From Homelessness, to Housing, to A Career



When Fi first became part of The Connection's Start program for young adults, she was working at a lounge in Bridgeport and sleeping in her car. With the help of the resources and staff of the Start program, which works with homeless youth to help them move from homelessness toward safe, stable housing and self-sufficiency. Fi has turned her life around since she began working with her case manager, Eaman Nassar.

"A friend of mine at the lounge is a friend of Eaman's," Fi says. "He told me to call Adam (Paquin, the program manager for Start Bridgeport). Adam referred me to Eaman."

Eaman adds, "My best friend used to go to place where Fi worked, and she confided in him. He knew that my job involves helping get homeless youth off the street, and the next time we saw each other, he asked how Fi could become a part of the Start program."

Now 23, Fi and her twin sister became part of the Department of Children & Families' foster care system when they were freshmen in high school. Their mother had decided that she could not afford to care for all her children and put the two girls in foster care. Their brother, now 18, still lives with their mother.

At first the girls were placed together. But while her sister was successful in the placements, Fi struggled. "I bounced around from home to home. I had one that lasted longer—my sister stayed there and stayed with the program. . . . She's getting her master's now."

When Fi turned 18, she left DCF system and began working to support herself. "My last year in high school I worked at ShopRite and was cheerleading; nights I worked at the clubs. I was very busy."

After she graduated from high school, Fi continued working at the clubs. But making enough money to support herself was a struggle.

Fi hit the ground running when she got connected with the Start program. Now, almost two years later, Fi lives in an apartment with several other women, is a full-time student in a two-year dental assistant program, and works part-time to help support herself. When she graduates from her program, she will take a radiology course to earn the license needed to become a dental hygienist.

"Fi has done very well in our program," Eaman says. "She saved up enough money to pay the security deposit for apartment she's in now and to buy herself a new car. . . . She could have been discharged within a year because she got herself housing, but because we helped her enroll in school, we wanted to be with her when she graduated. She did very well very quickly. All she needed was a bit of support."

The supports provided by the Start program and staff have certainly been a large part of Fi's success. But the relationship between Fi and Eaman has been vital.

"She's just been there whenever I needed anything," Fi says. "When we met, I didn't have Social Security, I didn't have an ID. When my car broke down, she taught me how to save money to buy myself a new car. Even if I don't have her as a case manager, I feel like I can call her—that she'll always be there. When I'm down, she's a big mental help. Even though she's my mentor, she's a friend now."