Maddie, 18, doesn’t just cook for people going through hard times—she’s been one of those people too.

**By Maddie Craig, as told to Jessica Press**

**Vocabulary**

- **nourishing**: providing what is needed for health and growth
- **recipient**: person who receives something
- **diagnosed**: told you have a certain illness
- **treatments**: ways to try to cure a disease or illness and make someone healthy again
- **nutrition**: the process of eating the kinds of food that keep you healthy and strong

**T**uesdays are my favorite day of the week. On those days, I leave school and drive 40 minutes to a special kitchen. When I get there, I put on my white chef’s coat and black Converse sneakers. Then I pull my hair out of my face with a bandana.

By 3:30 p.m., a dozen more teens arrive. We sit down with a snack. Our head chef tells us what we’ll be making that day. I start to get excited. Why? This isn’t an ordinary kitchen. I’m not just working an after-school job. I’m volunteering to make food at Ceres [SEER-eez]. It’s an organization where teens cook nourishing meals for families who are dealing with illness. It means so much to these families to not have to worry about cooking healthy food. I know this because my first experience with Ceres wasn’t as a teen chef. It was as a recipient of their meals.

**A Family Illness**

When I was in eighth grade, my mom was diagnosed with cancer. I felt sad, angry, and scared. As a nurse, my mom had spent her life caring for other people.
She was the strongest woman I’d ever known. But soon she was tired, weak, and in pain from her treatments.

My mom also had to have three surgeries. Those were even harder on her. At one point, she was in the hospital for 17 days. It broke my heart to know she was so sick.

But there was one thing that always cheered me up: our weekly deliveries from Ceres. I loved unpacking the delicious foods and desserts. The pudding was definitely my favorite!

I also loved seeing the handmade cards that the teen volunteers sent with the meals—just to cheer us up.

And I liked knowing that the shopping, cooking, and cleaning for each meal were all taken care of.

My parents had enough to worry about. They were juggling doctor appointments and their normal duties. They still had to do the laundry and make sure my sister and I had rides to school.

We were all busy and tired. But Ceres fed our bodies, and it helped lift our spirits too. Instead of just eating quickly, we were able to come together over delicious meals.

Giving Back

I’m really happy to say that my mom is doing well now. Her strength continues to inspire me, and so does Ceres. Cooking healthy food is an important life skill that means so much to my family and me.

Learning by Doing

About a year later, I found out that Ceres was opening a kitchen near my home. I signed up to volunteer right away. Part of me was excited, but part of me was nervous. What if I was the only one who didn’t know how to cook?

Before I began going to Ceres, I couldn’t do much more than bake cookies. But soon I was part of a team of teen chefs. We prepared food for huge groups of people. I learned how to make enough soup, turkey burgers, and chicken stew for 50 families.

I also learned how to correctly use knives to cut vegetables. Everything we learn at Ceres we learn first by watching. Then, we try it ourselves.

Now I’m a senior in high school. I’ve been a part of Ceres for so long that I’m a teen leader. I help other students learn how to prepare their ingredients, follow recipes, and package the meals. I also visit schools to talk to younger kids about the importance of nutrition.

The Cause: Maddie’s mom was diagnosed with cancer.

Effect 1:

Hint: How did this make Maddie feel?

Effect 2:

Hint: What did the cancer and treatments do to Maddie’s mom?

Effect 3:

Hint: What did the family receive as help?

The Cause: Maddie started volunteering as a teen chef for Ceres.

Effect 1:

Hint: What did Maddie learn how to do?

Effect 2:

Hint: What does Maddie do now as a teen leader?

Effect 3:

Hint: How does volunteering make Maddie feel?

Answers are in the Teacher’s Guide.