



Student Stories

How CATC changes lives, gives hope and opportunity



"I thought I was bad, but when I saw those kids, I thought, 'I'm nothing like them.' They would talk back, cuss at their teachers.. always in arguments about petty things...didn't do their work, and this was their life... I realized this was the path I was going down."

-- Ellen P., CATC graduate, Bridging the Gap student 2012- 2013

When she was 10 months old, her mother dropped her off at day care and never came back. Ellen refers to the people who adopted her--the day care lady and her husband-- as Ms. Bea and Mr. Hop, for reasons she can barely recall now. Or she calls them her grandparents because they are much older. Mr. Hop passed before she turned five, but she has loving memories of cowboy movies, Mr. Hop taking her side, and Hostess goodies from a store near the steel mill where he worked. "I loved him. He loved me, too."

The love of Ms. Bea and Mr. Hop early in life probably saved Ellen, but there were many adjustments. Kids teased her for wearing hand-me-downs that were too small, for not having any parents to stand up when her name was called at school functions, and for a certain aloofness that Ellen attributes to life experiences. "My maturity level was greater...my peers seemed immature."

Ellen didn't take well to people teasing or talking about her and "I beat people up all the time." In seventh grade she stopped doing homework and the As and Bs she'd earned in elementary school turned to Cs and Ds. The cycle of teasing, being bullied, and responding by fighting--in a way, becoming a bully herself, Ellen realized-- continued. "My Spanish teacher called me Mike Tyson."

In her freshman year Ellen found herself in a school for bad kids, and that's when she decided to change her life. "All the rest of the kids were bad all the way around, and I realized this was the path I was going down." A math teacher there, who remains one of Ellen's mentors to this day, knew that Ellen was different. "Why are you here?" she asked, "you're not bad. There's something bothering you and you need to figure it out." Ten days later, Ellen emerged a different girl.

CATC was a chance to make up credits. Ellen figured it would be "super lame," but "I came for a quarter and stayed a year." Ms. Jamie sparked a passion for art in the ceramics studio. Ms. Laura was always available to help make decisions and "think out loud." Ms. Deb helped Ellen cope with issues at school. The assertiveness that led Ellen to stand up for herself in misguided ways like fighting, she learned to channel it into speaking up, asking questions, and saying what she wanted. She was accepted into Bridging the Gap, graduated, and hopes to land a job at Cincinnati Children's. That will be great training for her ultimate goal, to become a child clinical psychologist, which is what she'll study at UC Blue Ash starting this fall..

"CATC confirmed who I am. It gave me the opportunity to use my gifts and showed me sometimes you have to get out of your comfort zone." In the end, though, Ellen realizes it was up to her. "Someone can reach out to you but you have to want the opportunity enough to take it." Ms. Bea always says 'you can lead a horse to water...' "I didn't understand what that meant. Now I do."