



# WOMEN IN CHARGE

independence through healing, education and support

Spring 2012

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**We Prefer to Call  
Them  
“Challenging”**



*Students gather in the classroom.*

“Please no cell phone use in the classroom. That also means no texting. You can’t listen and participate in class if you are on your phone. Turn it off NOW. If I have to say it one more time, I am taking your phone.”

Sometimes adult education feels suspiciously like high school. These five sentences occurred within ten minutes; all directed at our teenage students.

We have a simple attendance policy at Women In Charge: Monday through Thursday 9.00AM to 2.30PM. Our teenagers tend to think that this is very restrictive. How can we

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## Kadie’s Story

There were 8 girls and 4 boys in my family growing up. I was next to the baby. My mom was a good mom; she showed us love, and took us to church. She had a lot to do during the day, and she had to have a meal ready for my father when he came home from work. A couple of my sisters got pregnant at a young age so my father made me baby sit for their babies to teach

me, so I wouldn’t get pregnant. We couldn’t go to parties, go outside to play with friends, spend the night at my cousin’s house or go anywhere.

When I was 14 I was home after school doing my homework and my nephew was crying so my daddy told me to take care of the baby and not to leave my room. I went to go to the bathroom and he thought I

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## *Our Mission Statement*

***Women In Charge heals the spirit, builds confidence, and educates women in need so that they may provide a better life for themselves and their children.***

We offer Adult Education and Literacy instruction, GED preparation, individual and group counseling, career counseling, parent mentoring, yoga and computer classes. The program is free of charge. A free on-site children’s program is available to participants. September through May, hours are: Monday through Thursday from 9:00 to 2:30 PM. Summer hours are: Monday through Thursday from 9:00 to 12:30PM.

*Kadie's story: cont'd from page 1*

said something smart to him. He grabbed me by the neck and threw me against the wall and punched me in the face. I went into my room and took a whole bottle of pills. The ambulance came; the hospital kept me all night. I had to lie about how my face was messed up by saying somebody jumped me. My father wouldn't let me go back to school, so I started doing hair.

My dad used to call me names. My sisters were skinny and I was the thick one. My dad would tell me how fat I was and he tore down my self esteem. When I was 18, I still wasn't allowed off the porch. One night my dad yelled at me to get inside, and I didn't want to, so my dad beat me up again. After that I took my mom's bottle of blood pressure pills. As soon as I turned 21 I met Mike and at first he was nice and cool. I felt safe with him for a whole year.

After I got pregnant he showed me his true colors. I couldn't take the verbal and physical abuse anymore. I packed up all my things in the middle of the night when he wasn't home, and took a cab to my mother's house. He kept trying to get to me. Three weeks later my mom and I moved to another house partly to get away from him. A social worker told me about Women In Charge and I started attending classes. One day I was coming home from school and Mike was waiting for me. I let him see his son, and Mike said he wanted to work things out. After a couple of months he turned out to be the same abusive person. Mike's father was an alcoholic, a drug user, and abused his mother. Mike was doing everything his father did. I got a restraining order against him and moved into a new place so he couldn't find me. Of course I dropped out of school.

It was peaceful for a while, I got my own place, but he found me

again and ended up staying with me. It was the worst mistake I ever made. There was no one to protect me. I was fighting for my life. One day he was on me and I couldn't breathe. I was so mad, I maced him and I cut him. I just went crazy.

I'm trying to get past all that now. One day I went to church and asked God, please show me today if Mike is the man for me. I went to his mom's house and I ran into another woman who had a key to his house! I was done with him. I'm back in Women In Charge now, and after all that, I still take care of my parents.

Women in Charge is helping me with being focused and being patient—I'm trying to learn how to trust other people. If they are similar to Mike, I don't want to deal with them. I'm still holding a grudge.

Women in Charge is helping me learn to love my self. My attitude has changed to be more patient, to feel good about myself because I'm going to accomplish something. When I first came to Women in Charge, I didn't know my multiplication, now I'm working on geometry. That's a long way. Vicki taught me how to communicate better, how to react with others when we disagree, how not to go off the edge but to talk about the situation to resolve the problem.

I'm focusing on school, but I have to work not to remember what happened to me. I'm not depressed anymore. I'm getting my life back, I am taking back what people tried to take from me; my happiness. I was being controlled, now I am the WOMAN in charge.

