

Jennifer's Story

By Clare Pavelka

2008-09 Rotary Club President

During Jennifer Scheuer's senior year at Red Wing High School something happened that made her begin to see her future in whole new light.

Since Jennifer was 14 years old, she had been in foster care. She was separated from her two younger siblings. And she didn't get to have the childhood most kids have. She struggled with school and her grades reflected that frustration.

Then came Jennifer's senior year at Red Wing High School. The Red Wing Rotary Club was preparing to launch their inaugural year of STRIVE during the 2008-09 school year. Jennifer's guidance counselor talked to her about STRIVE and encourage her to participate in the new program. It was for students like her, who didn't have good grades, but wanted to make a change. Knowing those changes don't come easy, the STRIVE program would pair an adult mentor with Jennifer. Someone from the community that didn't know Jennifer's past, didn't have any reason to label Jennifer as 'poor student' and give up on her.

Jennifer came to that first STRIVE meeting during the Senior lunch hour. And kept coming to the bi-weekly meetings. There was a message at every meeting; how to improve study habits, time-management skills, self-esteem messages and encouragement in how to change old habits and make new ones. After every group 'lesson' Jennifer talked with her mentor about how these ideas could be applied to her life. She talked about how she procrastinated doing her homework and it left her panicked when test time came. Through the year, Jennifer made some goals for herself. And together with her mentor they discussed those goals every two weeks when they met at the High School.

STRIVE wasn't all business, lunch was catered in by the Rotary Club at each meeting. Students got to know each other and developed friendships that would have never happened if not for STRIVE. One time all the STRIVE students went to a noon Rotary meeting at the St. James Hotel. The students had a formal lunch and were introduced to the Rotarians and invited to the front of the room for a round of applause. They had their picture taken and it was on the Rotary website and Rotary newsletter.

Jennifer and the STRIVE students decided it would be fun to do a pot luck awards banquet at the end of the school year. An awards banquet to share with their family to find out which three students would win the STRIVE scholarships. That night the students came with their pans of bars and hot dishes; dressed up in ties and skirts. Jennifer was there too, with her foster parents. They were beaming with pride as all the parents were. Because for some this was their first awards banquet they got to share with their child. It was the first time their child was called out and recognized for their achievement. The students nominated two peers to talk about what STRIVE meant to them and their favorite memories from the year. And there were more speeches; from the Rotary club President, the High School guidance counselor and mentors. And then it was time to announce the scholarship winners.

For Jennifer, during her Senior year something happened in her life, she started to believe in herself. She believed that she could overcome her personal struggles and make a change for the better. That she didn't want to settle for Ds, she could get an A in class. And she succeeded. Jennifer was awarded a STRIVE scholarship from the Rotary Club because she achieved the greatest success in improving her grades during her Senior year. Was STRIVE that turning point in her life? Was it the mentor that gave her the tools and encouragement to make a change? Jennifer never had that ah-ha moment. It was the little things that stayed with her over time. STRIVE became that constant reminder in Jennifer's life that she could make a change and there was help available.

Sometimes as Rotarians we don't realize just what our impact is on the lives we touch. STRIVE is one of those Rotary programs that illustrates what it is to be a Rotarian. We come together to be a part of something greater. STRIVE is a program for students who want to make a change, but they just don't know how, and need a little help getting there. Rotarians want to make a difference and that's why they create programs like STRIVE to bring a brighter future to someone else.