

## Preparing for Independence

Megan Dyar has a dedicated following at the Whole Foods store in Annapolis. During her weekly culinary food demonstrations, called Tasty Thursdays, many of the store's same customers visit regularly specifically to see Megan. They come to learn about and taste her latest culinary creations using cheeses, chocolates and other ingredients from the store's specialty foods department.

As a graduate of the Hotel, Culinary Arts and Tourism Institute (HCAT) at Anne Arundel Community College, Megan is happy to be settled in her culinary career, living on her own and successfully supporting herself. The 27-year-old's success is made all the more sweeter by the fact that the road leading to where she is today wasn't so smooth.

At the age of 10, Megan and her sister were placed in foster care where they had multiple placements before being placed in the Board of Child Care's Residential program in Baltimore. Megan was 15 at the time and found residential care to be a much better fit for her and her sister.

"We didn't need another family," she says of her time in foster care. "We had a family, we just couldn't stay with them."

Megan found living in a cottage at BCC was much more helpful to her because she was surrounded by staff—including social workers and therapists—who were readily available to talk with her and help her overcome anger issues she was dealing with at the time. She found it comforting to be around other kids her own age going through similar issues, yet she had her own room in the campus cottage that allowed her to have some privacy.



"As a 15-year-old, the world is not an easy place," Megan recalls. "Being around a bunch of different people my own age made the situation easier. We could all work together."

She adds, "It was a nice support system at the Board of Child Care. That's not to say [some of the residents] didn't get ourselves into trouble occasionally, but the staff wouldn't hold a grudge. They understood we were teenagers and just tried to make sure we were safe and that we were taken care of."

Megan went on to live at BCC for four years, graduated from high school, and eventually left BCC at age 19. She moved to California and held a couple different jobs, including door-to-door sales that gave her the opportunity to travel and see different parts of the country. Then she moved back to the East Coast, enrolled at HCAT and launched her culinary career.

Over the years, Megan has maintained a close relationship with her sister and improved her relationship with her mother. Both her mother and her sister live in North Carolina and she visits them frequently. While living at BCC, Megan kept up regular home visits with her mother and, with BCC's help, worked on many of the issues that troubled their relationship and prevented them from living together.

Today, Megan also keeps in touch with BCC. She hasn't forgotten the support that the agency gave her and during the summer of 2010 she attended a reunion for younger BCC alumni. Although one of the things she liked most about BCC as a teenager was that the agency wasn't trying to be a substitute for her biological family, BCC did eventually become a family of a different kind for her—one that contributed to her self-confidence and skills to eventually succeed as an adult in the wider world.