

Celebrating Success... Stories of Learners and the BEAD Department

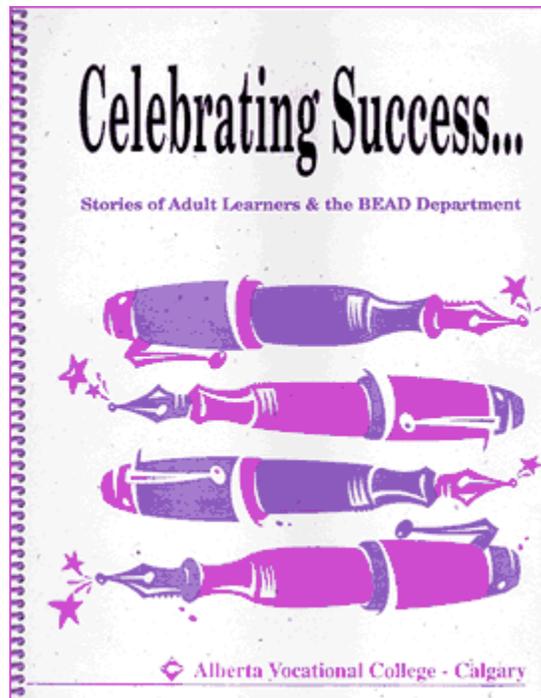


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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

The responsibility of the BEAD Department at AVC - Calgary is to deliver a variety of academic upgrading programs to adult students in Calgary and vicinity. BEAD is an acronym for Basic Education Alternative Delivery. The key word in the name is "alternative" because it describes the philosophy, the flexibility and the method of delivery present in our programs. BEAD programs are alternative routes for adult students to pursue their educational goals. Students are our prime focus and all program decisions are based on meeting their needs. Meeting needs means providing classes in the community where our students live. It also means a flexible schedule, individualized programs and continuous registration.

This biography of successful students was prepared for two reasons. First, the students portrayed in these vignettes have experienced success in their lives. Each individual's success is unique. It may be personal satisfaction or accomplishing a goal. It also means becoming a productive member of the community or getting a job. All our students are individuals and each one's success is different. Their achievements range from simply learning to read to further education and employment. Second, we were interested on the impact that the BEAD Department had on these students. Did our program assist these individuals in achieving their goals?

As you read the following selections, you will notice that the lives of adult students can be difficult. In addition to the responsibilities that all adults have, these students faced the difficult challenge of resuming an interrupted education. You'll notice that these successful students have different stories but a common characteristic -- they have the necessary courage and conviction to see their way through a hard time.

Several of these individuals mention the assistance of an instructor who provided a quality education as well as encouragement and support. On behalf of our students, I would like to thank the BEAD instructors for their efforts and for their assistance in the publication of this book.

Conrad Murphy
Chairman, BEAD Department

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This publication would not have been possible without the co-operation of the people whose stories it tells. It was truly a pleasure for me to meet with them and have them share their experiences so willingly.

Instructors and counsellors from the BEAD program suggested successful learners. I would like to thank them for their enthusiastic involvement and I regret not interviewing each and every one of the students they recommended.

Deborah Martin shared her knowledge and experience concerning the conduction of interviews and presentation of learners' stories. The BEAD Department provided every kind of needed support: financial, moral, critical and celebratory. A special thanks to Divina and Joan who made sure endless drafts were typed and uncomplainingly fielded much of my other work when I was preoccupied. And to Rainer for his patient editing and encouragement.

Finally, thanks to all the students, tutors, and staff in the Interchange program who perhaps felt abandoned, but never complained.

INTRODUCTION

The following stories belong as much as possible to those who told them. Interviews conducted using a tape recorder were later transcribed. Although the material was edited for the sake of clarity and readability, every effort was made to remain true to the original language and ideas.

Without exception, each of the learners interviewed mentioned AVC staff who motivated them and encouraged their success. I have not usually mentioned the latter by name but they will know who they are and will appreciate the valuable contribution they made to the success stories recounted here.

Assembling these stories was a challenging and rewarding project. I trust the reader will enjoy "meeting" these adult learners in print as much as I did in person.

Robin Houston-Knopff
Alberta Vocational College-Calgary, Spring 1992

SEAN COLLINS



Sean is a success by anyone's measure. He left school at fourteen, worked for twenty years, returned to school as an adult and ultimately graduated with a Bachelor of Education. Currently, he teaches for the BEAD department at the Forest Lawn Adult Learning Centre. He has also worked for the Catholic Board of education and taught apprenticeship math for AVC. Not all Sean's steps toward success were easy. Sacrifice, financial struggle and hard work faced Sean as he returned to school as an adult. What is impressive about Sean is his ability and willingness to meet challenges directly.

I was born and raised in Ireland. I remember being fourteen when I entered the workforce. It was quite normal at that time. Not many people went on and got a secondary education. My first job was working in a diamond factory cutting and polishing the diamonds. That job lasted less than a year, then they closed down the factory. I moved around a bit and then worked in construction. That was when I moved to the United States, working in construction in New York and Alaska. In the late seventies, I stopped in Calgary. When I saw all those construction cranes, I knew it was the place for me!

After working as a general labourer, I became a heavy equipment operator. But I always wanted something more stable and challenging. I always felt in the back of my mind I would go back to school one day. I'm sure lots of people do who leave school early. But most people never follow through. The recession made the time right for me, there wasn't much work. I started an evening program at BEAD.

