

# PARTICIPANT INSIGHTS

In Motion & Momentum+ (IM&M+) was created and powered by the Canadian Career Development Foundation. These vignettes are part of the IM&M+: Building the Evidence Case project funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Centre.

## MANDIE

Mandie is a 30-year-old woman who identifies as Caucasian-Canadian. She lives in a small city in Ontario with her young son, who is currently undergoing psychological assessment for a potential neurodivergent condition. Mandie had previously been employed full-time in the retail sector, “but unfortunately I was let go in November due to my son and the challenges that he faces on a daily basis.” Following the loss of that job, Mandie entered the IM&M+ program seeking a clearer direction for her career path. According to her, the program helped her to find that direction, leading her to pursue post-secondary education:

*As I look back, when I first started, I was really, lost. I didn't know what direction I was heading in. And I'm proud to say that I have enrolled in college full time for September. So, I think the program really, brought that out for me. I'm currently going for a child and youth worker [diploma] ... I heard it really branches out once you get kind of through the door with that program and then you can end up in all sorts of environments, so I'm really excited.*

Due in part to experiences she had with other employment programs, at first Mandie was skeptical of the value of IM&M+ and participated primarily because she was required to engage in employment-related activities. In her own words,

*To be honest in the beginning, I didn't see a point to the program... being on Ontario works you have to make effort to hit certain requirements and I said, okay, well, this would qualify for that. So, I just said, you know, what could I have to lose? Like, let's see how long this lasts.*

However, despite missing some sessions at the beginning due to other commitments, Mandie was able to catch up and successfully completed the program, “and I think I got a lot more than I thought I was going through initially.” Completing the program was a source of pride for her, along with providing her with the career direction that she required. In addition to the structure of the IM&M+ program and the general support provided by group members, Lisa identified two specific activities that she found to be particularly beneficial: (a) an exploration of roadblocks

through The Maze activity and (b) the Community Project. She elaborated on how meeting the challenge posed by the project was beneficial for her:

I was actually really proud in the fact that I stuck with it and I put in the effort even though I couldn't be there every day. And the fact that, you know, maybe I didn't start with a goal. But I ended with one. And to me, that's really important because I've never had a sense of direction. I've always been indecisive and, throughout that program, it kind of gave me the ability and the confidence to choose what it is that I was going to do.

In addition to providing Mandie with a clearer direction for her future career, the IM&M+ program helped her to develop a greater sense of confidence in herself and what she has to offer in the workplace. Mandie has noticed this new sense of confidence not only in her pursuit of her own education, but also in advocating for her son.

*The biggest changes I see in myself is the amount of confidence that I have when I'm carrying a conversation when I'm advocating for my son or myself. Kind of the ability to recognize who I am as a person and what I have to offer ... It's brought out in a group setting and other people see it and other people mention it. It really, brings your attention to it and you kind of think, "oh, like maybe I do have that or maybe I am good at that." And I think the program really brought that out in me.*

Finally, looking ahead to the future, Mandie is currently taking pro-active steps to prepare to for her education program, including obtaining appropriate supports for her son. She explained,

*My next steps would just be making sure I'm situated for school in September. I did apply for OSAP. And just making sure I have all my ducks in a row as far as having the academic accommodations that I wanna have in place before starting the program. And then making sure that I have all of my son's resources situated ... him going to school, like, nothing was really in place for him. They tried to accommodate him as much as possible, but because there's no documentation and there's not one word written on the paper, they don't really have to do anything, right? So, I'm really hoping that once we get the diagnosis from the psychologist, then we can move forward and get him the support he needs so I can move forward.*

## SPECIFIC COMPONENTS OF THE IM&M+ PROGRAM

One of the most important features of the IM&M+ program for Mandie was its flexibility, which allowed her to remain in the program despite needing to miss some sessions due to commitments related to her son.

*The flexibility is kind of what sold me on the program, just because I never know when I'm gonna get a phone call or have another appointment. Usually I have appointments weekly at this point. Hopefully they subside as time goes on. But yeah, just knowing that there's flexibility, knowing I wasn't the only one that missed a day and we were all considerate of each other's personal troubles and nobody judged the other person.*

Mandie also gained substantial insight from an activity where participants were asked to reflect on obstacles and barriers that they experienced, along with potential ways to overcome them:

*Having an end goal and putting what kind of bumps were along the way and what we can do to get through those. And I really had no idea how many obstacles I was truly facing until I wrote it down on paper. I used to think, you know, I'm not doing enough. There's more that I could be doing. I'm always really hard on myself. So, for me to see all of what I've done and what I continue to put in written down, it really gave me the insight that I am doing plenty more than what the average person does on a daily basis. And I think if it wasn't for that project I wouldn't have ever came to that conclusion.*