

Diagnosis didn't stop her

Story and photo by Rob Rombouts



For some, being told you have a brain tumour would stop you in your tracks. For Brantford resident **Toni Knight**, hearing the news inspired her, which is even more surprising considering when Toni received the diagnosis.

Toni worked for 21 years as a hair stylist and was working as a retail manager when complications from a surgery resulted in a neurological disease and left her unable to stand for prolonged periods. This meant she could not work in either field. While she was dealing with this, she was diagnosed with a brain tumour. Toni was told she would likely not be able to work full time again.

“Some people would have let that take over their lives,” said Toni. “I don’t like to let things beat me.”

Determined to prove the naysayers wrong, Toni applied for [Second Career](#) funding and, at the age of 42, enrolled in the Addictions and Community Service Worker program through [Everest College](#).

Getting back into the routine and dedication school demands was difficult after being away from the classroom for 20 years, but Toni said the teachers in the program were supportive and helpful. The effects of the tumour also interfered with her learning, creating trouble with focus and information retention. Toni used voice recorders and audio-to-text software to overcome these obstacles. She finished the fast-track course with a final mark of 92%.

Toni completed her placement at [St. Leonard’s Community Services](#) and is now looking for work in treatment centres. She also plans to go back to school. She has applied for the [University of Waterloo’s](#) Social Development program and plans to complete her Bachelor of Social Work, through the same university. The benefit of the program, she said, is that she can do most of the courses online while continuing to work.

Toni is unsure whether she would have gone back to school if not for the diagnosis. “I honestly believe being told I had a brain tumour woke me up. When someone tells you, you have a life-changing experience, it’s true,” she said. “When I was told I had a brain tumour, I made a lot of life changes and going back to school was one of them.”

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