Celebrating Adult Learners’ Week 2015
April 11 - April 19

Literacy Changes Lives

Literacy Nova Scotia acknowledges and thanks the Government of Nova Scotia’s Department of Labour and Advanced Education for their support.

Produced by Literacy Nova Scotia
Introduction

The Canadian Commission for UNESCO’s International Adult Learners’ Week (IALW) is an annual celebration of lifelong learning. It is the highlight of Literacy Nova Scotia’s year and for the past eight years it has been celebrated with a contest and a reception.

The contest was a culmination of six writing workshops conducted for Literacy Nova Scotia (LNS) by Jenni Blackmore; 91 learners participated in the workshops held in Sydney, Digby, Yarmouth, New Glasgow, Halifax, and Port Hawkesbury. Workshop participants, as well as learners from English as an Additional Language, seniors and workplace/workforce programs were invited to enter the contest with a video or written submission. LNS received 31 submissions and are pleased to share them.

The 2015 contest winners are:
♦ Jon Adams – Work Activity Programs
♦ Tiffany Rhodenizer – Community based Learning Programs Levels I & II
♦ Samantha Lundrigan – Adult High School, NSCC, Community based Level III and Workplace
♦ Mahnaz Musawi – English as an Additional Language (EAL)

The four winners were honored at a reception held on April 17th at the Halifax World Trade and Convention Centre. The winners read their submissions. The Honourable Kelly Regan, Minister of the Department of Labour and Advanced Education attended and was presented with copies of the writings. Minister Regan congratulated the winners and all adult learners for their determination and commitment. Minister Regan read the Adult Learners’ Week Proclamation on behalf of Premier Stephen McNeil.

Submissions received for the contest are published in this booklet. Literacy Nova Scotia thanks all who shared their stories and enthusiasm for adult learning. These writings demonstrate how learning has made a difference and will inspire others for years to come.
Proclamation

International Adult Learners’ Week

WHEREAS Nova Scotians mark International Adult Learners’ Week from April 11th to April 19th, 2015, celebrating the achievements of adult learners and the organizations that support them; and

WHEREAS learning is the foundation for growth in all aspects of our lives, and International Adult Learners’ Week raises awareness of the value of lifelong learning, and the supports and services available to Nova Scotians who wish to enhance their knowledge and skill; and

WHEREAS lifelong learning has a significant impact on individuals, their families and communities, by helping better prepare the province’s workforce to seize the economic opportunities of today and tomorrow;

THEREFORE I, Stephen McNeil, Premier of Nova Scotia, do hereby proclaim the week of April 11th to April 19th, 2015 to be “International Adult Learners’ Week” in the Province of Nova Scotia, and urge all citizens to observe this week and to be more fully aware of the importance of a lifetime full of learning in all aspects of their lives.

Signed at Halifax, Nova Scotia

Honourable Stephen McNeil, M.L.A.
Premier of Nova Scotia
## Table of Contents

### Winners

- Jon Adams – Options Work Activity Program
- Tiffany Rhodenizer – Pictou County Continuous Learning Association
- Samantha Lundrigan – Bedford Sackville Learning Network
- Mahnaz Musawi – Cunard Learning Centre

### Honourable Mention

- Joan Welsh – Lunenburg County Adult Learning Network
- Shayna Farnsworth – Yarmouth County Learning Network
- Tracey Robicheau – Nova Scotia Community College, Truro Campus
- Trevor Robson – Pictou County Continuous Learning Association

- Ashley Heaney – Nova Scotia Community College, Akerley Campus
- Angela McMullen – Nova Scotia Community College, Kingstec Campus
- Sylvia White – Halifax Community Learning Network
- Mary Hutchison – Adult Learning Association of Cape Breton County
  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0dICXEpFznk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0dICXEpFznk)
- Tashlynn Shaw – Cunard Learning Centre
- Jane Roy – Queens Adult High School
- Serena Muise – Pictou County Continuous Learning Association
- Haylee Gilbert – Adult Learning Association of Cape Breton County
- Viola Baker – Adult Learning Association of Cape Breton County
Jennifer Rhodes – Hants Learning Network Association
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GWiMv6Qfcok&feature=youtu.be

Gary Hamilton – Dartmouth Learning Network

Natasha Howard – Dartmouth Learning Network

Doruka Nicodemus – Cunard Learning Centre

Darnell Miller – Nova Scotia Community College, Pictou Campus

Kristen Smith – Queens Adult High School

Jeanette Roy – Queens County Learning Network

Mary Roberts – Queens County Learning Network

Leticia Montero Perez – Lunenburg County Adult High School

Wayne Wambolt – Queens County Learning Network

Terry Westhaver – Queens County Learning Network

Laura Smith – Queens County Learning Network

Mike Yurczyszyn – Halifax Community Learning Network

Suzanne Clairmont – Yarmouth County Learning Network
How Learning has Changed My Life
Jon Adams - Options Work Activity Program

Until fairly recently, education didn't matter much to me. I did little more than what was necessary to graduate from high school. After a few years I had forgotten almost everything I learned in school. A calculator was all I needed for math; I couldn't even remember how to borrow when subtracting. Even those who seemed intelligent to me were lacking in math skills, so I saw no reason to do anything about my problem.

Shortly after starting the Options Work Activity Program, education started to grow on me. This is partly due to upgrading instructors with real passion for what they do. Also, I had grown up a little. Eventually I wanted to take in all I could in the time available. Math became my favorite class. It was the perfect end to my work week in the second phase of the program. It's very hands-on, appealing to my analytical mind and as an added bonus it is useful for my vintage television repair hobby. By the time the upgrading classes ended, I had a fairly solid grip on whole number operations. My overall math score on Canadian Adult Achievement Test had reached post high school.

I didn't want to just stop it all, but I couldn't continue learning new math operations without instruction, so I continued working on my chosen science series in my spare time. Rather than try to choose a concentration I chose a series with a little bit of everything. I don't just read the material; I study it with the hope of not having to refer to it when answering the questions. Doing it any other way would be pointless. Even though this is not my preferred learning style and the earlier units were more interesting, I'm dedicated to finishing.

For my work option, I chose customer service. In my opinion, it is the most valuable work option offered. I'm passionate about serving others, but was severely lacking in experience and knowledge of how to properly deal with others. The instruction delivered by my highly competent facilitator along with my work experience helping with deliveries to grocery stores has helped me get started on the road to becoming the kind of person I really want to be. As long as I do my best to keep walking tall, I will be successful.

I will continue to seek out new learning opportunities. Most importantly, I must study and practice what I'm passionate about. Any piece of paper that says I have completed a course only means that the foundation has been placed. I must continue to practice and apply whatever I learn to get the full benefit. If I choose to get more formal education, I will likely start with the Academic and Career Connections program at Nova Scotia Community College. Their science for technology offering looks most appealing to me. Whichever path I choose, I'm now much more likely to choose the right one.
My Experience at the Pictou County Continuous Learning Association
Tiffany Rhodenizer - Pictou County Continuous Learning Association

My name is Tiffany Rhodenizer and I have been a student at PiCCoLA since 2013. My learning experience has changed my life in so many, positive ways. In this essay I write how learning has increased my happiness, my ability to trust others, and develop a positive example for my family.

Before I came to PiCCoLA, my fiancé and I had a hard time getting by. I was nineteen and had two children under the age of three and decided I needed to change my life around. I was wondering about starting school again and my friend suggested that I call PiCCoLA. She told me the Pictou County Continuous Learning Association was run by Carollynne Nemecek and Sandy Mackay. I knew right away that I had to make a call to set up a meeting with Sandy. He told me that I could come to PiCCoLA because I was nineteen and have been out of school for three years.

