

Brenda Snyder

Brenda Snyder is currently an Ontario Works case manager with the Housing and Social Services Department at the City of Kingston. She has been employed with the Corporation of the City of Kingston for 35 years. She is also a CUPE 109 member and Robbie Snyder's wife. Robbie Snyder has been an employee of the Kingston Transit city services for over 30 years. He is also a member of the CUPE Learning Champions Network and an adult learner who managed to complete a Grade 12 while working full-time. He was awarded a CAMA National Award of Excellence in 2008.

How was it to have a studying husband at home when you have kids?

When Rob decided to get his Grade 12, he worked full-time days and studied full-time every evening at home and on the weekends. At the time, our 21 year old son was also studying to get his Grade 12. Rob encouraged him to stay focused and continue on getting his grade 12 as well. While Rob was working full time and studying, we took on the responsibility of caring for our great-niece who was under 1 year. She too wanted family time, somehow he managed to juggle work and home while obtaining his grade 12 studies. I continued to try to give him as much space and time as he needed to focus on his education, as I knew then how important this life accomplishment meant to him and our family too.

Have you seen a change in his attitude since then?

When he got his diploma, and our family watched their dad and my husband walk across the stage, was a very special moment for us all. To be able to see the results of him getting

his much deserved grade 12 diploma, he was through the moon! It meant everything to him. And all the family was so proud of him. Rob has been through a lot of hard times in his life, so it's a proud accomplishment. He has been more determined since, more confident. It seems that there's a takeover in the family: one of our granddaughters loves to write little poems and every Christmas, she reads us a little Christmas story she has written.

As a member of the Learning Champions Network, he is encouraging people interested in returning to school. What do you think of that commitment?

This is an important task that Rob is taking seriously. He continues to promote literacy on a daily basis even to his riders of Kingston Transit. With the other members of the group, they work really hard to raise awareness and get more people into learning. However, it can be a challenge, one that the committee takes seriously. This committee over the years has become very caring and compassionate to promoting literacy.

As a case manager with the City of Kingston, you also promote literacy. What does it look like?

As a case manager with Ontario Works, I work with a very diverse clientele; many of our clients do not have their grade 12. Some have not finished grade school. Lots of times, our clients need to secure accommodation's before thinking of going back to school and if this is the case, we work with them when they are ready to focus on schooling. Depending on their needs we try to set them up with the tools that would be successful for them to get their education.

It is great to see that life experiences are now being looked at in helping people obtain credits and are focused on a work environment rather than "school material". Some people are afraid to go back to school as they don't have fond memories of their school years. You learn the same things but with a very down-to-earth, work-oriented angle.

Learning is a challenge we face every day, as technology changes so fast, it's hard to keep up and stay focussed. However, we count our lucky stars that we were able to learn something new today.

I like to help other individuals, to help them improve their quality of life. In the long run, I see

a positive attitude, a supportive one, as an essential part of my work. Even with my colleagues, I think it is important that we support each other, that we keep high moods.

As a member of Local 109, do you feel CUPE does a good job at raising awareness on literacy issues?

There is still a lot to do. I'm asking to all sorts of people every day: "What is your goal? What do you want to do?" For many of them, they have to go through some sort of education. Our literacy assessment person is busy. Back in the days you didn't need a Grade 12, but now there's nothing you can do without it. CUPE union meetings and committees are

good places to raise awareness, but more can be done. People learn at different pace, and there are also so many things to learn in the workplace. Not everybody is a computer savvy, for example. And it's not easy to access courses or even a one on one help. Rob

had in fact pretty much to learn by himself because his teacher had so many people to help.

Also, as a member of the Learning Champions Network, Rob has to take some time off his job to participate in events and talk about his experience. It's sometimes not that easy.

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CUPE Literacy Program