This program met my needs at the time. I had been away from school for 20 years. As you mature, you get these ideas in your head that you could study and pass exams without a problem. But they are false. You really have to go back and do the work. You need to see what it is like to learn. The BEAD instructors were all very helpful and easy to work with. The counsellor helped by telling me that there was a full-time program downtown, and I could apply for funding. Then I went to AVC, the same counsellor was there. That was important to me.

When I started at AVC full-time, I didn't have any goals. In three years I had my grade 12 and was accepted at the University of Calgary. Still I didn't have a goal. When I started university I decided to be a social worker. I knew I wanted to work with people. But as time went on I realized I'd spend my life in an office pushing paper. That wasn't working with people so I changed to the Education faculty.

Going back to school helped change my life. I suffered from low self esteem because I didn't have an education. Even though I worked, I felt second rate. Going back to school boosted my self esteem. It builds up bit by bit. You write exams and do as well as anyone else. All the sacrifice and loss of income would have been worth it for this one thing.

However, one has to make sacrifices. I was single and didn't have family responsibilities. I sold my car to avoid financial pressure that might interfere with going back to school. You have to adjust your life style to live within your means. I was able to drive cab on the side which helped me make ends meet while I was in school. I often jokingly tell people that I got a better education driving cab than attending university. Studying was very difficult. It was hard to learn how to study and how to make the time for it.

If you are an adult thinking about going back to school, there are some things to keep in mind. First, don't take the attitude that you can do this and not put any work into it. Just sitting in class isn't enough. You have to put in work outside the class. If you aren't willing to do this don't bother going back; it will just be a frustrating experience. Second, have a goal. It is much easier if you know where you are going.

I plan to stay in education. It's like anything else, you have to learn as you go. I'm pleased with the way things have gone. It's a lot of hard work and the kids today are very demanding. But you have such an influence on people's lives at a critical time. I think it's a great profession.

KATHY SHERIDAN



Kathy is a very self-possessed woman who is determined to achieve her educational goals. Education has not always been one of her priorities, however. For many years Kathy had no educational goal. She grew up in communities all across Alberta, changing schools as her father moved from one job to the next. Junior high school was a negative experience for her. Kathy became one of the drop-out statistics we hear about so much in today's society, leaving school without completing grade nine. Kathy returned to school and began to experience success only as an adult. As her story indicates she has become an excellent role model for her peers.

The first program I took at AVC was a night course in computers. I hoped this would help me get ahead at work. At my job, in a cash and carry grocery store, I kept working very hard, but without results. Not only did I not get promised promotions, but they eventually let me go so a relative of the manager could have my job.

I thought about it and knew I needed a better job. Business Careers at AVC seemed to lead in that direction. I saw a counsellor and took an entry test. Unfortunately the full-time program had no vacancies. I was sent to the BEAD site near where I lived and began studying in September. It was the perfect placement for me. I'm convinced that without this program and the wonderful instructor I would not be here now. I still relate and apply what I learned there to my present high school studies. But it wasn't only the serious side that taught me things. For example I had never been to a play in my life. I went with the BEAD students. Now I love the theatre and go whenever I get the chance. Something else that was important to me was the support from other students. We were a close-knit group and still get together. The whole approach helped me become a well rounded person.

By February there was a full-time place for me at AVC and I started my high school credits. I worked very hard. Last year I won the academic achievement award and then I won it again this year! A key for me was work. I had to want to work, not just to achieve the end product. I also appreciated the extra help from instructors and the Learning Assistance Centre. I see many new students who want careers, but don't want to do the necessary studying. They usually leave the program quickly.

For the next year I have been accepted into SAIT (Southern Alberta Institute of Technology) to take Engineering Design and Drafting Technology. This is a two year program. I'm nervous about starting a new course, but I'm also excited about the future.

FERNANDO CAMPOS



Fernando's story reveals a person who is able to make the best of any situation. He is a survivor. His accomplishments are remarkable considering Fernando had no opportunity for an education as he was growing up. He had never been in a classroom until joining the BEAD program in 1991. However, Fernando was a self-taught man. Since arriving in Canada he taught himself English and was able to read and write well enough to begin at a junior high level. Fernando would like to be a journalist. In the future we may see this man, who began as a young boy with no education selling newspapers on the streets of Mexico City, reaching his goal.

I grew up in Mexico City speaking Spanish. Down there I was raised on the streets. I was 7 or 8 when my parents disappeared. I don't have any idea what my parents looked like. I don't even know their names. The only thing I worried about was where the next meal came from. To make money I washed cars, shone shoes, and sold newspapers. Mind you, selling newspapers was a pain in the neck because I couldn't read. Other kids sold more. Gradually I learned that these kids knew enough to read the headlines, then they would make up their own news. I did this too. Soon I was outselling everyone else because I've got one hell of an imagination!

My desire to leave Mexico was reinforced when I saw a friend of mine die. Seeing him there scared the devil out of me because he was younger than I was. Everywhere I looked I saw suffering.

After coming to Canada I had a variety of jobs. I washed dishes, worked in construction and was a "carnie" for three years because I wanted to see the country. But you don't get to see Canada when you work in a carnival. You travel at night and you work hard the rest of the time. When I got married I realized that was not the life for a married man, so I settled down in Calgary and worked for seven years at the Holy Cross Hospital.

I always wanted to go to school and finally I had a chance. Here I was, a family man with two children, entering class for the first time. I was scared! But the BEAD teacher made me feel so good that it was easy to get used to school. She took time to explain things to me. I learned grammar and things you don't teach yourself. These things stayed with me and helped give me confidence. The other problem for me as an adult student was money. I had a family to support, but you have to make sacrifices.