PiCCoLA has changed my life completely. I’ve never been happier with myself for joining PiCCoLA. I’ve been able to be more open to activities and programs that PiCCoLA offers. I feel more confident in my skills as a student and as a parent, and PiCCoLA gave me that. I’m beyond grateful for one of our teachers Nikki who runs family literacy on Wednesday evenings. I get to take my kids to my school, where I go each morning.

PiCCoLA has helped me develop a trust with the people here. They make you laugh and enjoy being here and turning your work into a game to keep you interested. PiCCoLA has also helped me put my guard down to experience new things. I am learning about my community through others, for example food mentors at Sobeys and Literacy Nova Scotia writing workshops at the library.

I’m grateful for PiCCoLA and setting a positive example for my family and encouraging literacy in my community. Learning has changed my life.

The enjoyment I get watching my four year old daughter trying to print is wonderful. Seeing how learning has helped me to be able to teach my children, which makes me glad to be in PiCCoLA.

My goal for my future is one of two things; either a burn specialist or a Continuous Care Assistant. My daughter was one and a half years old and she touched a wood stove and burned her hand. We went to Halifax and they told me how to look after it. She’s four now, and her hand looks like nothing ever happened. Then a few years ago my mother had a complete hysterectomy done. There were complications and they showed me how to clean and bandage my Mom’s incision, and now she’s all better.

I love learning and I know PiCCoLA will help me get to my goal. After enrolling at PiCCoLA, my life has changed for the better and I’m looking forward to the future.
My life is Forever Changed
Samantha Lundrigan - Bedford Sackville Learning Network

I thought I would start off by telling you a little about myself before explaining how literacy has changed the course of my life. My name is Samantha Lundrigan, but everyone just calls me Sam. I'm 26 years old and was raised in Lower Sackville. I have a 3½ year old boy who is just the coolest little dude.

All through elementary I had “social butterfly”, or “talks too much” written on every report card I had ever gotten. In sixth grade my math was slipping and the teacher, who was one year away from retirement, decided to put the “slow” kids in the middle of the class to do math work that was a grade below instead of working with us. It was humiliating, and I believe that had a huge impact on the way the rest of my schooling has gone from then on.

In Jr. High I tried my best, but began failing horribly, especially in math. After going through summer school for grade seven and eight I started giving up on myself until finally failing ninth grade, now that was a horrible feeling. At this point I had gotten assessed and found out I had ADHD, OCD, Anxiety and Depression. Finally an answer to why I was the way I was, but too little too late. All through ninth grade I coasted through and started using drugs, even attending class intoxicated. I was well associated with the “bad kids.” We were all around the same age and most of us had failed at least one grade in that school. That being said, we knew that the principal would not keep us there past the age of 16 and we took full advantage of that. None of us were actually “bad kids.” We were just kids who after having teachers fail to show us our own potential; we inevitably gave up on ourselves.

By high school I was struggling to keep myself on track, even attending the program Choices until finally dropping out for good at 18 and going to work fulltime. I decided my life needed something more, so here I am. Since coming back to school I have done much better than I ever had in previous years. I love seeing my classmates and also my teacher’s warm smile. It makes me feel like I am accepted and I belong and for the right reasons. Having a friendly and patient teacher makes a world of difference. I am not shy about asking questions and she has never made me feel inferior, quite the opposite actually. It reminds me that my past has nothing to do with my future and I am worthy of a better life.

The biggest difference I have found since getting my nose back into a book is how I perceive myself. I no longer see myself just as a street smart girl, I also see an intelligent book smart woman who can do anything she puts her mind to. Whether I win this contest or not, I am just happy that my teacher encouraged me to even enter, which is something I would have never of had the courage to do. Thanks Katie J
How Learning Changed My Life
Mahnaz Musawi – Cunard Learning Centre

I am twenty years old. I am student at the Cunard Learning Centre. My nationality is Afghani, but I was born in Iran. My grandparents moved to Iran thirty-six years ago to study and get an education for their children. Also, they wanted to get a job and earn a little money, but they couldn’t. They thought when they moved to Iran it would be a good country for them, but it was not. After a while, they had some problems. First of all, Iran’s government didn’t permit to them to study. Afghan people had to pay a lot of money for school, for every grade, for books, and school insurance. Some of them could pay this money, but some of them couldn’t.

My dad couldn’t pay. My dad was a labourer. When I was in grade 4 or 5, I cried a lot. After two months, school finished. My dad worked very hard and earned the money for me to go to school. I loved to study and get an education. I went to school every year and it was very expensive. Finally, I finished grade 11 with difficulty and after that I didn’t go to school because I didn’t have a lot of money to pay. Also, my brother and sister didn’t go too.

One month later, I was looking to find a job. I went to the every store, but they didn’t accept me because I didn’t have a high school diploma and also because I was Afghani. I became sad and angry. I asked myself why they didn’t accept me because I was Afghani. I am a human like another person. I am girl who lives in Iran. But Iranian people didn’t know this. They treated us badly.

In 2012, I married and I came to Canada. On the first day, I asked some questions of my husband about education here. He told me everything is good here. Everyone can study because there is no difference between you and another person. I became happy when I heard this. I started my school on November 10, 2013 at the ISANS. In the ISANS, my teacher helped me very much. When I didn’t understand he explained it to me very well. And, he told me it is never too late to learn and return to school and get an education. Also, it is never too late to change direction in your life. He told me, you can study at any time. I learned the alphabet for one week.

After one month, I came to the Adult Learning Program to complete my grade 12 and get my high school diploma. Adult Learning has given me many skills. I need to continue my education. Also, adult learning has made me believe that everything is possible. Learning lets me give something back to my community. Age is not important. I can see the sun shining on all of my goals in future. My teachers made me a more confident person. In addition, they encouraged me to study more.

I am now working in a store to save a little money for university in the future. I will go to the NSCC this September. I wish to become a pharmacist in Canada.

I love Canada because I can study. I am like another person in Canada now. I wish to have an education for every child in the world because education and learning change
our lives very much. Also, they help us to become independent people. I got a lot of experience to live better for myself and my family. I now feel more confident in everything I do.
A Changed Woman
Joan Welsh - Lunenburg County Adult Learning Network

When reading is difficult for a person, the enjoyment of books and school is not possible. I knew something was wrong in grade one, but I didn’t know how to fix it. In the 1950’s you got the work done or you were left behind, which happened to me four times in my schooling because of reading. I always thought I was stupid.

Trying as hard as I could, reading just did not get any better for me and reading affects all the other subjects. I stuck it out until I was twenty-one. I was so tired of trying and not improving my reading at all.

Life went on, and I got married and had children. My goal at that time was to make sure my children could read. I read to them, but I chose very short books, and if I didn’t know a word, I would pass it by, or they would tell me the word.

So to make sure they could read I took them to the library. I started to take books out for myself and slowly my reading did improve. I also got a tutor for reading in the 1980’s and again my reading took a jump up the ladder.

I have always been a housewife and now my children have grown and my husband is retired. I still go to the library to get books, but I still want to do better in life. With the support of my husband, my life has changed since coming back to class a year ago. It was a hard decision to make because I was sixty-eight years old then. I have gained so much more confidence in the work I am doing. I see an improvement in my spelling and I can sound my words out much better. Math is a challenge, but I am facing that head on. Also, I am working with a computer, which I have not done before.