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A Special Thanks to
Sandy and Sigrid
for teaching a weekly writing
class to help our women pre-
pare for the GED essay.
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# Walking Thru the Minefield: For Profit Colleges

You have seen the commercials on TV appealing to young people, those who may have obtained their high school diploma, but have discovered that doesn't mean you will find a good job. The commercials show happy, well-employed people, loving their job and driving new cars. They speak of how quickly you can earn certificates; they make enrollment easy and hold your hand through the financial aid process. Unfortunately too frequently we have students who are daunted by the enrollment process at the community college, and succumb to the ease of enrolling at a for-profit institution. Typically students drop out and then have thousands of dollars in debt. Some complete the program, but discover there are no jobs because their certificate is not for a degree program that is valid or that employers recognize. Enrollment at for-profit schools has grown dramatically over the past decade. They spend heavily on marketing: television ads and billboards. The average tuition is six times higher than community college. Sadly while 10% of American students are enrolled at for-profit institutions, they account for 50% of all student loan defaults.\*

In June of 2011, the federal government released new regulations requiring career college programs to prepare students for "gainful employment" or potentially lose access to federal student aid. Programs must fail the new guidelines three times in a four year period before they can lose their eligibility.

Meanwhile we try to guide and direct our students to the next level of education, to prepare them for a job that can truly support their families, but the lure of "quick and easy" degrees and certificates represents a real problem.

\*Senator Tom Harkin website: For Profit College Investigation HELP committee analysis of US Dept. Of Education data.

*“Challenging”: Cont’d from page 1*

expect them to be here that often? We tell them that they should treat this program like a job, good practice for their adult life. No employer would let them come 50% or even 75% of the time and remain employed. But this is school and not a job, they say. Truly, it is like we are on two different planets.....

We love our teens, so while the population can present challenges, we know we can help them in many ways. They are mothers themselves, so while learning how to get up on time, dress appropriately, work responsibly and respectfully, they must teach their children the same behaviors. Many of our teens lack good role models, or worse, were badly abused.

Natalie, the children’s program Director, is part of our parent mentoring team. Recently she worked on communication skills with one teen mom, by inviting her into the classroom to enjoy play-dough time with the children. The teen mom sharply addressed her daughter saying, “Girl, give me those scissors!” Natalie addressed another child by saying, “Let’s use the play-dough scissors instead.” The young mother saw the different reactions of the children, and then proceeded to model Natalie’s words and actions. She learned about redirecting, giving choices, and disciplinary options.

We are very grateful to The Children’s Trust Fund who recently awarded Women In Charge a grant to further our work with teen moms. See Page 4 for more information on how you can help.



Above: Students surround Jessica, the newest addition to our staff.

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## Welcome Jessica!

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After years of working two jobs, coupled with classes, an internship, and three daughters, one might be surprised that Jessica Menhkus even had time to interview with Women In Charge. She had never heard of us, but upon learning about what we do, she became intrigued. She liked the idea of improving the lives of women; healing as well as educating.

“Everyone in my family is either a cop or a teacher”, Jessica says, so although her Bachelor’s degree is in psychology, it was quickly followed by a Master’s degree in Education from Webster University. Jessica commutes from south county each day, with her two younger daughters who attend the Women In Charge childcare program.

Jessica’s role at Women In Charge includes teaching science and computer classes, plus team teaching reading, grammar and math. Jessica created our Face-

book page ([www.facebook.com/wicuc](http://www.facebook.com/wicuc)) and is currently working with The Foundry to create a new website for Women In Charge. We desperately needed someone to wear the “tech” hat at Women in Charge, as well as to help in the classroom, so Jessica is a perfect fit!

### *Where Are They Now?*

Laura: Forest Park Community College

Crystal: Park Express

Anni: retail at Burlington Coat Factory

Lori: Florissant Valley

## Check out our new website!

Available April 2012

***www.womenincharge.org***

- Read success stories
- Make on-line donations
- Find out more about us

Our thanks to the newly formed branch of  
**100 Women Who Care**  
for choosing Women In Charge to be the first  
recipient of their generosity.

**Women In Charge received \$3,500!**

For more information on this program contact Sandy at  
(314) 726-6737.

## How can you help prevent child abuse and neglect in your community?

One way is to purchase the  
official

***Children's Trust Fund***  
license plate that features  
green handprints and the  
words "prevent child abuse".

Make an annual contribution of  
\$25 or more by sending a check  
to:

Children's Trust Fund  
PO Box 1641  
Jefferson City, MO 65102-1641  
Or go to [www.ctf4kids.org](http://www.ctf4kids.org) or call  
1-888-826-5437.

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