

Interview with Jacqueline Dalt

No Date/ Location given

START OF INTERVIEW

Jane Ryan: (JR): I am pleased to be interviewing Jacqueline Dalt, who will talk to us about her experiences with the Women's Center as a consumer of their services. Jacki will bring in the information about how and why she happened to utilize the Women's Center and her experience with it. She'll begin by telling us a little about her background and then we'll move into some general questions. Jacki, I'm delighted you're able to do this with us.

Jacqueline Dalt (JD): And I'm very happy to do it because I feel the Women's center helped me so much.

JR: Fine. Tell us a little bit about yourself.

JD: I was born in the U.P. and lived in Iron Mountain. I lived in the U.P. almost all my life, I did work in Milwaukee for a very short while but then came back to the U.P.

JR: And what community were you, did you grow up in Marquette?

JD: No, in Iron Mountain...

JR: Iron Mountain

JD: Which is about 90 miles from Iron Mountain

JR: And what brought you to Marquette?

JD: I had been married, oh, for twenty years. It was not a happy marriage, and I finally realized that I wanted to go on and do something different, and I needed more education to be able to put quality into my life. And I was taking courses through Northern. The instructors would come to Iron Mountain at night, so I began taking a few courses through Northern at night, and then decided I couldn't finish or complete too many to get a degree. So that's when I decided I wanted to go back to Northern.

JR: How did, what field were you interested in? How did you happen to choose that?

JD: Well I was interested in business but ended up as a Social Worker, which somehow my life was steered that way. And I found that I liked the field.

JR: And no doubt you brought your business talents with you also

JD: Yes which were very helpful to being a Social Worker. I could write grants, I knew about budgeting and things like that which are very important.

JR: Sure. Did you have children during this period, and were they with you during the period of your studies?

JD: Yes I did. My four children were with me when I started at Northern in Iron Mountain, but my two older children, my oldest daughter was in college and my second son was going into the Marines, he had finished high school. And I had decided at that point with my two younger ones still not in the higher grades, I decided that a move would be better during this period of time.

JR: So they came with you to Marquette?

JD: The two younger came with me and the two older were out of the home by that time.

JR: Right, so your primary reason for coming was to complete your studies. And were you challenged in terms of raising children, and earning a living, and going to school? That burden seems to be quite common among...

JD: I had a very good job. And I was very successful in it, but I realized in order to support my family, the two younger, I needed to get training in a better-paying job.

JR: Alright, at what point did you connect with the Women's Center? Was it in existence when you arrive at Northern or?

JD: You know, I've thought about it and I don't know. I decided to come here and go on campus, and see about a lot of things: how to actually move and find housing, and also how to enroll as a full-time student. And I don't know if, maybe I had heard there was a Women's Center here. I really don't know, but when I came here I didn't know really where to go or anyplace. And it dawned on me, "Hey, maybe this Women's Center would be..." And I walked in there.

JR: And so it was on campus at that time?

JD: It was on campus. It was on campus for quite a while during when I moved up here.

JR: In the `70s then, you were here in the late `70s?

JD: Yeah. I came here in `75.

JR: Five, okay. Alright, so you walked into the Women's Center office, and what happened there?

JD: Well I think at this time there were a lot of women... that were starting to be empowered, you know? They were in marriages that were bad and I think women were deciding that they weren't going to stay in these marriages. And they had, I think, a few women coming in at that time. And they understood and I think they actually took the financial aid person and came down and talked to me. They also told me about student housing.

JR: So they really eased you into this new situation and connected you with the proper resources?

JD: Well, yes. What I liked about it was they didn't do it for me, they just showed me what to do. And I liked that because it seemed like before that everybody was telling me what to do, and I like that feeling of them thinking that I was able to do it and would help me, but wouldn't do it for me.

JR: And that's where that term, empowering keeps coming into all these conversations. It was to help women know that they were capable and then direct them to, in some of the ways they could connect with what was important to them.