With learning as my goal, I am much more confident than ever before. I definitely can say I am a changed woman.
Returning Back to Education Brings New Beginnings…
Shayna Farnsworth - Yarmouth County Learning Network

Going back to school after 8 years has been extremely hard. Going back with a past has been even harder. This year I finally made the decision to return to school and enrolled at the Yarmouth Learning Network full-time. More than anything, my learning experience as an adult, has taught me to believe in myself and to conquer my fears. At the age of 25, and with a family of three, I found myself at a point in my life where I asked myself: “What do I do now?” As I started to seriously look into my options, with only a grade 11, I kept coming to the same road block. Everywhere a turned required a high school diploma in my small town.

The thought of returning to school and studying overwhelmed me to say the least. I thought it to be impossible. Over the years, I have had a hundred and one excuses why I just couldn’t do it. I now know that coming back to school is a window of opportunity to be able to create a better life for both my children and myself.

Growing up, I never really understood why everyone told me to stay in school. Then I grew up. Now I understand why they said it. It was for my own good. You can’t provide for yourself or a family with no education, the same way that you can with an education.

I have an outstanding instructor who is there for me every step of the way. When you have someone that cares and wants to see you succeed it makes a big difference. When I don’t understand something, my instructor will explain it over and over -- even if she has to show you a different way. She won’t stop until she knows you understand. My goals for the future are to continue being the best mother I can be to my children and to teach them that all things are possible with hard work and also that they should follow their dreams. As well, I would like to provide for my children out of money that I have earned, not money that’s just given to me. My plan is to eventually go to Nova Scotia Community College to take Cosmetology and Esthetics.

Going back to school is pretty scary even for an adult. You might wonder if you are making the right decision. Everything else in life seems to be more important and takes more of your time. Other people may make you feel guilty, but don’t give up no matter what age. It’s never too late to go back to school and pursue you dreams. At this point in my life, I am taking my education seriously. As a young mom, I think it’s about time that I get this done! I have been procrastinating and I realize that the older I get the harder it will be…

School where do I start?
On time, work hard, end result
Graduate, good job!
Positive Reasons for Returning to School
Tracey Robicheau – Nova Scotia Community College, Truro Campus

I thought about returning to school for a long time before I actually took the step to do it. It always seemed like something else took precedent. When I began this process a year ago I can honestly say I had totally forgot how much work it was going to be. I was not sure if I would have the time or the energy to do this as I still had to work and have other family responsibilities as well.

Returning to school has definitely been a positive experience for me. It has taught me that in order to succeed you have to be dedicated to the commitment that you make. You have to be willing to put forth the effort and not be afraid to ask for help and take the time to learn the things that come hard.

I returned to school for a number of reasons. I want to be able to get a job that will better support me, because right now I have to work two jobs in order to support myself. I also want to further my education and you need to have grade 12 in order to do so. Learning has made a difference in my life because it has given me more confidence in my abilities, and made me realize that I have the skill needed to further my education; they just needed to be developed. The goals I have for the future is graduating from ALP in June and returning to school in September 2015 to continue with the CCA program.
Incarceration and Education: My Life Has Changed for the Better
Trevor Robson - Pictou County Continuous Learning Association

Growing up I was, what I call myself a fast learner. But I was only teaching myself bad habits. Although I went to school until grade ten, I was failing. School became secondary to partying. I wasn’t taking responsibility regarding schooling.

Life was full of downs for me. I didn’t really want to attend school anymore because I was failing and letting myself fall behind. I was feeling embarrassed, as I watched my peers move forward without me. So, in 1994 I quit school and looked for work.

In 1997, I moved to British Columbia to get a new and fresh start. In 1999, I went to Community College and I graduated from a Hospitality and Tourism course. This I thought was the start of a new beginning.

However, I found myself turning back to my old habits as an escape route to dealing with real life issues. In 1999, I ended up in prison, and I was in and out until 2014.

I knew for years while incarcerated that there was schooling for inmates. But I never felt the need to help myself. I became quick to adjust to “the inside” but I wasn’t interested in preparing myself for my release.

Seeing my fellow inmates successfully write their GED exams was inspirational. I realized that if they could do it- why couldn’t I? Sitting in my cell, I asked my higher power to come into my life and teach me patience. I needed the right environment to stay focused and apply myself to my educational studies. So out came the books!

From that moment on, things began to change. I was moved out of my cell to an open range where others were studying. I had less than two months to study for all the GED exams. At this point, I was realizing that I could change my life through education.

During that time I became a bookworm. Ha! Me- a book worm! Well it’s true! When it came time to write my GED exams, I felt I was finally accomplishing something.

I wrote my GED exams, and lo and behold, I passed all of the subjects except math! After my release I enrolled as a student at PiCCoLA to follow up on my math so that I will be ready to write again in May. I am keeping myself focused and attending my classes.

From the support I am receiving at PiCCoLA, I am developing new skills so that after I complete my math, I will be looking forward to applying to the NSCC for a trade in a field that best fits me.

My education can only open new doors for my future. Throughout all these years, I never imagined myself going back to learning, so that I can reach my future goals. I am living proof that through education, lives can change.
The Power of Learning
Ashley Heaney – Nova Scotia Community College, Akerley Campus

The definition of learning is not just about education, it is about exploring a whole new world of endless opportunities. Education gives you the opportunity to achieve any life goals that you want to achieve. Learning to me is a privilege that not all people have the opportunity to experience and that is why I take advantage of every chance I get when it is presented. Learning has changed my life not only with book knowledge; it has given me more self-determination, motivation and ambition in having a career that I’ve dreamed of having my whole life. Since I’ve returned to school as a mature student learning has opened the gateway for me to have the chance to obtain the necessary skills to gain employment in the career of my choice, and for that I am grateful. Learning has not only made me a better person, but a better mother, partner as well as a better member of society.

As I learn more throughout my journey in education I find myself more driven than ever in achieving my life long goals. In having an education I feel I am able to accomplish anything I put my mind to and that is a great feeling. Growing up I had a rough life, I was a foster child and never had a sense of belonging. Dealing with my life situations my education was never my first priority, and I didn’t realize how important it really was until it was too late. After I became a mother I focused on being the best mother I could be and during this time education still was not on my priority list. It wasn’t until my son started school that I realized I had to set a good example for him and decided it was time to go back and to have a career that would give he and I, the financial stability that we needed. I felt as a mother I owed it to myself and my son to get an education, I always thought it was hypocritical of me to sit and stress to my son on how important education is when I did not have one myself. As a mother you only want the best for your child and I felt that going back to school would to give him the best chance at having a good education.

My son has been and continues to be my biggest motivation in deciding to go back to school and in becoming a registered nurse. He has encouraged me every day to never give up on what I want in life. My future goal is to become a registered nurse and hopefully one day to open up my own private midwifery practice that is dedicated to supporting minority groups such as African Canadians, immigrants, same sex couples, etc. I feel that learning will help me with achieving this and also to help educate people on something that I am passionate about. Learning has given me a lot and now it’s my time to give back.
Grateful for Education
Angela McMullen - Nova Scotia Community College, Kingstec Campus

I am honored to be a part of the NSCC community, especially after a twenty seven year absence from the academic platform.

My program of choice has been the two-year Social Services program at Kingstec, in Kentville Nova Scotia. Through this educational opportunity, I have learned many useful skills, but the most useful has been the advocacy skills which I have learned from the course supported by Instructor Murray Pickering; Professional Practice. All of my instructors have played important roles in my personal and educational growth, but it has been through this specific course which I have learned the components of advocacy. Advocacy is an integral part of life. Many individuals and organizations need voices and it is my intention to be the voice for the many, specifically for women and children who have suffered hardship in one form or another.

