizzy was really great to work with. She’s super nice and kind. She definitely helped me come out of the shell that I always hide in. She really helped me to feel comfortable with my writing skills even though I’m not the best at writing. I named my lullaby, “*Never Lose Sight of Your Dreams.*”

My second class with the Lullaby Project was recording day! I had my mind set, and I wasn’t going to sing my own song. I have always had a fear of singing in front of people and that’s kind of my stepdad’s fault for always asking me, “Who sings this?” I’d answer, and he would tell me to keep it that way. After Lizzy kept pushing me and pushing me to sing, I

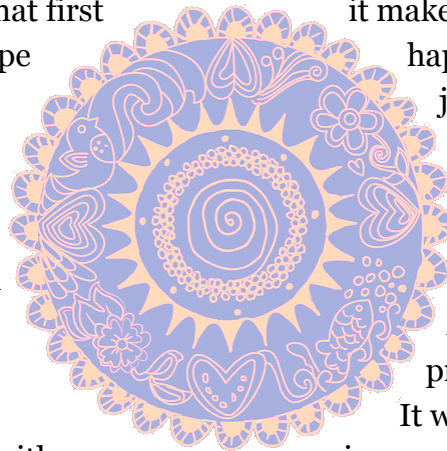
finally gathered up enough courage to sing and record my own lullaby. I was definitely nervous and messed up a few times, but I think we only had to redo it twice until I finally got the lullaby.

After it was recorded I felt super hot, and nervous. I kept wondering if I sounded good enough and I wanted to make sure I didn’t make a fool of myself - haha! After I heard it played back to me, I was happy with it. I mean, no one likes listening to a recording of their own voice, but I was happy with the song.

I hope that one day when my kids hear the lullaby I created for them, they will tell me their honest opinion about it. Things like what they like about it and what they didn’t like. How did it make them feel? Did it make them happy or sad or mixed emotions? I just hope they take the song to heart and really “never lose sight of their dreams.” I want them to know they can do anything they put their mind to.

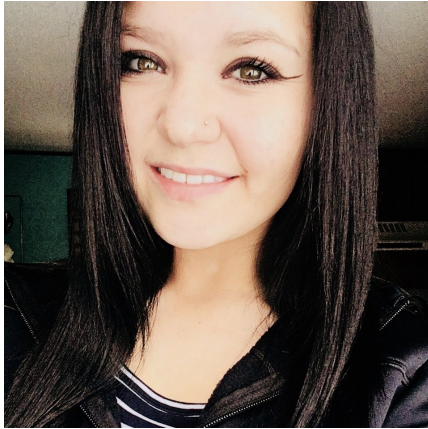
April 10 was the final concert presentation for the Lullaby Project. It was amazing. Even though I didn’t sing my own song, I was nervous - being nine months pregnant it’s hard to really push your voice out! Hearing my song being sung brought tears to my eyes and my grandmother, Mamma, also cried when she heard it! It was great that my daughter was there to hear my lullaby. Unfortunately, my son, Xzander, wasn’t able to stay and listen because he was overtired. My husband had to bring him home early so he could go to bed.

It was honestly one of the coolest experiences I have ever been a part of! I hope my song is heard by many and that it will help soothe other people’s children, as well as my own.



## Kiera McGowan

### Swanville



My name is Kiera McGowan. I am seventeen and had my son, Ryker, at age sixteen. Entering the Passages Program was one of the best decisions I've made for myself. I always have had a hard time in school. There was always a lot of stress and I struggled with depression and anxiety. Finding out that I was pregnant at age sixteen wasn't easy for me while in public school. I was obviously excited, but I was also nervous about it. The morning that the other students in my school found out about me being pregnant they watched the show *16 and Pregnant*. It made me feel very uncomfortable. Once I found out about the Passages Program it was a life-changing experience for me. I was told that I would be able to stay home and learn. At the end of it, I would get a real high school diploma. It sounded perfect to me as I had struggled with being around a lot of people. I came up with the idea to be a stay-at-home mom until I graduated. I wanted to graduate so I could become a registered nurse and work in the nurseries and help out postpartum mothers.

When I finally had our son, Ryker, I brought him to many workshops and now I have had less of an issue with my anxiety, too. I've become very close to my teacher, Cathy, and the

other teachers in the program. The students are pretty much to themselves, but they all are very nice. I know that we are all trying to do the same thing and that's to graduate, not only for ourselves but for a better life for our children. I've brought Ryker to an apple orchard where we picked apples, and a workshop where they played children's music and let them play with instruments. Around Christmas time Ryker and I created Christmas cards for our family during a workshop. We've also been to the Children's Museum in Rockland.

