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AJAX -- Megan Bayes played with her son, Kole, Dcember 7 at WINGS, a home for teen moms.

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Ajax woman creates home for pregnant teens

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By [Reka Szekely](#)

AJAX -- An Ajax woman who has created a home for pregnant teens is asking for the community's support in helping her initiative rise to the next level.

Through WINGS, a shelter for pregnant teens, Ajax resident Marion Cozens can give three teens a home as they go through their pregnancy and adjust to being new moms. Now, she's hoping to expand her home to accommodate up to 10 mothers through the Aviva Community Fund competition.

WINGS is a semi-finalist in the contest and the top 25 semi-finalists, as determined by online voters, will move on to the judging round. The insurance group has \$500,000 available for the best ideas.

Ms. Cozens, mother of four daughters, points to statistics that show Durham has the highest teen pregnancy rate in Ontario and said she's always wanted to help girls who were pregnant and living on the streets.

Since two of her daughters had gone off to school, Ms. Cozens had initially advertised a room to be rented out to a senior. But when 18-year-old Megan Bayes's mother called asking if she would consider a pregnant teen, it was a sign to Ms. Cozens that the time was now to create her organization, four years ahead of schedule.

"For me, it was a five-year plan to do this, but it became a three-day plan when Meg's mom called me," said Ms. Cozens.

At the time, Ms. Bayes had been living on and off in shelters and had a history of alcohol and drug use.

"She didn't understand that I wanted to keep it because of doing drugs and drinking and the lifestyle I've been living," said Ms. Bayes.

Both Ms. Cozens and Ms. Bayes say Ms. Bayes's mother is supportive and the mother-daughter relationship has improved since Ms. Bayes has been at WINGS.

"Sometimes it's not necessarily the parents who aren't supportive, the kids are rebellious and they'll leave in their teens and they'll go from shelter to shelter or foster home to foster home," said Ms. Cozens.

Now 19, Ms. Bayes gave birth to a baby boy, Kole, in September and has been attending school and undergoing drug and alcohol and anger management counselling.

A 15-year-old pregnant teen also now lives in the home and Ms. Cozens said she's getting inquiries from other teens and organizations.

WINGS is open to pregnant young women up to 21 years old who agree to work towards completing their education or seeking employment while living there. Each teen gets her own room which she shares with the baby once he or she is born. The mothers stay until their babies are six months old and the goal is to work with them to transition smoothly out of WINGS. While there, they live as a family with Ms. Cozen's own family, sharing meals and chores and they get help working with social service agencies offering support, including teen pregnancy and nutrition programs.

Ms. Bayes has only praise for WINGS.

"This isn't just a shelter, it's a home and a family to be proud of ... it's a place you can be safe and know your baby will be taken care of."

As it stands, the organization is funded entirely by Ms. Cozens and donations from the community. Teens who are able to contribute do so, but it's not mandatory. Ms. Cozens is in the process of creating a registered charity and if she were to win a prize from the Aviva Community Fund, Ms. Cozens would add an extension to her home.

To contact Ms. Cozens, vote wingshome@live.ca. To vote for WINGS, visit <http://www.avivacommunityfund.org/ideas/acf1791>. Voting closes on Dec. 17.