

Challenges, attitudes inspire advocacy in student

Story by Rob Rombouts

Photo by Blackbird Photography



Lesley Ritchie believes that “Education is never wasted.”

At age 14, the Brantford resident suffered a stroke as the result of a motor vehicle accident. She then spent many years feeling useless, faced with barriers to her mobility and her success.

After high school, Lesley attended college but facing issues with accessibility, and negative attitudes of staff and administration, she left without completing her diploma. With a settlement from the accident, Lesley had financial support to live her life.

But she still felt something was missing. When she heard about a new treatment for people suffering from head injuries, and upon meeting an inspirational person who overcame a disability to do post-graduate studies, Lesley decided it was time to go back to school.

She was faced with further setbacks when, due to course changes, she had to complete 11 credits, instead of the five she expected. She stayed committed and her experiences made her realize that people with disabilities needed stronger advocates.

Upon finishing her diploma, Lesley started a Human Rights and Human Diversity degree program at [Laurier Brantford](#).

Some people have told her that she won't be able to get a job with her education, but Lesley says she's not concerned. “If I don't get a job, at least I spent my time learning something,” she said.

Lesley is working hard to complete her education, and is considering following up with her Master's degree. She also wants to learn French to see if she can earn an internship with the UN Disability Committee.

Her previous negative experiences have motivated her to fight for the rights of people with disabilities, and she encourages all people to overcome their challenges and stay committed to their goals.

Education Works Alliance is a community group dedicated to building prosperity through training, education and lifelong learning. The group's mandate is to raise the education, literacy and skill levels of Grand Erie residents, in order to broaden opportunities for employments and economic development. For more information visit www.educationworks.ca