



Ed Souza/Staff

Rachel Cox, who will do the graduation walk tonight with 45 other Delta High School graduates, has an interest in fashion design that she hopes one day to turn into a career.

Delta High graduate travels road from teen runaway to college student

BY MICHELLE HATFIELD
STAFF WRITER

The moment teacher Beth Bronkey saw Rachel Cox and heard the teen's voice, she knew the girl was special.

Bronkey had Cox in her poetry class. The first day of class, the two went out to lunch, talked and Cox read Bronkey some of her poems.

Cox, 17, graduated from Delta Continuation High School in March and will walk at the school's graduation ceremony tonight with about 45 other grads.

Cox is a teen runaway turned college student. She's attended several high schools on the Central Coast, some community schools and has spent time in San Luis Obispo County Juvenile Hall for running away from home. She moved around between foster

homes until enrolling in a transitional home for teens through the Family Care Network. Cox lives in the home now, but has to move out when she turns 18.

"I didn't get along well with my parents," she remembered, adding that there was a lot of conflict at home.

After her second stay in juvenile hall, Cox decided to turn her life around and "get serious." She also saw how her mom struggled to find stable work and didn't want to turn out the same, she said.

"My mom dropped out when she was a junior (in high school) and I graduated when I was a junior," Cox said. "Seeing the lifestyle she had, I didn't want to take that path."

Delta serves students who need to continue their high school education under a more flexible environment than comprehensive high schools. Students who attend the

school are having health or family problems, fell behind in the number of class credits required to get a high school diploma, are pregnant or have been expelled or suspended. Some just thrive in a smaller school environment.

"I hated regular high school. I couldn't really get the teacher's attention," Cox said. "At Nipomo High, kids were talking out of turn, it was hard to get individual attention."

Cox graduated early because she took courses during the summer and at Hancock College. Many of Hancock's classes count for double credit at Delta, Bronkey said.

Cox enjoys fashion, writing and photography. After two years at Hancock, she wants to pursue a career in fashion and then get a masters degree in psychology to be a therapist.

"She's made some wrong deci-

sions," Bronkey said. "She's never played the victim. At this point, many at-risk kids do that."

The teen has worked at Albertson's for more than a year, recently promoted from bagging groceries to florist.

After Cox leaves Delta's individualized support network and that of her transitional home, the teen believes she will still make it, for herself, her family and to prove people wrong.

"My dad never really had any faith in me," Cox said. "My dream is to get enough money to buy my mom a house (so she's not moving around so much). I don't want to see my family fall apart worse than it already is."

Michelle Hatfield can be reached at 739-2216 or mhatfield@santamaria-times.com.