

Doors of opportunity started closing at a very young age for me;

From growing up with an overlooked learning disability to language barriers, I often worried I would remain behind my peers in education. My name is Marissa Long and I've been attending the C.A.E.C program since September. In those few months alone I've been able to open doors I was sure would stay closed permanently.

My first door closed very early for me as I grew up in a small French speaking village. While growing up speaking French as my native language was my biggest blessing, it came with its drawbacks.

The French language is recognized as an official language in both New Brunswick and Canada, yet it remains the minority as English is predominantly spoken nationwide.

The average French speaking student doesn't begin taking English classes in school until the end of elementary, with lessons being very basic. When my parents moved across the province for work, I slammed head first into that closed door as the town we had moved to had no native French speakers and only an English school curriculum available.

Luckily I picked up on the language quickly enough to pass the school year but after spending the previous eight years learning in a completely different language, my next few years wouldn't be easy.

I struggled immensely trying to keep up with my English speaking classmates as I hadn't grown up with the language, it felt like trying to run before learning how to walk. Fortunately, when I joined the C.A.E.C program I was met with full French language testing in all subjects and I was paired with an amazing French speaking teacher that helped me through any language barrier I faced.

The second door I slammed into happened during the Covid pandemic. It put the world on pause and that pause included education. During the span of nearly two years, we lived in times of worry and uncertainty. To keep the spread of the virus to a minimum, many trial and error measures were put into place. During the first year, online classes were put into motion so that students could attend class virtually, but many students including myself didn't have access to the necessary materials to attend them. Nearly an entire semester of crucial class time was missed during the first year alone. During the second year of the pandemic, in person learning returned to many schools across the country but students could only attend in person classes for limited times during the week before having to return home for virtual learning. With so much missed class time, I wasn't able to catch up in order to graduate on time. This left me with a sense of incompleteness and worry regarding my future. Luckily, with the C.A.E.C program I've been able to catch up on missed time with ease.

My final and most formidable door in education is having grown up with a learning disability that went unseen for many years. Until a few years ago, I had no idea that I

had been struggling with autism. Sadly, many learning disabilities including autism, dyslexia, and attention disorders go undetected in many women and girls. Throughout my school years I often struggled to catch onto and retain certain subjects. Despite paying close attention to the subjects I was being taught, I frequently needed more support to understand certain subjects fully. In a standard classroom setting, a teacher with a full class can't put sole focus on one student alone, which led me to do poorly in the subjects I struggled with. Finding support was difficult as most teachers felt I could improve by simply paying closer attention during class.

Thankfully, the C.A.E.C program provided me with a teacher that could give me in depth explanations, as well as the support I needed to excel in places I once fell behind in.

The reason I took the initiative to return to learning is because the C.A.E.C program opened my eyes and allowed me to see that my closed doors could be opened and stay open. The program has given me the opportunity to pick up where I left off with my education, with all the help and accessibility I could ever need to succeed. It's given me a sense of worth and belonging, and most importantly, it has revived my dreams of a bright future. Thanks to C.A.E.C, I no longer feel limited about jobs and careers I can pursue or great feats I can accomplish. My goals for the future are simply to become the best version of myself I can be, and now it's finally possible.

-Appreciatively, an upcoming graduate.

Marissa Long