During my time in the Program my partner and I have taken a First Aid and CPR class and now we are both certified. I'm happy to say that during my time in Passages, I have learned everyday life skills that I know I will be using in my everyday life, unlike in public school. I can't even remember the things I was taught there.

I am really grateful to be given this opportunity to be in this program and be given all the help I've needed. I've had a lot of support which I'm very thankful for, too. Now I can move forward and do the things I've always dreamt of doing.

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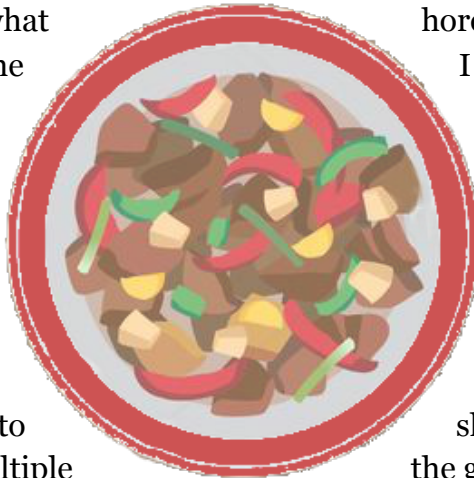
### **My Passage Project - Gluten-Free Cooking**

For my Passage Project, I learned about gluten-free cooking. During my pregnancy, I learned that I have celiac disease which is why I decided that I would do my project on gluten-free foods. I really like desserts and I enjoy making sweets that are good for my body that I can actually eat.

I was diagnosed in November of 2018 with a gluten allergy. My expert is my counselor, Leah. She often talked about her daughter who has gluten sensitivity. When I decided that my project was going to be about gluten-free foods,

I asked her if she would help me out. I am a young lady with my first home and a young child. It can be difficult to afford expensive gluten-free products. We also talked about how simple meals like meat, potatoes and a veggie are all gluten-free, simple and delicious! Leah informed me that an all-purpose, gluten-free flour made of corn and rice cost eight dollars for only four cups! In my eyes, that's really expensive. She explained that finding out what was gluten-free and what her daughter liked was hard, and expensive as well. We talked about my project and we brainstormed some ideas. She suggested that I could pick recipes from different countries like America, Japan, or Mexico and make a brochure on what the whole meal would look like. She talked about how she and her family eat corn chips instead of the gluten tortilla chips. Leah also gave me a recipe for a gluten-free Oreo and ice cream cake. She is very supportive of me. She helped me break down my project so it was easier for me to put together and has given me multiple ideas to help me with it.

My teacher, Cathy, and I prepared a gluten-free Mexican meal together. It took us half of the day to do it. Cathy and I prepared a grocery list of what we would need. When we went to Hannaford, but they had a power outage so we couldn't get the meat or the scallions. My favorite recipes were the fruit salad and the cinnamon chips. I also enjoyed the Mexican casserole. During my presentation, I gave out my brochure with the whole meal that Cathy and I prepared together. I talked about what gluten-free labels look like, talked about what celiac disease was, how I found out that I had it,



and how others might be able to find out if they have it, too. I talked about how hard it is being gluten-free and how expensive the food sometimes can be and how people with celiac could find easier cheaper meals that they might like.

I struggled with making the flourless cake. The cake was easy to make but the baking time was a lot longer than the recipe said it would take. We realized that the first time we made the cake we messed it up. It was supposed to be jello-like - not as hard as a rock. So, the cake we made the second time came out really nice. I was really proud of myself about that. If I could change anything it would probably be the horchata. It didn't taste all that great.

I believe that the horchata could have been different by adding more sweetener to it. Something I will be making again are the chips, fruit salad, and the casserole.

If I had to change my project or do anything better I think I should have brought some items of the gluten-free food boxes and gluten boxes in so people could read the labels themselves instead of a picture in my slideshow.

I think that putting my project together after speaking to Leah made it easy for me in the beginning. Before speaking with my expert I struggled with brainstorming on how I was going to put my project together. A challenge during my Passage Project was getting meetings with her. It was difficult finding time to talk about my personal life and talking about my project at the same time.

