

'Unplanned' actress helps start scholarship for pregnant women

Ashley Bratcher, lead actress in the pro-life movie *Unplanned*, has helped establish a scholarship for women pursuing an education during an unexpected pregnancy.

"Women can pursue their careers, live out their dreams, and have richer, more fulfilling lives while balancing motherhood. Sometimes, it just takes a little help," Bratcher said in a recent press release from Heartbeat International.

"I wanted to be a part of empowering mothers to chase their dreams and to provide a means for those who choose life to continue their educations."

The scholarship, called the [Unplanned Movie Scholarship](#), will give US\$5,000 (\$6,662.50 Canadian) annually for a woman facing an unplanned pregnancy. It can go toward educational opportunities including college or trade school.

The project is backed by Heartbeat International, a pro-life agency providing pregnancy resources to expecting mothers in more than 2,000 locations worldwide.

"Not only will the scholarship financially support the decision of mothers to continue their education, but it will also connect them to an organization that will support them throughout their pregnancy and beyond," Bratcher added.

Jor-El Godsey, president of Heartbeat International, said the scholarship will help expecting mothers embrace education and life.

"Tucked into *Unplanned* is a vivid reminder that education can present an obstacle to accepting the new life within," said Godsey. "The Unplanned Movie Scholarship will be a lifeline to a young mom's future as she makes the brave choice to embrace motherhood."

Bratcher played Abby Johnson in the movie, [Unplanned](#). The story follows the life of Johnson, a former clinic director for Planned Parenthood, who had a conversion experience after witnessing the horrors of abortion. Today, Johnson is a pro-life advocate and the director of [And Then There Were None](#), a ministry that helps other abortion workers leave the industry.

In Canada, *Unplanned* has been controversial since an estimated 2,800 people attended the largest public screening to date on May 14 at the Edmonton Expo Centre, hosted by Harvest Ministries International. *Unplanned* has had to overcome a lack of theatre promotion and distribution, a boycott threat, and media skepticism.

During its weeklong run in 49 Canadian theatres, [*Unplanned* raked in \\$352,000 over its first three days](#), averaging more than \$7,100 per screen, and took in almost \$643,000 in total.

Following the movie's release, numerous women reached out to Bratcher to share their stories of difficult pregnancy situations. Andrea Trudden, director of communications for Heartbeat International, told CNA that many women shared a common conflict – they needed financial support to finish their education.

"After the release of *Unplanned*, Ashley had a lot of different questions from moms who were reaching out sharing their stories about their unplanned pregnancies," she said.

"The education aspect tended to be one of the hurdles."

Trudden said the scholarship's development is still underway. She said applicants will be recommended from one of the agency's pregnancy help centers, where the mothers' needs will be best addressed.

"[Pregnancy centers] provide parenting classes and financial classes. We are able to couple what we do through these pregnancy health organizations with the woman who wants to continue her education," she said.

"We are really looking at exactly how to partner with our pregnancy help organizations in order to provide the funds to the women."

She said the scholarship will begin accepting applicants at the end of this year, after the organization receives enough funds. The scholarship is now accepting donations.

Trudden said the opportunity will provide women the support they need to pursue their education, but it also presents a bigger message.

"Women can have careers, they can have fulfilling lives and be mothers. It's not an either-or situation," she said.

"We want to do everything we can to support the mothers during these hard decisions, to help prepare her for motherhood and ... [provide her with] everything she needs to get through her pregnancy in a loving and caring way so she can positive choices for her life."