Finding treatment—and self-esteem

Darla Zimmer was 12 when she was diagnosed with plaque psoriasis. “It was very difficult,” she remembers. “The remarks I got in school were, ‘Don’t go near her!’ No matter how hard [I] would try to talk to kids, they didn’t want to comprehend. I just got tired of trying. I wasn’t able to finish high school due to the humiliation and ridicule.”

By the time Darla was 18, psoriasis plaques covered her legs, hands, stomach and even her face. When she got pregnant with her first child, the disease worsened.

Darla tried treatments ranging from topical ointments to ultraviolet B light therapy to wrapping her moisturized skin in plastic wrap at night. Nothing worked. So she investigated clinical trials.

Five years ago, Darla enrolled in a trial for a biologic medication. Her psoriasis, which had covered about one-quarter of her body, almost totally disappeared.

Darla’s self-esteem rebounded with her skin. Now 30, she works as a customer service representative for a dental insurance company. She has become more active, joining a gym and participating in soccer, volleyball and other activities with her two children. She sleeps better and has more confidence.

And she is committed to helping other people get the information they need so they won’t have to go through what she did. Whenever she sees children who might have psoriasis, Darla takes the initiative to talk them about the disease.

“I have seen a significant change from when I was a child,” she says. “There’s more research and documentation. I’ve become more resourceful and able to talk about it more and I look into resources for young adults to help them cope with it.”

“(I don’t want) children in high school to struggle with the same things I went through.”