

Ashley's Story: Thriving in a Supported Distance Learning Environment

Ashley Sturgeon has accessed her Academic Upgrading courses while travelling. She has accessed them from home. However, her favorite place from which to access her courses is from the Northern Lakes College campus in Peace River. The flexibility of the NLC LIVE Online™ delivery model that allows her to access her courses from wherever she may be is part of the unique, Northern Lakes College Supported Distance Learning environment.



Ashley lives in Grimshaw and travels to the Peace River Campus, about a twenty-minute commute. She is in her second year of Academic Upgrading, on track to graduate in June 2020. After that, she intends to enrol in the College's Educational Assistant Certificate program. "I worked as an Educational Assistant for a year or so and I loved it. In order to continue to work in that capacity, I need a credential." Ashley intends to stay in the

Grimshaw and Peace River area and work for a local school upon graduation.

Of returning to school, Ashley says, "It has been a great experience. I am glad that I had the opportunity to come back when I did. I appreciate it more. When I was a teenager, I disliked school, even though I did not struggle academically. The difference is that I now enjoy the learning process. For example, I love Chemistry – I enjoy the mixture of math and science and how understanding Chemistry helps to make sense of the world around you."

"I had my daughter when I was 17 and left school to raise her," explains Ashley. Ashley now has three daughters. Over the years, she kept pushing her yearning to finish her high school studies into the future. When she did come back, she had been out of school for 14 years. "I am very grateful for the opportunity to finish my high school diploma. My oldest daughter will graduate from high school a year after me. It is wonderful that I will obtain my high school diploma a year before her. It has always been a motivator, to get my high school diploma before my girls do."

While it took Ashley time to adjust to the Northern Lakes College online delivery model, she thoroughly appreciates the flexibility it affords. "The fact that I can review the class recordings is really helpful. Upon second viewing, I catch things that I missed in class." Having once tried a correspondence course, Ashley explains that NLC's Supported Distance Learning (SDL) model is worlds apart from the correspondence learning model. "Correspondence did not work for me. There was nobody checking up on me, no support, nobody to motivate me. I knew when I came back to school that that model of learning would not work for me. SDL holds me accountable to progress."



SDL means learning online in a supported environment. That ranges from having a physical campus to attend, to obtaining assistance with funding. “It is nice to have a campus to go to. I need to be away from my house, away from the tasks that need to be done at home, in order to focus on my studies,” comments Ashley. Most importantly, it means having a campus resource person whose primary function is to ensure student success. For Ashley, that person is Campus Instructor, Marty Fullerton. “Marty is always checking in with students. He is so friendly and understanding of the struggles an adult learner might face. If you need anything, he will facilitate that as best he can. If he can’t answer a question, he will find someone who can.”

Of her plans for the future, Ashley is keeping her options open. Obtaining the Educational Assistant Certificate will allow her to get a job locally doing something she knows she enjoys – working with children. Ashley thoughtfully states, “I want to leave the door open for future educational opportunities that may present themselves. If I can find a way to get further education, I will pursue it. I don’t want to box myself in. Knowledge is power. Returning at first, it feels like you are going to drown. But once you get the swing of it, and realize you are not as far behind as you thought you were, it changes your perspective on yourself and your abilities.”