

Graduate finds success the second time around

The 38-year-old man says the trick to being successful at school is to make education something you want to do.

By Kelley Teahen
The London Free Press

Education, says Eric Magrath, is the process of learning about yourself.

Magrath, 38, was one of 300 Londoners to graduate Thursday with secondary school diplomas from the G. A. Wheable adult education centre. It's a record number of graduates for the centre, which offers high-school credits and basic literacy education.

BEST AT LUNCH: "Education isn't so much about memorizing history or learning your A-B-Cs," says Magrath, who admits with a laugh that his best subject was "lunch" when he went to high school as a teenager. "But I don't think kids look at it that way. You rebel against something you have to do. The trick is to make education something you want to do."

Magrath, who had a successful career as a sales representative for Emco, decided "something was missing" in his life. "I didn't feel fulfilled."

With the support of his wife, he decided to go back to school full time, get his high school credits and now has applied to study kinesiology at the University of Western Ontario, with an eye to a teaching career.

The graduating class's valedictorian, Leslie Murray, dropped out of school in Grade 10 and had good luck initially finding a job through family connections. "I was a purchasing planner for three years. But it was a shock when I tried to look elsewhere — no one wanted to hire me."

Murray, 26, decided to return to school after her marriage broke up and she had a baby needing care. "I couldn't support her properly and I didn't want to have to rely on support payments all my life."

She's thankful the Wheable centre has child care on site for her daughter, a factor that made it "much easier" to concentrate on her studies and get her credits.

"When I was in school as a teenager, I was a poor student. I didn't believe teachers when they said I had the ability, if I applied myself," Murray says.

"It's an amazing feeling to learn. Your confidence comes back. You know, I never realized how much I missed. My classmates and I are on the phone all the time to each other, going over what we're learning. It's like having a puzzle, and watching all the pieces come together."

DREAMS FULFILLED: Murray wants to pursue further studies to become a physiotherapist.

But for May McAllister her high-school diploma is her long dreamed-of goal. McAllister, 55, left school at 16 to work and support her retired parents. "I have two children now and I've encouraged them to go to university. I thought it was time I at least got my Grade 12."