

Interview with Metro Youth Service Center Food Supervisor, Jason DiMare

Q: What is your background of culinary training?

JD: I worked as a snack bar attendant when I was 16, learning to make hot dogs and pizza. I then moved on to work as a dishwasher in the early 90's. From there I worked in various restaurants of all kinds, advancing in rank from dishwasher to become a sous chef for a local chain restaurant, and they helped develop me into an executive chef. In the 2010's, I left restaurants with an opportunity to enhance healthcare nutrition in a growing healthcare company. I became an accredited dietary manager through the Association of Nutrition and Food Service Professionals. After three years of improving nutrition and food quality, it brought me to DYS, where I saw an opportunity to provide restaurant quality food to the youth and staff that we serve.

What is the latest style of cuisine you are working on?

JD: I have just started to peak into the world of Korean food. Kimchi, Boiled Pork Belly Wraps, Seaweed Rice Rolls, steamed dumplings

Tell us more about this style of cooking...

JD: It's just versatile, ya know? So many different flavors melding together, from sweet, sour, umami, salty, bitter. Just all going together to make an amazing dish.

How do you bring this cooking style to DYS?

JD: Well, I would probably fuse it with some Spanish style cooking to make something completely different that most of these people haven't had before.

Any new dishes in your current menu?

JD: We create our own signature burger. Dorinda, our cook came up with the idea. It's a burger, on a fresh onion roll, with lettuce, tomato, spicy BBQ sauce, with a baked onion ring on top. There will be some infusions and different ideas popping up on the summer menu here for sure.

How do you get the youth to try something new?

JD: We have tried different approaches, such as the E.A.T.s program we ran last year. Engage and Taste. Every Wednesday, we prepared something different, from smoothies to sushi, and encouraged everyone to take a small sample and see if they liked it or not. We had weekly cook outs over the summer, in which we would add a new vegetable or a side, such as the corn and poblano salads.

What do you think about DYS youth compared with the general teen population?

JD: I tend to feel like DYS youth are at the point in their lives when they need guidance the most in life. Most of the time, the guidance was not always available to them and that's how they came to be in our care. We have a responsibility to help re-shape their lives. Food is, by far, the most effective way to tell our youth that we care for them and we are here to offer quality meals to them. The food

we cook not only needs to taste good and look good, but has to be good for their body. The general teen population, as annoying as parents are, has the consistent support from the family. Our youth, on the flip side, don't always have that consistency. They then turn to whoever shows care to them, but those may not necessarily be their parents.

What is your favorite cuisine?

JD: I prefer south American/Latin/Spanish Style foods. The possibility for flavor combinations is endless. There is always a chance to get creative, for example, with street tacos. I can create new flavors with different sauces and fillings and a new experience every single time I make them.

Food is a way of living. We have the opportunity to change lives at DYS. We can make, for our youth, the food like they've never had before. We teach them the importance of choosing healthy choices. We show them we care for them and want them to be successful in life. We are there for our youth to power their growth, for both the mind and body. Even more, youth will have the opportunity to gain skills with us which helps to path their career path. Culinary art is one of the steppingstones for youth to build a better living and make contributions to the community.