This program has helped me shine,” Emma said with a shy smile. “I’ve overcome many barriers like communication skills, and I’m learning new ways to cope with my anxiety.

“I’m also planning to go back to the adult high school to finish my credits.”

For Emma, whose future once seemed beyond reach, that’s an incredible change. What could make such a difference? You. And Courage & Renewal.

Your gift helped Emma find the courage to begin to step beyond her disadvantaged life and start to create a brighter future.

Like some teens in rural Nova Scotia, Emma grew up in a precarious position, with few opportunities to support herself.

Emma hadn’t finished high school and though she’d been living on her own for some years she continued to struggle to find work, manage her money, and live healthily. Without these skills, it was almost certain Emma would keep struggling.

Thankfully, you gave Emma the inner strength to pursue a better life. You gave her a chance to grow and experience a trustworthy community while also learning the fundamentals of independent living at a youth program called HeartWood.

Before, Emma struggled with social anxiety, always worrying about the way others judged her. When she first started coming to the group she was so self-conscious she couldn’t even tie her hair back.

“Now, Emma feels like she can be genuine and show more of her whole self. Maybe that seems like a small thing, but for Emma it’s huge.

You made that possible by providing the Courage & Renewal practices that helped Emma see what matters is not how she looks but her actions and convictions.

At HeartWood, Courage & Renewal facilitator Brian Braganza used Circle of Trust activities to help youth explore their dreams, fears, and hopes. The teens talked about how they could use their gifts to help themselves and others.

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here must be something more we can do,” people said after the murder. There was — and you’ve done it! Keep reading for the story of how your generosity helped a community after a heartbreaking tragedy . . .

Northeast rural Vermont is a tough area that’s seen its share of murders, break-ins, thefts, and domestic violence. There are high levels of poverty and drug abuse, too.

In the fall of 2013, a local woman lost her life to domestic violence. But the shock of the murder wasn’t the only thing that broke people’s hearts — it was that things like this kept happening.

At her candlelight vigil, community members huddled together in the cold autumn air and wondered what they could do differently. “There must be something . . .”

Thanks to your support, a group called Community Allies for Safety, Trust and Respect took shape the following year. Courage & Renewal facilitators and practices have guided their work. It was a vital first step!

Almost 100 people attended Community Allies’ first dinner forum on safety. Tara Reynolds, a Courage & Renewal facilitator, guided the conversation.

“You helped Tara create an optimistic, hopeful community dialogue.”

“First we were afraid no one would come,” said Tara, “But lots of people came and we created an optimistic, hopeful experience that touched people in a really deep way.

“The most commonly used words that evening were connection, community, and trust.”

“By having these events, Community Allies has lifted the veil, taken the shame off coming forward, and sent the message that needing help is okay. It gave people a voice,” said Anna Pirie, who directs the local domestic violence prevention agency.

You helped Tara create an optimistic, hopeful community dialogue.
Carol Zaagsma was in her sixth year as a pastor and was feeling weary. She had just finished the arduous, painful process of closing a church, and needed something more life-giving next.

Thanks to you, Reverend Carol found clarity and courage to fulfill her dream of giving kids a safe place to learn and play during the summer.

Oftentimes, pastors and their congregations focus inwardly. But after she attended Soul Leaders, a Courage & Renewal retreat series for Minnesota United Methodist clergy, it dawned on Carol that she wanted to meet the needs of her community in other ways.

“I am grateful to Courage & Renewal and Soul Leaders for opening up this God-sized dream in me,” said Carol, “and for granting me the wisdom to go with it as it took a different shape.”

Carol’s dream came from hearing that the kids in Bloomington, Minnesota, were falling behind in school.

Students were spending the first three months of the school year just catching up on everything they’d forgotten during the summer.

Carol wanted to help, but wondered what she could do for school kids. Then a local substitute teacher asked if Carol’s church could be the venue for a summer program for elementary kids. Carol recalled the words she’d adopted as her mantra during Soul Leaders: *Give voice to what’s possible.*

“Let’s make it happen!” she replied with determination.

Carol partnered with two substitute teachers to open a summer school camp at her church where kids in grades 1-6 would have time for reading, math, and social activities. Kids in Carol’s camp improved in their reading skills as much as five months of school work. They returned to school ready and excited to learn. “It’s meeting a great need in our community!” Carol affirmed.

Look at the wonderful change your gift helped create. Not only did you help Carol rediscover her passion, but because of you so many kids now have a space to keep learning and growing.

“You helped Reverend Carol claim her God-sized dream!”

“Soul Leaders stretched me and gave me the courage to step into the unknown,” Carol said. “It resurrected who I am and who God created me to be.”

Your support of Courage & Renewal helped Carol bring forth her gifts as a leader and seize her dream of helping kids get a jump start. Thank you!
You Helped Youth Build Confidence and Courage!

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“Young people who face marginalization require multiple opportunities to reframe the story of who they may have been. One program like this can nudge them further on their journey,” Brian affirmed.

Emma’s journey isn’t over. She still faces barriers to moving beyond poverty — and may continue to struggle. But she does feel more courageous and confident as she returns to school. Is that enough to sustain positive decision-making and success in her life? We have to hope.

On behalf of Emma and other young adults like her, thank you! Your gift encouraged disadvantaged teens to begin to create meaningful, independent lives.

Community Heartbreak Healed with Courage

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You helped people feel like they are all in this together. And that’s really important, because building a safer and stronger community doesn’t depend solely on the police. It takes all of us. It takes courage.

“Our town may never turn the curve on domestic violence, poverty, and addiction, but we can’t not try. The awareness that we’re bringing to it is vital,” said Tara. “We’re standing in the ‘tragic gap,’ but taking action.”

Thanks to you, this once-heartbroken community in Vermont is already improving. You helped people have the courage to come together and lean toward a future where safety, trust, and respect will be the new norm.

Reflection on Community from Parker J. Palmer

We all need other people to invite, amplify, and help us discern the inner teacher’s voice for at least three reasons:

The journey toward inner truth is too taxing to be made solo: lacking support, the solitary traveler soon becomes weary or fearful and is likely to quit the road.

The path is too deeply hidden to be traveled without company: finding our way involves clues that are subtle and sometimes misleading, requiring the kind of discernment that can happen only in dialogue.

The destination is too daunting to be achieved alone: we need community to find the courage to venture into the alien lands to which the inner teacher may call us.

— from A Hidden Wholeness

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