

Morgan Beals

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By Megan Doyle Staff Writer

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When Morgan Beals signed up to take a Global Issues class at Deering High School, she needed to complete six hours of community service as a course requirement.

With one of her teachers, she went to spend a few hours serving dinner at a Portland soup kitchen. She remembered the moment when a man she didn't know paused at her place in the serving line.

"He walks up and he's, like, 'Thank you so much. I don't know if you realize how much this means to us. I really appreciate it, and I hope you continue doing this,'" Beals, 15, said.

She took his words to heart and did continue.

Now in her sophomore year at Deering, Beals is hooked on helping others.

"When I was looking for volunteers to help at the 'Feed the 5,000,' she showed up at 8 a.m. and worked all day," said her teacher, Pam Bessey, referencing a public event in October to highlight the problem of food waste. "On the day of the financial literacy fair at Deering, she came to my office early in the morning and asked how she could help."

At school, Beals is contemplating an original speech for debate teams about the negative effects of bullying.

She ran for student representative to the school board last year, and during her campaign, promised she would set up a separate email address for students who wanted to share their concerns or ideas in private. She didn't win, but she plans to run for another school position in the future.

Asked what change she would make at Deering High School, Beals didn't need to think long about her answer.

"I wish everyone was friends with everyone," she said. "To be honest, there's some kids here, including me, that don't have a lot of friends. I want everyone to have a friend, at least two friends."

Outside school, she recently graduated from SEALSFit, a fitness and leadership course offered through the Portland Police Department. She groans at the thought of running, but she likes to make other people laugh. She remembered dancing back and forth during one class when she was supposed to be sprinting; she said the instructor couldn't be angry because she was giggling the whole time.

"I did it with a smile," she said.

Beals also participates on the Youth Leadership Advisory Team, which works to improve outcomes for young people who are or have been in foster care. Based on her own experiences, Beals gives advice to prospective foster parents and caseworkers.

"Avoid asking too many questions, because too many questions is super overwhelming," Beals advises. "Definitely give them space, if a child needs their space. That's one of my main things."

Eventually, Beals wants to go to law school and work with youth who need to go through guardianship hearings and other court proceedings.

When it comes to giving, she wants to continue.

"When you commit to something, it means you follow through on that," said Gretchen Scales, a specialist at Deering High School. "She really does follow through."

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