

# ANDREA MEADOWS

Andrea Meadows lives with NF1, but she has never let the disorder define her life or stop her from achieving her goals.

Andrea received an Educational Scholarship from the BCNF in 2006. She used the scholarship to begin her schooling for her Early Learning and Childcare (ECE) Diploma, which was a two year program at Keyano College in Fort McMurray, Alberta. She has spent the last three years at Vancouver Island University in Nanaimo, BC, and recently graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Child and Youth Care. She still plans on doing either a Master's program or a business program in the future. "I worked part time in after school programs and residential homes while in school," says Andrea. She is currently working full time at a daycare and hopes to find a full time position in the Child and Youth Care field. "I also do gardening and odd jobs for people in my neighbourhood on weekends and evenings."

When Andrea was six months old, her mother, who also suffers from NF1, noticed birthmarks on her daughter and suspected that she may have the disorder. She saw a doctor at that time who said it was likely that she had NF1. When she was a teenager, she was sent to a genetic specialist due to sore knees and a sore hip. It was then, at fifteen years old, that the diagnosis of NF1 was confirmed. "NF has never really affected me too much," tells Andrea.

Andrea shares that the children she works with are often curious about the marks on her body. "I explain to them that I have had them since I was born, just like some people are born with brown eyes and some people with blue eyes," tells Andrea. She says the kids think it is neat because they see shapes in some of her birthmarks such as a butterfly on her shoulder. Although she is not sure if her current boss knows about her NF, Andrea shares that she is very open and honest about her condition. "I am not afraid of ever being fired or judged due to my NF," says Andrea. "I work in a field that is supposed to be very inclusive of all people no matter their culture or disability." Andrea shares that if anyone in the workplace ever judged her or viewed her differently because of NF (which does not affect her work performance); it is not somewhere she would want to work.

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"I was teased about the birthmarks on my neck in school," Andrea shares. She did not know much about NF when she was a child other than the fact that she had it. "I mostly ignored the teasing, but at some points in my life I became very withdrawn with the kids my age," says Andrea. "I spent all of my recesses and lunch breaks being a crossing guard or monitor for the younger kids." When she got older and learned more about NF, she was able to explain to her peers why she

had the birthmarks and what they were. "I was then able to laugh off the comments and teasing," shares Andrea. "I have always been very open and honest with people and not afraid to talk to them about NF."

Since Andrea works with young children, she has at times noticed suspicious, numerous birthmarks on some of her students. She hesitates to mention NF to the parents. "Approaching parents about something that may be 'wrong' with their child is a very difficult thing to do. I have had good experiences and very bad experiences in the past when talking about behaviours or delays the children I work with may be experiencing," Andrea shares. "I have mostly just seen a few birthmarks on the kids. If I was really concerned, I would definitely approach the parents." Andrea also worries about future children of her

own. "I am nervous about how badly my future children could be affected," says Andrea.

When she is not working, Andrea loves kayaking, gardening, walking, and camping. "Now that I am finished this part of my schooling I hope to have the time to spend on my hobbies."





## JEREMY DE SILVEIRA

In June, 2008, Jeremy De Silveira was awarded an Educational Scholarship from the BCNF, which he went on to use at the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) after graduating from high school. Jeremy finished a program in Computer Systems Technology in December, 2012. “I heard about the scholarship during my senior year of high school and I thought I’d try applying for it because I knew I wanted to go to college. I didn’t want NF to hold me back,” tells Jeremy.

After completing the program at BCIT, Jeremy immediately began his search for employment in the computer industry, but unfortunately has not been able to find a job in that line of work. “It seems every employer is looking for past experience in the field, so I started looking for jobs in other areas,” Jeremy shares. He was determined to obtain work and was employed at a grocery store. Unfortunately, due to a lack of understanding and patience regarding NF by his boss, Jeremy was recently laid off. Jeremy continues to work on broadening his computer skills on his own time in order to increase his employment options.

NF has affected Jeremy's mental processing and his ability to retain information which has been a challenge in his schooling. “In high school, I had the challenge of keeping up my good grades by spending so much time on my homework that I didn’t have much of a social life.” He also had to overcome struggles in college at BCIT. “The workload at BCIT for the full time program got too overwhelming for me in the third semester.” Jeremy decided to finish the rest of the courses on a part-time schedule. It took quite a bit longer, but the important thing was that he succeeded in completing the program despite the struggles NF brought his way.

In addition to his learning disabilities, Jeremy was bullied growing up due to speech delays. “I had a hard time making friends and keeping them all throughout school,” tells Jeremy. “Since I was bullied so much, I became very shy which is something I’m still trying to overcome.” Jeremy shares that he still sometimes has trouble speaking clearly and articulating his thoughts, especially when excited or upset.

Jeremy enjoys playing video games, anime, and everything related to computers. He has overcome many obstacles and has not let NF stop him from achieving his goals. His strong work ethic and determination in life are to be admired and will take him far.