

## Graduation Is Not the End, It's the Beginning.

### To the Class of 2024

On May 28th, thirteen students from the FloCrit Class of 2024 received their diplomas and many had the opportunity to speak. One of the graduates, Geneva, addressed her peers and supporters with a beautiful speech to close the ceremony. Read Geneva's speech below!

“Being a teen mom in this world today may be one of the scariest things I’ve faced my whole life. People giving you negative labels: ‘A baby having a baby,’ ‘You’re gonna be a bad mom,’ ‘You just threw your life away.’ Seeing those two blue lines as a 16-year-old sent chills down my body... The day I found out I was pregnant I thought my life was over. (...)



Class of 2024 graduate, Geneva, delivers a speech to close the graduation ceremony. Photo Credit: Noelle Williams Photography

I started my last couple months of junior year at Florence Crittenton and I felt like I was where I belonged. I felt seen. I felt comfortable of who I was. Being able to attend school with help for my baby was a blessing but also scary...Despite all of my fears, they’ve always treated him so well — as if he was their own. I couldn’t thank the ECE and high school staff enough for helping me be here today and get my education. It was hard and I had some days where I thought I couldn’t do it. I just wanted to give up on school — on myself, but through all the sleepless nights, the hard days, tears and not knowing what to do — there was my son. My reason to fight harder and get back up. ‘I am going to do this and get through it. Not only for myself but for Mateo.’ My son pushed me harder to be where I am now and I sure am a good mom. I couldn’t imagine where in life I would’ve been without my son, so I thank God everyday for giving us our true blessing to both sides of the family. So here I am today reading this speech to you because my life didn’t end when I found out I was pregnant at 16.

Last but not least I wanna appreciate all the girls standing here with me today because we did it with a baby or two on our hips. I couldn’t tell their stories or imagine what they’ve been through but all that matters is they pushed through and I’m so proud of each and everyone of us. May life treat us well. Thank you.”

### A LETTER FROM PRESIDENT & CEO, DESTA TAYE-CHANNELL

As President & CEO, I navigate challenges in focusing on our mission, managing resources, partnerships, and staying relevant in the ever-changing economic, political, and social climate for non-profits. Ensuring FloCrit’s success in educating, preparing, and empowering teen moms for two generations is the most important thing.

Over the past two years of my tenure, our commitment to teen moms has remained strong. The Early Childhood Education Center maintains a Colorado Shines four-star rating, and we’ve expanded support to include alums as well as initiatives like housing assistance. Family Advocates continue to conduct needs assessments, empowering teen moms to set goals for themselves and their children.

As Director of SFSP, my focus was on FloCrit moms. Now, as President & CEO, I prioritize staff as well. Strengthening self-care, retaining quality staff, and fostering personal development have been my focus, drawing on my mental health background to build a healthy work culture and prevent burnout.

Looking forward, I envision FloCrit as an access point for education and prosperity, offering safe, affordable housing and workforce opportunities. We continually aim to deliver impactful, sustainable programs to empower FloCrit moms and their children.

Your support ensures FloCrit provides crucial services to teen moms and their children, helping them thrive in the world. Join us for a tour or event to witness firsthand the impact of your support on these incredible young lives!




DESTA TAYE-CHANNELL, MA, LPC, PRESIDENT AND CEO

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# Meet the Class of 2024



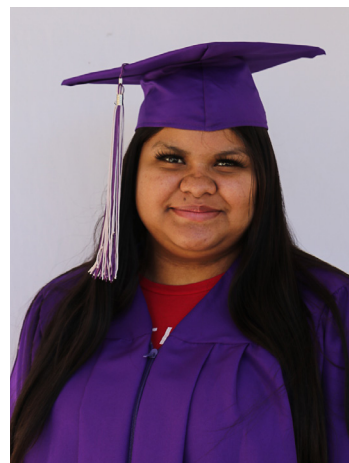
**Jenny Alvarez-Zuniga**  
Mother to Osiel (1yr).  
Jenny will be attending the Community College of Denver to receive a certificate in Business and is grateful for all of the support that FloCrit provided her so that she can have a successful future. She will always remember laughing in the halls with her friends.



**Geneva Aragon**  
Mother to Mateo (1yr).  
Geneva will be getting her Business certificate at Emily Griffith Technical College so that she can own her own business one day. She was able to focus on her education because FloCrit helped meet the needs of her and her son. She's glad that she met so many friends and supporters during her time at FloCrit.



