



PEOPLE YOU SHOULD KNOW



stories about
the value of
inclusion and
of people
discovering
their calling.

COMMUNITY LIVING 
Ontario

STUDENT LINKS 
Community Living Ontario

Driving the Road to Independence

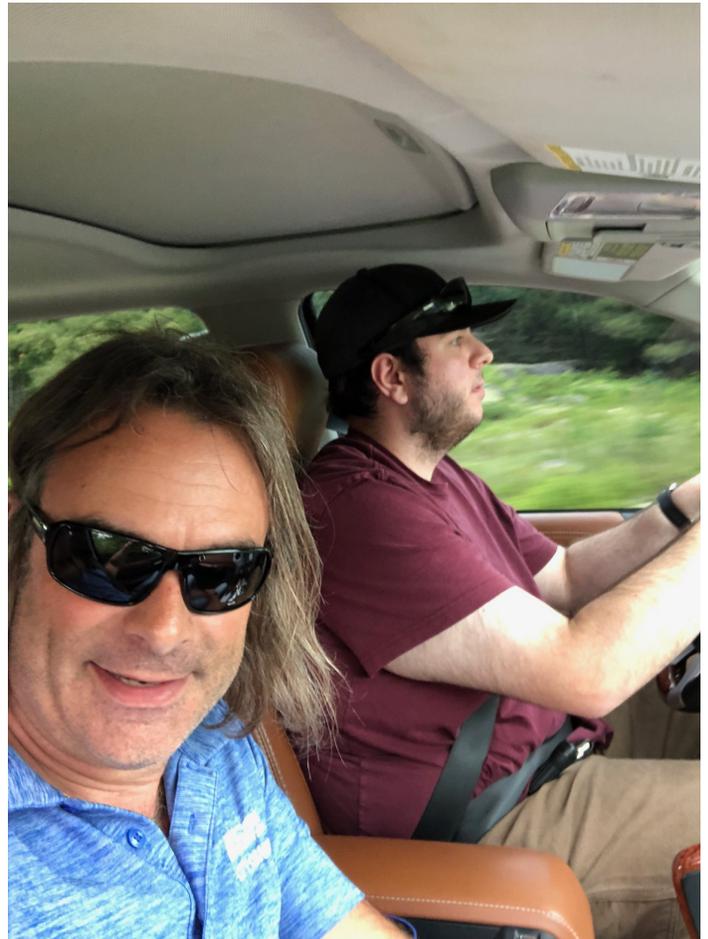
As a young child, Mitchell “Mitch” Heyd would spend countless hours with his beloved toy cars, taking them for a spin along roads drawn onto cardboard. Now, as a young adult, Mitch is still forging his own road ahead and still passionate about automobiles—only now he gets to work with the real thing, excelling beyond his childhood dreams.

Mitch had always been a hard worker and had pursued employment roles such as cleaning at a local school board, but he knew he eventually wanted to advance his skills in an area he was passionate about. Fortunately, in the spring of 2018, Mitch connected with Shane Campbell of City Centre Collision CSN in North Bay, Ontario as part of a Student Links mentorship. Shane was able to provide Mitch with invaluable guidance on how to combine his long-standing interest in automotive mechanics with his penchant for computer technology.

“I wanted to make a positive change in both my life and someone else’s,” Shane explains. “I felt the need to give whatever I had to offer.”

Though Mitch’s mentorship with Shane did take some time to find, once connected the two were dedicated to establishing a valuable experience. The pair proved to be an instant match, with Shane giving Mitch the keys to the mentorship, which allowed him to steer the experience in any direction he wanted. This allowed him to learn and explore at his own pace, eventually giving him the opportunity to prove that he had the capacity, character and skills to do the work.

Mitch’s hard work has paid off: Even though the formal Student Links mentorship is now



over, he continues to work with Shane—only now as a paid employee at Shane’s shop. Mitch has even found an opportunity to exercise his computer technology skills in the shop.

“We’ve got two big machines in here: We have a server which has all the clients’ information, but we also have a diagnostic scanner that we use to scan cars when they come in and before they leave,” Shane explains, adding that he’s been trained on how to use these sophisticated computer systems.

