

Empowerment Through Art

Teen moms share their stories at Congress

Montreal, Quebec – June 4 2010 – Annika and Isabelle look like average teen girls: they're polite and bubbly, and wear skinny jeans with sneakers. They've got to run off to do work and meet with parents for dinner, but they've agreed to take a picture for me. Isabelle's black leather bomber jacket goes perfectly with her awesome manicure, and she shyly fixes her bangs when I bring out my camera. Meanwhile, Annika is chatty and laughs easily as she poses with Isabelle.

They're typical teen girls, except Annika and Isabelle are also mothers.

In a room tucked away at Concordia University's Hall building during Congress 2010, they're helping to present their story to a room full of academics who are curious about Project Teen M.O.M.

Isabelle and Annika are two of eight young mothers who took part in the Project, a media workshop designed to empower young women.

Concordia's Sandra Weber and Leanne Levy launched the Project to study in a community. For 13 weeks, the women would meet at Elizabeth House, a non-profit centre for young parents that provides schooling, housing and different educational programs in an open environment. Levy and Weber devised different art projects for the mothers: body writing, collages, digital photography. One of the goals was to encourage the young women, many of whom face scorn from family, friends and strangers, for their choices, to style themselves and their lives in a positive way.

The women's raw, honest artwork and writing is the heart of teenmom.ca, a site designed by Levy and Weber to reach out to teenagers with or without kids, researchers, and everybody else.

The girls come from diverse backgrounds, and have different stories.

Angel, who was 15 when she found out she was pregnant, wrote: "I wanted to be pregnant, I wanted a baby. I know that for certain girls this is young and they say that a teenager should get an abortion or take the "Morning After" pill to kill the baby but I talked about it for a long time with my boyfriend."

Shantelle gave advice: "You can do anything that you want to do. Don't let a child stop you and don't let anyone tell you that your life is over – because it's not."

Their artwork is like anything a teenage girl would make: 'diva' collages with sparkles and pictures of purses, self-portraits taken at an arm's length. But the images are still imbued with a solemn maturity.

The launch of teenmom.ca comes as a study released last week found that teenage pregnancy has gone down dramatically across the country – except in Quebec, which saw a lower drop in comparison to other provinces. This project will hopefully shed light on what it means to be a mother, when you're barely done being a kid yourself.

Get more from the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences

Organised by the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, the annual Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences brings together about 9,000 researchers, scholars, graduate students, practitioners, and policy makers to share groundbreaking research and examine the most important social and cultural issues of the day. Montréal's Concordia University is the host of Congress 2010, May 28 to June 4.

The Congress program includes original research from across disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences, providing a great collection of expert sources and innovative story leads. Contact the Congress Media room for assistance connecting with researchers at Congress.

-30-

Ryan Saxby Hill

Media Relations

Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences

media@fedcan.ca

613-894-7635 (mobile)

514-848-2424 ext. 5023 (media room)



Canadian Federation for the
Humanities and Social Sciences

Fédération canadienne
des **sciences humaines**