Once you make the decision to come to school you have to stick with it. If you don't you're wasting everyone's time -- and for what? Dish washing I guess, because that's what is left. I want to be a journalist, but from wishing to doing takes a long time!



GEORGINA ROLLINMUD

Georgina's life has been a patchwork of school, casual employment and family obligations. Now Georgina is composing a quilt from these patches. Studying at the Eden Valley Adult Learning Centre has allowed her to stitch her life experience together and look toward a positive future. Georgina is a very articulate woman who tells her own story so well.

I started out, as far as I can remember, speaking Stoney. Then I moved to Calgary and learned English. Now I understand Stoney very well, but I don't speak that much. Calgary was where I started school. School was like a law and you did not break it. I was brought up in a very demanding home. If you missed one day of school you were looking for punishment. Once I got used to school, I really came to like it.

Later on this driving force behind me -- pushing -- got to me. I didn't have time to enjoy myself. I couldn't take that any more. I quit school and moved back to the reserve when I was fourteen. My grandfather needed me then, to help him around the farm.

I had a big dream to join the army. I applied at 14, but I was under age. Over the years I reapplied. But each year the entry requirements changed and I no longer had an adequate education. My first time back at school was when I was 18 and I came to AVC in Calgary. It was a frightening experience. Not school, I expected those responsibilities. What I didn't expect was how fast moving everything was. Just getting around the city was a problem for me. I didn't have my freedom. I lived under someone else's authority. There were financial obligations and I was lonely. I got as far as grade 11 in English. Reading and writing were things I loved. What really started getting me down was that my sponsorship, which came from Indian Affairs, was cut off completely. I was so determined to finish that I travelled back and forth from the reserve for one whole semester. This meant getting up at four a.m. to arrive in Calgary for my classes.

When I finished that semester I was exhausted. There were family problems too. I went back to the city and worked in casinos, but I thought there was something better I could do. I started to look around for something related to the army because that is what I always wanted. But then my mother needed me and I moved home. I worked at odd jobs, but didn't do any schooling.

This program started for me in October. Personally, it restored my sense of caring. For a while I hadn't cared about having any wants or needs. I didn't have any energy to drive myself. Instead I just sat like a bump on a log. I had to do something so I talked to the instructor. At first I didn't have any enthusiasm, but soon things changed and I enjoyed trying to meet a challenge. Now I have all my GED subjects except math, which I will write in June. I also study social science by correspondence.

I feel a lot of doors are opening. When I had my interview to get into this program and they asked what kind of career goal I would like, I told them the army. But I really didn't believe that anymore. I said it to get into the program. Soon my instructor started talking about Lethbridge Community College where there is a Criminal Justice Certificate Program. That really pushed me forward. All my applications are in and I have been accepted for September, 1992.

Now I have a sense of responsibility and direction. Maybe from the outside, if a stranger came, this person might not see the program here as something special. However, for those of us involved, it means everything.



JIM BRANDON

Currently Jim is working in an auto body shop as an apprentice. It takes four years of work and part-time study at SAIT to be successful in an apprenticeship program and receive your "ticket". Jim is committed to the program which allows him to provide a living for his family while acquiring a trade. Jim's future did not always look so secure. His story is filled with challenges.

Going to prison changed my life. When I got into trouble I figured that just sitting around in there wasn't going to get me anywhere. I could use my time better than that. I'd always wanted to go back to school but it was very hard to learn to sit down and concentrate. The way they ran things at Spy Hill worked for me. I could study at my own pace instead of having somebody there pushing me. On the other hand, I had trouble with some of the stuff and needed the instructor's help. I studied for six months and passed my GED (General Education Diploma) and pre-apprenticeship math. This education got me my apprenticeship. I never used to look ahead and now I want to do something with my life.

It wasn't always this way. I grew up on a reserve in Manitoba. When I was about 6, we moved to the city. I was on my own a lot and there was nobody to look after me. I moved back and forth from the city to the reserve and never went to school much. Because I was abandoned, I was eventually adopted. Still, it was hard to go to school as a teenager, especially when you were behind the other kids. I dropped out before I finished grade eleven.

I want my kids to have an education. I don't want them to have the kinds of jobs I've had to do -- very hard work and not much money. I worked in construction, seasonal work with no security. My kids should use their heads. I want them to go to university. My wife went back to school after I did. Not that I take credit for that.

Maybe down the road I'll take accounting. The only thing I regret is not going to school when I was younger. It's never too late and you're never too old, to go back to school. If I had the chance for more schooling, I'd do it!

PAULETTE ANILUS



Sometimes, when the winter winds are howling, the snow is drifting and temperatures reside for weeks at sub zero figures, one thinks of places where one basks in warm sunshine year round. Paulette and Presner left behind just such an ideal climate in their native Haiti. But they have no regrets. Both speak of Canada with great fondness and appreciation. They are grateful for the opportunities extended to them in their new homeland. Extremely hard working individuals, they have continuously juggled jobs and study in order to pursue educational goals. Soon after arriving in Calgary they joined a BEAD evening program where they attended class together after a full day's work.

In my own country, Haiti, I had a high school education. After that I trained for 2 years as a lab technician. But getting a job was very difficult. Jobs were scarce and if you didn't know the right people, you didn't have any opportunity.

I met Presner when he came to visit Haiti. Then I moved to Montreal. There I worked in a factory. Living there was easy for me because I could speak French. When we moved to Calgary in 1981 we had to learn better English. I had studied English in high school but I couldn't speak much.

