

Graduates

of Christian Women's Job Corps - Nashville

May 6, 2006

Meet the Class of 2005-06 of CWJC - Nashville

Dorthena Batey

Dorthena Batey, a single mom of three, says that raising a family and trying to keep them straight and keep God in their lives and trying to find a good job, are the biggest challenges she's faced in her 43 years of life.

Currently, she's working temporarily as a cook and would like to get a better job, but she's experiencing pain in her feet that prevents her from standing for long periods of time and doctors haven't been able to diagnose the reason for the pain. Following graduation, Dorthena is scheduled for more tests.

Dorthena found out about CWJC through a friend who was a participant. The goal she set when she first entered about two years ago was to find a better job. Toward that end, she's been taking life skills classes, computer training and Bible study.

She says her mentor, Billie Boyte, has been a great resource for her — helping her with her reading and sharing with her kids and teaching her to be strong and stay close to the Lord.

Dorthena hopes to resolve her foot pain soon and perhaps continue her studies in culinary school.

Jamie Crawford

Jamie Crawford is excited. She's recently married, moved and getting ready to have a baby. With a due date of May 25, she's not expecting to be at graduation. But she is attending the volunteer training program in April and planning to become a mentor as soon as her schedule allows.

"I think Christian Women's Job Corps is a great program," she said. "But once I got involved in it, I realized I needed to be on the giving end — not a participant."

There have been lots of bumps in the road in Jamie's life. But in May 2001, she was saved and she allowed God to take control and He totally changed her life. She had been into drugs and alcohol as well as exotic dancing. But she became involved in the McKenzie Faith Foundation and her life started changing for the good.

It was through this organization that she became involved in CWJC. But after just a couple months of classes and with the encouragement of her mentor Terri Dixon, Jamie was ready to graduate and start helping the other participants. "I've been through a lot in my life," she said. "Drugs, alcohol, dancing, having and giving up babies. I think I have a lot to offer these women. And, I've been very, very blessed."

Martha Dale

Martha Dale isn't the average CWJC participant. She didn't need her GED or a better job. What she needed was self-esteem and confidence. But what Martha thought she needed — computer skills — is what brought her to CWJC.

According to Martha, she came home for lunch one day from work in 2004 and was flipping through her phonebook and crying out to God. "I was begging Him to help me learn computers and do it for free," she admits. "And it was at that moment my eyes landed on the CWJC ad."

She called the number and began to tell the lady who answered why she probably wasn't qualified to participate. Instead of rejecting Martha — as she had expected — the receptionist scheduled an interview for her. She enrolled in computer classes and Bible study in September and her entire outlook on life, herself and what she could do for her fellow man changed.

Before coming to CWJC, Martha says she was down and discouraged a lot. Her life was meaningless and she didn't think she had anything to offer anyone. She had a good job and was involved in her church, but something was missing. She just didn't know what. CWJC opened her eyes to that something.

"When I saw the volunteers giving so freely of their time and talents, I realized what was missing in my life," she said. "It was the reaching out and doing for others that I needed."

But to do that, Martha needed self-confidence. And in the course of Bible study

and learning computer skills, Martha found that.

"My mentor, Jet Hill, really helped me," says Martha. "She gave me a computer and encouraged me to write emails so I could improve my communication skills. And she gave me lots of encouragement to help build my confidence."

Martha is also a talented singer, but didn't have much confidence in that area either. CWJC executive director Becky Sumrall recognized Martha's talent and gave her several opportunities to perform in public including the organization's annual fundraiser and graduation. Now, Martha wants to produce a CD of Christian music and give the proceeds to CWJC.

Martha has two other goals she wants to achieve — obtaining her associates degree and becoming a volunteer at CWJC. She believes the volunteers don't really recognize just how valuable they are to the program's participants. "Even if you are not being told how much we appreciate you, we do," she said. "Nothing you do is ever in vain. You are making a difference."

Vallerie McCathern

At 35, Vallerie McCathern didn't think she was smart — at least not smart enough to obtain her GED. She had tried three times and failed.



CWJC —
A Hand Up, Not A Hand Out

Our purpose is to equip women for life and employment with basic life skills necessary for self-sufficiency, within her culture, which may include sustained employment; adequate income; housing; transportation; child care; and/or medical care.

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So when she ran across a flier on the Christian Women's Job Corps she decided to give it one more try. Now, after three years in the program she's passed her GED and is enrolling in college!

What made the difference this time around? Vallerie says it's the volunteers.

