

Young mom finds road back to education

JENNY CHAVEZ
Copy Editor

When Charity Hess entered Clackamas' Young Parent Opportunity Program as a high school dropout, her only goal was to get her GED to qualify for a job at Hollywood Video; she never dreamed her first job would be in a prestigious Portland lawyer's office.

Hess left high school as a sophomore and became one of 10,621 other Oregon kids who dropped out of school in 1997. According to the Oregon Department of Education, 42.7 percent of those students were from the Portland Metro area, which includes Clackamas, Multnomah, and Washington counties. But Hess didn't know she just became another statistic - all she knew was that she felt worthless and depressed.

"I did nothing for two years but lay on the couch and watch TV. I went through a lot of hard times," said Hess. "I didn't really care."

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, self-concept was a big issue among students surveyed. Dropout reports showed that one-half of the students felt useless at times, one-third thought they were "no good at all", and nearly one-fourth said they didn't have much to be proud of.

There are other factors that influence students' decisions to drop

out of school. Not getting along with peers and faculty, getting too far behind to catch up, substance abuse and dysfunctional home lives are some of the most influential factors. Hess struggled with some of those factors.

"I started missing more and more school," remembered Hess. "The next thing I knew, I just stopped going."

Hess had been out of school for two years when she got pregnant. She suddenly realized that she had someone else to think about.

"When I got pregnant, I started to re-evaluate my life," explained Hess.

"I had to redefine what I was doing with my life and how I would provide for my child."

Hess heard of the College's YPOP program through her mother who attended Clackamas. She met with YPOP Instructor Toni Kruppenacker for an interview and was accepted into the program. Instructors Linda Durham and Kruppenacker played a major role in influencing Hess to continue her education.

"They really encourage you to go to college and I had no intention of going to college," said Hess. "They help you a lot, but they also help you

do things on your own."

With praises from her instructors, Hess went through the program so successfully that she began to feel she had potential.

"I realized I was actually kind of smart when I had always thought all that learning was beyond me," Hess said.

After getting her GED, Hess moved on to Clackamas' Bridges program where students were immersed in career exploration. They toured the college, learned to set goals, and prepared for the transitional stage in their lives where they would either find their place in a work environment or further their education. Hess did both.

"Leslie Black (Bridges instructor) directed me to an emergence program in Portland," said Hess.

"Instead of working at Hollywood Video, I went to a six week intensive office skills training program and got my first job making \$9 an hour as a receptionist in a lawyer's office."

Hess also enrolled at CCC and plans to transfer to Portland State University for a degree in computer science or psychology. But teaching is on her heart because of the mentoring she received in YPOP and



JENNY CHAVEZ / Clackamas Print

Charity Hess dropped out of high school as a sophomore. After getting pregnant, she evaluated her life and decided to join the YPOP program at Clackamas.

Bridges.

"They all boosted my self-esteem way up," beamed Hess. "I had such good experiences with Linda, Toni and Leslie that I've carried that on to this part of the campus and feel comfortable."

When Hess earned her GED, 1,170

other previous dropouts in Oregon earned theirs as well. But along with her GED, Hess also gained a better understanding of herself and her future.

"I know I can do whatever I want to do," said Hess. "All I have to do is apply myself."

Passion for environment motivates new program coordinator

CORINNE RUPP
Opinion Editor

Enthusiasm shines from Francesca Woodruff's face as she talks about her new position as program coordinator for the Environmental Learning Center

"There's so much to do. I've really not even hit the ground running, but running at full speed."

A recent graduate of Marylhurst University in Lake Oswego, this Oregon native fell into environmental sciences almost by accident.

"I had this really cool science teacher." She remembers of her introduction to the field. He recommended she volunteer for a local program, Headwaters to Ocean (H2O), that teaches steward-

ship out on the river.

"I'm still with them. It's five years later, and to this day I am still doing work for H2O."

Volunteering turned into a paying position for Woodruff. It also served to whet her appetite for teaching kids about the environment.

"I love working with kids, and my passion is definitely in taking care of the environ-

ment."

After graduating with her environmental science degree, she was a coordinator for Oregon Trout as an environmental education specialist. The organization works to promote understanding in the community about our native fish and their environment.

"We'd go and see endangered salmon spawning in their own habitat." She said.

Part of her duties as program coordinator will be to develop programs and become involved in community outreach. She has already begun the process of getting local kids interested in the ELC's wetland habitat. Shortly after starting, she began a program that encourages kids to become park rangers.

"Instead of coming out to the site and trashing it, which is what bored kids do, they apply to be park rangers," explained Woodruff.

Rangers are responsible for walking the grounds and telling their peers about the plants and animals.

She hopes the program will discourage vandalism. Being a ranger lets them know that they can make a difference in the environment directly.

"It gives them ownership of the site," she said.

Woodruff is excited about her new position at the College. She emphasizes one mission that she wants to fulfill her new job.

"I'm just basically dedicated to opening up the minds and hearts of kids and adults."



MIKE POLLOCK / Clackamas Print

Francesca Woodruff is the new program coordinator for the Environmental Learning Center at Clackamas. Her duties as coordinator include developing programs and becoming involved in community outreach.

"I love working with kids, and my passion is definitely in taking care of the environment."

Francesca Woodruff
program director

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Mike's proverb of the week

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English proverb