So we found we could go together to AVC classes in the BEAD Department. We went in the evening and worked during the day. For me this was a good opportunity because I could improve my English comprehension and review math. You know, when you don't do math for a while you do tend to forget things. The teacher was very helpful and encouraged our progress. After studying for a year at night I went back and got my grades 10, 11, and 12 -- in English this time! I also took Business Careers at AVC, which offered me a chance for employment.

My English still wasn't good. I still felt shy speaking and would use my sense of humour to cover-up anything I didn't understand. I'd applied for work as temporary office staff and they sent me to a large oil company. Luckily they needed a bilingual switchboard operator and I was hired. I worked there for almost a year, but it was not me to work in the business world.

Since I was a little girl I've always wanted to be a nurse. When my father asked as a child what I wanted to do when I grew up, my reply was always "To be a nurse". So I applied to many places and was accepted into the psychiatric nursing course in Ponoka. That is where I am now. Next year I will transfer to Red Deer College to take the registered nurse's program. Likely I will take this for 2 years and move back to Calgary. Then I will be able to work and complete my studies for my degree at night. Eventually, I'd like to work in the area of gynaeccology.

Having a dream to be a nurse isn't all that easy. You have to give up a lot of things as an adult student. You have to give up your freedom. Your family suffers too. You can't always cook for them -- Presner hates to cook -- and there are many other things you don't have time to do for your family. But the end is very worthwhile.

PRESNER ANILUS



While attending this program they improved their English skills and prepared for further studies. Paulette is currently studying psychiatric nursing at Ponoka. Presner is working on his Electrical Engineer's Diploma and will attend SAIT this spring to complete the technical component. Paulette and Presner are justifiably proud of their accomplishments. They echo each other in saying that without the BEAD program they would never have been able to take the first step on the path to "educational success". That path was not always easy or direct. What Paulette and Presner obviously have in common is a sense of determination and a capacity for hard work.

At present I work for the Calgary Herald. It's a good job and I enjoy my work. I'm an electrical assistant and look after repairs. But I didn't start in this position -- not at all. I began as a janitor when we moved to Calgary in 1981.

As you know, Paulette and I are from Haiti. I came to Canada in 1973 and worked in Montreal. Since French is my first language, Montreal was perfect. But the company I worked for, Sylvania, was relocating to Toronto. That didn't appeal to me so I took a brief vacation to Haiti where I met Paulette and she risked coming to Montreal. Before long we moved to Alberta and within a week I had a janitor's job at the Herald. My supervisor there knew I had some electronics experience and suggested I take a course so I could move into the electronics department. That was an excellent idea, but before I studied the technical courses, I needed to learn more English. Just speaking English with your friends and co-workers is not the same as studying in English.

Paulette and I entered the BEAD program. We attended in the evenings for a year and really enjoyed it. First, the instructor was nice. He understood that we had to work all day and then study as well. Each person had individual program, so Paulette and I could be in the same class, but study different things at our own pace.

The next year I took the Apprenticeship Math program also run by the BEAD department. I was successful in that course and moved on to SAIT where I finished my Building Operator's Certificate in 1985. At work this meant I could be promoted from janitor to building operator.

Still I didn't want to quit. I wanted to do something different. This time I went to DeVry for my Electronics Engineering Technician's Certificate. To do this I had to go to school in the day and work the evening shift. That, too, was completed, and now I am taking correspondence courses towards my Electrical Engineer's Diploma. In a few months I will be taking the technical part of this course at SAIT. It will mean school during the day and working the evening shift. They are very aware of this at my job and see that I can handle it without a problem.

I feel very proud of all of this. I would suggest to anyone to go to AVC and talk to a counsellor. Whatever they want to do there would be a benefit. Without the BEAD program at AVC I would never have started studying. I would not have been so confident about what I'm doing now.

To be successful you need determination and to know what you want. You must have a specific goal or you are wasting your time. Even if somebody needs to help you with this, you must establish a goal. A good education is an asset, something you are always proud to have.

HEATHER LOCHHEAD



Heather had many ideas she wanted to share with other adults returning to school. Her good suggestions and positive approach were very refreshing. As a single mom, with a two year old, she finds life a constant juggling act. But she has juggled successfully and is now in her second year of studies at the Okotoks Adult Learning Centre. As Heather prepares to write her GED (General Education Diploma) she has planned for the future and applied to Mount Royal College.

I didn't care for school at all. I found the discipline, teacher's expectations and pressure from the other kids hard to take. Learning took me a long time. I was dyslexic and very disorganized. I couldn't get my ideas on paper and the letters weren't formed properly. Of course I also had a real "attitude". I'll admit that! My parents were very loving and caring. After grade six they sent me to a private school. I attended until I was 15, then dropped out. I wasn't very scholastic but I also had low self-esteem. School was not a good experience for me.

This is the first place that I've ever put my nose to the grindstone. I have this program to help me on my way to something bigger and better in my life: college, then a career. What makes this program work for me is the flexibility. I'm constantly shuffling people's needs and time often seems like the biggest obstacle in my life. Something else that is important is the one-to-one relationship with the instructor who takes time to explain things without making you feel like an idiot. I'm able to stand up for myself in a positive way and discuss things in class on an adult level.

The turning point in my life was after my son was born. I wanted to help him with his school and his life. It was important to me to be a good 'example. Now I have a goal. I worked for a year in a high school as an aid to a mentally disadvantaged girl. Working with this type of person has always fascinated me and never been intimidating. I have applied for the Rehabilitation Service Program at Mount Royal College so that I'll have the qualifications needed for this work.