JD: Because, now as I look back, when you're in a marriage and my ex-husband completely dominated me and I thought I had no value what-so-ever. And yet I was doing, I was employed, I was successful. I actually was supporting the family fully, but I didn't think that...I didn't know or even realize what I was doing. That I was capable, but when somebody keeps telling you, "You aren't," you know, you believe it after a while.

JR: So would you say that the Women's Center was critical in your turn around in helping? You must have known to some degree inside that you were capable but you couldn't get ahold, it wasn't reinforced until you came to campus?

JD: I couldn't, yeah. And I think they reinforced it, they supported me, and they were excited about what I was doing.

JR: Sounds very good, sounds very good. So how much connection did you maintain with them as you were going through school? Or once you got into the right setting and got your studies on, was that pretty much it?

JD: No. When I was on campus I'd go to the Women's center and it was smaller and there was always somebody you could talk to them. I was doing some work study and I think it was one semester I worked there. I met some other women that were coming back and.

JR: Was there support among the women, the other clients?

JD: Oh yes we met...

JR: Did you find each other and?

JD: We met, I met other women and we were supportive of one another. They had excellent, excellent workshops. They had assertiveness training which I needed. And one workshop I took, and it has helped me so much was Active Listening.

JR: Could you describe that a little bit?

JD: It was listening to what people are saying and don't be ready there to just jump in and talk about yourself. It was a conversation you give and take, which has helped me, I think, all of the years.

JR: Probably in your profession as a Social Worker but also just personally?

JD: Yes.

JR: Yes. I can appreciate that, and it's something I need to work on [laughs]. We all do I guess. So you mentioned workshops, were there any others? The Assertiveness Training, and definitely I've heard women speak of how helpful that was, gaining, you know, the confidence that you could speak out.

JD: Yeah.

JR: Were there support groups, per-say, where women would just get together and chat about common problems?

JD: Yeah. They'd have, I think they were pure leaders, they would sort of focus on the group so we wouldn't go on all kinds of tangents, but I learned a lot in those groups. And they were so positive and so supportive.

JR: Do you recall any of the Staff's names at that point in time?

JD: I remember Holly Greer, I remember Judy, I think her name was Judith Russell.

JR: She was a counselor, I believe, on the staff.

JD: Yeah. She was, I think, one of the first counselors.

JR: Okay. Can you give us a little more now, how that led you when you got your degree, and did you continue then to get support or did you find you were always, not just from the Women's Center but as a woman in a position? I think you mentioned to me you worked for the county of the State?

JD: I worked for the county. As I went along I didn't go to the Women's Center as much. But I found it convenient when they were located on campus. When they left campus I took some workshops but it was like they had helped me and I was able to move on.

JR: Yeah, yeah. Give us a little bit about your career though. I know something of it and it's just very interesting. You worked, not in an internship, but just in a basic position and earned your way into a...?

JD: Well, what happened, I had graduated and my children, it was in the spring, and my children were still in school and I had decided to wait until they were done with school and make...decide what I was going to do. And one of my friends who worked for the department of Social services told me about a job, a six-week job. And I thought, "Good, that'll be perfect! That'll bridge this gap and I'll be able to make some money." And I went there and I did just some...what I did was I would read files, they were overcome with paper. And what I did was read papers and determine what should be kept and what should be discarded. And it was utterly fascinating, I could understand why people were in the positions they were in. I read a lot of hard poverty, and health affected people. And then I think I worked there about, oh, maybe a month and the

director who was new had just come, and he talked to me about a job. He was, that he was going to start. And he showed it to me and it was like [exasperated] “What?”...

JR: A perfect match!

JD: It was! And I think he saw it too.

JR: Do you recall who that was?

JD: His name was Dave Burns.

JR: Dave Burns, okay. And he was, I think you had mentioned to me another time, very supportive throughout your career...

JD: Yeah

JR: With that program and vice-a-versa.

JD: Yeah, he...It was like he was confident in my ability, and he left me sort of, get, organize this project and he was _____ but you know, he didn't...what didn't watch or he left me go and if I had problems I went to him, otherwise he just left me _____.