I also struggled with talking in front of my Passage group because I struggle with anxiety. Another struggle was when I thought I was done

with my project but wasn't because I still had a few things left to do, like talk to Amy, a person I didn't know. Amy's son has a severe case of stage four celiac with internal bleeding. Her son was two and was sick all the time. She said that he cried around people all of the time and she thought it was a behavioral issue. Her son had a tube down his throat and up his bum, and every two years he gets tests done and sometimes sends poop in to be tested. It was really scary for her and her family when they found out about him having celiac. Sometimes people gave him food he wasn't supposed to eat. She says being gluten-free when you have celiac is important because you will get diarrhea if you eat gluten. Amy told me that it is a lot easier to make gluten-free meals for her son than twenty years ago. She told me that the first six months were the hardest. Everything she made for her son was self-taught and she prepared regular meals and cake mixes. No-bake-cookies and cream pie are her favorite gluten-free food, and gluten-free bread was the worst that they tried. Amy also made me lots of yummy gluten-free snacks and gave me the recipes.

This project was real for me because I suffer from celiac. I feel it helped me understand my disease better and help me with recipe ideas for my future. It also could help others so if they run into someone with celiac they can understand how serious the disease is.

At the end of my project, I was really proud of myself and was ready to just get it over with. I felt nervous but wanted it to be semi-professional. I did a lot of research and that made it easier to answer questions at the end. This project has helped me to gain more knowledge of my disease.

I also feel so accomplished and proud of myself for getting so far this past year. I've

learned that I can do anything I put my heart and mind to. A dream of mine is to have a healthy son and get my degree so I can work in the nurseries with newborn babies and help postpartum mothers. I also dream of moving out of Maine and going to Virginia with my fiancé and getting married when the time is right for us. Being in the Passages Program has really been life changing for me. I'm so thankful for all the support that my teachers have given me. I'm also so grateful for a wonderful experience. It's been nothing like public school. It's so welcoming and I've never once had to deal with drama or disappointment. They make it so you can be yourself and really focus on school and your child at the same time.

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**Dear Ryker,**

Before I met you, Mommy had a lot of trouble getting up in the morning and wanting to explore the world. Before I met you Mommy didn't think that she would ever get far in life. Before I met you I believed that I didn't mean anything to anyone and struggled with self-confidence and much more. Depression and anxiety made it hard to keep pushing forward.

When I met your daddy we loved each other so much, but we went through some things. At one point in our lives together Mommy and Daddy had to take some time for Mommy to get better. Not long after we got together again, Mommy and Daddy found out about you. It may have been a difficult time, but honestly, it was the best gift I could have ever been given.

Planning for your arrival made me excited and nervous because I didn't know who you would be, but I knew you were already my everything. You made me so happy and never made me forget that I wasn't alone by all your kicks and turns. You made me happier and made me feel like I had a place on this earth. You made me realize that I was going through all this stuff because I was expecting you. It may have been a hard time. It may have been early. I may have been young, too. But I know for a fact that I met you when I was supposed to. You helped me realize why I am here and my place on this earth.

A lot of people told me my life would be over, but I knew in my heart it was the beginning of my life as your mother. The first time I heard you cry and held you, I knew that you are my purpose, and you were the hope that I've been waiting for. You were the sign from God that everything I've gone through was to prepare me for you. All your hugs and laughs and tears have pushed me to want to do better for myself and for you by starting back in school and graduating this June.

You've helped me get over some of the things I used to be afraid of so I can protect you.

Whenever I am upset you always smile and laugh and help me re-group so I can be a good

mother to you. You've shown me that I can be and do anything, just like I believe for you. I love you with all of my heart, and I'm so happy to be your mother and to be here today with you and your daddy. I'm so proud of our little family and how much you've grown and how much you've helped me grow as an individual.

Thank you for giving me hope, and thank you for being such a great, happy son. I believe that you can move mountains and do whatever you please! I believe you will do so much good in this world, and Mommy and Daddy will try our best to teach and guide you. I love you so much Ryker Devon, forever and always baby boy!

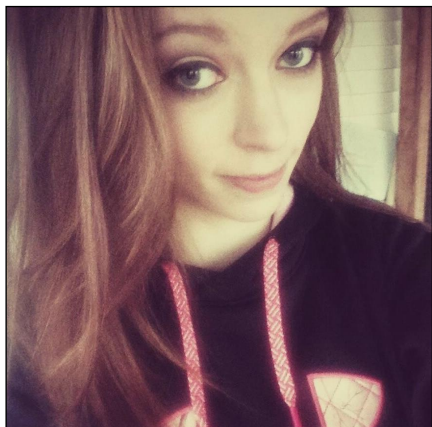
Love,  
Your Mommy

**“Optimism is the faith that leads  
to achievement.  
Nothing can be done without  
hope and confidence.”**

*Helen Keller*



## Rochelle Ann Millay *Milbridge*



The Passages Program is such an awesome program. I found out I was pregnant when I was only 15 years old. Just prior to finding out I dropped out of school. I knew I had to do the right thing and get an education, not only for myself but for my child.