I am so honored to have been accepted into the program. I was a high school drop-out. Much of my life has been spent raising children single-handedly; widowed at twenty-four, and then divorced at thirty. I have raised a family with no trade, no formal education, and with no spousal support or child maintenance. I maintained a home for my family under adverse circumstances and worked very hard to create a safe, healthy environment for myself and my children.

At forty-four years of age, I gave up all my material, worldly possessions in order to make room in my life for education. In a very short period of time, I made conscious lifestyle changes, changes which required self-discipline, determination, and detachment from everything that could possibly hinder my success.

Each day that I walk through the grand doors of Kingstec, my heart is filled with gratitude for this opportunity. I often find myself standing at the top of the atrium stairs, taking it all in. I love school, I love my life. My life is filled with learning, surprises, and above all, it is filled with books. From a very young age, I learned how to read, and throughout my life, books have played an instrumental part of my personal education program. A very long time ago, I made the decision to self-educate, because I never anticipated the opportunity to attend college or university. At my age, it took courage to enroll in post-secondary education.

I will never forget specific moments of my academic journey; the moment I paid my initial acceptance fee, and the moment I received my student I.D card. I could feel my throat constrict with emotion on both occasions. Emotion overwhelmed me as I shopped for school supplies.

The life skills and academic skills I am learning will certainly be utilized for the good of myself and for the good of others. Goals include plans to teach, inspire, lead, and assist. Wherever my life takes me, I am confident that, after completing this two-year program, I will be better equipped to access fulfilling employment opportunities. It is
certainly a joy to be embarking on a career that will bring fulfillment. I am grateful for this privilege of education, and am committed to assisting others with navigating the post-secondary education process.
How Learning Feeds My Family and I
Sylvia White – Halifax Community Learning Network

I live in the part of my city where stigma points its accusing fingers at those who rely on a government system to survive. The mocking of things I can't obtain for myself or my children eat at me and I feel weak from the constant struggle to offer the necessary items my family needs to survive because that archaic system I rely on only provides enough so that I don't actually die, but if I did; I'd just be one less problem for the system to worry about.

The only way out is an education. I can honestly say I have one; it just wasn't enough. Grade twelve won't get you the job you need to actually survive these days. It's a gateway to mediocre pay rates and hell in childcare costs, a constant struggle of which bill to rob to make ends meet each month. I needed more; in my life to prove I was worthy, just to keep both "Peter and Paul" both happy.

So I embarked on a journey to improve my chances in getting away from the one thing I hated the most. The stares, the accusations and the common thought that I MUST be bad or done something stupid in order to end up on income assistance. I made poor choices in life, but not having an education to meet my needs wasn't one of them, but upgrading, getting my GED would improve my chances in escaping the nightmare I was thrown into head first with my kids hanging onto me for dear life praying we wouldn't get sucked in and forgotten.

I want to be a plumber. A job that has more than just a fantastic pay rate. It has meaning to me. I was told "Well; if I was selfish too; I'd go back to school and get a better education. Then I could gain a better job as well." This came from a man who claimed he loved me; who had a job and lost it because he said I stressed him out. He blamed me for his work ethics. I'm on income assistance because the man who mentally abused me finally left. To him I say, "Thank you." You set me free.

Learning; getting my GED has given me a new outlook on the prospective things I can be. I will be able to provide for my children. I will have pride in my accomplishments once I achieve each small goal. Those will bring me closer to my larger goal soon enough. I will have obtained a goal that so very few people get a chance to do. If learning is so selfish; I want to be greedy and gobble down as much knowledge as I can; like a starving man who's only goal is to obtain that round comfortable semblance of being full. Learning will be my food, it will feed me and in turn I shall feed my children and build a better home a life for us.
How School Changed My Life
Tashlynn Shaw - Cunard Learning Centre

I’m from Halifax, Nova Scotia but I grew up in Niagara Falls, Ontario. From the time I started school it was never really important to me. Growing up I struggled with ADD/ADHA and my grade level not being the same as my fellow classmates. This made it very embarrassing also it didn’t help that I went to seven different schools in six years, moving around a lot, meeting new friends, losing old friends. So I never really bothered to stay with school knowing I’d probably move again. I gave up and pretty much never really went to high school. My childhood was a lot harder for me than other people.

As a teen I got myself into a lot of trouble with the law by hanging with the wrong type of people. For me I had no role model to guide me in the right direction. When I turned 21 and gave birth to my daughter, she’s now three years old and I want her to one day get her grade twelve and go to university so she doesn’t live pay cheque to pay cheque. I never want my daughter to struggle like I had too. I’m going to make it my main goal to be sure to show her that school is very important and not look at her mother and think because I didn’t try when I was younger she doesn’t have to either. I want to be able to give my child everything and not struggle anymore being on welfare. This made me want to better my life to become someone my daughter could look up to. And of course being a single mother made it that much harder.

At 24 I’m back in school attending the Cunard Learning Centre. This is the best decision of my life. With amazing teachers, I’m a lot happier and have more confidence in myself. I now know that I can become the person I want to become for my daughter and not only her for myself.

I always thought that because I have a record that I would never have a career and that I wouldn’t go anywhere. But for everyone who made their mistakes being young should know there is a light at the end of the tunnel and there is time to change your life. My teachers showed me that I can accomplish my dreams, finish level three, attend NSCC and get my cosmetology. So yes, school has already changed my life more than anyone could know. I want to wake up every day and attend school every day, study and work hard for what I want in life. And I couldn’t be more excited to better my life and see what the future holds for myself and my daughter and make her proud to call me mommy.
How Learning has Changed My Life
Jane Roy – Queens Adult High School

Sitting in my rocking chair, I enjoy the bright rays of sun streaming through the windows of the sun room. Heading into my sixtieth year, I reflect upon my life journey. The memories of another time and another grandmother sitting in her rocking chair, the oven of the wood stove open, allowing the heat to disperse in the small kitchen. The large tea kettle on the stove boils happily, making a whistling sound that lets her know it is nearly time to make that long awaited hot cup of tea and a cup of hot chocolate for her granddaughter.

Patiently she sits in her chair as she often did, waiting for the arrival of her granddaughter. The three-mile trek she made each day to attend school meant crossing the Mersey River Bridge. The winter winds were cold and the wind that swept across the water was icy, so much so that her legs would become numb and red in color. The knowledge of bullying perpetrated by an older girl, threatening to throw her granddaughter over the rails of the bridge into the icy water did nothing to rest her mind. Her granddaughter had lived with her as her companion since the passing of her husband several years ago. Today was the day they formulated the monthly grocery list and it would be written down by her granddaughter.

Nan, as she was known to her family, had no formal training and she could not read or write, other than print her name and use stick figures in increments of five to add. During the years she was growing up, families did not have the same opportunities to attend school as today. She believed that the programs she watched on her black and white television were real and she couldn’t understand that the actors portrayed characters in a story.

Looking out the window, she saw the girl appear, waving an envelope; mail picked up at the Milton post office. The girl knew that it was from Nan’s friends in Halifax and she would read it and be asked to write a reply. As always, Nan’s ending dictation would be “News is scarce, write soon.”

The story I have told you is about my grandmother and me. Our experiences, as well as existing research, show the impact of literacy on areas in a person’s life; economic well-being, aspirations, family life, health, civic and cultural engagement. It has a significant effect on a person’s happiness and success. My grandmother led a disadvantaged life.

Literacy is about more than reading. Literacy skills also include the abilities to write, to do math, to solve problems, to access and use technology. Without these capabilities a person would not be able to fully participate in the world.