When asked about the experience from a mentor’s perspective, Shane said, “My

favourite part is his honesty, and he genuinely cares about people. He works for me, so him and I have a special bond that's different from other employers, which I find kind of cool."

Mitch and Shane's relationship has grown into a bond that has transcended both their initial mentorship as well as their professional relationship. Their friendship includes sharing things they have in common outside of the shop, such as playing pool together once a

week. Shane also gave Mitch guidance and support by taking him out driving when he found out that Mitch wanted to obtain his driver's license.

That kind of guidance and support is what Shane has been able to offer Mitch on the streets of North Bay and beyond—but it's always been Mitch in the driver's seat, and the road ahead is filled with endless possibilities.

Aspiring Woodworker Polishes His Skills

Simon Lafleur is an explorer at heart. From collecting rocks, enjoying a variety of music, and DJing, to modelling and taking part in sports, he is always open to new experiences. It's this curiosity that led him to pursue a Student Links mentorship with Bill Wright, a woodworker from Nepean, Ontario.

Woodworking has been one of Bill's passions for over 40 years. As a retired teacher, Bill relished sharing his knowledge with Simon. In turn, Simon eagerly awaited their weekly get-togethers at Bill's workshop.

Simon's first project was building a pickaxe from the video game Fortnite. Bill admits he was "thrown off a bit" because he didn't know anything about the object.

"I told him that when he came the next week, I needed a drawing showing size and shape. It was a great experience, as after that when he wanted to build something, he drew it out first so he had a plan," Bill explains.

For Simon, the challenge was learning quickly, and he did. After making the Fortnite keepsake, he moved on to make his own toolbox and workbench. To accomplish this, he progressed from using hand tools



to working with power tools (including a bandsaw and lathe), wood such as ash and walnut, and different sandpapers and glues.

Simon's projects also touched the lives of Bill's family. He helped handcraft over 160 pens for Bill's daughter's wedding as gifts for guests. Simon didn't stop there, suggesting the bride

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and groom receive colourful handcrafted pens just for them.

“He was proud of this, and I of him for it,” says Bill, “but I think Simon was most proud of making and finishing a table for my wife’s office.”

Throughout their time together, Bill was “quite impressed with Simon’s point of view and ability to visualize things.”

“It blew me away!” Bill exclaims. “More than once, he looked at something I was doing and said, ‘that won’t work’ and he was right. I think the confidence to say that was something new.” With Simon’s new skills, increased patience and dedication, Bill believes he “could become a competent furniture-maker.”

Their relationship was strengthened by what Bill refers to as a shared “warped sense of humour.”

“Simon often said the banter was as much fun as the learning,” Bill chuckles.

Simon recounts two of their ongoing jokes, which were also lessons in safety around machinery. At the beginning of each get-together, they would remind each other, “Ten fingers in, ten fingers out,” and Bill would jest, “Did you lose any fingers? I don’t want to make hot dogs.”

Bill was also a kind of “father to look up to,” who taught Simon “a lot of patience” and problem-solving skills. Simon sums up his experience by saying Bill was “100 per cent the best man to work with. He was very helpful.”

According to Paula Poliquin, Simon’s supportive grandmother, guardian, and advocate, “The matchup was perfect.” Since Simon lived with Paula during the mentorship,

she saw first-hand how he was “always excited and looked forward to leaving for weekly sessions.”

“It was the only commitment at the time that he was genuinely excited about,” Paula adds. “It provided Simon with regular socialization, time away from electronics, and was a confidence-builder. He learned and loved it because Bill is such a kind, patient, respectful teacher.”

Dana LaBrash, the Student Links Coordinator for the Ottawa region, also watched the mentorship blossom. “Many students experience a culture that has extremely low and often negative expectations for them.



Simon and Bill’s mentorship is a perfect example of how, in the right environment, students might not only meet typical expectations, but in fact exceed them. Bill even commented that Simon was laser-focused and more safety-conscious than some of the most experienced woodworkers he knows. This hopefully provides encouragement to other students, families, guardians and mentors about the untapped potential that can be uncovered.

