

RIGHT Jenna Buchanan earning hours towards her apprenticeship



## ACE IT Students a Cut Above Kelowna, BC

When eighteen-year teacher Arlene Currie from Central Okanagan School District started her Masters Degree she never imagined her other career as a hairdresser with a program called ACE IT would be the impetus for a highly successful hairdressing program at the Mount Boucherie Secondary School. The program started in September 2004 with 36 students from across the district. Among this year's graduates are Jenna Buchanan and Kayla Laroch.

ACE IT stands for Accelerated Credit Enrolment in Industry Training. It is a dual credit program that enables secondary school students to get a head start on the school based, technical training part of an apprenticeship.

Jenna transferred from Okanagan Mission Secondary School to be a part of the hairdressing program at Mount Boucherie. At OKM Jenna was a solid student with average grades and what she calls an above-average social life. "I was a social butterfly at OMS with lots of friends and good relationships with the staff," explains Jenna. Still, she was willing to carpool an hour each way to attend the hairdressing program, driven by her desire to have a clear career direction once she left secondary school. Now Jenna has it all. Her performance in the class was excellent and she became a teacher's assistant. Today Jenna is continuing her apprentice training at her new job at Total E'Clips.

Classmate Kayla Laroch is another ACE IT student from a very different background. Just two years ago Kayla was in hospital recovering from an overdose on street drugs. "By Grade 10 I was into street drugs, stealing and other bad stuff," Kayla says. "After being locked up in the psych-ward for over two weeks to clean up, I knew I had to change my life." She went back to secondary school and there she learned about the ACE IT hairdressing program.

Kayla Laroch did indeed change her life. Today she is an articulate, confident, 17 year old young woman

whose life has changed radically from the time when home was a women's shelter a few blocks from the hospital. Instead, she is a secondary school graduate with one year's training towards her hairdressing certificate, and full-time work in the upscale Diva Hair Salon, where she will complete her apprenticeship.

School District #23 Central Okanagan, under the direction of career transitions and apprentice coordinator Kelly McRae, had 42 students participating in the ACE IT program this year. The Mount Boucherie hairdressing program has another 20 students registered to begin next year.

Jenna and Kayla come from very different backgrounds, but ACE IT has given them both the same advantages—walking out of secondary school with something they can rely on. "Life already has so many challenges to deal with," Jenna explains. "Why not take advantage of something you can count on?"

ACE IT was launched with seed funding of \$1.2 million from the Ministries of Education and Advanced Education and has so far received additional funding of \$2.3 million from the Industry Training Authority's (ITA) budget. In the 2005/06 year, 37 school districts are projected to participate in the ACE IT program and deliver 24 industry training programs to over 1,950 BC secondary school students.

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