

LONDON COUNCIL FOR ADULT EDUCATION ADULT LEARNER AWARDS MAY 17, 2018

I would like to begin by thanking each person in attendance today. A quick scan of this room is all the confirmation I would need were I to doubt the importance of adult learners. Like many of you, I started this journey alone, forging ahead with determination that I would succeed, regardless of how long it might take. It began nearly ten years ago, not far from where I stand now, at the G.A. Wheable Centre for Adult Education. I vowed to myself that I would earn my high school diploma in time for the birth of my son. The following June, I posed outside the red-brick building in my blue gown, beaming husband by my side and an infant in my arms. I knew even then that this was only the first stop on a long road ahead, but instead of feeling discouraged, I was inspired.

Inspiration, however, is temporary. It won't get you through all the long days on little to no sleep or overpower the guilt of missing yet another important milestone in the lives of the people you care about most—the very people you sacrifice for. Inspiration is but a mere spark that ignites the engine. Hard work is what drives the vehicle and dedication is the fuel that will get you where you want to go. But like gasoline, it comes at a steep price. Every mature student takes a unique route, but regardless of our starting points, our motivators, our aspirations, I think I can safely assume that the roads we have taken have come with many twists and turns, not to mention panic-inducing steep hills that have caused us to grip our seats, afraid of sliding back down. But somehow, we always make it to the top.

While we share the knowledge of what it's like to embark on a solo journey of this magnitude, if we are lucky we receive encouragement and support along the way. For me, this came in the form of

teachers who patiently shared facts, but more importantly, wisdom; staff members who supported me while I navigated a new and sometimes terrifying environment, offered guidance, and allowed me the opportunity to get involved on campus; and perhaps most importantly, my family. Making the decision to return to school at any age means sacrificing time, energy, and for some, a steady income. All of these are evaluated and believed the benefits will far outweigh the risks in the end. But when you're in the thick of it, it's not always easy to keep in mind. Having people who consistently remind you of why you started makes the process much easier. When I began at Western, I was lucky enough to find a community of people who did just that. I met people who understood the struggles I was having and what it's like to juggle multiple responsibilities simultaneously. People ahead of me, who mentored me and showed me that anything is possible, and the people behind me on whom I can only hope to have a similar impact. I would urge all of you to seek out a supportive community like this, and if you cannot find one, create one. The road doesn't seem quite as long if you have company.

On behalf of myself and fellow recipients, I extend immense gratitude to the London Council of Adult Education, an extended community of adult learners and supporters. Adult education has the power to change lives, and every single person on this stage today is proof of that. Thank you for hosting this annual ceremony to recognize the efforts and accomplishments of people who continue to defy the odds and for offering us the chance today to hear a small piece of their stories. Thank you for raising awareness about who adult learners are and what we have had to overcome to get to wherever we're going. Thank you to the teachers and staff members who believe in us and remind us that success is not always linear. Thank you to our families, for their compassion and understanding that this life stage, like all others, is only temporary, while the rewards are long-lasting. And lastly, thank you to all the nominees today, who embody the spirit of adult education. In the words of Nelson Mandela: "It always seems impossible until it is done." Whether your journey is winding down or only just beginning, give yourself a huge round of applause for making it this far. Thank you.