

Confident in her future

Jackson High grad overcame struggles on way to success

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From the outside, Jackson senior Lauren Bennett looks the essence of the high-achieving, highly active teen.

She's senior class president, a cheerleader, president of the National Honor Society and a member of Teens Against Tobacco Use, Drug Free Youth and Leaders of the Pack, a mentoring program for freshman. She also has the kind of robust exuberance that suits the young.

But it hasn't been an easy road for Bennett, who graduates this week. She's faced a set of struggles that, she says, have helped her grow into who she is today.

"There's alcoholism in my family," she said. "I struggled with this -- I didn't have the tools for coping."

Throughout her life, both of Bennett's parents were alcoholics, she said. Bennett's father, whom she lives with, recovered from his addiction two years ago, she said.

"It was like he came out of a brand new manufacturing company," Bennett said. "I'm so thankful for that."

When younger, Bennett had to care for her parents.

"I had to grow up from an early age and take care of the household," she said. "Do the laundry."

Today, Bennett and her father are very close and do everything together, she said. They will bike the Seattle to Portland race -- for the second time -- this summer. They go to dinner and meetings together, and are both involved in a Christian group that works with juveniles in prison.

These days, Bennett has more confidence than she did when she was younger and feels she can make a difference, she said.

One thing that helped her achieve that was the support of counselors and teachers at school, including Bev Robertson, Lyn Lauzon and Judi Montgomery.

"I could name a million," Bennett said, referring to other adults she's become close to at school. "God kind of takes over and puts good people in your life for certain reasons."

Getting involved with activities helped too, she said. In middle school, Bennett focused heavily on ballet lessons, but had little extracurricular involvement outside of that.



Enterprise/CHRIS GOODENOW Jackson senior Lauren Bennett discusses her upcoming graduation, and future, Monday, June 11, in the library at Jackson High School.

As a freshman, she decided to run for ASB office on a whim.

"I was just this awkward freshman," Bennett said. "I was shocked I won actually."

That year, Bennett fell in love with the concept that you could change things for the better, she said. That's partly what's fueled her involvement in activities, including Teens Against Tobacco and Drug Free Youth.

"I have a lot to give right now," she said.

Bennett will attend St. Lawrence University in Canton, N.Y., next fall. She plans to major in psychology and minor in French and possibly education.

"I want to be a high school counselor because of people who've pushed me up and challenged me so much," she said.

She'd also someday like to work in education in Africa.

But for now, she's realizing it will be hard to leave the people she's grown close to at Jackson.

"With my parents splitting up this year and everything changing so quickly, it's weird I'm going to New York," she said.

She faced a different loss this August, when her grandmother died. It taught her that things can disappear quickly, she said.

"Every moment is so precious," she said. "Every moment you have you need to live to its fullest extent."