ALFRED GOODER



Doing the interview at the adult school on the Morley Reserve, Alfred was surrounded by children. His warm heart and kindness were all-inclusive. Alfred is a grandfather who raised seven children. Now he has several young adopted children living with him and his wife. He seemed grateful that he was given a second chance at parenting. Since returning to school Alfred has noticed that the children in his household take their own schooling more seriously. They are better motivated to attend school and follow his example of reading and doing homework. Alfred himself felt very positive about education. The highest compliment he gave anyone during our interview was to say "He is a wise man and he is educated too." Alfred refused to have his photo taken unless his instructor, Alice, was also included. Together they make an effective "learning team".

I quit school in grade five. My mother was a widow and there were three of us to raise. I helped out and went to work. When I stopped going to school I thought things would stay the same and that time would stand still. The jobs I used to do like logging and farming are lost. Now there are trucks and power equipment. Time didn't stand still, it passed me by.

In life I've been bluffing my way all these years and I can't do it any more. I want to write better and learn the modern ways. I want a trade. I'd like to be able to repair small motors and fix appliances. That is really needed out here on the reserve.

The first step in getting an education was making the decision to go back. That was hard. It changed my life style a lot. I used to run a courier's service from here and look after the kids. As they grew older, I didn't have to stay home.

Education is the key to success and you have to sacrifice some good times to succeed. You have to give up your own personal time. Learning isn't hard work, but it is a challenge. It requires determination. I've been in this program less than a year and next September I want to go to SAIT for that small engines course. Education is the way to prepare for the future.

JOHANNA VAN KAN



Johanna grew up in Holland. She and her husband arrived in Canada several years ago and found work in Calgary. She has always worked since leaving school. Her jobs include store clerk and cleaning motels. The latter job involved seasonal unemployment with Johanna being laid off each winter when the tourist season was slow. In 1987 she was referred to AVC as a route to further training and a more stable employment situation. Johanna graduated from AOP (Academic Occupational Program) one and two and at the same time successfully completed the GED (General Education Diploma). Now she has a permanent job in the Traffic Court Offices of the Provincial Government. It is also interesting that Johanna's husband attended the BEAD program in the evenings while working full-time. He was also a successful GED candidate.

I grew up speaking Dutch. I went to school in Holland and at 15 I finished and started working. It was easy to get a job. At that time it was normal to work at a job for two or three years, then change. That's what I did. That way I had a lot of experience.

At that time I wasn't really interested in continuing with school. My parents didn't talk me into staying at school. Maybe if they had I would have been a kindergarten teacher. That was something I was interested in. I would have studied more if I'd had the encouragement. For me, it changed here in Canada. I went back to school. Now I have a different outlook on life. I'm so much more interested in different things, more curious.

When I was laid off my cleaning job in 1987 an employment counsellor suggested I try AVC. So I went right to AVC to check what was available. I started in the BEAD program and stayed for six months. The church where the program was held was close to my home, I could just walk over. It was nice. You were close to the teacher and she understood your situation. The students were older and you could always find one or two friends. This beginning prepared me for full-time school. Working on an individual program was a good way to start. I improved my spelling and my English. The math wasn't hard and I could review all the things I'd forgotten. Coming back to school was really depressing especially in the first year. You had to go to class all day, then come home and do homework. It was not easy at all. The subjects were easy, it was the discipline and study that were hard. It's different from a job--you're not paid to get up early and study into the night. After you finish you can look back and say "Wasn't I lucky?". But at the time it is hard. It helped me become more of a fighter. It forced me to do things I didn't think I could.

For example I was in the AOP and they said I had to attend a work experience placement. I didn't want to do that. I didn't feel ready. So I went to see my counsellor.

She said I had to go or I wouldn't get my diploma. I went... and it was great! This work experience placement turned into my current job which is now permanent.

Going back to school was hard for me, but for others it is worse. Some people have such a hard life. Still they do go back to school. If it's hard for them when they go back to school they should go to a counsellor and talk it over. The counsellors told me many times "hang in there". Also talk to other students if you have a problem. Chances are they might have the same problem as you. Adult students don't realize that they just have to finish school and their lives will be easier.

SHAUN MARION



There is a very special program run by the BEAD Department in partnership with the City of Calgary Social Services. The City of Calgary Work Activity Project (CCWAP) offers a unique opportunity for learners to and vide their time evenly between study and on-the-job-training. They also receive a wage while attending the program. Shaun Marion took advantage of this learning experience to get his GED (General Education Diploma) while gaining practical experience in woodworking. Shaun, who is now twenty-one, was able to merge the educational and practical components of the CCWAP experience in his current full-time job manufacturing wooden doors.

I liked learning, I just didn't like school. The way the system worked frustrated me and I just wasn't successful.

When I think about it I had a good school experience until junior high school. It was then that attendance became a problem. I just didn't want to go. My marks were average and stayed in the 60's even though I wasn't in school much. I kept passing, but by grade nine the system caught up with me, and I was kicked out for attendance problems. I finished grade nine by correspondence. I went back to school and finished grade ten. The first semester of grade 11 I got locked out for attendance problems again. The next semester I ended up in the hospital with diabetes. I was 19 and that was the end of my school career.

I always wanted to go back, but I knew staying there would be a problem. The CCWAP course was different. It was one week of work followed by a week of school. This kept me interested. Also you could teach yourself at your own rate. You didn't have to do a bunch of unnecessary work. In about 6 months I finished my GED in all 5 areas. That included a perfect score in math! Also, I took accounting by correspondence.

