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Our mission is to provide comprehensive mental health and social services to children and their families. Developing healthy alternatives to abuse and violence, addressing emotional and behavioral challenges, results in healthy children, families and communities.

## Quilting Therapy Helps Teen Moms

Did you know that quilting can be used as a form of art therapy? At Montebello High School, ICGC's licensed art therapist, Denise Fanelli, helps teen moms develop a bond with their babies, learn life skills, and improve their self esteem—all through quilting. As part of a special program designed exclusively for teen moms at the high school, the quilting art therapy helps the girls work towards their high school diploma and learn the life skills to become competent, good parents at the same time.

Every week for the entire semester, the teen moms focus on making quilted blankets for their babies. The girls begin by designing the squares of their quilts. In each square, they write messages or draw symbols and pictures for their babies. A great amount of thought, effort, and care go into these designs, and sometimes even the baby's father or grandparents write messages. After designing the unique, special squares, the girls learn how to use sewing machines and stitch the squares together to make a beautiful quilt.

Throughout the process, the teen moms are able to improve their self-esteem. Many of them have insecurities about sewing and about being able to take care of their babies at the beginning of the semester, then feel much more confident by the end. One teen mom said, "I really liked working on the quilt for my daughter because I didn't think I was capable of making something so beautiful for her." In addition, the process can also help the moms bond with their baby, which predicts strong attachment and healthy outcomes for their child. The art therapist also talks individually with each girl to discuss her relationships, family problems, goals, and any other issues that she is dealing with. The girls are often more responsive to talking with the therapist during the quilting session because quilting helps the girls relax and feel more open. Through the compassion of their peers and the art therapist, the quilting group also becomes a supportive environment for the teen moms. This is especially important since other peers outside of their program may not be as supportive of them.

Currently, the art therapist is organizing a new group of teen moms for the spring semester. This group will not only be able to gain valuable benefits from the quilting art therapy, but will also participate in traditional art therapy with the art therapist every other week. Using more traditional media such as markers, oil pastels, paint, and clay, the teen moms will also be able to work through the problems that they are currently experiencing. As they did through quilting art therapy, the teen moms will benefit from an increase in self-esteem, a supportive environment, and the knowledge of valuable life skills. Coupled with the other curricula in the program, the art therapy will undoubtedly help the girls improve their lives and learn to be good parents.

