

# Thrive: This is your chance to change the story

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Ginger was a prostitute.

After the trauma of being assaulted in high school, she encountered a pimp from Dallas, who said all the right things, and she turned to him.

“I prostituted in every state in the U.S.,” Ginger said.

Becky Ellison listened to Ginger tell her story for two hours. At one point, Ellison asked, “What do you want tomorrow to look like?”

“So not like today,” Ginger replied.

## Changing the story of today

Ellison began her journey with the Christian Women’s Job Corps in Waco in 2004, going on to become a statewide CWJC consultant for Woman’s Missionary Union of Texas. [CWJC and Christian Men’s Job Corps](#)—ministries of WMU—exist to empower men and women by providing life and job skills to enable them to enter the workforce. During the program, men and women are introduced to Christ and engaged in Bible study.

Around the time of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of CWJC and CMJC in 2017, Ellison asked Sandy Wisdom-Martin, formerly the executive director of Texas WMU and now executive director of national WMU, “Where do we go from here? After 20 years of ministry, how do we expand?”

Wisdom-Martin replied that she saw young people graduating from high

school unprepared for life in the world. She asked, “What about reaching teens?”

Ellison was overwhelmed by the idea. She already was relating to 58 sites and their respective leadership all around Texas. How could she take on more? Could she really do it? Did she have the energy to work with teens?

“I prayed,” Ellison recalled. “And God said, ‘Becky, we can change the story. This is your chance.’”

## **What does it mean to “change the story?”**

With a grant from the Texas Baptist Missions Foundation, Texas WMU launched Thrive 2:7 as a pilot program. The name is derived from Colossians 2:6-7: “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.”

When Ellison and the CWJC began working with teenagers, they saw familiar patterns. The same poor decision making, financial illiteracy and unemployability they saw in women already were present in teenagers entering Thrive 2:7 pilot programs. Having worked with adults dealing with the consequences of these patterns, Ellison and her colleagues knew the potential future for these teens if they continued on their current trajectory.

“If we will walk along and invest time, care and love with high school students through life and job skills training and mentoring, maybe they will make different decisions, be better prepared, and go back and influence their families,” Ellison said. “We’ve seen families of women we’ve served who have noticed the difference in those women after going through the

program. So, we know it can work the other way with high schoolers going back to their families and their families seeing the difference in them.”

Citing Jeffrey Arnett’s work in [\*Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties\*](#), Ellison reflected with sadness on the large number of 18- to 24-year-olds who do not identify as adults. Many in this age group lack wise guidance into adulthood and end up in a cycle of poor choices and their consequences. Ellison hopes “they’ll find hope earlier.”

## **A new story of hope and thriving**

From the first pilot program at Kimball High School in Dallas—which enrolled 16 girls, nine of whom described significant challenges at home—Thrive 2:7 has expanded to three more locations: the [Nacogdoches CWJC](#), the Family Hope Center in the Bachman Lake Community of Dallas, and the [TEAM School](#) in Cleburne.

After going through the Bachman Lake Family Hope Center Thrive 2:7 program, one teenager said, “Now I know how to protect myself in relationships.”

Ellison’s vision for these Thrive 2:7 programs is to engage freshmen and keep them connected to the program through their senior year. To develop leadership and mentoring experience, juniors and seniors would reinvest in freshmen and sophomores. In this way, Thrive 2:7 is modeled after mentoring in Christian Men’s and Women’s Job Corps: relational, stable and speaking the truth in love.

To help ensure thriving, Ellison also envisions a savings matching fund for students in Thrive 2:7 and an endowment to provide college scholarships to graduates of the program.

# When Becky's story changed

Eight years ago, Ellison was diagnosed with a rare cancer and given a short time to live. Eight years later—well past when doctors expected her life to end—Ellison is alive and grateful. “Just to be alive and have [this] opportunity is fantastic.”



When God called Ellison to change the story, she saw the big picture and found it overwhelming. Like Moses, she said, “But Lord...” And like Moses, God addressed all the objections on her “but Lord” list.

This new vision changed her lens from “what can I do” to “this is yours, God.” She expressed profound gratitude that “I got to be the light of Christ for somebody.” Ellison continues to say to God, “This is yours. What do you want me to do? Show me the steps.”

God is showing Ellison the steps as she seeks to change the story for others.

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Ginger *was* a prostitute.

She ended up in jail, and when she got out, she went through the CWJC program and graduated. Ginger then went to college, got a house and a car, and reconnected with her daughter. Several years ago, Ginger died of

Hepatitis C.

Thankfully, that's not the end of Ginger's story.

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