I still don't have enough education. There are a lot of jobs I know I can do, but I'm just not qualified on paper. They wouldn't let me in the door or give me a chance. I'd like to go back to school, but I know I'd get bored again and drop out. It is just me. This is not the reaction I have at work though.

It is good to know other things, to develop other skills like landscaping or construction. So if one trade doesn't work out you can do something else. I live my life day by day and take it as it comes. I wouldn't mind getting into accounting eventually. I'm still young, there is my whole future ahead.

CHAU HUYNH



Imagine yourself in a new and strange country. You are not familiar with the custom or the language. Now imagine that you are also hearing impaired and do not possess an effective means of communication. If you can imagine this situation, then you have a sense of the courage and determination Chau Huynh possessed to pursue an education. Currently attending a BEAD program for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Chau is learning Canadian Sign Language. She is also learning to read and write English as well as studying math, computers and issues in Canadian culture.

In Vietnam, in my country, I wasn't Deaf. I went to school and studied in a regular class until I was 17. I was sick for a while. I got an ear infection and the doctor wasn't able to help. I was very close to graduating, but they didn't have classes for Deaf so I stayed home.

When I came to Canada I really wanted to go to school, but I didn't know what to do about it. I lived with my family. I could lip read Vietnamese, but I didn't know any English. For five years it was like this. I lived with my brother-in-law and sister and worked taking care of their children. I was on my own -- no friends, nothing. I would eat, sleep, and watch T.V.

Once on T.V. I saw an interpreter and I understood that there was actually sign language for Deaf people. Still, I didn't know where to find a school, but I remained patient. Finally, I phoned the social worker who then visited me, and I explained I wanted to go to school. At last, he found AVC and I was really happy!

For the first year I went to night classes. There I learned mostly sign language. After I learned signs my English learning really progressed well. Then the next year I came during the day and now I study full time. I had so much to learn. Not just sign language and English but many, many other things. For example I had to learn it was O.K. to hug people. Deaf people hug each other when they meet. In my country that was **never** done, so I felt very embarrassed. Here we also learn a lot of life skills. We talk about sexual issues (which we **never** would in my country) and how to take care of our bodies. Most important, we learn how to be independent.

In the future I would like to buy a computer for myself so I can practice at home. I still feel awkward with English, so I need to study more. I hope to continue with school and get a job in the computer field. Attending night classes while I work would improve my English.

My whole life changed as an adult student. I can do things. I can go out shopping if I need to. I can write down notes to people and when I'm at home I can use the TTY (telephone device for the Deaf). I've started meeting more Deaf people and I have a Deaf boyfriend. It's WONDERFUL! I have an independent life now.

*Chau told her story with the help of her instructor/interpreter.
Special thanks to Kathryn Wollenberg for acting as Chau's interpreter.*

MARCEL LANDRY AND ERIN BLAIN



Marcel is a beginning reader and writer. At the time this booklet was published, Marcel could not read these words. However, with the help of Erin Blain, Marcel is showing remarkable progress. Erin is a student at the University of Calgary. She volunteers to work with Marcel for three hours each week. But Erin's volunteer hours do not end with the time she spends tutoring Marcel. She prepares lessons, makes teaching tools such as flashcards, and keeps ongoing evaluation of Marcel's progress. As Marcel expressed it You need the right people to help you. Erin does this for nothing. You need more people like her! Marcel studies two nights a week at the Cochrane Learning Centre. One of these evenings he works with Erin, during the other he works primarily on math, which, for him doesn't require as much individualized attention. As there are many other adults in the same class and only one instructor, Marcel feels very fortunate that he has the benefit of both an instructor and a volunteer tutor. When Marcel joined the program, he could neither read nor write. As a youngster, he grew up in an isolated French speaking community on Quebec's north shore. This village had no electricity, no roads, no phones, and most significant for Marcel, no schools. This lack of opportunity to attend school is quite rare in Canada-- probably even rarer now than when Marcel left his home town 20 years ago. Marcel's is a fascinating story.

On the north shore it was very isolated. In the winter we got around by dog sled and snowmobile, in the summer by boat. Supplies came in during the spring and fall, for the rest we lived off the land. There was fishing and hunting for survival. Work was more important than school, but I always wanted to study. At thirteen I left home and worked on cargo ships and oil tankers. I didn't need an education for the type of work we did on the ships. I caught on very quickly to the work, that wasn't a problem. But it was hard in the cities if you couldn't read. Along the way I learned to speak English, Spanish, and Italian. I still couldn't read, but sometimes on the ship I would copy out words.

When I left the ships and came to Alberta there was never a problem for me finding work. I've always had to work hard, sometimes at two jobs and often seven days a week.

For the past 10 or 12 years I wanted to study. People told me they could help only if I quit my job and went to school during the day. That didn't seem like a good idea. A few months ago my wife called around and found this class. Being able to go to class in Cochrane is important for me. It is just a short drive home which is much better than having to go to Calgary.

I look forward to coming to class every day. I just want to read and write, to sit down and read a book, a newspaper. At first I didn't tell my kids about my problem. I was scared about what they would think. If they asked me to read something, I'd send them to my wife. Once I started school, I told them that I never had a chance to go to school. They could understand that. Now my oldest boy helps me with my homework.

It was hard to start from nowhere. But I've only been studying for a few months and already there is a difference. Now I can read road signs. I can pick out a few words and put the rest together. Since Erin has been helping me I've written the first letter I've ever written. It was to my family in Quebec. This makes a big difference to me. I don't know how far I can go, but I plan to put in as much time as I can.

