

SECOND CHANCE AT EDUCATION



Robert Inglis/The Daily Item

Jenny Keister, left, talks about some of the course work she did with Julie Shumaker, the adult education manager for the Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit, on Monday at Career Link in Sunbury.

Valley program aiding adults looking to go back to school

By Justin Strawser
The Daily Item

SUNBURY — Jenny Keister didn't think her dreams of becoming a nurse would ever come to fruition after she missed too many days to graduate from Sellsingrove Area High School due to an unplanned pregnancy two years ago.

However, last week, Keister, now age 20 with a 2-year-old son named Bentley, passed her General Education Develop-

ment (GED) test with the help of the Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit's Adult Education Program in Sunbury. She now is planning to study to be an Licensed Practical Nurse in Lewisburg.

"It's a good program," Keister said. "I didn't think I could do it, but (adult education program manager Julie Shumaker) pushed me and I passed."

The adult education program, funded through the state Depart-

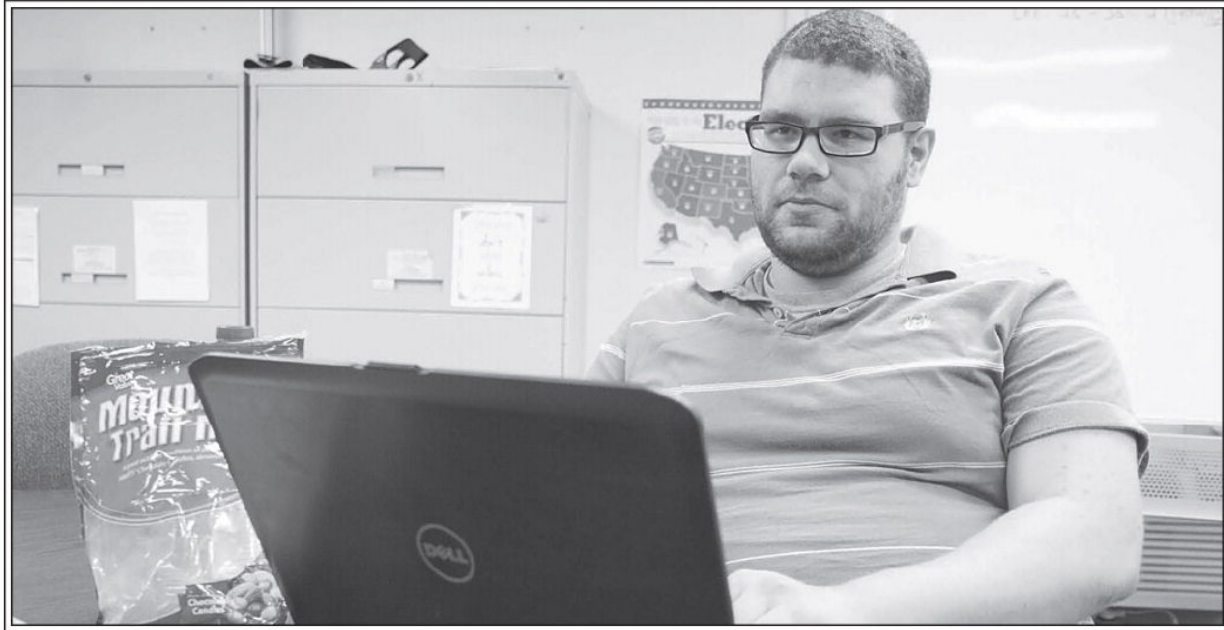
ment of Education, prepares non-traditional students for and tests for the Commonwealth Secondary School Diploma, a high school equivalency credential available to Pennsylvania residents who do not possess a high school diploma and who have met certain criteria. The program prepares students for the HiSet Exam, GED exam or allows students to improve their academic scores in order to attend secondary education.

The classes are held on the sec-

ond floor of the Sunbury Career-Link, 225 Market St.

The Adult Basic Education program has been in existence since the CSIU's first year of operation in 1971. Until the late 1970s it served incarcerated adults, and then expanded in to community classrooms, school buildings, municipal buildings, and community centers, according to CSIU Public Relations Manager Jennifer Spotts.

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Robert Inglis/The Daily Item

Joe Babb of Selinsgrove uses his computer on Monday at Career Link in Sunbury where he is working on getting his GED.

Program aids adults looking to go back to school

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Since July, 162 individuals were served in the CSIU Adult Basic Education and English as a Second Language programs throughout the five-county area; 30 of them were in the adult education program in Sunbury, Spotts said.

"I had a job working in a restaurant, but it wouldn't buy me a house or get me to my goals," Keister said.

After she left high school, Keister has been living with friend Ruth Heintzelman, a retired Shikellamy elementary teacher, in Sunbury. It was Heintzelman who told her about the CSIU program and inspired her to join. Her high school test scores for science and social studies were bad, but she said she did well on the GED exam.

"The teachers are really awesome and push you to be the best you can be," Keister said. "They are very supportive and I recommend this to everyone."

Leonard Leitzel, 47, of Allenwood, was laid off in February from his job as a welder at Wirerope Works, Inc. after 13 years. While he had the company's certification, he lacked the national certification to find a new job at other locations.

"I couldn't believe it," Leitzel said. "I didn't know what to do. I didn't even own my own house, so I couldn't fall back on that."

After improving his test scores through the program, he enrolled in a 16-month course at Triangle Tech in Sunbury for certification so he can weld again. He hopes to be a boxcar welder for a railroad company.

The program is a "Godsend, lifesaver and a blessing," he said.

'Destined for greater things'

Kountry Brown, 35, of Sunbury, grew up in Jacksonville, Fla. He dropped out of high school and moved out of his mother's home so she would be able to afford to feed his

younger siblings and their children.

"I'm at a point where I'm 35 years old and I don't want to spend the rest of my life serving tacos," said Brown, an employee at Laredo Tacos in the Sunoco Gas Station in Sunbury. "I don't want that to be my career. I want to go beyond that. I am destined for greater things."

Brown is interested in public speaking, public relations and politics.

"I like my job, I like the people, but I feel I can make an impact elsewhere," he said.

Kayla Benelisha, 19, of Sunbury, found herself down the wrong path of drugs and dropped out of Shikellamy High School.

"I came here seven months ago, and I learned more here than my whole time at Shikellamy," she said.

She now hopes to go into the medical field.

The subject areas for GED are writing, reading language arts, math, social studies and

science. The subject areas for the HiSET are writing, math, social studies, reading and science.

"Some people come in with a lot of skills, so we find out where their gaps are, and we fill those gaps," Shumaker, the program manager, said.

The program is open to anyone free of charge and students can stay as long as they need. Enrollment is every two weeks. Classes meet 9 a.m. to 12 noon Monday through Thursday. Shumaker teaches classes along with a team of volunteers.

Other similar classes are held in other places: adult education classes in Bloomsburg, Shamokin and Lewisburg, family literacy classes in Milton, Selinsgrove and Shamokin and English Language Acquisition Classes in Berwick and Milton.

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