"There were plenty of times when I wanted to give up," she said. "I got discouraged. It was hard. I wasn't comprehending stuff. But the volunteers kept pushing me. They'd call and try to find out why I wasn't in class. Celeste (Myall) would meet me early in the morning to give me extra one-on-one attention. They kept telling me I could do it while I was telling myself I couldn't."

Vallerie is a single mother of two and dropped out of school after completing the ninth grade because she was pregnant. When she found out about CWJC, she was working as a Metro school system custodian and not very happy with her situation.

The Nashville native admits that her relationship with Christ was strengthened during her time at CWJC as well. "You see all these Christian women going the extra mile for you — they're not getting paid — they have to have good hearts," she said. "That makes all the difference in the world. They are so important to this program and really help make the difference."

Vallerie, who admits her mentor Tammy Bryant has been instrumental to her progress, is currently applying for scholarships and plans to enroll in Freewill Baptist College and pursue her degree in psychology. "I like talking to people and helping them, and I do a lot of counseling," she said.

"You know, everything we need is inside us," she added. "Sometimes, we just need help finding it."

Carolyn Page

Just when Carolyn Page thought there were no more good people left in the world, she found Christian Women's Job Corps and began changing her mind.

"I lost my job after 25 years," she said. "I was really depressed. I had to file for Chapter 13 bankruptcy to keep from losing my house and I kind of just fell apart. I was living like a hermit. I didn't want to go out. I didn't have any friends. My neighbor knew what I was going through

and she had seen an ad for CWJC. She took down the phone number and gave it to me."

Two years ago Carolyn entered the program with the intention of getting her GED and improving her computer skills. She dropped out of school at 17 when she became pregnant and had tried to get her GED before, but tests terrified her. But this

“They kept telling me I could do it while I was telling myself I couldn't.” — Vallerie McCathern

time — Feb. 25, 2006 — was different.

"Since I found God and got back into church, I'm just so comfortable," she said. "I had everybody praying for me and I just felt a peace about taking my test. I wasn't scared."

Carolyn returned to church after she became involved in CWJC Bible studies. And shortly after visiting with her daughter at Smyrna First Baptist, the two were baptized on the same day. "I have more self-esteem now than I've ever had," she says freely. "I know that if nobody in this world loves me, there's still somebody else who does love me."

Carolyn has faced many obstacles in her 53 years of life, but she believes her biggest obstacle has been herself. "I'm hard on myself," she admits. "I get it in my head I can't do this and I don't even want to try."

She credits Becky (Sumrall), her mentor, Myrna Deere, and all the volunteers with giving her the confidence she needed to get her GED. "I've met so many nice people," she said. "I love all the volunteers ... their encouragement that I can do this — their love — their support — their belief in God — their belief in prayer — I just love them all!"

Carolyn is continuing to work on her computer skills and is looking into college courses, especially in the area of accounting. She has done manual labor for a long time and hopes to obtain an office job in the near future.

Bonnie Payton

At age 27, Bonnie Payton read her first book.

Bonnie dropped out of high school her senior year. She had problems at home and ran away. As soon as she turned 18, she was on her own.

During the next 8 years, Bonnie's life was turned upside down. She married — had two children — her husband was incarcerated — she became an exotic dancer to support herself — she lost custody of her children — her husband got out of jail and after she had waited for him, he wanted nothing to do with her.

She literally hit rock bottom. That's when she sought the services of Christian Women's Job Corps-Nashville. "I turned to God and said I surrender," she said. "On February 17, 2004, I asked God back into my life and it was the beginning of a big turnaround."

From there, Bonnie found CWJC. She set two goals for herself when she entered the program — to get her high school diploma and to learn to master her dyslexia. She's achieved both! "It's the first time in my life I've reached goals that I've set for myself," she admits. And accomplishing them has been no easy feat for this 28-year-old.

"I'm not the easiest person to teach," she said. "I get frustrated easily. When I don't understand I want to give up."

Because of her dyslexia, Bonnie had to start at a third grade reading level when she started working on her diploma. "I just thank God for Rachel (Freeze — a volunteer with CWJC)," she said. "God put her right where I needed her when I needed her. She sat there month after month after month teaching me how to deal with my dyslexia. I give all the credit to her — and to God — for getting me here."

Bonnie is presently working for a temporary service, but has plans to work with the Red Cross after graduation to receive her training and certification to become a phlebotomist. "I've always thought I might want to work in the nursing field," she added. "But I've always been nervous about college."

And while Bonnie gives Rachel most of the credit for helping her learn to read and her mentor Amy Lowrance for encouraging her, she also recognizes that it takes all the volunteers to make CWJC successful.

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“We (the participants) all love and appreciate you (the volunteers),” she said. “You might not hear it on a daily basis, but we realize it takes all of you working together to make this work for us. We thank you and say God bless you.”