I don't really expect a better job out of this. If that's the only reason you're going to school you might as well stay home. There is no guarantee that you'll make \$20 or \$30 an hour. I think people expect too much. I enjoy school. I look forward to learning more.

CECILIA MARCONI



Cecilia is a woman with a true sense of adventure. She left her native Chile, worked in Spain and then immigrated to Canada. She studied English in the evening while working during the day. In Canada she married and now has three children. Cecilia's life has had its trials but she treats each difficulty with the same sense of adventure that brought her to Canada. She spoke with tremendous enthusiasm about learning and one could sense her innate curiosity. Cecilia also has a very resourceful approach to life: as we spoke she pulled her former texts, workbooks and certificates from an unused dishwasher sitting in the corner of her immaculate kitchen. "I always keep my books near by" she exclaimed with a laugh!

I trained as a cosmetologist in Chile and worked here in Canada for many years teaching hairdressing at a private college. When it closed down I worked elsewhere but the pay was very low. Going back to school really appealed to me, but I had no idea what level would be appropriate. At AVC they tested me and sent me to a program close to where I lived in Bowness. I needed to find a job **soon!** My husband was unemployed and we had three children. In four months I finished my level three at the Adult Learning Centre and entered SAIT. Six months later I graduated with a Certified Sterile Processing Aide diploma. Fortunately I found work right away.

This work requires you to assemble, sterilize and package instruments for operations. The heaviest ones are for knee and hip operations. It is very heavy work and especially hard on the shoulders and arms. The other disadvantage is the shift work -- one week of days, one week of evenings. This prevents me from taking my high school courses to get my grade twelve. The work is good for now but I'm not getting any younger and I must think of the future. Perhaps I can take correspondence courses. My future goal is to teach cosmetology in a Vocational School.

Choosing to go back to school as an adult was not easy. I already had 11 years of education in Chile and was a trained cosmetologist. The most difficult thing was the financial stress. The money had to be stretched. I learned some things from my mother in this area and cooked using lentils and beans instead of meat. It was cheap and healthy. I also sewed clothes for the children. To do this I had to organize my time. When I studied I sometimes drank a lot of coffee to keep working until one in the morning.

But going back to school as an adult has some advantages. You feel better about yourself. You feel motivated. You feel younger! BEAD gave me an opportunity to review the basics. It was free and close to my home. I loved the computer work. It was very motivating for my children to see their mother working so hard at school. I would say to them, If your mother can do this, you can do better!

JACK STEVENSON



Growing up in a single parent home with limited financial resources, leaving school at a young age, getting into trouble as a teenager, and then losing a hand in an accident - all these elements are part of Jack Stevenson's past. Today he holds the same full-time job he has had for fourteen years. He returned to school as an adult to complete his GED (General Education Diploma). Now Jack considers studying enjoyable and even took a non-credit Spanish course, just for fun! He is a very resourceful individual who never dwells on misfortune. Enquiry about his handproduced the response Oh it was just a party mishap. I loaded a gun with the wrong powder, next thing I knew, the hand was gone! Now Jack uses his mechanical abilities to fashion various hooks and attachments adapted to the work he does. Jack's candid nature and wonderful sense of humour made our interview a pleasure.

Since 1977 I've worked for the Hamlet of Aldersyde. I'm the guy they call if there is a new sign needed or a culvert to replace. Just recently I got a promotion, and now I also do the water distribution for the MD (municipal district). To get this promotion I had to go back and get my GED, then write a water distribution exam. Now that I've started I'd like to do more courses and get a water treatment certificate.

As a kid in school I did fairly well till about grade six, when I squeaked by. Then I failed grade seven. At that point I got a little rebellious but made it through the next year. By grade eight I really didn't get along with the teacher, failed again, and left school at fifteen. My uncle let me apprentice with him as a mechanic and I did the course work at SAIT for two years. I was pretty good at that and I really liked the work.

I went to the Okotoks Adult Learning Centre to get my GED. I studied there for 6 or 7 months. Man, it was hard to get into the study habit. It was much easier to say "I think I'll just scoot off to the bar". I found it hard to sit and learn something that I'd never use again. Except math -- I needed to use that.

I think what scared me the most was writing skills -- essays and stuff like that. Its OK if you can write what interests you, but we had to do things like What Do You Like About Your Community.

There was a lot I enjoyed. For example I was surprised at the variety of people in the class: young people, older people, housewives and bus drivers. The atmosphere was relaxed and you had an opportunity to talk about important issues. The instructor is there to help you out and make learning look **so** easy.

Taking an upgrading course helped my career. If people want to go back to school, they should stick with it even though it's tough. When you do a GED its helpful to study something you're good at, like math, along with something difficult, like English. And remember, you can't scoot off to the bar. You have to study!



DEBRA MICHAUD

Strength is the word that comes to mind when referring to Debbie. She has a very special inner strength which has helped her meet many of life's challenges head on and emerge a winner. This strength is joined by resourcefulness and a capacity for hard work. Having suffered many hardships and ordeals, Debbie remains positive and motivated to help others.

"My childhood was not a happy time. I was a victim. My mom was a bad alcoholic. She was very abusive both physically and mentally. The oldest one at home got most of the beatings; my turn came eventually. My dad worked away from home. He never saw how we were treated or anything. We never told him about what our life was like.

My oldest brother left home at 14. When he was gone my next oldest sister got the beatings. She was taken away by welfare when she was 12. That's when Dad found out what had been going on. My next sister was taken away when I was eight, then I became the target for abuse. By the time I was 15 I couldn't take it any more. I went to school after a beating from my mom and threw my books in a window. I was gone. From that point on I worked and supported myself; not great jobs, but work. At 17 I went back and took my younger brother away and helped him get a job in the bush camp where I was a cook. Much later, my mother had a heart attack and changed because she got the help she needed for her alcoholism.