I felt a little iffy after first hearing about the Program, but I decided to give it a try. I'm SO glad I did! I couldn't have done it without my amazing teacher, Fern. She has gone above and beyond for me. She's probably pretty happy to get rid of me after six long years - haha - but I'll definitely miss her.

Now, after having my second child, I'm graduating. I'm finally getting my high school diploma, and I couldn't be happier. I am so excited to see where life takes me next.



## Jenessa Morin *Auburn*



My time in the Passages Program has been nothing short of amazing. I have never been to a school that comes to your doorstep and works around your schedule. Throughout the year I have learned so many different things about parenting. I feel like Wayfinder is the only school where I actually learned important things such as understanding abuse and sexuality.

Working with Dana allowed me to get out of my comfort zone by working with peers and meeting new people. I also learned that you can do anything you put your mind to, even if it is not something that you would generally take on.

Each one of my core skills taught me different things about life and daily activities. Early Childhood Development was the most interesting because when I began the core skill I had a three-month-old and did not really know a lot about how my baby would mature as time went on. I learned that every child is different, and no behavior between children is the same. I also learned about the different milestones they go through during each month of the baby's first year.

The convenience of this program allowed me to work at my own pace and meet at my availability. When I was in a public high school

setting I felt extremely stressed and underconfident in my work. This at-home-school with a one-on-one teacher, allowed me to ask questions that I would not normally be comfortable asking in a classroom setting.

I also like that there was minimal test taking. When I was in public school I had extremely bad anxiety as there were constant weekly tests and daily pop quizzes.

I feel that while I put in a lot more work with Wayfinder, it paid off in the end and I was able to do my best work in order to succeed and graduate. I feel very good about the grades I earned, and that I worked very hard for every one of them.

In conclusion, Wayfinder Schools is the best out there because they

actually care about you, your needs to graduate, and your future dreams. I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to be a student at Wayfinder and wish other students that struggle in public high school could have one-on-one time with

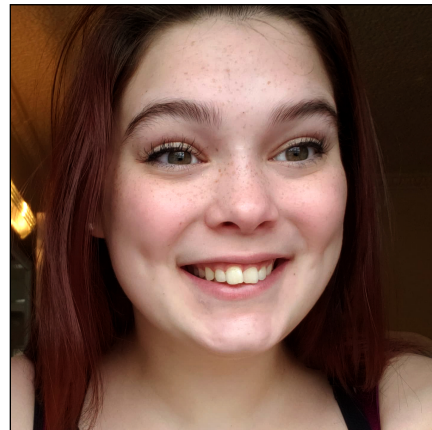


teachers they need. Although I don't necessarily feel like an hour a week with the teacher is quite enough, I am still very appreciative that I had that time with my teacher. I am so thankful for all I have learned and accomplished.



## Rebecca Phifer

### *Union*



My time in Passages has been amazing. I have had such a good experience with teachers, and the students and all of the workshops. I love that we get to meet at the school and do things as a class, but also get to do all the work independently and don't always have to meet.

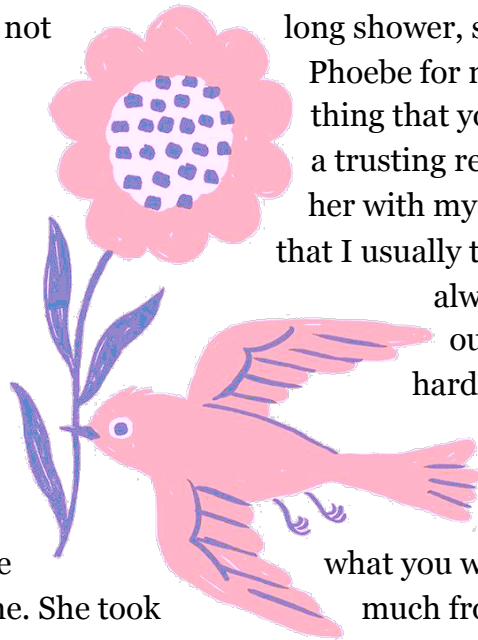
Going to workshops were some of my favorite times. I loved getting together with everyone and seeing all the kiddos. We got to do fun things like apple picking, going to the children's museum, and dog sledding. Who can say they have gone dog sledding? One of the biggest setbacks in public school for me was that I couldn't focus just by sitting down and being quiet. I have to talk and move around and I need a one-on-one to really grasp something. That's exactly what this program offers. They give you everything you need to graduate and I'm thankful for the program and Wayfinder Schools.