Literacy changes the person, their whole life, increases your confidence, makes you aware of the importance of school and gives you a sense of dignity.
To be literate is to be liberated from the constraints of dependency upon others. Literacy equals empowerment. There are good people out there to help you achieve your goals; people who see the person and address their needs, be it mental, physical or a learning disability. I am presently attending an adult high school to obtain my high school diploma. I am thankful for the opportunity to go back to school.
Rediscovery of Self  
Serena Muise – Pictou County Continuous Learning Association  

The sun’s rays felt so good on my face that morning. Here I was, sitting on the back of a fishing boat drinking in the scenery, feeling the light breeze through my hair. Never until then did I ever think I was as appreciative and grateful to be in that moment. Time seemed to have stopped as I felt the surf lightly spray my face. I closed my eyes and let my other senses guide me. We were mackerel fishing, which I was experiencing for the first time but not as an adult, more like an eight year old child. I was jovial, joyful, happy, all of the above. I thought for sure I would burst with happiness. The very simplicity of life was so gratifying that August morning.  

The entire month of August was filled with so many great, similar moments. At the time, I didn’t really know what was happening to me. I was so grateful to be alive. It had been years, many years where I was struggling in a mental prison. I was confused about who I was and where I belonged in this universe. At times my true self would trickle out cautiously, but outside forces were so menacing, waiting to pounce. Finally, one day I decided I’d had enough and was going to regain control of my life. The door to the cage was opened and the little bird came fluttering out, took a deep breath and soared through the sky. I turned into an embracing and receptive spirit. Little did I know what mental phenomenon was unraveling.  

I came across the term “transformative learning”. According to Jack Mezirow, an American sociologist and Professor of Adult and Continuing Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, in order for transformative learning to occur you have to be in a phase called “perspective transformation”. This phase is triggered by a life crisis or major life transition and has three components: changes in understanding of the self, revision of belief system and changes in lifestyle. We as humans need to understand our experiences and form our own convictions instead of acting on feelings and beliefs of others. I was finally able to define my life changing experience.  

Of course I’ve educated myself with different types of learning but none have had such a profound impact on my life. You choose to go to a learning establishment and educate yourself in whatever subject you prefer; however, during transformative learning there is no conscious choice to be made. It is a state of mind. You embrace what you once took for granted, are grateful for the smallest kind gestures, and have much more compassion and empathy for others.  

During this time I learned how to view the world around me through an optimistic lens. I became less judgmental of others, more appreciative of the things in life that are still free and had a strong desire to be the best I could be. I now believe I can reach my potential. I know who I am and what I stand for and I’m open to new possibilities. Although I’ve broadened my horizons, I’m still a work in progress and will continue my journey towards enriching my life experiences.
My name is Haylee Gilbert and it has been four years since I have been in school. I graduated from high school but I never made the right marks. I was in a program called O2 Options and Opportunities; it was not regular grade 12, they only pushed me through.

When my friend told me about the adult learning program I looked into it; I called up and asked if I could get in and get my regular grade 12. I explained that I did not get my regular grade 12; it was a program I went into in high school. I was not supposed to pass grade 9 because of my learning disability with math and English. I was accepted into the program and I could not be any happier.

Going back to school scared me. Thoughts were going through my mind like: “What if I don’t make it through?”, “What if it’s just like high school?”, “Am I going to fit in?” This program changed my life so much; I am learning so much more than what I did in high school. I have learned that the math I found so hard to do in high school really is not that hard; I just was not taught it correctly. My instructor explains it so that I can understand it and I have been making 90’s. My English has become better as well; I now read out loud in class, where in high school I would not because of the thoughts everyone had.

This program taught me that if I put my mind to something I can accomplish anything. Being in this program, I learned to talk in front of people. I overcame my fear of public speaking with the encouragement of the instructors in the program. I got up in front of twenty people and spoke about coming back to school. I even said in my speech: “I am not here just to take up space; I am here to learn and get my grade 12 that I never got”. This program changed my outlook on life; I now want to go to college to become a motorcycle mechanic; I am looking towards having a great career, not working at a dead end job making less than thirteen dollars an hour. I love this program, it has changed my life in so many ways; the instructors are amazing and my instructor has helped me so much. I am so grateful to be a part of this program and to be accepted into such an awesome group.

Without this program I probably would not be going to college. Before I joined this program I wasn’t even thinking about college. I would recommend this program to anyone that wants to get their grade 12; it is such an amazing program. I now have the skills to become something that I never saw myself becoming; someone with a career and a happy life.
How Literacy and Learning Changed My Life
Viola Baker - Adult Learning Association of Cape Breton County

I was asked how learning has changed my life. Where do I start? Before I decided to come back to school, I had many different feelings about life. I struggled every day. I just figured that what I wanted for myself was too late. I wanted to be just like everyone else. I wanted to have a good job and to feel good about myself and to provide for my family. It is hard taking the steps to make change after you have been living life the same way for so long. You start to feel depressed and unhappy. For a long time I would talk about taking courses to upgrade my education, but I had a hard time actually doing it. I didn't feel good about myself and how I looked, and just figured that change was not going to happen for me. I guess I was embarrassed. It is almost like you focus on nothing but the negative. Now I look at my life in a different way. By taking the steps to make this change, it helped me want to be a better person mostly for me but for my family too.

I am not trying to become someone else; I just want to know that I did everything I could to become the best that I can be. I am already feeling better about my future. I have learned so much about myself. I am starting to look at my life in a positive way. I have fun going to my classes and I have made great friends. Learning has changed me. I look at my future and think about all the things I want to do and I feel that I can do anything. Relationships with my family and friends are stronger. I am happier now that I have changed the pattern of my old ways. You can see that learning has changed my life in so many ways. I completed my life. I got my CPR course and lots of others and by having these new skills it is helping me to achieve everything that I ever wanted. I have great listening and communication skills which are important for anyone looking for a new job. I have more knowledge about computer and programs. I am changing my appearance and taking care of myself. I feel much healthier and happier about this change in my life and can't wait to see what the future holds for me.
My name is Gary Hamilton. I'm 25 years old. I'm taking a class at Dartmouth Learning Network that's called O.G. O.G stands for Orton Gillingham and it is a program that helps people with dyslexia where their main difficulty in learning to read or interpret work, is with letters, other symbols and their sounds. My teacher, Jocelyn, is helping me to learn how to read. She is teaching me step by step in O.G, help that I didn't get back in public school. Jocelyn is showing me the sound of letters like consonants, vowels, chunks and two letters together that make a different sound, (called digraphs and blends). This is structured and taught in a way that is manageable for all learners. O.G helps me read books to my son that is 4 years old and when he gets older I can help him with his homework, and it helps me fill out information and forms. I see the world different now and it changed when I learned more about how to read.
How Learning Changed My Life
Natasha Howard - Dartmouth Learning Network

My name is Natasha Dennis Howard. I’m from the continent of West Africa, from a country called Liberia and from St. John’s NL. I moved from Newfoundland to Nova Scotia five years ago. I’m 25 year old.

Learning changed my life a lot. Now I can read, write and speak better. I learn for my family and friends. Family taught me how to read, write, count number and how to say A, B, C too. I don’t just learn from school, but at home too. Learning can come from everybody that you know, from family, friends or even strangers too. Through the years of my life, I learned from many people, including some who don’t know how to read or write, but one thing I did learn from them was how to speak English well.