COVID-19 regulations have put Simon and Bill's relationship on hold for the time being. They tried meeting over Zoom, but it was difficult to see each other's work.

"It just didn't feel the same," Simon explains.

However, Simon hopes to maintain his friendship with Bill and, at some point,

collaborate on more projects together. According to Paula, "That's how good the relationship was on both sides."

In the meantime, Simon has moved into his own apartment and is looking for a job, where he's sure to continue building on the skills, confidence, and focus he honed during his mentorship.

Young Artist Blossoms into Confident Quilter

Shania Brown is an artist based out of Kingston, Ontario, whose passion for art shines through in all her unique creations.

Looking to expand her artistic skills, Shania spoke to Student Links about finding a mentor who might teach her more about textiles. Shania was introduced to Annette Willis, a local quilter and the owner of chasing lightning bugs studio in Kingston, Ontario. Annette is highly regarded within the quilting community for her one-of-a-kind quilts and for her warm and welcoming studio that often leaves visitors inspired to pursue their own creative projects.

"It was kind of overwhelming," Shania says of her first meeting with Annette. "I was kind of scared and nervous."

Annette wasn't sure what to expect either. She thought she would have to start with the fundamentals, but Shania had already picked up basic sewing skills through a previous mentorship.

"I thought I'd have to be more hands-on with her, but she jumped right in," says Annette.

Their weekly meetings evolved from "diving into a mountain of fabric" and choosing what



Shania wanted, to using the iron and quilting machine to create a double bed-sized quilt.

Annette connected Shania with a global network of quilters through her business's social media pages. As she posted updates about Shania's progress, Annette says her

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followers “went on the journey with us.” One Utah-based quilter learned of Shania’s love of purple and sent her a package bursting with pieces of fabric in various shades of that colour. Shania was thrilled. A Facebook clip shows her beaming as she unfolds a lap full of material.

As the mentorship progressed, the trust in their relationship grew. Annette commented that “the reserved side of Shania fell away” as they shared their stories with each other and bonded over a mutual love of country music and affection for Annette’s dog, Maybelline. “It was a joy to be with her in the moment. Shania is a lovely girl. She oozes joy.”

It wasn’t long before Shania was bringing home a beautifully crafted quilt. Her use of colour and attention to detail resulted in a high-quality piece capable of brightening any



room. Photos of Shania with her quilt posted to Annette’s Facebook page quickly generated numerous compliments.

Practical quilting skills weren’t the only thing Shania picked up from the mentorship. Annette says her goal was to build up Shania’s belief that she can do anything and encourage her to be proud of all her accomplishments.

“And have fun!” she adds, “Nothing is a mistake if you are having fun.”

During their time together, Shania also learned to speak up for herself and establish creative direction for her project. With this atmosphere of mutual acceptance and understanding, Shania says, “I could explain what I needed.”

Shania’s mom, Sue Little, also saw changes in her daughter. “I saw a real growth in her confidence because she was out of her comfort zone,” she says.

But there was more than that. Sue observes that “Student Links teaches more than a particular skill. It teaches responsibility. For Shania, it taught her that it was important to be there and get there on time.”

On her weekly meetup days with Annette, Shania remembered to bring her sewing machine so that the Student Links coordinator could pick her up from school and drive her to Annette’s studio.

“Shania loved every opportunity Student Links provided,” Sue adds. “No matter what their interest, they [Student Links] find someone.”

Sue also appreciates how students are “given opportunities they might not get otherwise,” noting that she has two other children who have taken part in the program.

While Shania and Annette’s mentorship was unfortunately curtailed due to the pandemic, Shania has taken the skills she’s learned from her previous mentorships to become a mentor herself, teaching crafts virtually through the Boys and Girls Club.

“She loves it. She’s committed to it,” her mom

says.

And for Annette Willis? She thinks of Shania often, and “hopes good stuff is happening for her.”

According to former coordinator Andrea Whyte, Shania’s future will be bright because “she’s open to so much. Her willingness to try new things is the key to her success.”

