



A FIRST BREATH SUCCESS STORY



By Sara Barber

LA CROSSE COUNTY - As a result of support and encouragement from the La Crosse County Health Department, enrollment in the *First Breath* program, and unyielding determination, Jennifer was able to say she was smoke free thirty days into her pregnancy. Jennifer, a 20-year-old La Crosse woman, had been a pack-a-day smoker since the age of 15.

When Jennifer found out she was pregnant six months ago, she went to the La Crosse County Health Department for prenatal care services. There she began working with Dawn McFadden who introduced Jennifer to *First Breath*. Jennifer said that enrollment in the *First Breath* program provided both education and support. "Without it," she said "I couldn't have quit." After her meetings with McFadden, Jennifer would leave saying "I can't smoke. I'm having a baby. I can't do this." Jennifer would think of the sickening bottle she saw in McFadden's office filled with cigarette butts, beer bottle caps, and filthy water and think, "I have to quit smoking."

Jennifer's favorite aspect of the *First Breath* program was the baby shower the La Crosse County Health Department held for women in the county enrolled in the program. "The speakers and the support from other mothers-to-be were outstanding," said Jennifer. In order to quit smoking and stay quit it has been necessary for Jennifer to maintain a busy lifestyle and keep her mind off of cigarettes. This has not always been easy to do. Many of Jennifer's close family members smoke, and though they are supportive of Jennifer's desire to stay smoke free, they themselves are not ready to make a quit attempt at this time. The baby shower gave Jennifer both an outlet to discuss these struggles with her family and a time to have fun.

In addition to learning strategies about living harmoniously with her family while she is pregnant, Jennifer is involved in activities she could never have imagined herself doing as a smoker. For example, during the summer she went canoeing and hiking at a local park with her boyfriend who has also recently quit smoking. Jennifer has been enjoying her life without cigarettes. "Quitting smoking," she said, "gave me hope, and it gave me energy."