



City Centre Mirror

Frontier College students celebrate success

Program helps those at risk beat the streets

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A group of at-risk youth and young adults took an important step toward bettering their lives at a special ceremony at Frontier College June 20.

The young men and women celebrated their achievements in some of the Yonge Street and St. Clair Avenue area college's Beat the Street program classes, which helps provide a warm, welcoming educational environment for those who have struggled with conventional schooling.

Beat the Street offers literacy courses, high school equivalency diplomas and computer classes to not only help students gain entry into the competitive job market but also to help boost their self-esteem and enhance their life skills.

The program focuses on youth who have recently dropped out of school or those who have recently become homeless.

"These are young men and women who, because of some situational issue in their lives, just weren't able to complete their education," said Frontier College President Sherry Campbell.

One of the program's crowning achievements is the strides it makes in combating illiteracy. With recent surveys showing that more than 40 per cent of Canadians have poor reading skills, that support is vital in helping youth meet their potential.

"There's a lot of talk around adults and illiteracy, and the talk is always around employment and productivity," Campbell said. "We see it as helping these students engage in the community, being able to read the instructions for medication, reading to their children, street signs, being able to vote."

Quite often, Beat the Street students have slipped through the cracks, finding ways around the holes in their education until they reach insurmountable obstacles for which they lack the skills to overcome.

"People often aren't aware that literacy is an issue or a barrier until they're well into it," Campbell said.

The school president added that Frontier College has earned a strong reputation on the streets, with many of the students coming through word-of-mouth referrals from other at-risk youth and young adults.

"It's great that Frontier's is a 109-year-old organization and we're still considered cool," Campbell said.

Frontier College volunteer tutors offer one-on-one support to fit the needs of each student. While the tutors are primarily there to help with education, they also act as friends, confidants and mentors.

"You have to make it fun and interesting for the students," said tutor Joan Mitchell. "We don't always stay right on topic, because as a tutor you take the opportunity where you see it to steer things more toward the student."

Mitchell added that her job is made easier by the fact that students who sign up for Frontier College courses have made the conscious decision to return to the educational system on their own.

"They're great students and they've already been motivated," she said. "They're here because they want to learn, and by learning they get to feel that they've accomplished a great deal."

The college offers flexible teaching hours so that students can still work or take care of other responsibilities.

James Everett was one of the students who celebrated his success in the Beat the Street program. Beat the Street has helped him improve his literacy skills and pick up valuable computer skills.

"I never picked up books before because I could never really learn to read or write and I'd get frustrated with it," he said. "I have kids, and as they grew up I knew it was time to (improve his literacy skills) for me and for them."

Everett said he wants to be able to read to his children and help them with their homework. His own family was unable to help him when he was a child because - as is often the case - his own reading problems were passed down from his parents who also had difficulty reading.

While enhancing his own skills, Everett has also boosted his self-confidence.

"I didn't want to always have to tell my kids 'Go ask your mother' when they needed help," he said. "I didn't want to be the dumb one in the family. I feel really proud to be able to make these changes."

For more information on Frontier College and the Beat the Street program, visit www.frontiercollege.ca or call 416-923-3591.