

Ngeune

Ngeune is twenty. She worked as a construction labourer over the summer and managed to impress Alison, the carpenter on her work team when she took part in a volunteer project to build play structures at two local daycares. She asked Ngeune to spend two weeks at the end of the summer helping her. She did this and it turned out that although Ngeune's measurement skills were rusty she was quick thinking and eager to learn.

Alison and Ngeune talked at length and Ngeune decided that she would like to apprentice with Alison as a carpenter. Alison talked to her boss and they all met to discuss the situation. The company decided that as long as Ngeune got her high school diploma or equivalency then Alison could take her on as an apprentice. Alison remembered that there was an organization located close to the daycare that had an Employment Services sign on the door. She suggested that Ngeune go there to see if they could help. When Ngeune went to the office she found the local literacy network. She explained that she wanted to get into an apprenticeship and needed to get more information. The literacy network referred her to an Employment Service centre.

A week later Ngeune met with an employment counsellor who listened carefully to Ngeune's story. Ngeune had got in with a wild crowd at school and had often missed class. However, when a friend died of an overdose and another contracted hepatitis B, she decided to turn her life around. She had joined a program to help her overcome her addictions and she was certain that she could put that part of her life behind her. The counsellor hoped so too, but had heard many similar stories and knew the difficulties of staying clean. She checked that Ngeune knew how to contact an addictions counsellor for support if times got difficult.

With the help of a screening tool, the employment counsellor talked to Ngeune about her educational background. The counsellor wondered if Ngeune might need some help with upgrading in order to be ready to work on her equivalency. She also told Ngeune about options for meeting the requirements for getting in to the Carpenter Apprenticeship Certificate Program. To meet her educational requirements, Ngeune decided on a Grade 12 equivalency program offered by a local literacy program partnering with a local college. Ngeune was so excited she phoned them immediately and arranged a meeting for the following day.

During the intake interview Ngeune learned that she met the entrance criteria and could join the program at any time of the year. Best of all, she would be able to work at her own pace. Ngeune would be in class on Monday and Wednesday morning, starting the following week.

Ngeune went back to see Alison who arranged with her boss that Ngeune would work as a casual labourer on Alison's team, three days a week while she was upgrading and until she was ready to start her apprenticeship.

Everything was set up, but then Ngeune received some bad news; her mother, who lived in Alberta, was sick. She had to put everything on hold and go to Alberta to take care of her. Ngeune had the presence of mind to notify the coordinator at the equivalency program and Alison before setting off to her mother's. Ngeune took care of her mother for the next six months, until she died of pancreatic cancer. She stayed on to sort out her mother's affairs and returned home a month after that. She was upset that her mother had died so young but pleased that she had managed to stay off drugs in spite of being upset and under pressure.

She was sure that she had lost her one chance at doing a job she thought she would love. And perhaps this would tip her over the edge. To be on the safe side she arranged a meeting with her former addictions counsellor, who was able to listen to what had happened and provide some suggestions for Ngeune.

Luckily, things were not as bad as she had feared. She was still able to start her equivalency program. Alison was now working with another labourer but had only taken this person on until the end of August and it was now the middle of May. Ngeune went back to the employment counsellor at Employment Services who was able to help her find a part-time job as a labourer for the summer. She would be back working with Alison in five months time. She hoped that in that time she would be able to complete her course.

Ngeune had been a little over-optimistic. She didn't complete her program until March of the following year, but she did start working with Alison. Just before she graduated from the program she went back to see the employment counsellor at the Employment Resource Centre to find out how to register for the carpenter apprenticeship certificate program.

The counsellor told her that a 24-week program meets the in-school requirements of the carpentry apprenticeship program. The program is delivered during three eight-week periods of 30 hours each. Students take a total of 10 classes. Levels one and two of the program deal with residential construction. The program's final level concentrates on commercial carpentry. Ngeune already meets some of the criteria because she is currently working in the trade and her employer has agreed to let her have time off to attend classes. The counsellor explains that she also needs to have at least one year of work experience in carpentry before applying to the college. They calculate that Ngeune has completed the equivalent of three months full-time work.

Ngeune will need to work another nine months before she can make a formal application. Alison and Ngeune meet with their boss and he agrees to take Ngeune on full-time.

Ngeune works hard over that time and the construction company recognizes Ngeune's achievement and hard work by giving her a small increase in her hourly rate. Ngeune goes back to her employment counsellor to learn how to get registered for the carpentry apprenticeship program. Finally, she is enrolled and is hopeful that she will be able to keep up with the class work. Alison promises to help.