JR: He knew you were capable. So did you stay with that organization and that kind of work or again, fill us in on your career because I think it's an interesting one.

JD: I worked for the Department of Social Services for twenty-eight years. I designed a project and it was a project with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. And my project was awarded the most innovative social problem, the most innovative social problem. And I went to Washington D.C.

JR: And what basically did it deal with? The program that you'd institute?

JD: The program dealt with finding resources for people needing hospital care, and they had no funding. And I would go into the hospital, interview the people, and found different programs so they could receive healthcare.

JR: Is this an ongoing program, it certainly would be timely now in 2013.

JD: No, the sad part is they kept cutting the funding and that and when I retired the program was eliminated.

JR: Discontinued? Hopefully absorbed in some way but probably not.

JD: Well, not as much, it was like they took my baby.

JR: Well you and I were acquainted also in mental health programming, you sat on the board of Pathways for, I don't know, how many years?

JD: About seventeen.

JR: Seventeen years, again, you can't direct any of this, or connect it directly with the Women's Center, but your ability to work with people in need or challenged, obviously spilled over. Can you describe a little bit, how you got involved?

JD: Well my son was in a very serious accident, and he had a brain stem injury. And I worked with mental health for a while on trying to get some programs that he would fit in. And then the mental health workers helped me at times to get people with documentation so that they would be eligible for Medicaid and they were very cooperative. And they helped in my work to be able to develop that report with them.

JR: Okay, and so did you approach them about being on the board or they come after you to serve?

JD: No. I noticed there was an opening and I applied. And then I worked in the courthouse and a lot of the commissioners knew me because of working in the courthouse.

JR: Okay, so it was a nice blending of programs? And do you feel anyway that you're a mentor, carrying what you'd learned from the Women's Center and in your life to other women? You obviously encountered women in your work who were challenged financially and educationally. Do you feel your life experience helped you to help them?

JD: I feel like because of my life, I have report with people that had struggles. I think I was a better worker because I understood where a lot of people were coming from.

JR: And they probably could sense that in you, you know.

JD: They probably could.

JR: Very good. Let me see, I think you've really indicated one of the questions I have: Do you think your life changed because of your involvement with the Women's Center. Anything you want to elaborate on?

JD: My life was certainly entrenched and was able to support my family. I went on and got a job that provided wonderful healthcare benefits. I had a pension, which I wouldn't have had.

JR: So it's a combination of your having the grit to move ahead and take control of your life with the support of, and I'm sure there are other significant people, but places like the Women's Center really did make a difference for you.

JD: Well the Women's Center was a start. I wanted something but I really didn't know what to do. And how I ever walked into the Women's Center. I think I was guided.

JR: It was supposed to happen somehow?

JD: It was supposed to happen.

JR: Now have you kept in touch at all with the activities at the Women's Center? They've ebbed and flowed, but for example there was the spouse abuse shelter now, there's other programs that they're doing. Have you been in touch or involved at all in that?

JD: I was active in the Spouse Abuse program, right at the beginning before they had the shelter. The police, if a women had to be taken out of the home for protection, they were bringing them to homes in the area.

JR: And we've talked to some of the people, actually many of them were the Founding Mothers who would shelter those women. And that's apparently when it became so obvious we needed a place that could be known to shelter people. So you were at the ground-floor there?

JD: Yeah. I was in a very abusive marriage so I knew _____

JR: What that meant, okay. Well Jackie, if there's anything else you'd wish to add, feel free to add it, otherwise we'll close and it'll go on the record.

JD: Okay, thank you. I am so indebted to the Women's Center and now as I look at it, some of the younger women don't realize what a struggle it was.

JR: To get started? Yes.

JD: To get started. It was a new field.

JR: And I think maybe you and I have talked about it, it was one of the motivations for getting these stories on the record so that younger people will have a resource to look back on and say, “Hey this hasn’t always been here.” And we need to work to keep it going, that’s the other concern. If we lose the focus then it’s harder to raise funds, it’s harder to convince people of the need. So you’re doing a service by sharing your story, it’s wonderful.

JD: I’m very happy to _____

JR: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW