

JFA's Three Essential Skills Are the Life of the Party

Training thousands to make abortion unthinkable for millions...

Impact Report

JUSTICE FOR ALL

November 2013

JFA's alumni want to do one thing with their JFA training: practice. They attend multiple Seat Work and Feet Work events, and they want to teach others. They are a treasure because they come back time and again to JFA outreach events to help us reach thousands of students on campuses each year. They're also a treasure because of what their JFA training has enabled them to do when JFA trainers can't be present.

In this Impact Report, Kansas volunteer Anthony Trent shares in his own words the story of how he went from the fire of his second JFA training experience to the frying pan of a party of naysayers. He was ready to turn the debate into a dialogue.

Thank you for helping us give Anthony and hundreds of others like him the tools they need to be confident when the pressure is on.

Rebecca J. Haschke

...one person at a time.

Last weekend I had a pretty incredible experience. It was Labor Day weekend, a Sunday night, and I happened to be in Wichita visiting a friend who was hosting a party. Nothing seemed to be abnormal or different than most group functions I've attended. Of course, there was an understanding that many of this friend's friends didn't really share the same beliefs I held.

The timing was interesting because a week beforehand I had participated in my second JFA seminar and outreach at Wichita State University. Many of the people at the party were WSU students.

Later in the evening, the subject of the JFA outreach was brought up. After saying I participated in that event, one of the guys there said, "Yeah, well, we were making fun of that all day it was there. It was stupid." I replied, "Why was it stupid? We were asking questions and promoting dialogue with pro-choice students." After asking more questions, it was clear he didn't have a reason for belittling the outreach, and he admitted it.



During his first JFA outreach event, Anthony (second from left) interacts with a WSU student.

This conversation, not surprisingly, sparked a debate about abortion. While the room seemed to erupt in aggressive talking points and pseudo-listening, a person named Cole and I had a one-on-one conversation about abortion. Cole believed abortion was a woman's right during the first two trimesters of pregnancy. We found common ground that third-trimester abortions were immoral and that it makes sense to consider the unborn to be human persons when the pregnancy is far enough along that premature babies can survive.

Cole came to the conclusion that abortion should be made illegal, even in cases of rape.

I later found out that Cole considered personhood to be based on a sort of self-awareness—"the ability to know I exist independently." As I proposed to him the Equal Rights Argument and how his explanation of rights based on self-awareness excluded newborns and third-trimester children, though, he knew it couldn't work. The conversation went on for three hours as he tried to propose new functional abilities that might bestow human rights. I then asked him, "What is the one trait that every person in this room has in common?" We came to the conclusion that it was our human nature. As we

talked even more, Cole came to the conclusion that abortion should be made illegal, even in cases of rape.

Not only was my conversation with Cole refreshing, but the other people at the party also gave me some hope. As one girl came back from a late-night McDonalds run, she sighed, “Oh, another judgmental pro-lifer.” Another person spoke up: “Oh no, this guy is different. He’s listening and is making an intelligent, logical case.”

Now back to the friend I was visiting in Wichita. She attended the *Abortion: From Debate to Dialogue* seminar a week beforehand, and she was silently overhearing the conversation the whole time. The next day we talked about the conversation, and she said, “I finally understood how that training can be put into a real conversation and that it really does work.”

“Just one year ago, I would not have been able to have productive conversations like these.”

This is why I support Justice For All. It’s small moments like these that give me assurance we can win the culture for Life. Just one year ago, I would not have been able to have productive conversations like these. This is the purpose of the training. Rather than just holding a brochure or pointing students toward an exhibit, the purpose is to use the skills we’ve learned as an ambassador for our Lord, and to do that on a daily basis. I can’t thank this staff enough for equipping me to love those with whom I speak. Thank you, and God bless.

- Anthony Trent

After reading this story, I asked Anthony whether he would have spoken up at the party before his JFA training. “I definitely would have entered into the conversation,” he said, “but it would have been much more like a debate. I would have been a really bad ambassador... I would have just taken his comments, blown them up, and intellectually humiliated him.” Fresh from two rounds of Seat Work and Feet Work with JFA, though, Anthony went into the party living out JFA’s Three Essential Skills: asking questions with an open heart, listening to understand, and finding common ground when possible.

When the outreach event was mocked, Anthony didn’t respond in kind. He asked a clarifying question. Instead of reveling in a one-against-many showdown featuring him at the center, Anthony opted for a one-on-one format in which he could listen.

When Anthony learned that Cole was pro-choice, he could have simply listed off his best pro-life arguments, whether Cole was interested or not. Instead, Anthony started with common ground: adults deserve an equal right to life. Then he labored with Cole for three hours over *Cole’s explanations* of those equal rights. When it became clear to Cole that his explanations were flawed, Anthony was ready—ready to give him a hand up with the more satisfying explanation that we deserve equal rights because we have the same human nature. It was then a very small step for Cole to embrace the unborn as humans who share that nature. If you want to learn how to approach a conversation from the Equal Rights perspective like Anthony did, join us for an upcoming JFA training event (www.jfaweb.org/Register). Until then, enjoy stories from JFA missionaries in a newsletter collection entitled “The Equal Rights Argument” (www.jfaweb.org/Equal-Rights).

Since the party Anthony has continued to put his JFA training into practice. He’s created other Repeat Work conversations in his everyday life, and he’s joined the JFA team for six additional days of outreach, including one he arranged on his own campus (see photo above). For more discussion with Anthony about the value of practicing the Three Essential Skills, see my interview with him at www.jfaweb.org/Impact/Anthony-Interview.

What could have been a disaster became a delight for Anthony, for Cole, and for the others at the party. Thank you for helping us train pro-life advocates like Anthony to change hearts and minds in their everyday lives.

- Stephen Wagner, Director of Training

