

By Henry Bury

THE INTELLIGENCER

Cindy Courneyea turned to Abigail's Centre to help get her life back on track.

She's still there, only now she's helping other single mothers get on with their lives. She is also volunteering in other ways, from doing yard work to tidying up inside the Station Street premises.

"I can't say enough about Abigail's Centre," said the 28-year-old single mother of two children. "They helped me get my education and the confidence to achieve my goals. And even though I'm working, I still come in to help out any way I can.

"I owe them."

Abigail's Centre for early child development and parenting helps both children and their parents. While their children are supervised by child care experts, parents pursue academic upgrading, further develop their social skills, home and personal management and personal enhancement/empowerment.

Courneyea came to the centre in February of last year so her two children could interact with other children "and so that I could get back into the swing of everyday life after being home for three years."

She left a full-time job as a health care aide to be a stay-at-home mom. She has two children, Nathan, 6, and Jose, 3.

But when Courneyea decided last year to return to the workforce, she chose Abigail's Place as a stepping stone.

The centre has been assisting her complete her Grade 12 diploma through correspondence (she should have it finished next month) and is currently arranging for her to enrol on-line at Athabasca University for the medical lab technician program.

Courneyea has a college diploma in health care aide from Georgian College in Barrie but wants a career change "because it's a more challenging profession."

When she's not working as a part-time health care aide, Courneyea is at Abigail's Centre.

"I'm giving something back to them by volunteering in any way I can," she said.

She has done the yard work outside, picking up garbage around the building next to the beer store, raking, weeding and cutting the lawn.

She helps clean the inside of the two-storey building, by sweeping and vacuuming, picking up trash, sorting things and keeping the craft area tidy.

A lot of the other single mothers at the centre have turned to Courneyea for advice.

"I find a lot of moms look up to me because I have finished college, am older and have a good relationship with my children's father. They turn to me for advice for all sorts of problems."

Courneyea said she strongly encourages other moms to finish their schooling and has only been too glad to help them with their academic courses and homework.

"I try and get behind the girls. A lot of them need that positive support to succeed and so I try and get right behind them and provide that support," she said.

She acknowledged it's difficult being a single mother "but it's not impossible. Abigail's Centre will help you find the right connections you

need to achieve your goals."

Courneyea had high praise for Gloria Bentley, the centre's associate director.

"She is like a mother, sister and friend, all in one. She has been behind me 100 per cent and I'm grateful for that," she said.

Bentley, in turn, is also grateful to

have someone like Courneyea at Abigail's Centre.

"Cindy, right now, is more of a mentor for the other moms who are coming here," she said.

"Most moms are trying to find a direction for themselves and Cindy is a good support network for these parents. They relate



well to her."

Bentley said Courneyea also serves as a good example that single parents can succeed despite their individual circumstances.

She is also extremely appreciative of Courneyea's labour contribution.

"Basically anything that needs to be done to keep this building in order, Cindy will do. She is an exceptional volunteer," said Bentley.