

Hope mushrooms for mother of five helped by BC3 program

32-year-old dreams of mycology work after earning high school equivalency diploma

Aug. 18, 2020



Beth Dinger, 32, of Chicora, earned a high school equivalency diploma June 23 through Butler County Community College's adult literacy program. The mother of five has enrolled at BC3 this fall and will study biology.

(Butler, PA) Fifteen years ago, teen mom Beth Dinger was convinced she'd abandoned her pursuit of a high school diploma, and with it, her childhood dreams.

Of wearing that white spacesuit and gazing at Earth. Of wearing that personalized lab coat and shaking beakers. Of wearing that dark pantsuit and "looking professional" as she defended a client.

"I always had big dreams," Dinger said, "and goals."

But after becoming pregnant as a junior at Karns City High School, she discontinued her education. She resumed her studies at a virtual charter school. Only to have it close.

“I was supposed to find another one,” Dinger said, “but I already had a child at the time, and I just gave up.”

Dinger had given up after Cameron’s arrival in 2005, through son Brayden’s in 2007, daughter Zaylee’s in 2009, son Quinn’s in 2016 and daughter Fern’s in 2019.

Dinger had given up and had settled for the uniform she wore as she rung up or made sandwiches for customers while thinking about taxonomy – “binomial nomenclature, and putting things into the right families and species,” she said – and her adulthood dream, of becoming a mycologist.

“I didn’t want to give up on my dreams,” Dinger said, “but at that point, I was going to be a stay-at-home mom. It seemed kind of pointless to get my diploma.”

Until January, when the 32-year-old Chicora resident gave her dream another chance by enrolling in Butler County Community College’s adult literacy program.

“I can still do it, even if it is tough”

BC3’s free program prepares students to take General Education Development examinations that measure proficiency in language arts, which includes reading and writing; and in mathematics, science and social studies.

“I wanted to give my children a better life, and myself too,” Dinger said.

On June 23, a date she said that will be observed as an anniversary for the rest of her life, Dinger succeeded in taking the final two of four tests – in mathematics and in science – needed to earn the diploma she was convinced she had abandoned 15 years earlier.

“It’s a date that shows I didn’t give up,” she said, her voice quivering. “It’s a sign that I can do what I believe I can. I can accomplish things even if it seems difficult with schedules and children. I can still do it, even if it is tough.”

Added Barb Gade, grant director of BC3’s adult literacy program: “Just by getting their high school equivalency diploma, they start to change their vision of themselves, and the family starts to change their vision as well. They learn that they can do more than they thought they could. And they start seeing possibilities.”

“It’s hard to believe I actually got this far”

Like the 11 others who earned a high school equivalency diploma through BC3's program in Butler County and between July 1, 2019, and June 30, Dinger will receive a certificate of achievement from the Pennsylvania House of Representatives through state Rep. Marci Mustello, R-11, Butler.

A letter of commendation from Butler County commissioners.

And a Class of 2020 tassel from BC3's adult literacy program.

Fifteen long years after leaving high school, and two short months after earning her diploma, a woman intrigued by mycology – the study of fungi, and how certain types feed on plastics and can “help the environment” – and with a “passion” for mushrooms will take her first class as a biology major at BC3.

“It sounds too good to be true,” Dinger said. “I hope that it is not really too good to be true. It's hard to believe I actually got this far.”