Melinda Pinder

Overcoming negativity and doubt has been the biggest obstacle Melinda Pinder has faced in her life. But her participation in Christian Women's Job Corps has helped her succeed in doing just that.

“Being around people who are facing the same struggles as you — who are having to come out of a negative environment — is really helpful,” she admits. “And to have the support and help of the volunteers to encourage you is great.”

The 33-year-old Pinder became a participant two years ago after visiting the Hope Center. “My primary goal in CWJC was to get my life more in sync with God's Word,” she said.

Pinder says that through the lifestyle classes and weekly Bible study she has succeeded in meeting her goal. “I have learned how to apply scripture to my life and I want to share that with others,” she said.

Another blessing Pinder received as a CWJC participant was the gift of a car. “I was dependent on the bus or other people to get me where I needed to be when I first entered the program in 2004,” said Pinder.

“Becky and I prayed for transportation and while I didn't specifically ask for a car, Becky told me to believe in a car. And in December I got one ... a red 1992 Nissan Sentra. All I had to do was pay the taxes and title on it and get a new fuel pump. I'm still using it, and it really helps in getting me to my job and wherever I need to go.”

Pinder works for a temporary employment agency and is currently on a long-range temporary assignment at Tennessee State University. “I love it and hope that it becomes permanent,” she added.

Pinder also plans to continue an online study program for a bachelor's degree in psychology. “I love helping people,” she said. “And I would love to help people who are in negative situations learn to overcome them like I have. I think it's really all a mindset. I'd like to help them get a better perspective — like I have through Christian Women's Job Corps — on how to achieve their goals, how to recognize their gifts and fruits and how to go from not knowing to actually using them.”

Donna Spillman has been Pinder's mentor for two years. Pinder credits her most with showing her stability. “That's the biggest thing I've learned from her,” she said.

Malika Ridley-Hannah

Malika Ridley-Hannah is a woman of strength, hope and determination. She is no stranger to struggles, and she gives all the credit to God for bringing her through them.

Malika believes CWJC is a godsend. “I believe God is in the midst of it. The teachers and staff are so helpful, really blessed people. They would do anything

to be with her fiancé. In 2000 she married but recently moved by herself to Nashville to be with her sisters. Only days after arriving Malika heeded her sister's advice and investigated CWJC.

Malika's husband eventually followed her to Nashville to reunite the family. She now views the heartache of struggle in marriage as she does every difficulty. “God allows us to go through things in life only to make us stronger.” Malika has had ample opportunity to grow stronger and a lot of incentive to do so. “My daughters look up to me. I have to be a good role model. I try to show them that I am strong. And sometimes I hurt, but I am still strong,” she said.

Malika knows, all too well, “Everything isn't always gonna be sunshine in life. There's gonna be rain and storms.” But in spite of the struggles she has faced, she insists, “I'm not going to let anything bring me down. I thank God for all of this, because it's only made me stronger.”

Malika and her family have recently moved to their new home in Portland, and she is currently investigating college options and working with two home-based businesses.

Venus Whalen

“If you trust in God, He will make it happen,” says CWJC graduate Venus Whalen. And, God truly is making wonderful things happen in Venus' life.

Venus was attending a special program at a church she was visiting when a woman there heard her mention she was interested in computer classes and gave her the phone number for CWJC. At the time, her life was in transition. She had left drugs behind and had just ended a bad relationship. She was starting to get back into church and was wrestling with low self-esteem.

She became a CWJC participant and began the program by setting goals for herself. Venus already had two years of college and wanted to go back, but needed brushing up on her computer skills. And she wanted to get as much spiritual guidance as she could.

The computer classes at CWJC helped Venus remember things she had forgotten and learn many new things while the Bible studies helped her inner stability. “The

“I was dependent on the bus or other people to get me where I needed to be when I first entered the program in 2004.” —
Melinda Pinder

they can to help people who want to help themselves. They're really supportive.”

The support of CWJC and her mentor Terry Rogers has enabled Malika to realize her goal of earning her GED. Ever since leaving school at age 17 for the birth of her first daughter, Malika has been determined to get her GED, but has struggled to balance time and finances, alternating study and work.

Malika grew up in New Jersey as one of 10 children and moved to Florida in 1999



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visit www.cwjcnashville.org
or contact us at (615) 244-3669, 244-3696 (FAX),
or staff@cwjcnashville.org (e-mail).

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Bible studies helped me straighten out the inside me so I could deal with my relationship with God and with my children,” she said.