As for me, I can’t believe it myself, that this is me. Wow! I know how to read and write and I’m still learning every day and night. If there is one thing I know in life, it is that we are not too old for learning in life. I’m learning for myself, for my career, my dreams, and I want from my family to be happy and be proud of me. Without education I will not know how to read or write my name or to speak English well. I would not make sense to anybody, or be able to write letters to my mother, or use my abilities at work. I thank the Lord in heaven for blessing me with a great family who loves me, my sisters, brothers, uncles and aunts. I know some of my brothers and sisters didn’t go to school or can’t read and write. Thank the Lord for blessing my family for putting me in school and for supporting me all through and not giving up on me or my dreams. That is another reason I’m still in school. I know it not everybody is able to go school and not everybody is able to pay for education.
Learning to Grow
Doruka Nicodemus - Cunard Learning Centre

Learning has changed my life by allowing me to have a unity with the world and the people around me. It has changed my life adding more peace in my heart! Learning has reduced the sad feeling of not learning! I am very proud about how learning has changed my life so far. I am able to represent my community, and talk with my local government leaders about supporting my community. I probably felt like I was in the darkness of my mind without learning.

I had never expressed my own ideas by myself, so I had missed out on the lovely people that can do teamwork together. I much appreciate the learning that has come to change my life because I am now independent in the area of education. I find it profound that I have the opportunity to share my ideas with other people around the world. I prove to myself that learning changes my life by meeting the challenges. I make a commitment to myself although learning is not sometimes easy to handle.

Learning began to change my life by making the decision to follow my heart. I have no suitable job yet with this learning, but it is a sense that learning will still have a big change in my life. I am so confident for the vivid and open mind that I have the ability to read and write! It is an extremely massive change that I can adequately listen and speak with my family and friends. I am usually present to demonstrate the consequences of what my child is not sure of. It was so difficult that I cannot explain what I really mean in my own words! Learning is an ascent of a mountain and I deserve the value of continuing before I stop. Learning is the soap of the dirty clothes; I mean before I learn I was isolated with no chance of changing any opinion. Although I feel a need for more learning, I am already in the half-way of light. Since learning has changed my life, I no longer feel lonely and missing the value of things among my world and people!
We're Not Messin Around, Round 2
Darnell Scott Miller – Nova Scotia Community College, Pictou Campus

Since 2011 Works for you career training schooling. A lot has happened good in my favor. I was requested to have my picture with Conservative Gregg Kerr, Promoting Health and wellness in the local Digby newspaper. Though, I didn’t vote for that party on any level.

My last job, from that schooling, 11 month job replacement had ended; I was set to continue with getting my grade 12 diploma. First funded through unemployment went back to my local adult where I was class rep and then ALP vice president of student counsel from 2006-09. D.C.E.C/NSCC Digby site ALP 3/4. The importance of being a grade 12 graduate, 2014.

Last year now funding through (ENS) Employment Nova Scotia, as a cooking student 2014-15, as well as computer 1 and communication 1 classes first semester and computer 2 and human relations classes in second semester, and a lot more cooking than the first semester, and written essays from 2013-14 and 2014-15 that will fore sure able me to be of the understanding of a better published writer. In honor of 2015 Adult Learners' Week contest I'd like to reflect on my first 2007-08, 2012-13 entries of Adult Learners' Week contest. This year's contest theme is Literacy Changes Lives. My grad year essays about my academic studies and voluntary community work earned me a scholarship. Without it I wouldn't have been able to finically afford my chef clothes and tools 2014-15.

2014 Town of Digby Citizenship Award in recognition of volunteer service to Digby area while a student of Digby Community Education Centre; Presenter Bob H. along with completing his studies, Darnell has been involved in a variety of volunteer work at school and community. As a student of Digby Community Education Centre, Darnell has volunteer to help with the Ritchie Millbury Memorial Heart and Stroke Foundation fundraising event, the Digby Career Fair, and fundraisers with classes for this year's graduation and school trip to venture to the city of Halifax. In the community, Darnell has helped with the launch of the Black History Month poster and the organization of the Black History Gala. He has also shared his Global History assignments with the Nova Scotia Museum and Nova Scotia Black Cultural Centre and has been a member of betterment committee and educational committee. Darnell has set a good example in his role as a volunteer, and we hope that he will continue to make these valuable contributions to his community in the future.

Since 2007 written entry to this writer’s contest essay short story Across Canada Writer’s Contest, page 25, We're Not Messin Around Round Here. It's about phone mobility texting/online Facebooking with my family and friends that posted the good the bad and the ugly Canadian worldly current or past events. Many before adult students testimony's of their struggle/inspiration finically getting an education. I wrote in honor of 2013 Adult Learners' Week contest similar theme with more details.
2015 how has learning made a difference in my life? Since I decided to go back to get my education. How learning about current events has made the difference. Sustainable Environment, Political Science, and History I've researched now for nearly 10 years, stored on thumb drive data school assignments.

In general it isn’t being learned that the human race started in heart of Africa, and black skin is the earliest man, Bushmen, the oldest living human race. My favorite historian researcher Spencer Wells confirms that fact.

Research the education that's not yet taught in schools? It's that I had the opportunity to bring to my local adult school and community and mentioned that I also shared with Nova Scotia Museum and Black Cultural Centre and is how I earned a 2014-15 scholarship and to the Nova Scotia Diversity bursary. The first America’s that inhabited the lands, were Black (Olmecs) was to honor two references from my Global History ALP 4 NSCC 2013 school assignments. All Digby NSCC campus assignments and references to whom I've researched data stored on thumb drive.

Quotes: An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity - Martin Luther King Jr. He also said education should equip us with the power to think effectively and objectively. Education should us to rise beyond the horizon of legions of half-truth, prejudices and propaganda. Education should enable us to weigh and consider to discern the true from the false, relevant from the irrelevant and the real from the unreal. We are all of one family, the human family that comes in many colors of the rainbow. There is the possibility, that if the true history could be taught in schools, things would change for the better and so-called racial divisiveness all around the world would improve, we are family - David Imhotep. We come from nature. There is an importance to having a certain reverence for what nature is because we are connected to it. If we destroy nature, we destroy ourselves- Edward Burtynsky.

If chosen to attend this year’s adult learners dinner I'd thumb data and more. Not so new discoveries revealed that the first inhabitants of America's belong to the Negroid (Asian). I respect all humanity, this is the baby boomers days, we all need to respect and get along. I love my multi-cultural family.

My passion is cooking, returning and contributing in my community.
How Adult Education Changed My Life
Kristen Smith - Queens Adult High School

Hello, my name is Kristen Ashley Smith, I live in Liverpool Nova Scotia. I attend Queens Adult High School and my current courses are Academic English Art, Math and Business Technology. I still have eight credits left to get. Learning here at QAHS has been the best experience of my life. Sonya Eddy, my Art and English teacher and Ian Kent, my Math and Business Technology teacher, have been the biggest influences in getting my education back on track. My fellow peers here at the school are a complete pleasure to work with. They’ve helped me change my outlook on school and my goals for the future.

My entire high school experience hasn’t always been a comfortable, stress free environment. About a year ago I left public school. Some people feel this wasn’t a really smart move and I agree it was a bad decision. However, I was being bullied fairly severely. I felt constant depression. I couldn’t focus in class, I felt so out of place and I felt that no matter what I did it was never good enough.

No one heard my voice and my self-esteem was at an all-time low. Ultimately it ended up being more than I could take or more than anyone should. I was going nowhere in a hurry. Disappointing my family and myself, I needed to make a change and take charge over my life again, stop letting all of the horrible, nasty things people said to me take away my ability to learn and my self-esteem. So I took it upon myself to enroll at QAHS, after hearing about it through a family member, I decided to take the chance.

Since I started here at QAHS, I’ve become more involved in learning. I get to utilize my art skills, and be comfortable creating art and being at school in general. This place honestly has changed how I feel about learning. I feel like it’s not rushed, it’s at your own pace. Now I don’t have to scramble to finish work, or fear handing it in incomplete and have it be something I’m not proud of. I can finally start to think about my future. I still don’t know what I want to do after high school, but I’d really like to attend Nova Scotia College of Art & Design and find a career in something I love.