**Angelina Arellano**  
Mother to Leno (1 yr).  
Angelina will be attending Red Rocks Community College to become an EMT. Her favorite memory at FloCrit is meeting new friends who understood what she was going through. She's grateful for all of the resources and education that FloCrit provided so that she could build a career as a paramedic and a hard-working mother.



**Rosa Caceres**  
Mother to Jonathan (5 yrs).  
Rosa will be working as a medical assistant when she graduates. She believes her son will be a hard-working student one day because she's set an example for him. Her dream is to have a stable job so that her and her son can continue to thrive in the future.



**Karina Dominguez-Nava**  
Mother to Layla (2 yrs).  
Karina is happy to be graduating and is grateful to FloCrit for giving her so many chances to earn her high school degree. After graduating, she will be a dental assistant at Denver Health. She'll always remember her first prom at FloCrit and all of the happy memories she made.

**“I’m grateful for the support from FloCrit because it pushed me to ask for help and want more for me and my son.”  
-Juliana M.**



Graduate Angelina and FloCrit teacher Ginia Coors  
Photo Credit: Noelle Williams Photography







**Julianna Flores**

Mother to Damien (1yr). Julianna received her GED while at FloCrit and will begin working full-time at a salon once she becomes earns her esthetician's licence. She loved seeing her son interact with all of the other babies in the ECE, and believes he will be an amazing son and friend to everyone he meets.



**Julie Garcia-Portillo**

Mother to Juliett (1yr). Julie will be working at a dental office after graduation as a dental assistant. She is grateful that her daughter could receive care and an enriching education while she pursued her degree next door. She hopes to become successful in the future so that her child can have the opportunities that she didn't have growing up.



**Juliana Martinez**

Mother to Brandon (2 yrs). Juliana will be attending Community College of Denver to become a surgical technician. Juliana is happy that FloCrit pushed her to ask for help and to want a better future for herself and her son. She felt very supported by the FloCrit community and hopes that her son gets everything he wants and deserves when he grows up.



Salutarian Ingrid receives her diploma from principal Josh Howard  
Photo Credit: Noelle Williams Photography



**Flor Duenas-Villa**

Mother to Ian (4yrs) and Izan (1yr). After graduating, Flor will be attending Emily Griffith Technical College so that she can become a cosmetologist. She says that FloCrit was always with her, supporting her, and she will always remember how the people at FloCrit made her feel like she belonged and was understood.



**“FloCrit allowed me to focus both on my education and my son at the same time. Without the help of my counselors and the other staff I wouldn't have been able to go back to school and get my GED. I will forever be grateful that this school exists because now I can see a future for the both of us.”**  
-Julianna F.





**Monae Ortega**

Mother to Michael (3 yrs). Monae wants to study business, and hopes to start her own culinary business one day. She loved learning new things during her time at FloCrit and had so much fun at events like prom and family engagement events. She is grateful for FloCrit because “they have programs that no where else has.”



**Maria Ramirez-Mendoza**

Mother to Alexander (4 yrs) and Jerry (2 yrs). Her dream is that whatever she does for a living, that she is financially and emotionally stable so that she can support her children. Thanks to FloCrit, Maria was able to receive the support she needed to become a great parent.



**Alexandra Simental**

Mother to Alexa (3 yrs). Alexandra wants to be a police officer and plans to attend police academy after graduation. She loved seeing all of her classmates succeed and achieve their goals while she was at Florence Crittenton Services, and is grateful for all of the help and guidance she received from the staff at FloCrit.



**Ingrid Tonche**

Mother to Jazlyn (11 mos). Ingrid wants to provide the very best for her baby, and plans on working after graduation. She will always remember visiting Regis University and learning all about the different activities, food, and clubs offered on college campuses. She thanks all of the staff at FloCrit for supporting her throughout this time in her life.



FloCrit Class of 2024 graduates celebrate their accomplishment  
Photo Credit: Noelle Williams Photography



# FloCrit's Littlest Graduates Are Off to Kindergarten



**Elian** (began at 6 weeks)



**Julian** (began at 6 weeks)



**Leilani** (began at 4 months)



**Antonio** (began at 4 years)

**From 6 weeks old to Pre-K, FloCrit Early Childhood Education (ECE) students are prepared for kindergarten daily. Next to each student's name, you can see their starting age in the FloCrit ECE program. While FloCrit teen moms work toward their degree at Florence Crittenton High School, their children are cared for in a unique learning environment on the same campus, supporting their physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development.**



**Abby** (began at 2 years)



**Ian** (began at 6 weeks)



**Olivia** (began at 4 years)

# Reclaiming Your Narrative

## How FloCrit Empowers Teen Moms Through Storytelling

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One of the most beautiful moments at Florence Crittenton Services is watching FloCrit teen moms walking proudly across the graduation stage each May, their heads held high knowing that their children and supporters are in the audience cheering them on. Each of their journeys to this significant milestone represents the unique stories they've lived, the profound transformations they've undergone, and the barriers they've overcome.

