

Student Advocate

Helping kids get back on track

By Dana Minney
Light Contributor

Jill Porter is passionate about her students, and it shows.

"I love my kids," she stated emphatically, her eyes tearing up. After all, when she connects with a young person it's often because no one else can. Some people might even call her job impossible.

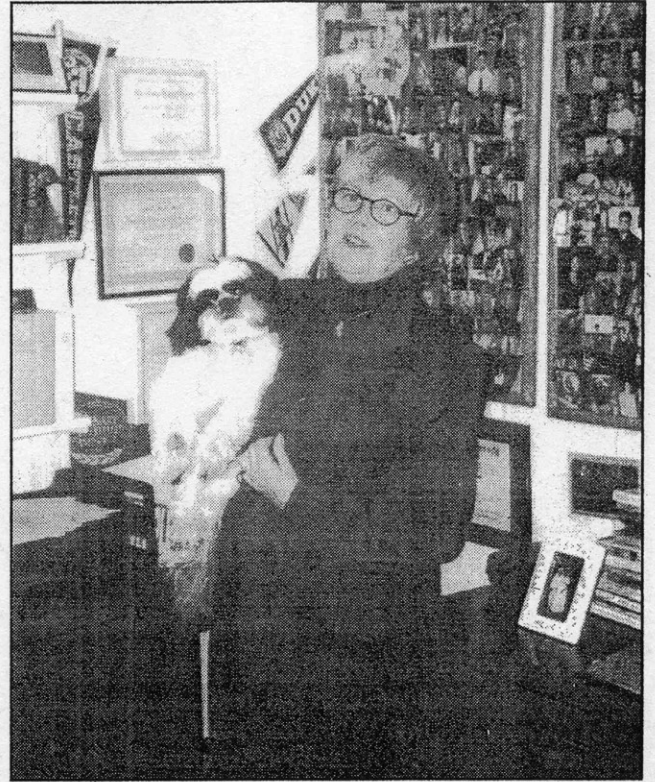
Different from a teacher or a therapist, Porter is a Certified Educational Consultant. She helps at-risk teens get their lives back on track. Her students have a variety of problems, some flunking school, acting out, doing drugs, lying or stealing. Families come to her when they have no other choice.

Porter tries to establish trust with the student right off the bat by being straightforward with them.

"First, I tell them they're messing up, and I can help them get back on track. They look around the office at all the pictures of young people and they understand I'm on their side." Sure enough, pictures of former clients line her office walls.

"I guarantee every teen wants to succeed." Her gray-green eyes sparkled with conviction, "I have to find out what the problem is, address it, then create a plan that will be effective. My goal is to get every student into college, and to reconcile with their families." She admitted this is often not an easy task.

"Sometimes the only option is wilderness camp." In such a place, students live in a very structured environment for several months, to work with counselors and other



Porter, in her office with her dog Zorro. Photo/Dana Minney

teens on addictions and emotional growth.

Other times the problem is as simple as a learning disability. In those cases, Porter uses one of her many connections with school officials across the nation to place the student somewhere suitable to their learning needs.

Not only does Porter have over 30 years of educational experience as a teacher, school counselor, administrator and assistant dean, but she's also been through difficulties with her own son.

"He ran away from home and was failing school." She says their relationship is much better now, they even joke about it. "He tells me, 'mom, I helped you become who you are, I taught you everything you need to know

for this job.'"

She has a warning for other parents going through the same thing. "There are a lot of bogus operations out there." She recommends using discernment when seeking treatment for teens and getting references.

One of the hardest things for Porter is when parents run out of resources.

"When that happens it just kills me." Her voice breaking, she added: "Let's face it, fixing these kids' problems costs money."

With all the frustrations of the job, she says what keeps her going is simple, "the success stories keep me going."

Interested parties can contact Porter, at 619-284-7277, or via e-mail at porters@electriciti.com.