

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the short period of time that my Thomas Institute of Well-Being colleagues and I have worked with children and families, the need for quality and effective care for pregnant teens has become prominently clear. Our social work has included many pregnant young women, who, collectively, share the same needs; they are in need of medical supervision to ensure a healthy pregnancy; they are in need of mentorship to plan for the uncertain future; they are in need of guidance to develop basic skills and understanding in order to properly care for their unborn child.

Traditionally these young women may receive services from a residential pregnancy program. These programs offer a safe and reclusive opportunity for young women to acquire these noted skills. Aside from the normal difficulties of being pregnant (especially at a young age), however, these facilities also present many additional challenges to young women. According to a 2005 study of 22 residential treatment facilities conducted by the US Department of Health and Human Services, residential treatment facilities annually fall very short of expected outcomes and performance standards. This decline has been present since the mid-1980's after nearly one hundred years of quality service. Several factors have contributed to this trend: an ever-increasingly complex social service system, a social breakdown of responsibility and concern regarding teen pregnancy, an overwhelmingly-large increase in pregnant teens, and a severe lack of efficient and effective therapeutic program elements.

Similar research has also indicated that the best possible alternative placement for any type of therapy among children is family-based services. There simply is not a substitute for the opportunities afforded by family-based services in terms of recreating, simulating, or replacing family dynamics for a child removed from their natural family setting.

It is obvious that residential treatment facilities, while centrally-integrated, lack the ability to interact, teach, and inspire young women in a setting that best prepares them for their return to normal social living environments. The 2005 DHHS study noted that *"a collection of pregnant teens and their elevated hormones increases the risk for unpleasant experiences, physical and emotional, as compared to other placement options."* The study also noted that *"residential treatment facilities are unable to*

*efficiently provide individual care that meets the particular and unique needs of each resident as a result of their institutionalized-operating systems."*

The Footsteps Teen Pregnancy Program is a revolutionary home-based program to meet the unique needs of pregnant girls ages 10-21. This program provides complete education, guidance, and supervision to ensure that each pregnancy is medically safe, socially appropriate, and emotionally supported. As a result, both the child and mother experience the best possible opportunities for personal growth, healthy development, and self-esteem acquisition.

The Footsteps Teen Pregnancy Program is actually a specialized category of foster care, although the program participants are not required to be declared as dependants by the court system. Each pregnancy home is licensed, oriented, and trained as a Pennsylvania foster home. In addition to this basic license, each home carries a Thomas Institute of Well-Being license to provide care to pregnant teens, which is earned after additional training and program-specific orientation. Similar to those homes from sister social service company, the Thomas Foster Care Agency, each pregnancy home is paid the industry's highest per diem and reimbursements including mileage, recreation, and clothing allowances. These generous funds have enabled the Thomas Institute of Well-Being to build the industry's finest portfolio of foster care and pregnancy homes.

The Footsteps Program is available to teens at any stage of their pregnancy, including several days after conception. Upon entering the program, a teen is placed in a pregnancy home, where she will begin her journey of education and guidance through her pregnancy, delivery, and first six weeks of her newborn's life. While in the pregnancy home, each teen will receive weekly education that details all facets of pregnancy and child rearing, including medical, emotional, physical, diet, exercise, daily tasks, and post-partem topics. These lessons are taught by the pregnancy home parents using a written manual and DVD presentations. Each time a teen successfully completes a topic, she will receive \$10 to purchase baby supplies. It is possible for a teen to earn over \$400 while in placement as a result of completing each topic.

In addition to completing the topical education component, each teen will be required to keep a daily journal of their experience and relationship with their unborn

child. Research demonstrates that this task further invests a young pregnant mother into her pregnancy, especially since it is common for young girls to not realize the magnitude of their situation. The pregnancy homes will also assist the teen in compiling a baby book as a memoir and point of discussion.

While living in a pregnancy home, each teen is also carefully supervised by the parents and professional case management staff to ensure that she receives adequate medical attention and care. Each pregnancy home provides transportation and guidance for every medical appointment. If it is appropriate, biological family members may also attend these appointments.

Also upon entering the program, each teen will receive a new crib, changing table, and well-stocked diaper bag. These items will be used to care for the baby after birth. Upon completion of the program, each teen will take the furniture and supplies, as well as any additional items she purchased with her earned program money, to their discharge destination. This will allow a teen to use the same furniture and supplies as she did in the pregnancy home even after her discharge.

After birth, the Footsteps Program includes a supplemental program titled "The Next Steps." This program's purpose is to provide the teen with any and all necessary guidance, resources, or support for her transition to her discharge destination. These destinations will include home to the biological family, college or further education, or entrance into society on her own. In each case, the pregnancy home will ensure the transition is smooth and the new mother is sufficiently connected to social programs and resources before the termination of the Footsteps Program.

In addition to providing these excellent program elements, the Footsteps Program is also integrated into the highly acclaimed Thomas Institute of Well-Being and its Digital Case Management System (DCMS). This filing system is 100% digital and is completely accessible to county workers, biological family members, service providers, and court staff 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. It operates at 99.99% reliability and is inspected daily to ensure its complete security that is DPW and HIPPA compliant.

As this program overview will detail, the Footsteps Program for Pregnant Teens provides a new standard of efficient, effective, and applicable social service for young

mothers. These new standards are significantly higher than traditional residential treatment facilities. Even more surprising, this program costs one-half the amount of traditional residential programs. As social reformist William J. Bennett once noted, "*the state has a manifest interest in promoting the kind of stability that results in healthy families. I am skeptical that we must stick to inherently flawed policies because we lack confidence in people's ability to change. The burden of proof ought to rest not on those who would try something new, but on those who support policies that have helped destroy large parts of an entire generation.*"

Submitted respectfully and earnestly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael G. Thomas". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Michael G. Thomas  
President & CEO, the Thomas Institute of Well-Being