

Family a major motivator for First Nations student

Story and photo by Rob Rombouts



Shelbi Jonathan didn't want to be another statistic.

When Shelbi was in Grade 11, she found out she was pregnant. Instead of dropping out and having to rely on other people, she immediately decided she was going to finish high school. With the support of her guidance counsellor, and through in-class, online and co-op courses, Shelbi earned her credits.

Shelbi, from Ohsweken, was one of five girls in her grade who were pregnant, and she was the only one to graduate. Upon graduation, she received a Perseverance Award for staying in school and maintaining high grades.

Shelbi's boyfriend encouraged her to continue onto college, and she obtained her Social Service Worker diploma from [Niagara College](#). She is now in the second year of the Contemporary and Indigenous Studies program at [Laurier Brantford](#). She has plans to get her teaching degree and become a guidance counsellor.

The support Shelbi received from her guidance counsellor inspired her, and she decided she wanted to help inspire others in the same way. Her focus on Indigenous Studies has given her an understanding of other First Nations' cultures, which will help her connect to other students. Shelbi also received a [SEEDS scholarship from Laurier](#), for Aboriginal students who engage in a wide variety of support services and activities on campus to increase their connection to Laurier.

Through the process, her family has been very supportive and gave her the drive to succeed. Her mother and grandmother helped with childcare, and her mom kept her motivated. "I know if I had a family that didn't care or didn't support me, it would have affected my outcome," said Shelbi. "It's sad because that happens a lot." Her grandmother is especially proud of her, as Shelbi is her first grandchild to finish high school, and the first to go to college.

Before getting pregnant, Shelbi was "kind of living in a fantasy world," and had dreams of going to California to be a back-up dancer or cheerleader. She has a clearer focus now and knows what she wants to do. She is also encouraging her friends, who are also young mothers, to go back to finish their education. "It's easy to accomplish if you have the drive," she said. "It shouldn't be an excuse not to graduate."

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