I read somewhere once that “Yesterday is history, Tomorrows a mystery.” I don’t know what the future holds for me, but I hope it is something that makes my family proud, something that allows me to show my full potential. I know I’ll have QAHS to thank for helping me steer my educational skills in the right direction. I’m very grateful that I got to have a second chance with such amazing people. I’m excited to keep learning. A year ago that’s not something I would have said. I have nothing but faith in the future because I know I will gain tools I need to be successful.
How Learning Changed My Life
Jeanette Roy - Queens County Learning Network

Hi, my name is Jeanette Roy; I am 53 years old. I am a single mom and my son is now 19 years old. The reason I went back to school was because of my relationship. The guy I was in the relationship with was the father of my son. Seven years ago he tried to kill me with an axe. After he did that to me, I wouldn’t go outside my door because I was so scared that he would try it again. I would stay inside and look at the four walls, every day and night. My sister-in-law came down and was talking to me about going back to school. My sister-in law made the appointment with the coordinator of the local learning network.

I have been going to the QLN for 5 or 6 years now. I was having trouble with math and social studies, but now, I think that I am doing well. I am doing very well on the computer also. I never ever went on a computer before, but these last 2 or 3 years, I am doing well on one. I never hear any complaints from the teachers.

I have seen lot of changes; now I can go on a computer, check my email and Facebook with no problem. I can go on a computer and type up my school work. My math and social studies are improving a lot. I really enjoy being there with my friends and the teachers. My son graduated last June and is doing well. I am a very good mother to my son. He got his name in places for a job but no luck as of yet. I am on assistance and barely getting by and making ends meet. I would like to have some good luck come my way soon.
How Going Back to School Changed My Life.
Mary Roberts - Queens County Learning Network

My name is Mary Roberts I am a 47 year old woman. Who went back to school in 2009. I dropped out of school when I was 16 to help my family with a family business. Then I started to work in the fish plants and as a traffic control person. After a while, I hurt my back and couldn’t do that kind of work anymore, so I went back to school in 2009. When I first walked in classroom of the Queens Learning Network, I was really scared, thinking it was like when I was a young child, but once I was there, the staff and students made me feel very welcome. It was hard to get back into doing English and science or anything to do with reading, because I had in my head how stupid I was.

Some friends wrote their GED and were telling me about it. My husband and I decided I should give it try, so I went and wrote it and passed math and science. I went back and wrote it again and passed social studies and half of English but couldn't get a grip on the essay part. One of the teachers sat down with me every day and helped me. Let me tell you, there were some hard days because I could not write a story, but after many months, it was time to write it again. When I went to write it, everything she helped me with came back and I passed it. I was so happy; that was in 2010.

In 2011, my husband passed away with cancer. I took it really hard. I became very depressed and suicidal and didn't care to live or die. My good friend talked me into going back to school just to work on my computer skills. Now, I try to go five days a week to keep up with my math and English, and I learn something new every day. They say you are never too old to learn. I truly found this out the hard way. Look at me writing this now-haha. So learning has changed my life for the better.
"To educate is to give man the keys to the world, which are independence and love, and to give him the strength to journey on his own, light of step, a spontaneous and free being", said José Martí. He was known as a journalist, a revolutionary, and Cuba’s national hero, but for me he was also a teacher. His ideas taught me to learn and to like learning. It certainly changed my life as well, I not only became a more knowledgeable and better person, but I improved my personal relationships as well.

Since I was born in Cuba, by the age of 9 I knew almost everything about our "hero". I had even memorized some of his poems and quotes. However, it was just because I had to; I was not paying attention to what I was really saying. Thankfully, as years passed I woke up one day and listed to the meaning of all the memorized quotes and suddenly it all made perfect sense. From that moment on, literature, history and science became my allies. Getting a general culture made all the difference to me. It made the ordinary extraordinary, and the best part of all this, is that knowledge will never go out of fashion. I believe it gives me more worth than any other possession I may have or could possibly have.

Something that came as a surprise as a consequence was the change in me as a person. Perhaps it was because, for once, I was questioning everything. This time I was not going with the flow. I had an open mind and a different view on life, so I could think by myself. I had my own opinion and I could make my own decisions. Moreover, I noticed the sudden boost in confidence. I was confident in my own skin, as though I could do anything and still succeed. I was feeling empowered; I was not only capable of making positive changes in me, but also in those around me.

Living a rich, active life, I got to meet new and different people from whom I learned, even if I did not share the same ideas. These people were not only the ones that stuck with me studying for exams but also those whom I met over simple conversations. I was not scared about making small talk with strangers or getting into a conversation on a topic where I had little or no knowledge because I felt comfortable and I wanted to know more. Plus, discussing a problem was not a fight any more. What is more, I created strong, long-lasting bonds with others because now I was sharing something more than just a moment.

Overall, I have to say I feel very lucky and blessed to have gone through this transformation due to my election. I guess we all have the same choice in this life. Whether you want to do something for yourself and discover a new world full of possibilities or just ignore life itself because it is what seems the easiest. But if you take the "easy way", you will never know your true potential. So, don't settle for any less of what you already know. Travel, explore, get a new hobby, do something you have never done before. Small changes can make a big difference. You can get inspired by the simplest thing, once it flips the switch you will only see light; that is when your journey will begin.
How Learning has Changed My Life
Wayne Wamboldt - Queens County Learning Network

Hi, my name is Wayne Wamboldt. I am writing this story to let everyone know why I have chosen to go back to school to get my education and try to change my life.

Let’s begin by saying; I’m from a small village called Milton. It’s in Queens County Nova Scotia. It’s a quiet little village and like in most small places, everyone knows each other. Growing up my family never had much, but my dad and mom always made sure we had the important things in life like love, food on the table and a roof over our heads. Most of my friends had what I would say everything because they had parents that had good paying jobs.

All the while growing up, I often said to myself, someday, I would like to get married, have children and a good paying job.

I guess like a lot of us when I was in school, I never paid much attention to school and eventually dropped out. I picked up a lot of odd jobs, but nothing great paying or fulltime. I decided to go to community college in Bridgewater to take a course, but like school, I even had dropped out of that as well. As time went on I met this wonderful lady and we had got married.

I was still working at part time jobs struggling to get by, all the while thinking to myself, “this is not my dream.”

Then, one day, a friend of mine came for a visit and said there was a job opening at the place where he was working. I wasn’t too sure about applying, knowing that I would never have a chance at that kind of place, but eventually I applied after being talked into it by him.

In about two weeks’ time, I got a phone call from the place where I had applied, saying that they would like to offer me a position. I told him that I would take it and he told me the date I would be starting.

I thanked him and hung the phone up. I was so overwhelmed about getting the job that I had tears in my eyes as I was telling my wife.

The next few years were so wonderful: having a good paying job, a family and our own house, my dream came true. Even my self confidence rose. Then one day I went to see my doctor and found out due to medical issues I couldn’t do my job anymore, so I had to leave my job and eventually ended up on social assistance.

Feeling down, one day my friend said,” why don’t you go back and get your schooling”. So I thought about it and made up my mind to go for it. Since sitting home being depressed isn’t going to change anything.
Going back to school for the first time felt a little strange. As I entered the classroom I was a nervous wreck. All I kept saying to myself was, "What am I doing here", but as the days went on, I was more relaxed and enjoyed going. I guess the reason being is the wonderful teachers; they make you feel wanted and not at all slow on helping you whenever you need it. Even my classmates make me feel like I’m one of them.

