



Jenny's Story

Jenny had a rough start. While other kids her age were making friends and learning to do well in school, Jenny was being uprooted time every time her mother got involved with a new man. "Men were her way of trying to find stability," she says.

Life at home became so difficult that drugs seemed like a great escape. "By 7th grade I was doing some pretty crazy drugs," says Jenny. "When my family found out about the drugs, they put me in a religious 'cult school.' When I tried to leave the school I was beaten, so I intentionally got myself kicked out of that place."

From that point on she was "homeschooled" in the very loosest sense of the word. Her family had mostly given up on her, and very little effort was put into her education. "I became the Cinderella of my house — I cleaned, I took care of kids, I went to church, I worked," she says.

When caught misbehaving one evening, she was beaten again — and so at 17 she left home with nowhere to go. "My family discovered I was gone and came after me. I literally ran through the Alderwood Mall, with all of my luggage, to escape from being dragged home."

And so began her life on the streets — in Everett, Kirkland, downtown Seattle, and the U-District. In 2003, a friend brought her to Street Youth Ministries (SYM) for the first time. "I was freaked out that it was in a church (because of my experiences with religion), but you guys weren't like that, and you didn't scare me away." SYM activities like Whirlyball and chocolate-tasting helped Jenny connect with other young people like her as well as with SYM staff and volunteers who cared about her. "You never made us feel like bums," she recalls.

Her real turning point happened in 2004 when she discovered she was pregnant with her daughter, Jada (now 8 years old). "I realized I had to straighten my life out. I don't believe in abortion, and I didn't want my daughter to have this kind of life. I quit doing hard-core drugs, got a job, and started pulling away from the street life. My daughter literally saved my life."

Staff members from SYM referred Jenny to an agency which provided her with housing. And they stuck by her side even when at times she bounced back to her old way of life. "People have 'hiccups' when they're getting off the streets. I did. But SYM staff helped redirect me when I needed it. You guys were always there — no matter what. You never turned your backs on me."

Even now, Jenny stays connected with SYM. She's grateful for staff members who love her and help her with practical needs — like getting a Christmas tree for her daughter to enjoy.

"My daughter is amazing — she is the smartest one in her class. People tell me that's because I am a great single mom. But part of the reason she is such a great kid is because we are surrounded by awesome people. I've known you guys at SYM so long — it's like you are my family *and* my friends."