



## Stillwater volunteer makes a difference



Jessica Knights volunteers for Payne County Youth Services on behalf of her church, Lakeview Church. Knights said experiences in her years as a youth have helped her in her role as a volunteer.

### By Chase Rheam

One woman's experience as a youth is guiding her to help current youth as a volunteer.

Jessica Knights grew up in Yale but has spent the past 14 years in Stillwater. During her time in Yale, she came to Payne County Youth Services for counseling as a result of things occurring in her family.

"I come from a very dysfunctional family and that background and having these services when I was younger, it made a big impact in my life and so I want to give back in the same way that was given to me when I was younger," said Knights.

She received services when she was 5 or 6 years old and again as a teenager in junior high with her older brother who attended the high school. Now, as a member of Lakeview Church, an opportunity arose for Knights to give back.

"It sort of started through my church small group, we had an outreach small group, and we all got to choose a place in the community that we wanted to serve at or be a part of, so I chose to be a part of Payne County Youth Services," said Knights.

As part of her volunteer duties, Knights does everything from folding and packaging newsletters to tackling the smaller details of fundraisers. Tasks change every time she volunteers, she said. The number of other church mem-

bers needed also changes.

"I don't think we've ever had a group less than seven," said Knights.

Executive Director of Payne County Youth Services Janet Fultz said Knights and others from Lakeview have helped. Their support was seen in this year's "An Evening to Remember," an annual event the Saturday before Valentine's Day, said Fultz.

"They were wonderful as always because not only did Jessica come help with, I think, getting some of the pamphlets and promotional information out," said Fultz. "(She) also promoted it through their church, I think, via email and some of those kinds of things."

Helping set up and being there to pack and clean after the event, volunteers like Knights have been important. "We have been very blessed the last few years with a lot of volunteer groups," said Fultz. "We've gone from using around 40 or 50 volunteers four years ago to around 400."

Knights recalled a memorable moment as part of her work.

"I think that the most memorable was the time that we got to spend at the (youth) shelter, when our group went out there — and interacting with the kids and actually being there and seeing how our efforts pay off in other ways," said Knights. "It was probably the most fulfilling."

One particular visit sticks out in her mind.

"When we first went to the shelter, there was a little girl and she was so precious and you just wanted to hug her, but she wasn't ready for that interaction yet," said Knights. "So, we would say hi, we'd walk by and then before the evening ended, she was outside interacting with us and that was something I didn't expect to happen in that short period of time ..."

Receiving help from the same non-profit organization, Knights said, she knows her work makes a difference.

"I know that some people don't understand that," said Knights. "They think it's just a few hours here or a few hours there, but I know for myself, when I was younger, just having that person actually listen to my felt needs, whether they were rational or not, made a huge difference. It changed the way I saw because a lot of times in those situations, you don't trust everybody. So, just having that person to listen, it makes a difference and it's not just writing (on) a piece of paper. It's something that can impact somebody's life."

Fultz said Knights' work is appreciated.

"Her volunteerism is very important to us and then she has been able to expand that significantly and like she said, if there's a need, she'll go figure out how to meet it if they possibly can," said Fultz.

Knights said knowing who she was and seeing where she came from with the knowledge of not having to be a victim of her circumstances led her to become the person she is today. She hopes to use her wisdom to help those in similar situations. "I would like to further my volunteering to be more involved with the kids, to spend more time at the shelter and to be a positive role model," she said, "and that's kind of my vision, to be able to do more stuff with them." 