



Shown at a birthday party for Stacy Mosby (left) are her mentor, Jennifer Ferguson, holding daughter, Irelyn and Jennifer's husband James Vickaryous holding son, Evan.

Photo courtesy of Jennifer Ferguson

Mentoring rewarding for both teen and adult

By Wayne Grant
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DAYTONA BEACH — Stacy Mosby's world was about to fall apart last May, just before she was set to graduate from Mainland High School.

Her biological mother, with whom she had not lived since she was 14, had just passed away and her foster parents suddenly announced they could no longer keep children in their home.

Stacy was bound for a group home.

Fortunately, she had a mentor through the Partnership for Children. Jennifer Ferguson had been spending time with Stacy for a year. When things got to crisis mode for the teen, Ms. Ferguson took their relationship to another level.

"I told them I would take her," Ms. Ferguson said. "This was a critical time for Stacy and I didn't want all the hard work we had put into our relationship to fall away."

Ms. Ferguson, a CPA at Raymond James Financial Services in Port Orange and the mother of two small children, took Stacy into her home and became her caregiver last June.

Stacy is now 18 and in January started at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University in Tallahassee with the help of a scholarship available

for foster children.

Stacy said when she first met Ms. Ferguson through the mentor program, she was leery of her intentions.

"I knew she was well off," Stacy said. "So I thought maybe she was doing this to check off her 'good person box.' I really didn't want to give her the time of day."

But she soon found that Ms. Ferguson was different.

"When you're in the system, people tend to underestimate you and talk down to you," Stacy said. "I have to say 'hey, I'm of substance and I'm going somewhere.' Jen seemed to know that from the beginning."

Stacy, who graduated high school magna cum laude, said Ms. Ferguson has played a big part in her success.

"She kept me from falling. I was going through a rough time when my mother died," Stacy said. "A lot of people say they care but she acted on it. I feel like part of her family."

Because of her work, the Partnership for Children has named Ms. Ferguson the 2010 Distinguished Friend of Children. She will receive the award on April 28 at the annual Friends of Children breakfast at Sunset Harbor Yacht Club on Ballough Road.

Stacy said there is no one more deserving. She uses the words "awesome" and "amazing" a lot to describe Ms. Ferguson.

"I just can't express how much she has helped me," she said. "She really was there for me when I needed someone the most."

The experience has also been rewarding for Ms. Ferguson, who includes Stacy in volunteer projects such as a toy drive through the Port Orange/South Daytona Rotary Club, of which she is a member. She said Stacy is part of her family.

"I consider her a daughter," Ms. Ferguson said. "We can't imagine being without her."

The success of the toy drive (525 foster kids received toys last Christmas) was one of the reasons Ms. Ferguson is receiving the Friend of Children award.

Jo Lynn Deal, communications officer for Partnership for Children, said for the past 10 years Ms. Ferguson has been reaching out to companies to donate toys and money.

"She's a tremendous advocate," Ms. Deal said.

Ms. Ferguson said foster children appreciate mentors because they are there voluntarily.

"They have case workers and agency people, and even though they really care, the foster kids know they are doing a job," Ms. Ferguson said.

Stacy agreed.

"Although they care, social workers may have 70 kids,"

she said. "They may want to have a personal relationship with you, but they really can't."

The one-on-one relationship with a mentor is key to a foster child's success, Stacy said.

"It's hard to stay motivated when things are rough," she said. "To have one person who makes you feel special, it really helps to keep you going."

There are many area foster children who need mentors, Ms. Deal said.

Stacy, who is studying theater performance and plans to get a master's degree so she can teach if she doesn't get a "big break," said if people are able to become a mentor they should.

"If God tells you it's something you should do and you have the means, you should," she said. "It's so motivating to have a mentor."

Ms. Ferguson said the volunteers will also be rewarded.

"Stacy has taught me patience and grace," she said. "Grace meaning being kind to ourselves and doing the best we can do and being satisfied with that."

For information about Partnership for Children or the Friends of Children Breakfast, call Jo Lynn Deal at (386) 944-4709 or go to communitypartnershipforchildren.org.