It’s been seven months now since I started and I must say I’m enjoying every day. Since I’ve been back to school it has made me a better person. I seem to be happy and think more positive thoughts. I guess it’s something that I had decided to do, that’s why I can say, if you put your mind to it, and want to do it, you can achieve anything.
I Want to Have a Better Life
Terry Westhaver - Queens County Learning Network

My name is Terry Westhaver. I am a forty-three year old man that struggles in school. When I was in grade primary and the teacher was teaching us our ABC’s, I could not grasp how it worked. Then the teacher tried to help me but she only had so much time, she had other students. So it went like that all though school. I didn't fit in school with my classmates. I went back to school every year and I would have different classmates every year. I eventually quit school and I went to work until my job was terminated. I could not get another job without education.

I met my wife in 2006; she knew that I couldn't read that well. She encouraged me to get my driver license so we went and got the book. I started to try reading the book and she helped me with it. I went and failed the test. I was so upset and mad at myself, I did not want to go back and do it again. My wife told me not to give up and to go study the book some more, so I did. I went back and passed it. She said you should try to go back to school. I said, “it will be too much for me”. Then days went by and I kept thinking about it. Then my wife and I went to see some people. I told them about my problems in school, they said they would look for some programs that would help. They called me and said there was a new program called Orton Gillingham they would like to try with me. I went to go see them we talked and about it. I said, “It is so in embarrassing”; they said not to worry about it. So we talked and my wife and I said we would try the program.

The day came and I was so scared, my tutor noticed me, she said "don’t worry" so we did a lesson. I went back and did some more lessons with my tutor and things were starting to make sense to me. Now I am back to school now it’s fun to learn. It is still hard to do some subjects but my teachers tell me that I am getting better. Now I am in ALP level three and in level five in the OG program. Things are getting better for me now I can go to the store and get things for my family. Now I am learning things in books and newspapers in school. I am learning about animals, trees, and plants in science and it is easy in math to do word problems. I hope to pass my GED or my TOWES test so I get my class one license. I want to make a better future for my two daughters, my wife and I. I want to have a better life.
Hi, my name is Laura Smith. I am a single mother of a beautiful daughter. One of the reasons why I decided to go back to school was because I needed more help with my math. Now, where I’ve been at the Queens Learning Network for almost four years, I feel that I have really accomplished a lot. My second reason for coming back to school was to help my daughter through her school years; she’s having the same problems that I had when I was in public school.

Now, I am in my early thirties and I have really improved in my math. When I started, I was in level II math and now I am in level III math and doing great. It took me a while to wrap my head around the subject, but I am proud to say that I have managed to complete level II and am now in level III. I’m feeling quite good about myself for accomplishing all that I have done.

My daughter is doing very well in school, and she’s in grade 5 now. I am really glad that I have decided to return back to school because it’s a fantastic way to actually sit down, focus, and understand all that has to be done in order for me to make a better life for my daughter as well as for me.
How Learning has Changed My Life
Mike Yurczyszyn - Halifax Community Learning Network

I hated school from day one. In fact, one of my mother’s favorite stories to tell is about my first day at school. When she came to pick me up at the end of the day, I had all of my supplies with me, even the ones that were supposed to be left at school. When she asked me why I had them, I told her “I tried it, mom, and I don’t like it. So I quit.” She later found out that I had told my teacher before I left that I quit. The rest of elementary school was no different. My problem was large group settings, like a classroom, which made me feel very uneasy. Actually, all of my young life I kept to myself and was very shy.

My mind was never on school unless it interested me, like science and history. I was never any good at math. I found it hard and I quickly lost interest. I never paid attention in class. I was stubborn and if I found it confusing, I tuned it out. This caused a lot of problems with my parents and teachers and my grades started to suffer. I failed grade three. That just increased my hatred for school and it showed up again when I failed grade five. Other students picked on me for being stupid. I think it’s also important to point out that all through this I was always suffering from migraines. Midway through my second year of grade five, my doctor prescribed a narcotic for the migraines I was having. This started a whole new battle in my life that affected me for the rest of my life: addiction.

It occurred to me quickly that drugs made me feel cool. I gained respect from my peers and a lot of them began to fear me. I learned street smarts and I had money at a very young age. I moved into a van parked behind my friend’s garage. I attended school until grade eight, when I failed again. This time I had had enough. I had a girlfriend; I got a job that paid $4.50 an hour under the table. I thought I had it all. No school in my area would let me on their property. They knew who I was and what I was up to. I had a bit of money, I had friends and I felt safe around them. I quickly realized, though, that I couldn’t trust anyone and I got very uncomfortable and paranoid. I wouldn’t leave my house except to go to work, pick up drugs and go back home. By this time, I was sixteen and living in a small hotel room which I paid for on a monthly basis. After being robbed several times by my friends, I decided to leave my small town and move to Halifax.

I checked into detox to get clean and then moved in with my uncle. I got a job with my cousin installing oil tanks. Due to my stubbornness, I didn’t take any proper training and a co-worker pulled me aside to tell me to shape up and start learning. I was afraid of this man and I really needed the job so I started listening. It was really hard at first and I had to bite my tongue a lot. But I was listening and learning for the first time and liking it. I was finally able to answer customer questions and learned about all the details of furnace repairs. The more I learned, the better I felt.
Since then, I have been in several car accidents which meant that I can’t do manual labour anymore. I am thirty-nine years old and feel that this is perfect time for me to get my GED and take oil burner mechanics at NSCC, the job I really love. I wish I had listened a long time ago to people trying to help me but I am very excited to continue my learning now with the Halifax Community Learning Network (HCLN). I have lots of support and feel certain that I can achieve my learning goals and pursue a successful career.
How Has Learning Changed My Life?
Suzanne Clairmont - Yarmouth County Learning Network

I had been trying to go back to school for years. I knew there was something missing in my life. A need for an accomplishment no one could take away from me. A drive to move forward instead of being stuck in the same rut as always, going nowhere. Most of all an example I could make out of myself for my daughters sake. So I began my path to the future.

I am Suzanne Clairmont, almost 30 years old and have just completed my GED in November of 2014. Before this happened I was struggling to have something in my life that couldn’t be taken away from me. Not having an easy up bringing showed me that personal accomplishments are about the only thing that I could hold on to forever and not have to worry about anyone being able to bring me down because of it. A high school diploma or equivalent was going to be my first big achievement.

After trying so many times to go back to school and failing due to whatever reasons I had pop up in life at the time was frustrating. It made it hard to get a job. It actually made me feel stupid because I knew I was smart enough to complete the process, I just kept putting everything else first and my needs last. It was a vicious cycle I couldn’t seem to get away from, until I decided this was it, I am doing this!

I have a daughter in grade 4. She is struggling to want to go to school every day. She is what makes me want to do better for myself so that I can be the best I can be for her. An education is the first place to start in my mind. If I can get through school even with the struggles I have then she can as well. I try to show her and make her understand that without an education you can’t get very far in life. It makes it hard and meaningless. That an education can only help her become whatever or whoever she wants to be.

After completing my GED I decided that I was only going to move forward with my life from now on. All the hard learning was over and now it was time for fun learning. Learning the things I can actually choose to learn about. That alone gives me so much happiness inside because I really do love to learn, when I am interested. So I took that motivation and applied for college. When I was accepted, it was even more of a good feeling than I thought possible. I had tears of joy.

I am living proof of how learning has changed lives. I have struggled, I have worked hard and I have survived. I am far from done my path of learning and I am so happy about that! I finally feel like I have self-worth. I feel useful and excited to show the world who I can really be!