

The Employment Journey

PEI's Top Source for Career Planning and Job Seeking

Returning to school: Can you do it? Yes you can!

by Stella Shepard

I am an adult learner who started to thirst for knowledge when my now 32-year-old son was a child. Raising a child alone drained my financial resources but I was able to attend adult education and save money for college and university courses. There were moments I felt like a weary traveler who had come to the end of the road and still had miles to go. But I persevered and marched forward with determination in my quest for further education.

Traveling and volunteering in Central America inspired me to pursue a career in journalism in the 1990s. Changing careers later in life was intimidating, but returning to the classroom was much easier than I had anticipated. Any concerns were quickly dismissed within the first few days. Further education has opened many windows of opportunity including my present job of seven years as a reporter for The Employment Journey. My journalism career has taken me across Canada and to the West Indies.



Can you do it?

Dr. Susan Hartley is a Clinical Psychologist registered on PEI and in Nova Scotia. She has worked extensively with students to help them make satisfying career and life choices.

"If you clearly identify your reasons for going back to school and if you really want to do this, then you can do it," says Dr. Hartley.



Dr. Hartley answers the following questions to help adult learners who ask: Can I do it?

Q: Can I learn at my age?

A: You are never too old to learn. Research indicates that we can learn at all ages. In fact, we are likely to think more clearly as we age if we are learning new things. People sometimes find that they are in fact better learners when they are older. They are more motivated, more attentive, and more likely to ask for help when they need it.

Q: Is it too late in life to return to the classroom?

A: Many Islanders are finding out that if they are motivated and want to return to school, it is never too late. According to the **Department of Innovation and Advanced Learning**, PEI has the highest percentage of adult learners writing and passing the GED test in North America. As an adult learner you are likely to be more focussed on learning and more mature. The environment of an adult classroom, which offers more flexibility and independent study, is more suited to the mature learner than what you might remember from your high school days.

Current statistics show that adults going back to school are the fastest growing student group. In fact, close to half of today's college students are mature learners. Get acquainted with other people your age in your class or program. You might be able to learn from each other by sharing studying, assignments, and notes.

Dr. Susan Hartley, a Clinical Psychologist, offers advice and insight to adults considering returning to school.

Q: What if I fail?

A: Fear of failure is common for people returning to school, especially if they had a negative experience in the past. Adult learning environments are more flexible and supportive than before, and the chance of success is high. If you do struggle with a subject, you will be able to identify the difficulty early and speak to your instructors. You can work together to get the learning support you need.

Motivation, desire to learn, learning styles, learning abilities, organizational skills, and supports all contribute to success. Talk with your instructors to help identify what you need to succeed.

Q: Is support available for adults enrolling in adult education or post-secondary education?

A: If you find it difficult to manage anxiety related to returning to school, a few counselling sessions may be helpful. Counselling support is available to UPEI, Holland College, and private college students. Students can also get counselling through community mental health programs or private practitioners.

Other helpful suggestions:

- Tour the learning institution before classes begin and talk to the instructor
- Talk to other adult learners who have returned to school recently
- Think positive and remain optimistic
- Be organized. Make a list of things that need to be done
- Write down realistic goals that you wish to accomplish.

For more information, contact **Dr. Susan Hartley** at sc.hartley@ns.sympatico.ca

For more encouragement, check out success stories about adults returning to school. Visit www.employmentjourney.com.

Scroll down to **Search for PEI Job and Industry Information** and click **Adult Education**.

