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Building a Future in our Communities, for our Communities

North Island College is creating new local educational opportunities with innovative partnership programs. Student Sarah O'Shannessy shares her story in this year's NIC Community Report.

"Part of living here is taking initiative," NIC University Studies student Sarah O'Shannessy explains, winding through tables at the bustling café in Manson's Landing on Cortes Island. As she passes, every face raises to smile and greet her. "You have to make things happen."

She returns the smiles. "These are the folks in my seniors group," she says. "I've really gotten to know my community through my work with different programs here."

When Sarah and her husband, a teacher at the Cortes Island School, moved to the island in 2008, Sarah worried she wouldn't be able to find work in the small community. But within the year, Sarah had initiated and developed a youth program, and was hired as Coordinator of both the Cortes Island Literacy Outreach with Literacy Now and the Seniors Helping Seniors programs.

She was introduced to NIC through her participation in Literacy Now, and has since become passionate about the value of NIC in remote communities. "We were discussing the importance of access to education and resources in the community," she remembers, "When I suddenly realized it was important for me, too."

As a public community college, it is NIC's mandate to serve the diverse needs of its communities, and so the College offers extensive distance learning options in addition to its four campuses and centres across the North Island. Through unique



partnerships, NIC is able to create opportunities for rewarding careers for its students in their communities.

For Sarah, this means she is able to follow her dream to become a teacher, a desire sparked by her work with the youth program. "Working with the kids is one of my favourite experiences," she smiles. "I love helping to create opportunities through education." She had started taking the pre-requisites for a Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree through distance courses when NIC announced its new BEd program partnership with VIU—and Sarah is thrilled about the opportunity. "It means so much to be able to continue my work with these amazing community-building programs, while continuing my education at such a respected institution," she says enthusiastically.

The new NIC/VIU program is designed for working people who already hold a bachelor's degree. Classes will be held on weekends and for one extended intensive multi-week session, and this part-time format allows students to live and work in their home communities while completing their degree. For Sarah, this means she can continue her work on Cortes full-time, commuting to the Comox Valley and Nanaimo infrequently.

"This program is a wonderful opportunity. Remote communities need teachers, but people have to leave their communities for many years to be educated," she explains. "And the reality is that many don't come back."

North Island College President Jan Lindsay understands the challenges faced by residents of remote communities who wish to access higher education, and says NIC is committed to developing programs that respond to the socio-economic needs of the Island. "We aim to develop the knowledge and skills required to strengthen our communities," she says. "We're working together to keep the North Island a spectacular place to learn, work, and live."

And this is great news for Sarah. "I'm very excited NIC is continuing to develop more opportunities," she says happily. "With access to education, we can make anything happen. And that benefits everyone."

Learn more about NIC students' stories in the 2010 Community Report, available online at nic.bc.ca or at your local campus or centre on May 19.

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PHOTO CUTLINE

NIC University Studies Student Sarah O'Shannessy at work with her youth group on Cortes Island. For more stories from our communities, pick up a copy of the NIC 2010 Community Report, available online at NIC.BC.CA or at your local campus or centre on May 19.

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