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photo by Amanda Cribdon Photography

Damien Jones: A Different Path

Not all students take the same path to reach graduation. Damien Jones is an excellent example of the importance of providing personalized, individualized learning plans to allow students to reach their individual goal for graduation.

Damien started at a neighbourhood high school and found it difficult to sit in class for four classes a day. He wanted to work and he knew he wanted to be a chef – a great beginning. He was halfway there already. It was suggested that he attend ILC (Individual Learning Centre). He came on a tour of the school and saw that students worked at their own pace with teachers one on one. Damien started the next day. The flexible schedule at ILC allowed Damien to work at the Charles Dickens Pub during the week. After completing two work experience courses he was signed as a Youth Apprentice and completed four Youth Work in Trade Courses.

Damien has a passion for cooking. His grandpa has been a big influence on him as a red-seal chef. Part of Damien's grad plan was to take the dual credit professional cook training program at Camosun. Dual credit programs give students high school credit as well as college credit. Damien now had a goal that he was motivated to work toward. He finished his prerequisites and was accepted into the program at the age of 15! With hard work and support, Damien successfully completed the program at 16 and earned 32 grade 12 credits towards graduation.

After the culinary program was completed, Damien returned to ILC to complete the academic courses he needed for graduation. During the program he competed in the Skills Canada regional competition and placed second. Encouraged by his earlier success, this past spring he competed again and won the gold medal! Damien graduated this June and we were so pleased to award him the \$1,000 Youth Work in Trades Award for this coming school year.

His mom Ashley said: "I would recommend this program for students who have the opportunity to go." She couldn't be more proud of her son.

Programs and partnerships that allow for these alternate pathways require vision, passion and a lot of energy. Wendy

Walker, the principal at ILC, has all of these attributes in spades. She created the first trade sampler (TASK) in partnership with Camosun College and CSETS. This program has been so successful that other school districts in BC are now providing this program as well. Wendy has been the driving force behind creating career programs in the Saanich School District as well as improving student capacity at ILC.

Her vision has provided opportunities for countless students to graduate. Being able to follow one's chosen career path greatly enhances their future employment prospects and success. As we celebrated Wendy and all her many accomplishments on her path to retirement we reflected that retirement is more like a graduation, with many exciting opportunities ahead.