At FloCrit, teen moms are empowered to reclaim their narratives and amplify their voices through the powerful tool of storytelling. The FloCrit team celebrates when a student chooses to share their experience, as it allows both the student and the community to honor their determination and resilience in overcoming barriers. In a recent article published by the Denverite, FloCrit Class of 2024 graduates Jenny Alvarez and Julie Garcia had the opportunity to showcase their paths to success while journalist Kevin Beaty captured their final days as seniors at Florence Crittenton Services through photos, reflections, and insightful interviews.

When a FloCrit student wants to share their story, they can:

1. Talk with their Family Advocate to request a nomination.
2. Fill out a short survey created by the Marketing team expressing their interest

Afterward, the Marketing & Communications Coordinator will consult with the student's Family Advocate to ensure the student is in a more advanced stage of the Growth Framework, usually called "Preparation" or "Empowerment." If confirmed, the Marketing & Communications Coordinator will schedule an interview where the student can share their stories and discuss the resources they've utilized at Florence Crittenton Services. These stories are used for social media posts, Pathfinder articles, press releases, brochures, and



Journalist Kevin Beaty interviews Jenny and Julie at Paco Sanchez Park.

more! Students are always compensated for their time.

# Denverite

## Read All About It!

Scan the QR code to read the Denverite Article, "At FloCrit High, Graduation is All About the Next Generation," featuring Jenny and Julie from the FloCrit Class of 2024



In some cases, journalists like Denverite's Kevin Beaty request to interview a student. In this case, Jenny and Julie, two best friends and FloCrit teen moms, were chosen for an interview because of their unique friendship and impending graduation from FloCrit. After a logistics meetings, they met with Kevin and the Marketing & Communications Coordinator in a park for the interview. Kevin also visited the Florence Crittenton campus to photograph their daily routine. Jenny and Julie were thrilled to be featured on Denverite and later on the NPR Instagram page. Storytelling is a crucial part of the FloCrit mission, empowering teen moms to own their stories while informing the community about the impact of Florence Crittenton Services.



# Volunteering at FloCrit

FloCrit loves our volunteers! Thanks to their support, the staff at the Early Childhood Education Center (ECE) receive much needed support, the grounds get new flowers each spring, and Baby Bucks (our free basic needs store) is kept well-organized.

Interested volunteering with FloCrit? Opportunities abound and vary depending on volunteer's schedules and availability. Our two main volunteer roles are in the Early Education Center as classroom assistants and helping in Baby Bucks. In the ECE, volunteers help care for infants, engage in activities such as reading or outdoor play, and give teachers time to take breaks and lunch. This role requires a background check, online training, and at least one weekly shift for consistency.

For volunteers who need more schedule flexibility, positions in the Baby Bucks store are a great fit. Volunteers sort and organize items and can channel their creativity in creating displays. Baby Bucks volunteers are especially needed during the holidays to help with the influx of in-kind donations.

Additionally, corporate groups, families, and friends of all ages can sign up for volunteer opportunities in the spring, summer and fall to help with groundskeeping, maintenance and other fun projects. This past year volunteer groups planted flowers, painted varnish on our outdoor picnic tables, and brightened the Student & Family Support Program floor by painting the hallway and Family Advocate offices.

Volunteering with FloCrit provides a deeper understanding of the comprehensive services available to teen moms and their children. Whether you're holding babies, reading to toddlers, or creating beautiful spaces for teen moms to enjoy, your time and effort has a tremendous impact on the Metro Denver community. For more information, scan the QR code above!



Volunteer Zoe helps out in an ECE classroom.



