



# Academic upgrading leads to YWCA Award

BY TOM BARTSIOKAS

Bridget Perrier enrolled in Seneca's college upgrading program two years ago to turn her life around.

Now she is being recognized as a woman of distinction.

On May 30, the 29-year-old will receive the 2006 YWCA Women of Distinction Award, which is presented annually to celebrate the public service achievements of Toronto area women.

Professor Elizabeth Charters from the Adult Upgrading/College Preparatory program nominated Bridget for the YWCA award after witnessing her remarkable transformation from a troubled youth to a hard working student and community activist.

"Bridget is a great role model for a lot of people," says Elizabeth.

"She had a more difficult background than many, and yet she was successful. A lot of people who fear they'll never succeed, can look at Bridget as an example and feel returning to school is worth a try."

In 2003, Bridget enrolled in Seneca's Academic Upgrading/College Preparatory Program at the Yorkgate Campus to pursue her goal of attending college.

The program, which is sponsored by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, provides intensive instruction to upgrade English and math skills to the level required for college eligibility. As well, career counselling and instruction in **computer** skills are also provided.

However, what makes this program truly unique is that it allows

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educating them about the dangers of

students to learn at their own pace through customized lesson plans.

In Bridget's case, it took 18 months until she felt ready to apply to college.

"Seneca's Upgrading/College Preparatory Program gave me skills and confidence and guided me towards what I really wanted to do," says Bridget, who recently finished her first semester at college. "I wouldn't be in the program I am in now if Seneca didn't prepare me."

Seven years ago, college upgrading was the furthest thing from Bridget's mind. She was a heroin addict who worked in the sex trade, and spent time in jail.

Her self-destructive path began at 12 when she was living in Thunder Bay. As a young Aboriginal girl, adopted by a white family, Bridget grew up confused about her identity and self-worth.

It took the tragic death of her son Tanner, whom she had as a teenager, to inspire her to get her life finally on track.

"I got out of jail three days before my son died of cancer," she says. "After losing him I said, 'I have to do something better. This isn't me.'"

On that terrible day, Tanner made his mother promise to be "good, and to love herself."

It's a promise she has kept ever since.

In fact, not only did Bridget turn her own life around, but she has managed to help others do the same.

Since coming to Toronto, she has been working closely with at risk youth in the Aboriginal community,

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