

# TRANSFORMATIONS

## Powerful Changes Through School Diversion

*Juan finds direction and confidence through the help of DCJ*



Juan was facing a misdemeanor charge in Family Court for an incident that happened on school property when he was 17. "When it happened, I felt like I had disappointed my mom and ruined my future. To my mom, I was the 'American Dream' and I wanted to make her proud and support her, to buy her a big house someday. I thought, now all my plans are over," says Juan. When the School Diversion Program's coordinator, Cindy McDaniel, met Juan at court to enroll him in the program, Juan recognized the opportunity for a fresh start. Cindy coached Juan and his mother through the steps of the program, including writing a reflective essay about his offense and performing community service, which he completed using his culinary skills at a local library and at a senior center. "I met some people while I was doing my community service that had it a lot worse than me," says Juan.

*"Cindy is very dedicated to her job and wants to give teens another chance at life, not to let their mistake ruin their life."*

*— Juan's mother*

Cindy worked with Juan on dealing with his stress and anxiety in healthy ways like reaching out to friends, family members, or teachers. Juan's mother says, "When Juan started the program, he started changing his ways. It's helped him grow as a person and find ways to cope with problems." Juan has completed the requirements of the program, his charges have been dismissed by Family Court, and his grades at school have improved. "He's doing great," says Cindy. Juan currently plans to pursue fashion design or culinary arts and he recently participated in a culinary competition.

"He's blossomed like a flower and now he's more open and articulate about his feelings," says Cindy. She is encouraging Juan to file the paperwork to completely expunge his record so he can continue to pursue his career ambitions without limitation. "This program can be a once in a lifetime chance. Don't let your pride get in the way, because these choices affect you later on, and can even affect your children," says Juan. Reflecting on what Cindy and the program have offered him, he says, "Cindy worked really hard for me. She has been there for me and helped me to grow as a person through this. And, I've gained a friend."

## WHAT'S HAPPENING THIS SPRING!



Delaware Center  
for Justice, Inc.

Annual Meeting

When: June 7<sup>th</sup> at noon

Where: Arsht Hall  
2600 Pennsylvania Ave  
Wilmington, DE 19806

Time: 12pm-2pm

To register, call 302-658-7174 or visit our website at [www.dcjustice.org](http://www.dcjustice.org)



Thank you for your support! *The DCJ Staff*



## A Fresh Start: Learning Life Lessons in the Kitchen

After serving a six month sentence at a correctional facility for violation of probation, Chris, age 22, was placed into DCJ's prisoner reentry program last April. He says, "I knew I had to stop doing the stuff I used to, and change my attitude." With two years of probation ahead of him, Chris knew he needed to find work and get enrolled in school if he was going to succeed and finish his probation without another violation.

Jessica Alicea, his DCJ case manager, connected him with the Culinary School Program at the Food Bank of Delaware, which provides training and certification to work in a variety of restaurant positions. "I had never heard of this program before," says Chris. "At first, I wasn't taking it serious. But then I started studying the book and I passed the test which makes it easier to get a kitchen job." Jessica helped Chris to set up an email address so that he could apply for jobs online. "I actually got a lot of responses [from jobs I was applying to] by email," Chris says.

A month and a half ago, Chris was hired by a local bar & grill as a prep cook. "Now, I'm waiting to take my GED class in April," says Chris. "Jessica would always call me and remind me to go to my GED classes over at probation."

Graduating from the culinary program and getting a job are major successes for Chris, but Jessica recalls Chris' attitude change as the most important part of his fresh start. Jessica says, "Chris struggled with his attitude, and we worked on it a lot so that he would be able to get through the Food Bank program. He received an award for the 'Most Improved,' and I'm really proud of him for that."

When reflecting on the last year, Chris says, "I used to get mad at the little stuff, but now I try to control it. When I started the program, I wasn't used to listening, but they do teach you a lot." Based on Chris' significant progress, Jessica advocated on Chris' behalf for his probation to be ended early, and Chris' 2 year term of probation was suspended after just 10 months.



*"I'm feeling good about my future," says Chris, "and I'm taking it step by step."*

Jessica says of Chris, "He made a true turn around, and it's a great feeling to see a client succeed and feel good about their future."

## A New Beginning: Victim of Domestic Abuse Finds Inner Strength

"Donna" was a victim of domestic violence who suffered a severe physical attack last year, landing her in the hospital. The police department connected Donna with DCJ's Elderly Victims Services Program. The program's case manager, Falon Desselle, began working with Donna immediately.



*"I was starting over, I had nothing," says Donna. "God put Falon in my life - she was a guardian angel!"*

In addition to intensive case management services, the program provides long-term support and helps victims navigate the criminal justice system, including providing transportation to and from court and to other appointments related to the client's victimization. When Donna was ready to leave the domestic violence shelter, she knew she needed to look for safe housing. Falon drove Donna to the DMV and to the Social Security Administration, helping her to reestablish her identity.

"Nothing was going right for me, and I was so lost. Falon was just a God-send, and she took me places that I needed to go and helped me get my life back together." When Donna found housing through a private landlord, Falon made sure that the new living situation was a safe environment and helped Donna move into the new home. And, when Donna goes to court this summer to face her abuser, Falon will be by her side. "When I finally realized what [the abuser] had done to me, I got my strength and said, 'I'm not taking it anymore.'" When asked about her experience participating in the Elderly Victims Services Program, Donna says, "The program is just wonderful. I have nothing but good things to say about it." Her advice to other victims? "Facing up to what happened to you is important. By not participating in a program like this, you're wallowing in your depression. By facing your past, you gain an inner strength. I feel stronger for the experience, and now I can face anything."