



Photos by Don Campbell / HP staff

Samantha Lindemann, a senior at Lakeshore High School, has received an A.C.E. Award of Achievement from The Exchange Club of Southwest Michigan. Samantha, photographed Tuesday, was moved around by her mother and didn't get to attend school regularly until she was 10, and now plans to attend Lake Michigan College in the fall.

Student aces life's tough tests

Exchange Club honors Lakeshore senior

By JOHN MATUSZAK
HP Staff Writer

When Samantha was 10 years old, she couldn't read or write, and didn't even know the alphabet.

That was because of the nomadic existence forced on her by her mother, which kept her and her siblings on the move and out of school.

"I can't tell you how many different places I've stayed in or how many hotels were called home," Samantha Lindemann recalled in an essay submitted to the Exchange Club of Southwest Michigan, which awarded her its Accepting the Challenge of Excellence, or ACE award, on Tuesday. "Because we never knew where we were going to stay, we never went to school."

Samantha did learn valuable lessons in survival, and how to take care of her younger sisters and brothers. Once she found a stable home, she applied that determination toward making up for lost time.

"She put 13 years of education into 10 years," said Jackie Lindemann, her adopted mother.

Samantha Lindemann, 19, is a senior at Lakeshore High School who plans to attend Lake Michigan College in the fall. The Exchange Club award included a check for \$250.

Exchange Club President Dale Stover said the ACE award is given annually to a student who has overcome huge odds to be successful.

That criteria fits Samantha, Stover said.

"My birth parents weren't fit to be parents at all," she admitted. "They couldn't care for my brothers and sisters and I, and give us the necessities we needed, such as food, shelter and even clothing."

She said she could count on one hand the number of times she has seen her birth father. Her mother ended up with five other children by different men, and Samantha and the other kids were shuttled around the country.

The turning point came when her sister, Desiree, died on April 5, 2006, in an accident, and Samantha and her siblings were placed in foster care. That's when Jackie and Dean Lindemann, their aunt and uncle, took in Samantha, her sister Leah and two of her brothers as foster children. Three years later the Lindemanns adopted the four children to join three of their own kids.

Jackie Lindemann said Samantha, who was 10 when she came to live with them, made it through the difficult years by focusing her attention on her younger siblings.

"Being the oldest, I think she had a defense mechanism," Lindemann said. "She had a mothering instinct. She took care of the others."

Samantha said it was difficult for her to learn how to ask for help from adults.

Lakeshore teachers did a lot to help Samantha catch



Samantha Lindemann overcame instability in her family to become a standout student at Lakeshore High School. She plans to study sonography in college in pursuit of a medical career.

up, Jackie Lindemann said.

One of those, Mari Maloney, a special education teacher, recalled that Samantha was an exceptional child when they first met.

"There was never once that she did not trust us," Maloney said. "She had reasons not to trust us."

Tonya Jahnke met Samantha while teaching a parenting class at Lakeshore High.

"Teachers are supposed to inspire their students. She inspired me," Jahnke said.

Samantha plans to become a diagnostic medical

sonographer, specializing in working with expectant mothers and children.

"I like pregnant women," she told club members, drawing a laugh. "I like taking care of babies."

Along with her school work, Samantha performs with a local dance troupe and works at Power in Motion gymnastics studio.

Her advice for young people who experience difficult times?

"Stay positive," she said. "Ask questions. And ask for help."

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