Getting to Know Nicole Flynn

Tell us about yourself.

Besides spotlighting students who meet mentors through Student Links, People You Should Know features people in the community who have interesting stories to share. In this edition we will be getting to know polymath Nicole Flynn. A polymath is someone who is knowledgeable about a number of subjects.

I am a photographer, conservationist, writer, business owner, public speaker, college student, philosopher and activist. I’m also a paid consultant for People Minded Business. I live in Centre Hastings.

You have some beautiful wildlife shots and those are not easy to get. How did you get them?

Patience, and being in the moment. I remember waiting for this shot of water as it dripped from my brother’s paddle. I like to absorb nature, and sometimes it takes hours to get the shot. Some wildlife, like the fox, is drawn to me. I am passionate about the messages of conservation in the photos. I am an activist for nature, as well as for people who have disabilities.



Photo by Nicole Flynn

You are a recent graduate of Loyalist College. Can you tell us about your academic journey?

I dropped out of high school and completed the Duke of Edinburgh Award. Then I learned about adult education and was accepted. I achieved my Ontario Secondary School Graduation Diploma and was the valedictorian. I was inspired by the poetry of Langston Hughes. His poem “I, Too” inspired me to go to college. I took college with everyone else, not the CICE [Community Integration through Co-operative Education] program! I got into Loyalist College and took social justice studies in the first year but moved to general arts and science in my second year. I learned about intersectionality and marginalization, which really opened my eyes and gave me the big picture. I enjoyed ethics – I love Socrates and debating. I am submitting a paper I wrote on ethics for publication. An academic friend of mine

has suggested different places for possible publication.

Tell us about your role as a political activist.

I presented a speech to the mayor and was eventually asked if I wanted to meet Justin Trudeau. I said, "hell yeah!" Presently, I am the VP of the Council of Community Living Ontario and I sit on the Freedom from Harm Committee and the Engagement Committee. People who have an intellectual disability need better income, better housing, better education, and better employment opportunities.

In an article you wrote called "Changing our instincts, beliefs and actions", you recommend the following in order to become more inclusive:

Become a friend, or a good neighbour, to a person who has an intellectual disability. Include your new friend in your book club, or Bible study, or bowling night. Try new things together. This will increase their awareness of someone who has an intellectual or developmental disability as a person. This will also begin to change the genetic code in the brain towards one of inclusion.

Why is this important?

It's important that you get to know people, like me, who have lived experience. Give us a chance to try. The most important thing is that people with intellectual disabilities get to define their own path.



Nicole Flynn, in the driver's seat

You have experienced exclusion and you have still managed to persevere and succeed in a number of disciplines. How do you do it?

I had good role models starting with my parents. In my life, I have focused on independence, learning and believing in myself. Life is not a straight line. There will be ups and downs, and obstacles, but you have to see beyond the obstacles. I like this quote by Bruce Lee: "Using no way as way; having no limitation as limitation."

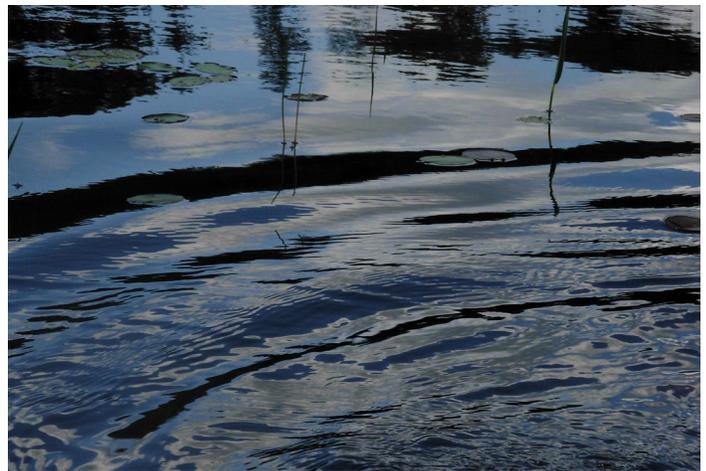


Photo by Nicole Flynn