Eventually I found work in a nursing home. I loved it. Although I didn't have any training I worked every shift, every job, and could do what needed to be done. I did this work for fourteen years. But one night on the midnight shift I asked "Why am I doing this for seven dollars an hour when I could become an R.N.?" I phoned AVC as soon as I finished my shift. I started in the BEAD program close to my home. At first I worked all night, went to class in the morning and looked after my son who was just a baby.

During the time I worked as an aide in the nursing home I was married. It was like marrying my mother. He was an alcoholic who beat me -- at least twice a week whether I needed it or not. Interesting isn't it, the way history repeats itself. My ex-husband killed himself a year after I left him. It's funny that I'm not nuts, but I'm not!!

Life looks better to me now than it ever has. I have a six year old son and a 17 year old foster son. After attending the BEAD program and finishing my GED (General Education Diploma) I went to a ten month computer course. That led to my current job at the Canadian Paraplegic Association. It is secretarial work and very interesting. I get to work with people and projects. This is only contract work though, so I have to see what happens after the new budget.

Going back to school made some changes in my life. I know more and have more insight into people. Plus, I feel more confident. There is more to studying than books, and I really think they should teach life skills at BEAD. It's a sacrifice, in a way, to study. You have to give up the 'party life' and become committed. If someone says you can't do it, get that person out of your life. These people will try to hold you back. Have only positive people around you.

A person would never regret going back to school. Even if you learn one new thing a day it is worthwhile. Anybody can do it. That's what BEAD did for me; it proved I could accomplish a goal. It wasn't the material I studied that prepared me for the future, but proving to myself that I could do it. The program was great. It got me to want to learn and not stop."

AFTERWORD

This was not designed as a research document. However, common patterns concerning successful adult learners emerged. Generally, the features associated with success divided into two categories: program characteristics and individual behaviours. There has been no attempt to prioritize any of the items which follow.

BEAD program characteristics which encouraged success:

- individualized programs
- caring, competent teachers
- flexible program times
- flexible curriculum
- regular visits from counsellors
- positive initial experience as adult learners
- support from other students
- proximity of learning centres to students' homes
- opportunity to transfer to other AVC programs

Individual behaviours (actions) which encouraged success:

- establishing goals
- attending regularly & purposefully
- completing extra work outside class
- remaining positive
- persisting, even in the face of obstacles

It is worth noting that the majority of people interviewed spent between six and twelve months at a BEAD Adult Learning Centre before transferring to other programs. Second, the GED was the most popular preparation for better employment and further education or training.

UPDATE - JANUARY, 1994

More than a year has past since "Celebrating Success" was first published. It was really exciting to renew acquaintances with those who originally shared their stories, and discuss the directions their lives had taken. All of them continue to inspire admiration for their determination to succeed.

SEAN COLLINS now works for the Calgary Catholic Board of Education. True to his professional plan he influences children's lives through the art of teaching.

KATHY SHERIDAN found the course at SAIT to be very different than she expected and did not stay in the program. Instead, Kathy and a business partner bought a chimney sweep business. She is now ready to enroll in evening courses in computers and bookkeeping to help improve her new business.

GEORGINA ROLLINMUD successfully completed her first year in the Native Criminal Justice course at Lethbridge Community College. She continues to study in this program and is looking forward to working in her chosen career.

PAULETTE ANILUS continues her nursing studies and is now at Red Deer College. She is looking forward to finishing her course at the end of 1994. At this time she will be able to return to live with her family in Calgary rather than just see them on weekends.

PRESNER ANILUS keeps busy while Paulette is studying in Red Deer. He is still working towards becoming an electrician. When this isn't challenge enough, he attends the Workplace Literacy Program at the Calgary Herald and takes a computer course in WordPerfect.

HEATHER LOCHHEAD can hardly wait to graduate from Mount Royal College. She will finish her course in Rehabilitation Services in 1994. After graduation she would like to work with brain injured people, who require just the skills Heather is developing.

JOHANNA VAN KAN loves her job! She continues to work in the Traffic Court Offices, while making time to travel and enjoy hobbies.

SHAUN MARION works full-time manufacturing wooden doors. He is still interested in taking courses on a part-time basis.

CHAU HUYNH completed the Literacy program at AVC - Calgary. She had enrolled in a program for Deaf students at AVC called "Computers in the Workplace". However, this program was not offered in September, 1993. Chau now works part-time for a major hotel and takes upgrading classes twice a week.

ERIN BLAIN completed her second year of general studies at the University of Calgary. She has transferred to a university in Quebec to take her education degree.

CECILIA MARCONI continues to work in a hospital sterilizing and packaging instruments for operators. She recently returned to Chili for a vacation, taking her son to visit his grandparents.

JACK STEVENSON still takes courses towards his Water Treatment Certificate. His work for the Hamlet of Aldersyde remains interesting and challenging. As for scooting off to the bar ... Jack still finds a little time to do just that!

DEBRA MICHAUD has spent time recently decorating and landscaping her new home. When contract work ended for Debra, her new challenge was to take care of a foster daughter. Now she is ready to return to work and hopes to find something in the secretarial field.

ANGEL YEUNG has passed her English 30 exam. She still works part-time while caring for two young children. She also finds time to take a course at the University of Calgary. Angel excels at balancing the many elements of her life, therefore putting her own philosophy into practice.