

Going to university without leaving home



Jennifer Pigeon is working towards a university degree with help from Gwaii Trust.

Living on Haida Gwaii can definitely pose a challenge when it comes to higher education, especially for islanders who already have jobs here and can't afford to move away and become full-time students. Residents of larger centres can take advantage of evening classes or part-time studies to further their education, but that's not usually an option for islanders.

For rural Graham Island resident Jennifer Pigeon, the solution to this dilemma has been online courses through Athabasca University, which specializes in online learning and offers a huge variety of university courses over the internet. Jennifer started her educational journey in 2012, with a year-long NorthWest Community College course in accounting. That sparked a desire to learn more, and she is now working towards a university certificate in accounting from Athabasca, one course at a time.

Jennifer explains that each course takes about six months to complete. She does her studies in the time left between running her own bookkeeping business and activities like working in her large garden. And while online courses are undoubtedly convenient, there are some challenges. Asking questions can involve lengthy email exchanges, and our slow internet is also a hurdle.

"It's definitely challenging," she says. "But I get to do my own schedule. I work when I want, and I can garden when I want."

Although she is only part-way through the certificate program, Jennifer has already learned new skills that she is using to help her bookkeeping clients, most of which are local small businesses and non-profits.

Gwaii Trust education grants have helped pay for her tuition and books, and Jennifer says this has made going back to school much easier. These grants are available to all islanders pursuing post-secondary education, whether on-island or off. "I really appreciate it," she says. "It's so great to have the opportunity to learn. It's kind of crazy when you're almost 40, but it's very exciting too."

DID YOU KNOW?

The Gwaii Trust places a high priority on assisting all Haida Gwaii residents in their educational quests. Our education grants are intended to help islanders smooth over some of the significant hurdles they face accessing post-secondary education, trades education, and other education opportunities. We can provide up to \$3,000 a year to help with tuition and course materials. Check out our website or talk to our staff for full details about these grants.

GRANTS CAN BE USED FOR SHORT COURSES TOO!

Queen Charlotte Secondary School student Liam Racz received a continuing education grant to attend the Gulf Islands Film and Television School, where he took part in a one-week course in 3D Computer Animation this past summer. Liam writes:

"I thank you and the board for this amazing opportunity. The 3D Computer Animation course reaffirmed my plans to enroll in a post-secondary animation program once I graduate. I had never had the opportunity to collaborate on a creative project before and now know this is something I would enjoy doing for the rest of my life. The instructors, interns and other students were incredibly supportive throughout the film making process, and provided excellent advice on how to choose a post-secondary school. I've made friendships that have continued since leaving the Gulf Islands and have been asked by the school to intern there next year. Once again, thank you for this experience that would not have been possible without the financial assistance from the Gwaii Trust!"