



My name is Jennifer and I have been benefiting from the WomenGive scholarship since the summer of 2008. I'd like to tell you all a little bit about my life, but most importantly about the role of The United Way in my life, and the uniquely inspired role of the WomenGive scholarship in the community.

When I realized that I was going to have a baby, I instantly knew that I was going to be a single mother, and education was the only way that I could be a good provider and a good mom. I've spent most of my life in very low paying jobs, and have become all too familiar with life on the bottom rung of society. The thought of holding onto that rung with a baby in my arms terrified me.

My son's dad has lost his life to alcohol. He's still living, breathing, working, even, but his life is gone. I was living in Durango when I found out about my tiny surprise, and I knew that staying near him would suck the life out of both of us.

I came to Fort Collins to find the shelter of family, as well as the opportunity of education. I began at Front Range Community College 2 days after moving here, which worked very well while I was pregnant. I could work, and my grades were good. But as all the mothers reading this will know, being pregnant is the easiest part of parenthood. You have a baby, but he's nice and quiet.

After I had my son, I continued to try and struggle through school but failed. I couldn't afford daycare, even for two classes two days a week, let alone time to study. When I quit school to find work, I couldn't afford daycare while I was at work because earning just ten dollars an hour made me too 'rich' to receive child care assistance from the state. Full time daycare equaled over half of my monthly income. The choice between rent and heat, or food and gasoline, is shocking once you have to make it.

I took a lower paying job in food service just to be able to put my son in daycare so that I could work, make money, have a place to live, and feed myself and my child. The feeling of spending more time at work than with my newborn is one that I can scarcely describe. The feeling of having my own child be more comfortable with the 'daycare



lady' than with me is one that I am unwilling to describe. As the dawn-to-dusk work week started taking its toll, I began to search desperately for an out, for any glimmer of hope in a world where struggling parents are so often punished so severely.

I called United Way of Larimer County on a whim; I don't even remember now what inspired me to do it. The woman on the phone, whose name I don't even know, said she wasn't immediately aware of any help for single moms hoping to go to school, but she'd look into it and call me back. Fat chance, I thought. She took the time. Five minutes out of her work day actually saved my life.

The WomenGive scholarship is unique. It doesn't offer help as the state does, grudgingly, only for the barest of essentials if even that. It offers real help, tangible help; but much more than that it offers real hope, tangible hope. WomenGive says to women, "we see your plight, we see your worth, and we respect you and your potential".

WomenGive is not a handout to the poor. This scholarship is an investment that guarantees exponential returns to the community. Educated mothers will have educated children. Educated mothers will become prosperous, significant members of society, not marginal and meager, burdens on the state, prone to disaster at every turn. Most importantly, those who are elevated through outreach will reach out and elevate others. The returns are exponential.

I know what WomenGive has done for me. I have grown intellectually and personally. I have gained the critical thinking skills and abilities needed to succeed in the professional world. I've gained a greater understanding of other cultures, and best of all an understanding of the greatness of charitable acts. Allowing a mother to put her child or children into quality daycare while she pursues an education may seem simple to some, but this very act, so lacking, so absent anywhere else in our community, has taken, in my case, a mother and a child off the bottom rung and onto the plateau of achievement.