

# A place for young mothers

BY KEVIN MERTZ

*Staff writer*

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SUNBURY — As she held her 5-month-old daughter Lillyanna in her arms, 19-year-old Gabby McCoy spoke passionately about how she has matured since she started living at Pinnacle Place six months ago.

McCoy was still in high school when her daughter was born.

“It was very difficult to do high school as soon as I had my child,” she said. “At one point, I wanted to give up.”

Since starting to live at Pinnacle Place — a home operated through the Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit (CSIU) that helps single, young mothers get back on their



Kevin Mertz/The Standard-Journal  
With **Gabby McCoy** looking on, Pinnacle Place Director **Kim Eroh-Diefenderfer** played with McCoy's 5-month-old daughter **Lillyanna**. An online campaign is underway in an effort for Pinnacle Place to receive \$25,000 in funding through the State Farm Neighborhood Assist program.



Kevin Mertz/The Standard-Journal

**Gabby McCoy** and her 5-month-old daughter **Lillyanna** have been staying at the Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit's (CSIU) Pinnacle Place for five months. McCoy, who is 19, has seen her maturity grow through her involvement in the program.

## Place

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feet — McCoy has completed her high school education, landed a full-time job in daycare and has her sights set on the future.

"Before I leave Pinnacle Place, I am hoping they can help me find some colleges to apply to," McCoy said.

She would like to further her education so she can either work in child-care or with teenage mothers.

Director Kim Eroh-Diefenderfer said Pinnacle Place first opened a home in 2013 in Coal Township after receiving a Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs grant from the Department of Health and Human Services.

Under the terms of the grant, Eroh-Diefenderfer said Pinnacle Place is receiving \$200,000 per year for a five-year period.

"We serve four moms at a time," Eroh-Diefenderfer said, while describing Pinnacle Place. "Each mom can have up to two children."

The mothers must also be between the ages of 18 and 22, and can stay at the home for up to 18 months.

"Over that period of time, we work with the moms on planning ahead and (career) development," Eroh-Diefenderfer said. "We connect them with all of the services in the community that can help them."

The women are required to search for gainful employment and help with chores around the house.

"We help them get housing," Eroh-Diefenderfer said, adding that a representative from the program continues to follow up with the women for one year after they leave the home.

In April, Pinnacle Place relocated from Coal Township to Sunbury.

"We moved because it's a larger home and closer to so many services," Eroh-Diefenderfer said. "It has also reduced our transportation costs."

As part of the program, the women are transported to their places of employment.

With Pinnacle Place being in the final year of the five-year grant, Eroh-Diefenderfer said CSIU is being proactive about pursuing additional funding opportunities.

The program will be applying for a renewal in the grant, however due to the funding cycle Eroh-Diefenderfer said there will be a five-month lapse in funding.

To help cover that lapse, Pinnacle Place has applied for a \$25,000 grant from the State Farm Neighborhood Assist grant.

Eroh-Diefenderfer said 2,000 organizations applied for the grant. Two-hundred were accepted to be considered through an online voting process.

Of the 200, Eroh-Diefenderfer said the top-40 vote getters by the end of the day Saturday will receive funding. As of Thursday, Pinnacle Place was ranked 45th.

Eroh-Diefenderfer is encouraging everyone to go to [www.neighborhoodassist.com](http://www.neighborhoodassist.com) by Saturday and vote for Pinnacle Place.

In the event that Pinnacle Place doesn't make the top 40, Eroh-Diefenderfer said other funding options are being explored to carry the home forward until it can seek more government grant money.

"We get donations, that helps us a whole lot," she said. "We are also very frugal."

Eroh-Diefenderfer added that those who work at Pinnacle Place are moved to see the progress the mothers make after coming to stay at the home.

"I have come a long way over the last six months," McCoy said. "I have bettered myself... I am more responsible."

Both she and Eroh-Diefenderfer said when a new woman moves into the home, those who have been there for a number of months tend to offer moral support.

"I love to help people," McCoy said. "Before I came here, I couldn't have said that... When I came here, my attitude about everything changed."

Eroh-Diefenderfer said there is a waiting list of woman looking to stay at the home and take advantage of its programming. Women are selected based on an application process and their needs.

Since the first home opened in Coal Township, 22 women have been served by the program.

Donations to support Pinnacle Place are accepted and can be arranged by contacting Leigh Aikey at CSIU, 570-523-1155 ext. 2310.

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