

A FRESH START

Story and photo by Elizabeth Whitchurch

“Three years ago, on a life scale of one to 10 with one being as low as a person can possibly get and 10 being incredibly happy, I was a one. But now I’m a 10!” says Christy Sperling, gleefully. But as her words indicate, Sperling’s life wasn’t always as sweet as it is today.

A recovering drug and alcohol addict, Sperling knows what many others feel. She’s been to the dark side – and back. Her teenage world was wracked with drugs, alcohol, arrest warrants, jail and near-death experiences. She dropped out of high school and at 16 was living in cars and getting into trouble stealing. She had no place to call home; was separated from her family. A “stereotypical junkie,” she says of herself.

After she was picked up for sleeping in an apartment building hallway on warrants for violating her probation, she spent months in jail, which forced her into sobriety. “I was sick and tired of being sick and tired,” Sperling says. “I needed help.”



“You cannot know what you cannot feel.”

Marya Mannes

Then I had a spiritual experience and things changed for me.

“In 2011 I made a resolution to get my GED and go to college. I started rebuilding my relationship with my family, too,” she says with a smile. “I got into self-help and starting feeling better than ever before. I realized I wanted to

help others get sober and give them hope. I want them to feel as good as I do now.”

While in jail, Sperling saw a WITC catalog and discovered the human services associate program. She enrolled in the inaugural class at New Richmond in the fall of 2011 and proudly crossed the stage in May 2013 to collect a well-earned diploma.

“I got a super high quality education, and I’m prepared in my job because I’ve already learned so much. Now I feel that I’m ahead of the game,” Sperling says.

For Sperling to turn her life around, she credits WITC’s human services associate program and instructor, Joel Gibson. His life experience and high level of caring for his students helped her succeed.

“I really benefited from the program. I only have good things to say about

WITC and Joel – he’s the coolest teacher I’ve ever had. So knowledgeable and amazing,” she says. “Joel’s really good at helping others without over helping. He’s real life.”

When it came time for her internship, Sperling remembered how she wanted to help others feel as good about life as she does, so she asked to do her internship at Kinnic Falls Alcohol and Drug Abuse Services, a halfway house in River Falls, Wis.

“The internship is such an important part,” she points out. “Many places normally don’t include an internship in a two-year program. My education from WITC is more than I expected.”

It didn’t take long for her to discover she was in the right place, and her internship with Kinnic Falls turned into a full-time counseling position. Now she sits in a sunny office, gainfully employed and working on her bachelor’s degree, her WITC associate degree diploma and state certification in counseling proudly displayed on her desk. Daily, she inspires others in recovery: she’s faced the demons they face and won. “It’s part of my recovery to help others,” she says. “And that helps me.”

“I have passion for the work I do. It’s the first job I’ve had that I look forward to coming to work,” she says. “Look at HSA if you like helping people, maybe not necessarily for the pay, but it’s the most rewarding thing. I recommend the HSA program to anyone.”



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