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## International Adult Learners' Week 2005

### Learners' Stories and Best Practices

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#### **Sabrina's Story**

Sabrina is a single mom in Kelowna, BC, who left school in grade 9. She needed her G.E.D (General Educational Development) in order to apply to the Culinary Arts Program at Okanagan University College. She and her tutor worked on all areas of the GED, with a focus on math. However, when she felt she was ready to write the exam, Sabrina was unable to pay for the testing fee. The Bridging Barriers Fund covered the cost of the testing. Sabrina received very high marks in all areas of the exam and is now succeeding in the Culinary Arts program at the college. She has already obtained part time work at a popular Italian restaurant, Agostino's. Sabrina is now on her way to fulfilling her dream of running her own catering company, thanks to Project Literacy and the Bridging Barriers Fund. Congratulations, Sabrina!

[Movement for Canadian Literacy](#)

#### **Education Really is a Family Affair**

Going back to school after being away from a classroom for more than two decades is quite a challenge. Just ask Brenda St. Jean of Stewiacke, Nova Scotia. She is raising her two daughters (aged 8 and 16) while working hard to get her Grade 12 diploma. "It's a whole new ball game now," said Brenda from the Adult Literacy program at the Nova Scotia Community College in Truro. Like many other people in Nova Scotia, Brenda dropped out of high school and moved on with her life before knowing exactly what she was going to do. As her children grew up Brenda had a number of odd jobs, mostly in the service industry, but now she has something to prove to herself and to her two girls. "You can't even wash dishes now without your Grade 12 (diploma)," she said. "I try to tell my children they can't get a good job unless they get a proper education." The lesson isn't lost on her 16-year old daughter, Marie, who wants to pursue a career as an English teacher when she graduates from high school. Living up to the expectations Brenda has for her own children is a great motivator for her to finish her education. Even more so, the support she gets from her children has kept her going through long nights of homework and endless days of doing chores and attending classes. Brenda says the sheer volume of homework is one of the greatest challenges of improving her education. But learning new things and meeting new people are among the best things she'll take away with her, besides the graduation diploma. Because of Brenda's determination and commitment she was recently awarded one of three \$500 Literacy Nova Scotia bursaries at a special ceremony last fall. "I want to set a good example for my children," said Brenda. "That's all I want to do."

[Movement for Canadian Literacy](#)

## **Building on Strengths**

At La Ronge Motor Hotel in Saskatchewan, learning is a daily activity supported by senior managers. The hotel helps its employees train for a Saskatchewan Tourism Education Council's national industry certification. The majority of the Aboriginal staff have low levels of formal education and have been raised in a culture where knowledge is passed on orally. The Hotel plays to the strengths of its workers by using the vehicle of oral culture to facilitate workplace education, while fitting training around the traditional way of life and the commitment to family that is so strong in Aboriginal culture. The idea of refreshing and developing literacy and numeracy skills led to the first wave of workplace education at the hotel. In the second wave, department heads were trained. The third wave of workplace education used peer coaching to help employees achieve certification. The program utilized the storytelling skills of workers in coaching exercises and produced a basic training video narrated in Cree, Dene and English. (Achieving Industry Standards in a Remote Northern Community: Developing Aboriginal Employees' Skills at La Ronge Motor Hotel, Kurtis Kitagawa, The Conference Board of Canada, January 2003)

[Conference Board of Canada](#)

## **A Helping Hand**

When Jessica came to Canada from her native Korea in 2002, she knew some English, but soon found it wasn't enough. Through SUCCESS, one of the agencies that administers a Community Bridging Services contract under the BC Settlement and Adaptation Program, Jessica was assigned a volunteer host and now she's practicing the language – and learning a lot about her adopted country. "It sounded great since I could improve my English and make a friend at the same time," she says. Heidi, Jessica's volunteer host, immigrated from Switzerland 25 years ago. She understands what it's like to be new in a strange land. Heidi has been volunteering with the Program for over two years and is still in contact with a Chinese family and a Thai family that she hosted previously. She helped Jessica find a home, took her to doctors' appointments and out for lunches and has now become a friend. Just as important, Heidi is helping Jessica improve her English so that she can study to become a community social services worker. "The commitment is for the first six months," Heidi explains. "After that I don't need to do so much anymore but they know they can always call me." British Columbia's Community Bridging Services program helps immigrants get to know their community and, at the same time, helps the host community learn about diverse cultures. The service is available to newcomer adults, families and youth in several communities across BC.

[BC Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services](#)

## **Portfolio for Success**

When Debbie decided to put her career on hold to raise her first child, she assumed she'd have no trouble landing another job once she returned to the labour force. Unfortunately, despite her vast work experience and the glowing recommendations she'd received from former supervisors, potential employers wouldn't look past the fact that Debbie had never finished high school. "Without that piece of paper, few companies would even consider hiring me and I didn't know how to convince them otherwise," she says. Going back to school full-time wasn't an option, since Debbie had a child to support. Instead, she enrolled part-time and continued to look for work. Through a friend Debbie learned about a local community college that offered a new course designed to help adults gain recognition for prior learning and experience. The portfolio-development course helped students create a record of personal growth and career development to document and verify learning from work and life. Debbie also learned how to reflect upon and communicate her past experience effectively to potential employers. Before completing the course, Debbie landed a full-time job in operational support at Nova Scotia Community College's campus in Digby. She loves every minute of it. "In this job, I get to use nearly every skill I've ever learned," she says.

Source: Canada Prospects 2003-2004  
[Canada Career Consortium](#)

## **New Skills, New Confidence – Two learners tell their stories**

For me, learning as an adult is a personal achievement. When I lost my job I wasn't able to find another one for several years because I had no knowledge of information technology and I lacked a secondary education diploma. I said to myself, "I'm going back to finish my studies." It was the realization of a dream. My progress back also encouraged my daughter, who had left school at 16 years of age, to return to her studies.  
Ginette, 46 years, Ste-Clothilde, Quebec

[Institut de coopération pour l'éducation des adultes](#)

## **Giving Back**

In June 2005, the National Student Caucus of Laubach Literacy Canada (LLC) elected Gary Porter of Barrie, Ontario as its National Student Representative for 2005-2007. This was just one of a number of milestones which have marked Gary's journey through lifelong learning which includes receiving a Canada Post Literacy Award in 2003. Since successfully completing his grade 12 GED, Gary has been an active supporter of organizations and events promoting literacy in Canada. He says his commitment to the movement comes from an understanding of how literacy can change your life. At 40 years old, Gary was financially secure and working in the family business. He hid his lack of literacy skills, leaving the sales and billing jobs to other family members. But when he took over the business with his brother he realized he needed help. Gary became a Laubach student, beginning his studies at a grade 4 level. His goal was passing the GED and he did it in four years. "The day I got my Grade 12 was the happiest day of my life," he says. Gary plans to continue his studies at a college or university and to become a Laubach trainer. He explains, "I want the students to believe 'if Gary can do it, I can do it'. There are no words to express how it changed my whole life."

[Laubach Literacy](#)