## Public Policy

### 2024 Legislative Session Overview

The FloCrit Public Policy Committee met monthly during the 2024 Colorado legislative session and supported multiple bills that were passed successfully. These bills are expected to make a positive impact on teen families, youth, and the broader Denver community:

- **SB24-001, Continue Youth Mental Health Services Program:** Provides professional support and resources to address adolescent mental health challenges, including services like counseling and therapy.
- **SB24-175, Improving Perinatal Health Outcomes:** Focuses on enhancing the health outcomes for mothers and babies during pregnancy and childbirth through maternal health education, enhanced interventions during childbirth and postnatal support.
- **HB24-1007, Prohibit Residential Occupancy Limits:** Aims to alleviate housing shortages by eliminating restrictions on the number of occupants allowed in residential properties, thus increasing housing availability and affordability for those in need.
- **HB24-1223, Improved Access to the Child Care Assistance Program:** Will alleviate the financial burden on families by providing easier access to affordable child care services.
- **HB24-1322, Medicaid Coverage House & Nutrition Services:** Will expand Medicaid coverage to include housing and nutrition services, thereby addressing broader health determinants and improving overall well-being.
- **SB24-008, Kinship Foster Care Homes:** focuses on enhancing support and resources for kinship foster care homes, recognizing the importance of familial connections and stability in providing optimal care for children.



**2024**

# Family Engagement Photo Roundup

Scan here  
to see  
more  
photos:



These events wouldn't be possible without the support of our dedicated volunteers!

## Interested in volunteering?

Scan this code to learn more and to fill out our volunteer interest form:



Every month, we organize Family Engagement events with the goal of uniting multiple generations of FloCrit families in a warm and inviting atmosphere. These gatherings are designed to create meaningful connections and quality time among families, as they participate in community activities and share meals together.





# From Venezuela to Denver

## How FloCrit Supports Newcomers Teen Families

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Johandra had already begun her journey out of Venezuela, seeking a better life, when she became pregnant at 13 years old. At first, Johandra and her family tried living in Colombia, but after being robbed and forced to start over multiple times, they moved on to Peru and settled into a small apartment. During her third trimester, Johandra fell in the shower, leading to an expensive hospital visit. Despite working long hours in a clothing factory from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m., Johandra and her family's income couldn't cover her hospital bills as well as the cost of food and rent. This is when Johandra, along with her mother, sister, and 7-month-old son, Mattias, started their trek north toward the USA with only \$100 to their names.



Johandra (15) and Mattias (18 mos.) at a FloCrit Family Engagement Event

For five months, the determined family pressed on through South and Central America, traversing jungles on foot, riding mules, and jumping onto moving trains until they reached the Rio Grande. They share this traumatic and arduous path with roughly 2.5 million other migrants who attempted to cross the southern border in 2023. "I cried a lot," Johandra recounts, "we had to sleep on the streets and we didn't have enough money for food." Once, they encountered tents hoping for shelter, but found dead bodies inside and had to sleep elsewhere on the ground. They frequently stopped to work or beg on the streets for enough money to eat and pay the exorbitant fares for buses and camps run by gangs, often inflated for immigrants out of racism. "I had to keep thinking about crossing into the United States" Johandra explains, "This was my main goal. We didn't want to be caught by immigration, kidnappers, drug cartels, or any other kind of people. So we had to keep going."

When they finally reached the Rio Grande, their coyote (a person who smuggles immigrants across the US-Mexico border) left them to cross the river on their own. As Mattias turned one year old, Johandra held her son tightly while crossing the river, unsure of the future but rejoicing in the hope she still had for her family. In the United States, they sought stability and safety, a place where they wouldn't worry about their next meal. At a Denver shelter, Johandra learned about Florence Crittenton Services, finding not only resources for stability and safety but also a community where she and her son could build the lives she had always dreamed of.

In her first few months at Florence Crittenton Services, the Housing team focused on finding Johandra's family a safe and stable place to live. Meanwhile, the Student & Family Support Program met their other needs through on-campus resources like bi-weekly food boxes, community food resource navigation, and FloCrit's free basic needs store, Baby Bucks. Johandra also meets regularly with her Family Advocate for one-on-one case management and has the opportunity to receive bilingual therapy and free medical services on-site.

At Florence Crittenton Services, the number of teen moms who are Newcomers has tripled in the past year. Johandra's journey is one of 20 Newcomer teen moms at FloCrit, each representing two generations at risk who deserve a bright future. Our mission is to "educate, prepare, and empower teen moms and their children," welcoming every teen mom who seeks support, regardless of their background. Through community support and strategic decisions, FloCrit has transformed into the right place for these 20 teen families, offering comprehensive services that have grown in the past five years to accommodate the needs of our community. This support gives people like Johandra and her son, Mattias, a chance to have futures that would have been unfathomable in Venezuela. We are proud to impact multiple generations of teen families like Johandra's, empowering them to build the lives they want and deserve.

# Pathways to Empowerment: Launching the Future

On April 18th at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science, we welcomed over 400 guests to our annual signature event, Pathways to Empowerment: Launching the Future. President & CEO Desta Taye-Channell remarked that “Just like a rocket needs a launchpad to soar into the sky, we have the opportunity to make the unexpected possible – educating, preparing, and empowering teen families with comprehensive resources so that they can reach for the stars.”

