

## Adult Education: A New Age of Success

Many adults are returning to school – with help from adult education facilities

For many people who left high school without graduating, returning to school can be an intimidating idea.

Fortunately, there are some great adult education options in the Seven Oaks School Division area for people who want to open up their employment and education possibilities.



### The Seven Oaks Adult Learning Centre – Maples Collegiate (1330 Jefferson Avenue)

The Seven Oaks Adult Learning Centre (ALC) is a “school within a school” on the second floor of the Ken Seaford Building at Maples Collegiate – a place where people of different ages and walks of life can earn their Mature Student Grade 12 Diploma.

But with students who range in age from 18 ½ to 57 however, many factors must be considered. For example, some people have children, some have jobs and some simply may have left school because they did not feel connected or had some negative experiences.

“The biggest thing we do is to try and establish personal contact with our students starting right from the registration,” says ALC Director Larry Pudavick. “It sounds like a very simple thing, but it’s a very important thing

because it establishes that initial rapport with students so they feel like, ‘Hey, someone is talking to me, they’re listening to my problems and to the barriers I’ve come across.’

“Whatever barriers were created at school, that’s why they left or became disengaged. So if we get a better focus on what those barriers were before they get here, we have a better chance of helping them get ahead and keeping them in our classes.”

Though there is a lot of flexibility and understanding, students are still responsible for keeping up with their studies, whether that means coming to an evening class instead of a daytime class, spending time with a tutor or taking a course in a different term to get the credits needed to graduate.

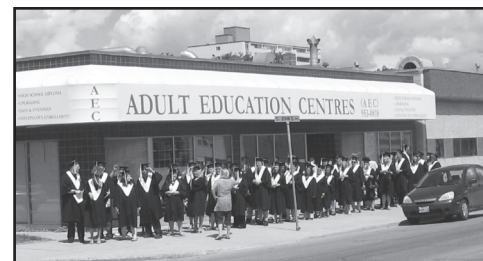
“We offer flexibility but with the performance guidelines expected at a high school level,” says Pudavick. “We’re not trying to lower the bar, we’re just trying to make the bar more accessible. That’s a huge difference.”

Students also have a measure of control over their own education, each building an individual educational plan that leads to their goal. There are optional courses (such as the Community Service credit) to provide choice in what they learn, and students even have a say in what courses are taught during a particular term.

“We always go back to our students and that’s part of feeling connected: you have power. You have some control over the classes being taught at your school. That doesn’t happen very often!”

Add in the fact that courses are offered at no cost, and there are plenty of reasons to get that diploma – and a lot fewer reasons not to.

*For information about the ALC – and the English as an Additional Language (EAL) program visit [www.7oaks.org/site/alc/home.aspx](http://www.7oaks.org/site/alc/home.aspx)*



### Adult Education Centres (AEC) – 1240 Main Street

Every year, AEC offers 600 to 700 students the opportunity to get the credits they need to get a high school diploma or to earn a Mature Student High School Diploma or take credits needed for post-secondary..

“We have six classrooms operating morning, afternoon and evening,” says AEC Director Phil McBurney, noting the school is operating pretty close to full capacity. “We also use the labs at West Kildonan Collegiate for Chemistry and Physics at night.”

Like other adult education facilities, the challenge for AEC is keeping students in school so the Centre does what it can to keep students enrolled and engaged. Math and English skills are assessed to place students in classrooms where everyone is at the same learning level. Teachers use an active learning approach to break up classes with activities.

AEC recognizes prior learning, enabling some students to earn credits based on lessons learned through life or work experiences. A resource teacher/career counsellor and a Skills for Academic Success course and literacy programming are also available help students overcome learning obstacles.

Another way AEC is looking at enhancing educational opportunities is through its affiliation with the Adult-Friendly Learning Institutions (ALFI) movement. AEC is one of four adult learning centres in the province which initiated ALFI, a self-evaluation process which helps in developing inclusive, respectful programming that meets the specific needs of adult learners.

"It's a series of performance indicators or benchmarks that help indicate how effectively an adult learning institution is run," says McBurney. "It helps provide a picture of what a successful centre can and should do – everything from advertising and outreach to principles of teaching adults."

AEC is always seeking new ways to connect with students and has been starting to use new technologies to reach out beyond the school grounds. Several teachers are using blogs as a means of reviewing tests. The school partners with other education centres to expand the resources available to students. AEC even has a Facebook page to keep in touch with students and graduates, just to see how they're doing.

"Use of technology is definitely an area where we're looking at doing more," says McBurney of the technological tools.

In the end, McBurney says, "the focus is on helping students get their diploma – and we're always trying to do a better job of getting them there."

*For more information on the Adult Education Centre on Main Street, visit [www.adulteducationcentres.ca/](http://www.adulteducationcentres.ca/)*



## Urban Circle Training Centre Inc. – 519 Selkirk Avenue

As soon as you step through the door, you can tell there's something special about the Urban Circle Training Centre.

For starters, the building itself is designed in the shape of a turtle in honour of the members Turtle Clan who started the first program in 1991. At the time, the Centre focused on helping Aboriginal women in Winnipeg's inner city find employment, starting with eight women taking a cashier course.

Though the Centre has grown exponentially since, the focus on helping Aboriginal students – women and men – find meaningful employment remains.

"Our mandate here is jobs," says Education Director Steve Britton (who also teaches English and Math at the Centre). "And about 90% of our graduates find employment."

That rate of success is an impressive stat, partially attributed to the way the school focuses on trades and industries with a high demand for workers. That's something the Centre is going looking to go even further on.

"What we've done this year is started an exploratory program with an apprenticeship," says Britton. "We provide Grade 12 Math, English and Life Skills, then five credits of work experience in a trade where students get paid."

Another key element of Urban Circle's success is the retention rate – the highest retention rate in the province.

"You get into this school, we don't let you go until you're finished and you get a job!" laughs Britton.

Before students even begin, they must go through a rigorous interview process and make sure they have all their supports in place, from day care to finances to a solid housing situation. But, as Britton says, once they're in, they're in.

"For example, if there are any problems like they've missed class or haven't been in for a couple of days, we go to their house and get them," says Britton. "But more than the fact that we go out and get them, we also spend a lot of time doing cultural and group activities to make each class a very, very tight group."

Aboriginal culture is brought into every class, every day. Each classroom is centred on the philosophy of the Medicine Wheel and the Four Directions. English classes use books written by Aboriginal authors. Every day starts with a smudge and a prayer. And an Elder from the community is available to talk to students about their personal problems.

The combination of cultural learning and regular classroom lessons is a key component for many of the students. At Urban Circle, they are not only gaining an education and job skills, they learn a lot about their own heritage and traditions.

"That's huge for us because that's how we hold them," says Britton. "We are an adult education centre, but we are also a spiritual centre for Aboriginal people. The spiritual piece holds it all together."

"You can change your life and still hold onto your culture."

*For more information on the Urban Circle Training Centre, visit [www.urbancircletraining.com](http://www.urbancircletraining.com)*

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