

Dare to Dream Helps Teens Find Their Purpose

Jan Tennyson and her faith-based organization, Dare to Dream Children's Foundation, are in the business of uncovering seed. Let me explain. Dare to Dream works with abused, neglected foster children, teen offenders and orphans, many of whom have succumbed to the emotions and the damages inflicted upon them by their families, the court system and their own lack of self worth.

The typical teenagers whom Dare to Dream volunteers encounter has become "satisfied with what he has-or at least not satisfied, he thinks there is nothing better." (Myles Monroe's book "Understanding your Potential"). The seed within these teenagers is not only dormant but covered up by shame, hostility, guilt, and pain. The general public sees the insecurity, shyness, or brashness of teens who wear hand me down clothing and having wild haircuts and many of us reject them. The potential of these teens (in the United States, Russian orphanages and all over the world) is invisible to us. So we react to the teen based on what we SEE, not by what lies dormant within them. Therein is the tragedy: wasted seed or potential.

But for the grace of God, these teenagers would never rise above their environment, the color of their skin, or the statistics which doom them to failure. Yet, Dare to Dream's mission is to uncover the seed and to create an atmosphere in creative classes, seminars and special events where the teen has an "aha" moment in which they recognize their purpose. That seed is unlimited potential to dream and to realize those dreams in the future and to overcome drug and alcohol abuse, juvenile delinquency and teen pregnancy in their present reality. Jan's goal as founder and Executive Director of Dare to Dream is to help teens recognize their seed; take the first step toward change; and uncover that seed to the world by working from the inside out.

Jan has an unusual background. She looks like she belongs in Highland Park. Her office is near Southern Methodist University in Dallas. Her speech patterns, manners, and fashion sense have all of the outer appearances of success. But there is another story. Jan was abandoned as an infant by parents who provided the physical seed to bring a child into the world, but not the spiritual or emotional watering needed to help her grow. She stayed in a New York Foundling home until she was 2 years old. After several attempts at placement, she was permanently placed and reared in a foster home in Queens, New York by an older couple. This couple offered at least some stability. They paid for and fostered her taking



Jan Tennyson's class of Russian orphans studies Dare to Dream materials to try to uncover their potential.

piano lessons. But Jan and her foster sisters and brothers never knew which of their mom's personalities would show up. One day, love would be lavished upon them. Later in the week, the next hour or the next minute, depending on the circumstances, there would be physical and/or verbal abuse. Of course, Jan was afraid. Upon one misstep, she was threatened that she would be sent back to the Foundling home. Parental love was tentative and fragile. It was only later that Jan and some of the other children learned of the power of forgiveness.

Jan's creative ability allowed the front "stoop" of her home to become her stage on the street where she invited neighborhood children to participate in her presentations. Performances at Carnegie Hall, Town Hall in NYC, radio performances ensued as her star quality was recognized. But at 16, Jan rebelled against the rigidity of always practicing, performing and helping to make her parents "look good". As a result, her foster mom told her that she must pay back every penny of the cost of piano lessons. Managing to graduate from high school, Jan left "the system" and went into the corporate world.

Jan worked for Bank of America, Thoroughbred Racing Organizations and United Airlines in New York City. She married. After moving to Dallas, she learned how to sell advertising for a privately owned subsidiary of the Dallas Morning News. For seven years she was the choreographer for the Chorale at Richland College. In the 80's when her marriage began unraveling (after 17 years), she came up with a course called "The Right Stuff". Jan convinced local experts to instruct the students. This course contained lessons needed by someone from her background or individuals who just wanted refinement. By advertising in the Dallas Morning News, Jan's course attracted kids from private schools.

Some topics included: How to eat difficult foods, Time management, How to

dress, How to dance, and How to be a well rounded person

Jan's courses benefited everyone (both rich and poor). But in 1987, Jan finally surrendered to her dream and began to minister full time to children through an organization she called "Dare to Dream". For twenty years, Dare to Dream Children's Foundation has provided services to over 20,000 abused, neglected and foster children in the Dallas area and in orphanages overseas. These services include providing educational seminars, special events, and donating clothing, furniture, vehicles and other items.

Her budget is totally dependent on the generosity of those who believe in helping children. Volunteers offer activities that encourage and engage the youth. Some organizations that currently benefit from Dare to Dream include:

Dallas County Marzelle C. Hill Transition Center, Texas Youth Commission-Cottrell House, YMCA Casa Shelter, and Buckner Children's Home. The volunteers use their stories of overcoming adversity to communicate this message: "Don't worry about what you don't have. Dream and fulfill your call on your life. Being a Christian is not boring. It is a relationship which is the springboard for the discovery of your seed. You may have an invisible Father, but there is a visible Jesus."

"Dare to Dream has received The Independent Charities Seal of Excellence as a result of vigorous review and has been able to certify, document, and demonstrate on an annual basis that they meet the highest standards of public accountability, program effectiveness, and cost effectiveness." Source: <http://www.dare-todream-dallas.org/>

Because of her passion, enthusiasm and message of hope, Jan has been invited to speak to adult audiences and to kids in foster care systems all over the country. In 2008, her efforts will center on a new vision:

- Identifying someone who is willing to walk with her for a few years in developing

and inspiring the organization to the next level, and who is innately a dreamer and visionary.

- Increasing the public awareness of the organization and the numbers of volunteers who devote their efforts to uncovering the seed in abused, neglected youth and those in temporary foster care.

- Increasing donations to the Dare to Dream organization which is recognized for its fiscal responsibility.

- Increasing prayer support for Dare to Dream

Over the last 20 years a large number of newspaper articles have been written about Dare to Dream and a number of commendations letters and awards given including:

Some Awards include: 2007 Texas Governor's Lone Star Achievement Award, 2007 Ebby Halliday Rose of Distinction Award, 2006 Outstanding Woman of Today - Altrusa International, Richardson, Texas - to Jan Tennyson, 2006 Best in America seal by Local Independent Charities, and 2003 Faithfulness Award - Texas Youth Commission.

Commendations include letters from the Governors, Mayors and the office of the President of the United States.

In 2007 Governor Perry awarded Jan Tennyson with the Lonestar Achievement Award. Lonestar achievers have a minimum of 15 years of serving others. This award recognizes the outstanding service of a rare individual who has impacted the delivery of social services in Texas.

Yet, one of the biggest awards she has ever received was in the form of a poem, written by a child in a group home to honor Jan for uncovering her seed although it had been covered with fear.

Dare to Dream Poem

I was alone and afraid

In a world I never made

I closed my eyes and I dared to dream
Of a world of laughter and bright shining faces

When I opened my eyes

I was surrounded by sad
and hardened faces

It was then that I realized

Those are the faces of laughter
_____ when you Dared to Dream.

For speaking engagements call 214 599 9563 x 3, Jan Tennyson, Dare to Dream Children's Foundation, 5401 N. Central Expressway, Suite 320, Dallas, Texas 75205, www.daretodream-dallas.org.