

Idaho girl makes fast friends at her first youth track.

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BUILDING ON EACH OTHER'S STRENGTHS.

In the summer of 2005, 13-year-old Karissa McCurdy went with her mother to a mental health conference in Sacramento, California. Although her mother, Cynthia McCurdy, is very involved in mental health issues here in Idaho, this was the first time Karissa participated in a youth track. Nervous at first, the other kids quickly put her at her ease and she went on to have a wonderful time.



Karissa's story:

In July, my Mom said I was going to go to a youth track. I didn't know what that meant. I kept thinking of a track as something you run on. Mom explained it to me, but I still didn't get it. Finally Mom said, "You'll like it."

When we got to the hotel in California it was so hot outside all I wanted to do was go swimming. The next morning, when it came time to go to the track, I didn't want to go. I was so scared all I wanted to do was stay in the hotel room. There was a knock on the door. My mother opened the door and I saw five girls about my age. They said, "Girlfriend come go with us." One of the girls, Whitney, was so sweet. She helped me get ready by fixing my hair. Soon we were all on our way.

We were like peas in a pod. The girls had been to youth tracks before so they knew what to do. I wasn't scared anymore.

The classes were great. All of our youth leaders made us feel comfortable. My favorite leader was Victor; he still emails me today.

The youth leaders taught me how to share my feelings. They also taught me about the rose and thorn. Everyday they would ask about my rose of the day — good thing — and thorn — bad thing. It really made me think. Even now my mom asks me about my rose and thorn.

Whitney and I became best friends. We had so much fun talking, swimming, doing hair, going to class, and riding in the boat. We still email each other once a week.

When it came time to leave it was hard to say goodbye. All the girls were so nice to me — we were like sisters. They even gave me a card the day I left.

Back in Idaho my mother and I had a chance to tell the Idaho Council on Children's Mental Health (ICCMH) about the conference and the youth track. I thanked them for making it possible for me to go.

The youth track was a great experience. I learned so much and I love my new friends. Maybe I'll get a chance to go again. I hope so.

...Youth can experience the same thing as Karissa....right here in Idaho. The System of Care conference, May 1-2, 2006, includes a track just for youth. Youth track sessions the include:

Empowering stories from parents and children affected by mental disorders.

"Unmasking the Real You" — A group art project
"Ask a Therapist" — your opportunity to interview a therapist

And much more!

Admission to the conference is free, but seating is limited.

For more information, call the Idaho Careline at 1-800-926-2588 or the Idaho Federation of Families at 1-800-905-3436. Check out the website: www.idahosystemofcare.org



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For more information about the Idaho System of Care and services and support available in your area, call the Idaho CareLine by dialing 211 or 1-800-926-2588.

You also can contact the Idaho Federation of Families, an Idaho-based support organization for families with children affected by SED, on the Web at www.idffcmh.org or by calling 1-800-905-3436.