

Chris Hunt

Eighteen year-old Chris Hunt of Vernon is a perfect example of how a simple opportunity made available at the right time can help turn someone's life around.

A graduate of the Connections Career Centre's Trades Work course in Vernon, part of the Community Futures Development Corporation of the North Okanagan, Chris said the five-week program had an immediate impact.

"It pretty much changed my life," he said. "It made me consider my lifestyle, stop being stupid and make changes."

The Critical Thinking component of the program in particular had a huge influence on Chris, a clearly intelligent and introspective young man.

"It was huge – it makes you think about your actions," he explained. "I realized I wasn't using my mind and how it could have infinite potential."

Program organizers believe that critical thinking, a process that enhances the ability to reason, has differentiated this program from the typical "life skills" program. Following a six-step process, youth learn skills that can be applied to a wide variety of topics, including communication. It has proven to be an extremely beneficial learning experience that assists youth at-risk to find and maintain employment. The program is funded by Service Canada. Program Coordinator Dave Rossi says the Critical Thinking component is "like magic – it teaches the students how to think, and to make sense of the world."

As for Chris, he calls him a "great success story". "This young man is well spoken and recently gave a presentation to our MP and Service Canada officials. He moved some to tears. I cannot say enough good things about him, especially how far he has come with his life."

The goal of the Trades Work Program in 2008-2009 is to support 50 youth-at-risk in their efforts to become independent and self-reliant, find employment in a trade or other occupation, and/or return to school. The results are excellent: 91 per cent of participants completed the program, and 85 per cent were employed or enrolled in school within three months.

After Chris completed the Trades Work program, he began a six-week practicum at Applewood Heating and Air Conditioning in Vernon. His employer realized his potential, and he was hired right away as a sheet metal apprentice. Chris has been there for a year now, and he is also going to school to earn his accreditation as a journeyman sheet metal mechanic. His employers are delighted with Chris. "I'd like to find a couple more like him," says Applewood's Service Manager Warren Biffert. "Chris has a real drive to better himself, he is very self-motivated to advance and do well."

Chris now has his own apartment and he credits the support he received from the Connections Career Centre as making all the difference.

"I realized there are people out there who actually care," he said. "The support I had was amazing."

Besides turning his own life around, Chris now speaks to students at the centre who are going through the same training he did just over a year ago. "I want to help kids like me," he said. "Everyone deserves a chance."

It's clear that Chris deserves every good thing that is sure to come his way.



Connections Career Centre is a member of the Association of Service Providers for Employability and Career Training (ASPECT), a province-wide organization dedicated to community-based training. ASPECT's mandate is to promote and strengthen their members' capacity to provide services to people with barriers to employment.