

## ETOBICOKE GAURDIAN

### Teen reaches for new heights in beauty pageant

**CHRIS VERNON** [More from this author](#)

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An Etobicoke teen who once described her life as sliding out of control says preparing for an upcoming beauty pageant and her strong faith in God helped her overcome a self-destructive lifestyle.

Joseline Ochoa, 17, said when she was 14 she would often fight with her mother, Bianca Aguirre, and run away.

When her grades began to sink after falling behind in school, Ochoa left home and lived on welfare.

"I wasn't focused. I had issues. I was planning to drop out of school. I never respected my mom," said Ochoa, a student at Monsignor Percy Johnson Secondary School.

However, it was a conversation with her sister, Elliana Mendez, that "turned her head around."

"She was crying and I asked her what was wrong. She was really worried about me. I've never seen her cry before. She wanted me to go back home," said Ochoa.

The troubled teen then turned to her faith, and said she asked God for guidance. That guidance came in the form of an eviction notice.

After living on her own for about a year, Ochoa said she was evicted from her apartment for being too rowdy.

She was forced to live at various friends' houses whenever they could offer up a couch or spare bed for the night.

"I didn't know what to do. I went from home to home to home for several months," said Ochoa.

The young woman said she accepted the eviction as a sign from God. Four months had passed since the tearful meeting with her sister, and Ochoa was ready to go home.

"I went back home to mom. We fought a lot at first but she never gave up on me. I am now so focused, we are the best of friends," she said.

Ochoa is now in Grade 12, and will graduate this June and is busy preparing for the Miss Latina Canada Pageant April 8 where she will represent Etobicoke West.

Although frowned upon by some, Ochoa said the pageant has taught her many valuable life skills including motivation, public

speaking and the power of a positive attitude.

"It's not about winning, it's about having an experience. It helps you become the person you can be," she said.

The change in her daughter is remarkable, said Aguirre.

"I'm very proud of her. We both went through so much. Life is about experience, if you learn from them, you're a winner. She's a winner," said Aguirre, a single mother who emigrated from Guatemala in the 1980s.

However, she added the experience has also changed her.

"The parent has to change too. Don't give up on your kids."

Ochoa, who works at retailer Miss Teen, is required to raise \$1,000 in sponsorship money, and has just more than a week to raise another \$300.

"I'll do it. You have to be positive," she said.

The Miss Latina Canada Pageant takes place April 8 at the Markham Theatre - Warden Avenue and Hwy. 7.

For more information on the pageant, visit [www.misslatinacanada.com](http://www.misslatinacanada.com).