

Changed Lives for Happy Endings



Originally from Tennessee, high school graduate Jessica Barnett moved to Spencer County with her parents when she was 18 years old. Wanting to make a fresh start, Jessica determined not to become involved with the drug crowd as she had been before the move to Indiana. A year later, she met Kenny. Although she was in love, because he was a user, she gave him an ultimatum. "It's me or the drugs," she said. "He chose me, and was clean for about 6 years."

Then the family grew. Along with their three children, Kenny's son stayed (and stays now) with them part time. With stress brought on by raising 4 young children, 23 year-old Jessica started smoking marijuana again "to cope." He told her, "You get to use your drug of choice, but you won't let me [use mine]." So behind her back, Kenny started using Methamphetamine. Since Jessica would not allow drugs in the house, Kenny was relegated to the garage and elsewhere for his Meth. When the weather turned cold, Jessica felt sorry for him and let him bring it inside. One day in 2009, Kenny urged Jessica to "Just try it," he said, "It won't hurt you." After one time Jessica was hooked. It is called the *Demon Drug* for good reason. Due to their usage, they lost several homes and Kenny lost good jobs, including one with the railroad. On January 28, 2010 Jessica and Kenny were arrested. The children were taken to their grandparents.

After 3 weeks in jail, under the advice of her attorney, Jessica entered the Drug Court Program, and stayed with her parents. Eight months later, Kenny entered the Program. Jessica continued, "I started off with a bad attitude. I didn't like Community Service." Jessica particularly did not like the arresting officer, because "She took my kids and arrested me. But she was doing her job and got me the help I needed. [All the people] at Community Corrections and Drug Court are good people. At first I thought they just wanted the money (a fee is required to participate). But that isn't true. They want us to succeed."

Jessica continued, "One day I woke up and realized, this [Drug Court] is for 18 months. I might as well deal with it. My kids were my main reason for turning around; how all that we had done was affecting them." Jessica, surprised at a passing thought said with a smile, "Actually, it's longer. It will be two years in May!" The Way was still on Main Street at the time, and Jessica liked coming there for the Celebrate Recovery meetings, "because I could relate to Brett and to the others who attended." After one year, Jessica was awarded custody of her children. Contented, she said, "Now we have a home and Kenny is working full time." On February 24th, Kenny's driver's license was re-instated. He is proud, and should be.

Jessica and Kenny have more reason to be proud. Jessica now volunteers for *The Landing* program. Her kids attend *Celebration Station*, and she says, "They have been there from the beginning. Our goal this year is for perfect attendance. It's real fun!" Some of our readers may remember seeing a poster that Gwynn Turner made for the 2 programs (see photo below). At the public school where Kenny and Jessica's children attend, character traits are worth noting. At the end of every 9-week grading period, each teacher chooses one student out of his/her classroom to be rewarded for exemplifying a particular trait. For the first grading period this year, the focus was on **RESPECT**. Out of all the students his classroom, Kenny and Jessica's seven year-old son was the recipient. That speaks volumes of character in his parents as well.

After telling her story at the annual Substance Abuse Council dinner, Jessica and her arresting Officer embraced; friends forever. But the audience she desires most to reach is children. She has traveled to the North Spencer School District twice, to speak to the IHHS group S.A.D.D. (Students Against Drunk Driving) and to the 6th graders at all four schools. She received several letters of thanks from the 6th graders. Excerpts from one example are below:



"I'm glad that you came here today. I admire how good you are at talking in front of people, especially when you are talking about a personal story. . . I think that it would have been much easier if you had taken the D.A.R.E. Program. And I wish you did. . . You've got me thinking about my decision. . . [no to drugs!] Thank you for helping me confirm that. You are nice and pretty, so it's hard to believe you did drugs. . . I know peer pressure is hard. Thanks for being so considerate."

Jessica concluded, "If I can help *one child* - and keep them from going through [all that I went through] - it means a lot."