This mother of three says she especially enjoyed a class on boundaries. “This class really helped me with my kids. I realized my kids knew how to push all my buttons. The class helped me set rules and guidelines and stick to them. Since I took this class, I started noticing a difference in my children,” said Venus.

Since attending CWJC, Venus has returned to college and is working on a degree in accounting. She’s taken two classes this semester at Strayer University and made A’s in both. She and her fiancé have also started their own painting business. Her fiancé does most of the painting while Venus is in charge of the business management. She’s also restored her relationship with Christ and joined Bellshire Assembly of God where she was baptized.

Venus was able to achieve her goals because of good support. She says her fiancé is her number one supporter. Her mentor, Susan Maywald, helped in many ways including help with job applications, scholarship applications and applications for school.

Venus says, “Thank you from the bottom of my heart” to all the volunteers at CWJC. “The women at CWJC have been a big inspiration to me. They give me an idea of what I want to be like. Especially Becky (Sumrall), she’s got a relationship with God that I want for myself.”

LaDella White

LaDella White was channel surfing when she happened to see a public service announcement about CWJC. She picked up the phone and called, but had to be placed on a waiting list until an opening was available for her. And LaDella waited, because she wanted her GED.

“That had to happen before anything else could,” she said. “Getting that off me was like lifting a heavy weight. It had

always bothered me. I was so embarrassed to have to admit that I didn’t have a high school diploma.”

LaDella dropped out of school at 16 because she was pregnant and had to take care of her baby. Since that time, she has had two more children and has worked for the past eight years in the manufacturing industry helping to make hardwood flooring. A job she describes as heavy and hard.

But LaDella has persevered. She has held this full-time job down, cared for her three children, taken classes at CWJC and earned her GED. Now, she’s in college at Nashville Tech working on her

The Bible studies helped me straighten out the inside me ... — Venus Whalen

associates degree and taking classes in computer science with no outside financial assistance!

But CWJC has meant far more than just an education to LaDella. While enrolled in classes to improve her mind, she’s also been in Bible study to feed her soul. And her children have benefited from the tutoring that is available. “Each of my kids had some special need,” she said. “Tutoring has given them a lot. They’re all doing well in school now — making As and Bs.”

LaDella also credits her mentor, Kim Jefferson, for helping her reach her goals. “She has meant so much to me because of her uplifting advice and because she pushed me to be the best that I can be,” said LaDella. “I want to be like her.”

At 28, LaDella has plans to reach several more goals. She hopes to earn her bachelor degree in Applied Sciences at TSU by the time she’s 35. And next year, she plans to buy her own home.

LaShonda Wright

The death of her child at birth interrupted LaShonda Wright’s participation in Christian Women’s Job Corps.

“I had been a Christian for a long time,” she said. “But my faith just went right out the door. Even as a Christian I wasn’t prepared for my child’s death. It was so unexpected.”

LaShonda credits CWJC’s Bible study classes and executive director Becky

Sumrall and her first-year mentor, Anita Davis, with helping her get back into the program and getting her life back on track after the death of her child.

The 39-year-old mother of four was working in food service in the Metro school system and participating in the Nashville Baptist Association’s Toy Store when she found out about CWJC. “I realized that I needed more training to provide a better life for me and my children, and that’s why I enrolled,” she said.

LaShonda’s primary goal was to acquire computer skills and to ultimately find a better paying job. And after two years in the program, she’s obtained her computer skills and has transferred jobs, but is still searching for a better paying job in the clerical field.

While LaShonda attended weekly classes at CWJC, two of her children benefited from the individual attention they received in the organization’s childcare program. “My son, who was about 13 when I started, was helped by a man each week with his homework and he also taught him how to play chess,” said LaShonda. “And my 11-year-old daughter enjoyed being helped with her homework and playing games. Having the childcare available is one of the reasons I was able to attend classes. When I’m not able to attend class, my kids miss it. What CWJC has been able to do for me has not only helped me improve, but it’s helped my kids too.”

“I really appreciate all the hard work the volunteers do,” she added. “They have got to do it out of the goodness of their heart, and I appreciate that. They’ve really helped strengthen me and my family. Sometimes you never know how you might be helping somebody because if they’re like me, they’re afraid to reach out and ask for help.”

When LaShonda re-entered the program, she was paired with a new mentor — Rebecca Jane Daniel, whom she credits with helping her attain her goals for graduation. She now plans to pursue training in the health care field through a program offered by St. Thomas and to enroll in a training program for foster parents. “I’ve always loved children,” she said. “And I’d like to work with them in some way.” □

Christian Women’s Job Corps – Nashville is a non-profit ministry. The CWJC Center is located at Downtown Ministry Center, 128 8th Ave. South, Nashville, TN 37203.