

MAKING IT!

Every year, TVOntario's Independent Learning Centre helps Ontarians of many backgrounds and circumstances who want to improve their skills and expand their knowledge. Maral Maclagan tells some of their stories.

Fall typically conjures up images of kids with textbook-heavy backpacks shuttling to and from school. For the 15,000-plus students taking courses at a distance through TVOntario's Independent Learning Centre (ILC), school arrives directly to their homes. This puts the goal of earning a high school diploma within reach for many who would not otherwise be able to continue their education.

Faster, Stronger ... Smarter

Peter Polyzotis is a competitive flatwater kayaker with dreams of competing in the Olympics. As if the pressures of international competition were not enough, the 18-year-old Richmond Hill resident also needed to balance school with training. "My school could not accommodate my need to train into its schedule," he said. Complicating matters, a biology course Peter would need to enter university was not available online, and night school would also eat into practice time.

To avoid the restrictions of a classroom schedule, Peter decided to take the biology course through the ILC, completing his course work in between practices. "My training schedule usually remains constant, but I don't skip 'class' when it doesn't." Peter enjoys the self-motivation that ILC course work demands, and likes to challenge himself by setting dates for completing assignments.

This September, Peter began a four-year human kinetics program at the University of Ottawa, and aspires to be a medical doctor.

The Art of Learning

Lilly Tjeng is passionate about art. The 15-year-old Hamilton native began painting at age seven. Lilly and her family found that home-schooling through the ILC allowed Lilly to devote more time to painting while keeping up with academics. As a full-time ILC student, Lilly's commitment to finishing her education has never been stronger. She finds ILC courses thorough, yet flexible, enabling her to study in the car, at home and during breaks from the canvas.

ILC staff have helped Lilly through the transition by making sure she understood the process of sending in work and receiving marks. "My teachers are very encouraging," Lilly says as she juggles course work with private art classes, community involvement, and valuable time spent with family and friends.

Along with the desire to earn her high school diploma through the ILC, Lilly hopes to inspire others through her art.

Discovering French

London Free Press photographer Ken Wightman's

inspiration to study French came to him in Tunisia, after encountering local kids who spoke in several different languages. Ken, 57, began researching correspondence courses upon his return home, discovering that the ILC would allow him to learn the language while maintaining his hectic work schedule. He started with Grade 9 French in 2002.

How do you learn French by correspondence? Ken listens to the audiotapes provided with his courses. He records his lessons and sends the tape to the ILC for review by a teacher. The teacher provides feedback and grades Ken's recordings.



Lilly Tjeng can pursue her passion for painting (above is one of her works) while keeping up with academics through the ILC.



Left to right: Peter, Katie, Lilly and Jean achieved their learning goals thanks to the ILC.

Ken says learning French has "opened windows" and given him a different perspective on the world, embracing French

When Katie did return to school – first part-time, and later full-time – she supplemented her studies with ILC courses at home. "Having

Lifelong Dream

Jean Dudgeon, 62, has been driving a school bus in Powassan, a small community near North Bay, for 34 years. This year, the mother of two realized a lifelong dream by earning her high school diploma. Jean had quit school in Grade 9 to work in the family retail and construction businesses. "It's what I had to do," she said. "But in the back of my mind I always wanted to finish Grade 12."

Two years ago, Jean converted a spare bedroom into her office and began work on the ILC courses she needed to receive her diploma. She dedicated a small part of each day to her courses, and while her husband knew what she was doing, Jean wanted to surprise her sons.

At a recent family gathering, Jean got her wish, showing up with a diploma that the ILC had faxed so she would have it in time. "It was a great feeling," Jean said. "To someone else, it might not mean anything, but to me, it was something!"

The ILC puts the goal of earning a high school diploma within reach for many who would not otherwise be able to continue their education.

culture through French-language magazines, television, and music. Not even heart surgery could distract him from learning. Ken recently completed his last ILC high school French credit and now plans to return to university to study the language further. After that, he plans to travel and put what he has learned to good use.

Medical Miracle

Katie McDonald's life was almost cut short in 2003 by Crohn's disease. While Katie's health improved significantly following surgery in September 2004, the illness had kept her away from school for nearly two years.

been out of school for almost two years, the ILC was an easier way to catch up," the 17-year-old points out. Another advantage was having a full year to complete courses. "Being a sick teenager, it gave me time to get [the work] done. I'm not rushing like I would if I were doing it from school. I'm able to take my time and try my best."

Clearly Katie is a fighter. She has come through her ordeal only five credits behind and with an amazing attitude, according to her mother, Kim. "It was really important to give her a reason to get up in the morning, so things like correspondence courses were very helpful," she said.

IT'S ALL A CLICK AWAY!

Information on ILC courses, homework help and post-secondary choices is available online at www.ilc.org.

• COURSES

Ontario Ministry of Education high school credit courses and elementary programs by correspondence

• CareerMATTERS

A guide to high school, career profiles, and post-secondary information

• ASK A TEACHER

Free online tutoring with certified Ontario teachers

• GED

Testing for the Ontario High School Equivalency Certificate

For more information, visit www.ilc.org or call 416.484.2704 in the GTA, or 1.800.387.5512.