



A Jewell of a Cause

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR
ADVOCATES SOCIAL JUSTICE

Jennifer Jewell '01, Assistant Professor of the School of Social Work, is the type of person that you meet once and think about often. If there was ever an illustration of the Spalding model, it is she. Jennifer is friendly, intelligent, motivated and...honest. When I first sat down with her, I thought that we were going to talk about her recent trip to Stockholm, Sweden, for the European Preparatory Assembly. I quickly learned that it was the events that led up to Jennifer being invited to the assembly that were so important to where she is today. Anyone else may not have been so candid about his or her life but it is evident that Jennifer openly shares her story, not for her own self interest, but as a way to advocate for others.

In 1994, at age eighteen and months before she was to begin college, Jennifer found out she was pregnant. She did not let motherhood hinder her plans to go to

college. So she began classes in the fall of '94—taking only one semester off to have her son—and graduated in '99 with a double major in English and Spanish. “According to my family and society, I wasn’t supposed to be pregnant,” Jennifer said. “It was a pivotal point in my life, and it made me more focused and determined to go to college.”

Her determination helped her to keep her grades up throughout her undergraduate studies, but Jennifer struggled financially as a single mother. She was often on welfare and became homeless in her junior year of college. Jennifer quickly realized that she was not alone in her situation; she met other single mothers on welfare at the University of Louisville and together they noticed “how poor women are marginalized in our society,” Jennifer said. This inspired Jennifer and in 1998 she helped to start Women In Transition,

“a local grassroots organization run by and for poor people.”

Jennifer also became involved on the national level with the Poor People’s Economic Human Rights Campaign (PPEHRC), an umbrella organization for groups like WIT. PPEHRC holds a similar vision to Martin Luther King Jr.’s Poor People’s Campaign, which ended in 1968 after King’s assassination. PPERCH is a movement to unite poor people of all backgrounds in the fight for basic economic human rights such as housing, food, and healthcare.

According to Jennifer, her life drastically changed when she found her passion—social justice. She began to speak out about injustice against poor people and became even more passionate about child welfare issues. Jennifer said that over 60 percent of children who are removed from their homes are removed on



Jennifer Jewell in Stockholm, Sweden

account of neglect. She has argued that if every American was guaranteed his or her basic economic rights as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, created by the United Nations in 1948, fewer families would be involved in the child welfare system.

Originally, she had planned to use her dual-majors to teach children, but she realized that there were many kids in the world who were not getting the help they needed. Instead, Jennifer continued her work with WIT and PPEHRC and went on to get her Master's in Social Work at Spalding University. She is now at work on her doctorate. Jennifer said that when she started her doctoral degree she knew that she wanted to end up teaching at Spalding. "Spalding is not just a name only but a pursuit of social justice. It is [a university] intent on teaching classes around social justice and social change," Jennifer said. "I would say that Spalding,

as a whole, goes above and beyond to ensure its learners are successful."

Jennifer is proof of that success, though she would say that she had some help from her family, professors, and organizations to get where she is today. "There are numerous barriers for people to be successful. I was able to overcome my challenges because of my privilege," Jennifer said. In August, her wish to teach at Spalding came true when she was hired on as a full-time faculty member after a year of adjunct teaching at the university. Jennifer infuses social justice into her classes on a macro and micro level. "Spalding has praxis of reflection and dialogue so students truly grow as a person and are not just spoon fed the information," she said.

Jennifer is a person familiar with the power of dialogue. In September, Jennifer was one of two Americans

invited to be a delegate at the European Preparatory Assembly for European Social Reform. The assembly was a chance for social movements across the globe to come together to systematically discuss their individual efforts towards social reform. The discussions helped the various countries represented to make connections between their issues. "It's important that we make those connections across the world," Jennifer said. "Most international groups believe that for a substantial change to happen in the world, it needs to first happen in the United States."

Jennifer understands that sometimes you have to act locally while keeping the global goal in mind. In all her effort, she is doing her part to ensure that Spalding students, as well as the community at large, begin to understand the steps necessary for change. -Liz Nethery