

Pincher Creek adult learning program celebrates 30 years of education

By William Cockerell

Shootin' the Breeze Reporter

Pincher Creek Community Adult Learning Program has supported adult learners for 30 years. It is a cornerstone of accessible education, personal growth and community connection for Pincher Creek, Piikani and surrounding communities.

What began in 1995 as a small grassroots effort to teach inmates to read has grown into a full-spectrum program offering literacy upgrading, digital skills, employment readiness, English language learning, and one-on-one support for adults at every stage of their learning journey.

A welcoming place to learn

CALP maintains the same mission that it has since its inception: to help adults enhance their personal and professional development while building confidence, regardless of their starting point.

Executive director Monica Sczyrba-Davis says Pincher Creek CALP is about meeting adults where they're at on their learning journey and connecting them with the next steps.

"There's no judgment on where anyone is at with their learning or how they choose to learn," she says.

New learners are often invited for coffee at the CALP facility, located by Pincher Creek United Church, to ease potential nerves and build trust before determining personalized learning options.

Rather than traditional classrooms, the learning space is a comfortable environment designed to make returning to education feel possible for those who previously struggled. This relaxed atmosphere helps learners alleviate the fear and anxiety that often deter adults from seeking the education or upgrading they need.

Broad and evolving range of programs

Over the past three decades, CALP's programming has grown substantially.

Today, it includes literacy and numeracy coaching, learning support for grades 4 to 9, digital literacy, employment readiness, and English language learning for newcomers.

The program also provides learner's licence preparation, personal-development workshops and one-on-one support for adults working toward high school equivalency or preparing to enter



Photo courtesy of Monica Sczyrba-Davis

Staff members of Pincher Creek Community Adult Learning Program pose with a student following completion of a course. From left are Monica, Jewel (student), Lucille, Shannon, Lee and Tania.

post-secondary pathways.

Staff help adults understand how they learn best, something many have never been shown.

They guide learners through identifying strengths, developing strategies and tackling goals in manageable steps, whether that goal is reading with confidence, navigating online platforms or preparing for the workforce.

"Our students are highly resilient," Monica says. "Often they've had a lot of struggle with school or trauma at home, so they already have intense resiliency skills."

"They just keep showing up, and they keep going on," she says, noting that CALP's programs are often the first environment where learners feel seen and supported.

Removing barriers

Accessibility has always been central to CALP's mission, with all programs being free or low-cost. Even small fees are waived, without hesitation, if they create barriers.

This approach extends to creating flexibility for learners facing transportation challenges, work obligations or anxiety about attending in person.

CALP embraces technology like the Owl teleconferencing system, which allows learners to participate from home while still feeling connected to the classroom.

"It really makes it like a kitchen-table conversation, and for students already struggling with anxiety, it

just takes away one more barrier," Monica shares.

Many learners arrive facing barriers such as housing instability, food insecurity, trauma or lack of confidence after negative school experiences. Staff work with individuals closely to ensure their basic needs are met so they can focus on learning.

For those who require additional support, CALP offers referrals to women's shelters, counselling, housing organizations and other community agencies.

The team also integrates cultural supports including smudging and guidance from a Blackfoot elder for Indigenous learners and any students seeking connection, grounding and support.

Above all, the goal is to help learners rebuild their sense of worth and capability.

"If we can help support people to have the confidence, to grow that feeling within themselves that they're 100 per cent capable of learning and just having pride in wherever they're starting — that's really our goal," Monica says.

Team behind the dream

While CALP's services have changed significantly over the years, the dedication of the staff remains the same.

With over 110 years of combined experience, many staff members have spent decades supporting adult learners in the Pincher Creek and Piikani Nation areas. They bring

a unique blend of lived experience, empathy and patience to the classroom.

Speaking about her colleagues, Monica couldn't express enough how grateful she is to work with such compassionate individuals.

"My team is exceptional. They all just have so much heart, so much passion, so much personal integrity. It's not just work, they live and breathe it," Monica says.

"The privilege of watching people grow just lights everybody up here. That's what it's all about."

Looking ahead

As CALP turns its focus to the years ahead, the organization will continue evolving in response to community needs.

More young adults are seeking support, particularly those who left school early or faced learning barriers. Digital literacy remains a growing need as technology becomes increasingly essential for employment and everyday life.

Despite growing demands, CALP remains committed to providing a safe, non-judgmental space where anyone can start or restart their learning journey.

Monica believes success begins with a single step.

"Be brave," she says. "Once you walk in the door, you've got a whole team that has your back."

To learn more about Pincher Creek CALP, visit www.pincherlearn.ca, check out its social media pages or call 403-339-1556.

PINCHER CREEK WOMEN'S EMERGENCY SHELTER ASSOCIATION

Shine a Light

To mark Family Violence Prevention Month, from November 1 to 30, the Pincher Creek Women's Emergency Shelter Association encourages the community to take part in our Shine a Light campaign.

Residents are asked to turn on an outdoor porch light, hang a glow stick in the window or plug in holiday lights for the duration of the night, to shed light on the issue of family violence in our community.

To donate, please visit www.pcshelter.ca and click on the How You Can Help tab