During the cocktail hour, guests browsed our silent auction featuring items like an African Safari, Broncos and Nuggets tickets, artwork, and restaurant packages. Nearby was a FloCrit exhibit showcasing the Growth Framework used by our Student and Family Support Program to guide teen moms on their path to empowerment.

The program included the presentation of the Dr. Kate Waller Barrett Advocate Award to Suzanne Banning, former FloCrit President & CEO, honoring her 8 years as CEO and 14 years of service.

The Denver Health Foundation received the Charles Crittenton Community Partner Award for their contributions to Florence Crittenton Services, including the development of the Alethia E. Morgan MD Health Center on our campus.

Karen Madeus (FloCrit Class of 2022) moved many in the audience to tears and laughter while she shared her story and recognized the outstanding transformation she went through while FloCrit staff stood by her every step of the way. Her experience vividly illustrates how FloCrit’s campus empowers teen moms to reach their full potential and launch into thriving futures.

Pathways to Empowerment: Launching the Future raised \$288,154 through an exciting paddle raise as well as sponsorships, auctions, ticket sales, the wine pull, and additional donations. The event was a testament to the potential that teen families hold and the importance of comprehensive, wraparound support for two-generations.



Desta and ECE student/astronaut, Antonio



Karen Madeus (FloCrit Class of 2022) shares her story.

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# Growing Together

## FloCrit's ECE and the Role of Colorado's Childcare Tax Credit

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Everyone agrees: the cutest department on the FloCrit campus is our Early Childhood Education Center, led by alumnae MonaLisa Valenzuela. She was first introduced to Florence Crittenton Services as a high school sophomore in late 1990 when she was pregnant with her daughter. She immediately felt at home among her peers—other teen moms—and appreciated being able to bring her daughter to school. The campus, then located at 12th and Federal, had classrooms for both moms and their children.

When she left FloCrit, MonaLisa volunteered at her daughter's daycare, discovering her passion for education. She began working as a preschool assistant at her childhood Catholic school, eventually earning her Director's license. After 16 years, she returned to FloCrit as a Support Teacher and eventually worked her way up to Director of the Early Childhood Education Center. As Director, she builds community with FloCrit teen moms and with staff. She understands their journey because she lived a similar one. It may not have been the exact same story, but she knows what it is like to be a teen mom, teacher, and an administrator.



Director of ECE, MonaLisa Valenzuela

MonaLisa loves relationship building and believes it is core to the program's success.

"I couldn't be the best at my job without those relationships," she explains. She also emphasizes play-based learning through the Creative Curriculum, allowing children to explore and create independently. Classroom activities are child-led with scaffolding – for example, when teachers say "Let's make a snowman," teachers don't give the child their idea of what a snowman should look like. There are no circles and no triangles for carrot noses. No adult vision of what a snowman is. Instead, the children get to create their own ideas. Children aren't restrained from their favorite play centers or directed towards activities, instead they are allowed to choose.

She says, "There isn't a day that goes by that I don't laugh or smile because of one of the kids. I love their innocent humor. It is the most rewarding feeling to work in an environment like that. They bring balance to my life."

If you'd like to support programs like the Early Childhood Education Center, the state of Colorado has a program that helps your donation go further! The Colorado Child Care Contribution Tax Credit (CCCTC) allows individuals and businesses to claim a 50% state income tax credit for qualified contributions to child care providers, including FloCrit. This is a very unique credit, both in administration and fiscal impact. In 2021, 16,445 credits were claimed by both individuals and corporations, representing \$33 million in credits claimed and at least twice that in investment in early childhood in the state. At FloCrit, we fundraise over \$1,000,000 annually to operate the ECE, and are a grateful for the additional benefits this tax credit can provide for our community.

When you make your gift, we will send you a DR1317 form which you'll submit with your Colorado state taxes. Additionally, you will still be able to claim your full contribution as a charitable deduction on your federal and state income tax returns if you itemize deductions. FloCrit raises over \$1,000,000 annually to operate the ECE and appreciates the additional support from this tax credit. For more information on how the tax credit works or to donate to the ECE program, contact Amanda McManus at [amcmanus@flocritco.org](mailto:amcmanus@flocritco.org). To make a donation eligible for the CCCTC, scan the QR code on this page and choose "Early Childhood Education Center" as your designation.

**Donate  
Today!**





October 5th, 2024



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