In the process of dropping out of high school, I was told about the Passages Program. I was going through a rough spot in my life and I decided to take a chance and apply. Cindy called me and told me she was very eager and excited to meet with me. It was too late to start having classes since it was June, so we touched base



again in September when I would have my first class. Once I started I thought that I had to live in a different location than where I was living, so I had Cindy come to my parent's home and I pretended that was my residence. She was asking me questions about my mom's schedule and my siblings that I didn't know the answers to. I think she assumed something was up. Once our first class was over she asked if there was anything I'd like to share with her before she left and I told her that I didn't actually live there and that I lived in Jefferson. With my first class ending in a laugh, I realized that Cindy was going to be the person in my life to not only push me toward my goal of becoming a high school graduate, but that she wasn't going to let me leave this program until I had everything I needed in life to be a successful mom, successful employee, and exactly where I'm meant to be.

My first workshop was apple picking at Hope Orchard. I was pretty nervous and didn't really want to go, but Cindy convinced me and assured me I'd have a good time. She took awesome pictures of me with my little baby belly. Once we got back to the school we got to cook for the open house, and cooking made me have even more fun. I had only planned on staying a few hours but found that I enjoyed my time there and loved meeting all the teachers and students and I wanted to stay until the end. She pushed me to go to all the workshops and usually convinced me to go by telling me there would be food involved. My favorite workshop was when we went dog sledding. Cathy watched Phoebe for me while I dog sledded and went sliding with Dakota.



Since the birth of Phoebe on December 26, 2017, Cindy has been a part of her life and Phoebe absolutely adores her. My favorite thing about Cindy is that she's not just my teacher. I think of her as a support person. She doesn't just do schoolwork with me and leave. She comes in and every class asks me how I am, what's new, and if there's anything I want to talk about. I use to be scared to take a shower while Phoebe took a nap when she was first born, and I remember one time I had class and I shared that I was feeling pretty crappy, and I hadn't showered in days. She told me to go take a nice long shower, soak, refresh, and that she had Phoebe for me. I think the most important thing that you need to have with someone is a trusting relationship. Not only do I trust her with my child, but Cindy is the person that I usually turn to before anyone else. She always knows what to say to get me out of a stressful moment. (It is hard to get me to slow down and listen) She would remind me to "Take a breath, slow down" or "Think about it. Is that really what you want to do?" I have benefited so much from having Cindy as my teacher. I was so blessed to have her stick with me even though I didn't always do the work I said I was going to do by a certain time. If it wasn't for this program and for her I don't think I would be getting my diploma.

Thank you, Cindy, for being the best teacher you could be to me, and thank you for getting me through high school. Thank you for having such a special bond with my daughter, and for always being there for me when I need you even if it's not school related. Thank you.

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## A Letter to My Daughter

Dear Phoebe,

The day I found out I was pregnant with you was the best day of my life. I was only seventeen and still in high school. I had no car and only had a part-time job. I definitely wasn't ready to be a mom. I had some troubles with love, but knowing that I was going to have a child that I would love forever, and would love me forever made me feel like nothing else mattered. You're the best thing that I could have ever asked for.



I didn't have you with someone that I was going to be with forever, and for that I am sorry, but I am also not sorry. I'm worried that someday it's going to feel like you have to choose between two dads. If it wasn't for your biological father I wouldn't have you, my sweet Phoebe.

You are very special to all of us, and you've made a big difference in our lives. If it wasn't for you I wouldn't be the person I am today. You made me grow up, take responsibility and you taught me what love is. You will forever be my baby girl. I love you.



## Katelyn Ann Szustak *Lisbon*



When I was told Wayfinder was only for teen parents, I was upset I wouldn't be able to be a part of the amazing school my friends talked about. Two of my good friends were Wayfinder students and they told me about all the lovely things I wished I could experience, too. Even though I was told I wouldn't be accepted, I reached out anyway. That was one of the best choices I've ever made. I was told Wayfinder had just started accepting non-parents. I did my challenge pieces and met with Julia and Erica. I felt so comfortable when I walked into the school in New Gloucester. I felt even more comfortable when I met Julia and Erica. They both have this wicked, chill vibe that I instantly loved.

I know I seemed very confident at our first meeting, but my teacher, Julia, got to know the real girl behind my confident smile and a good choice of words. Julia pushed me more than anyone else ever has. When I doubted myself she was always there to remind me of my worth. I know she is like this with all of her students because she is just that passionate. When something didn't make sense, she always had a different way of getting it through my head and helping me to understand.

Every core skill I did I did thoroughly, and full-heartedly and I loved and enjoyed the work. That is what I really enjoy about Passages, you actually learn life skills. I've forgotten almost everything from normal high school - with the Passages work I've done I can actually apply it to my life every day. I think my top three favorite core skills are Budgeting (Julia and I literally went to a bank to learn about different accounts and how to take out loans, which I reflected on when I bought my first car), Self Care, and Critical Thinking.

I got to experience so many things I wouldn't have been able to have it not been for Wayfinder. Things like volunteering at the soup kitchen, getting CPR certified, getting to know the other students, and getting to know a part of myself that I thought was gone. Wayfinder gave me confidence. I never thought I would be applying to colleges, let alone graduate high school. I used to have the hardest time speaking in front of other people, but Julia has really helped me get over that.

Overall, I'm really thankful I got to be a student at Wayfinder and be a part of the Passages Program. This school gave and taught me so much. Thank you, Julia, and Erica, and to all the other teachers. You all impact our lives and should be so deeply proud of the amazing teachers you are.



## Emily Mae Wilcox *Machias*



When I first began Passages, it was very early on in my pregnancy. I was extremely sick, hormonal, and not fully committed to the Program. I got a little bit of work done, but not nearly as much as I could have.

The first year in Passages I did not graduate due to lack of effort. That following summer my beautiful baby girl made her appearance a bit too early. Despite this, I enrolled for a second year in Passages. Now with a premature little baby, I had a glimpse at reality and finally kicked myself into gear. My "motherly instinct"



kicked in, if you will. I can't quite explain it, but I never had a second thought about my actions. I just knew now that every action and choice I make from here on out would forever revolve around my beautiful little jelly bean, whom at this point was only a whopping two pounds.

When school finally started in September, I instantly kicked it off with my teacher and we got along quite well. She built my confidence and formed a forever lasting bond with me. I truly would not have gotten my high school diploma without the help of Fern Hilyard.

Passages has been a very pleasant experience overall. I really enjoyed being able to bring my daughter to class and being able to completely trust my teacher with her.

I am very excited and proud to be graduating from the program in June 2019. It's been one hell of a journey. I have loved, I have lost, I have fallen off track, but in the end, I persevered and made it to the end. It feels as if a huge weight is being lifted from my chest and so many doors of opportunities are opening.

## **Ciera Williams, Brunswick *Lisbon***

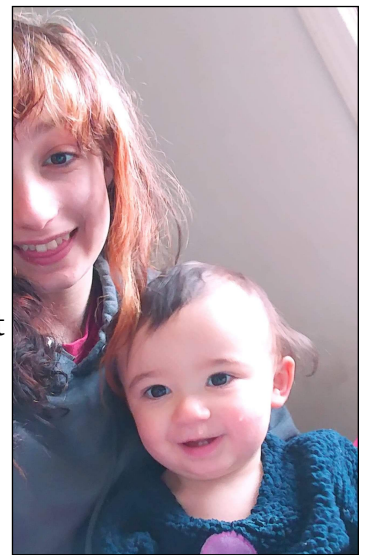


During the last two years of my life, lots of things have changed. The most important being becoming a mother to a beautiful little girl. I had already struggled through school due to many moves during my high school years that made it even harder for me to keep up. After my second attempt at senior year at a public high

school, I stumbled upon this wonderful program.

From the very beginning of my time with Wayfinder Schools, I knew this was much different from traditional high schools. I have accomplished so much during this last year and a half. I got my permit, I bought a home, and I've gotten a good, stable job. It has been amazing to meet all of the wonderful staff and even students that are involved with Wayfinder Schools.

This school has provided me with an immense amount of support through many difficult things. My teacher, Joy, was always willing to work with me. You don't get this kind of support and one-on-one time at traditional high schools. This program is a great way for anybody struggling to get through school.



The curriculum is also much different from other high schools. English, math, science, and history are still included, of course, but they also teach you life skills that you will need throughout your life. Overall, my time involved in Passages has changed who I am, as well as how I view myself.

