

Not letting limitations limit learning

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The story of Nicholas Stevens

False Bay TVET College Spokesperson with Nicholas Stevens

In his best-selling book entitled *The Last Lecture*, based on his parting address to American college students, Randy Pausch explains, "The brick walls are there for a reason. The brick walls are not there to keep us out. The brick walls are there to give us a chance to show how badly we want something. Because the brick walls are there to stop the people who don't want it badly enough."

This advice summarised Pausch's own response to life's adversities. After being diagnosed with pancreatic cancer at the age of 45, to which he eventually succumbed two years later in 2008, the college professor left a remarkable legacy, advocating for research and funding into pancreatic cancer. This while fighting his imminent death.

What his story tells us is of the impact and outcome of the human spirit when it defies the odds, the obstacles and the challenges inevitable to the human experience.

There are many examples of remarkable people who break through their barriers - whether these are extreme physical, emotional, financial hurdles - with fortitude and courage. They are unsung heroes who turn to self-reliance when faced with the choice of giving up or getting on.

Such is the example of Nicholas Stevens, a third-year False Bay TVET College Student, completing his National Certificate (Vocational) in Office Administration at the Fish Hoek Campus. Nicholas is the embodiment of a can-do tenacity in spite of his physical limitations.

Born with Vitreo Retinal Dysplasia, a condition causing blindness, Nicholas's formative learning was at the Pioneer School for the Blind in Worcester. At seven he learnt Braille and in the last two years of his primary schooling, Nicholas opted to transfer to a mainstream school, from which he eventually graduated.

"My commitment to myself is to complete my basic education, and once this is behind me I will pursue further studies and work. I am always open to finding ways of improving my knowledge. In doing this, it helps me improve my general knowledge and in turn I will become an achiever," commented Nicholas.

Nicholas's appetite for learning knows no limits. With a keen interest in technology, his spare time is also devoted to



Nicholas Stevens spoke at the official handover of False Bay TVET College's National Disability Award.

Jacqueline Lenting (False Bay TVET College Occupational Therapist), Adele Ebrahim (False Bay TVET College Occupational Therapist), Karin Hendricks (False Bay College TVET Deputy Principal: Education and Training), Nicholas Stevens (False Bay TVET College Visually Impaired Student), Hendrietta Bogopane-Zulu (Deputy Minister of the Department of Social Development), Jacqueline Layman (False Bay TVET College Student Support and Development Services Manager), Cassie Kruger (False Bay TVET College Principal and Chief Executive Officer)

ballroom dancing, horse riding, Djembe drumming and cycling.

"I really enjoy and look forward to my dances. I have completed my first Medal Test. In September 2014 I participated in the South African National Dance Federation Championships," added Nicholas.

Fond of riding horseback outdoors, Nicholas is grateful for the facilities offered through the South African riding for the disabled. Equally, his enthusiasm for physical activity extends to road cycling, and he has completed three Pick 'n Pay Cape Argus cycle tours on a tandem bike. He will be taking part in his fourth Argus in 2015.

Whilst Nicholas is not one to let disability get in the way of his dreams, he admits it is not an easy path. Says Nicholas, "I personally feel that society has no idea what it is like to live with a disability. I have to frequently rely on others to assist me in getting around, something that I would so love to do independently. In addition to the above, I find it extremely hard to find young friends and groups."

He is however appreciative of the support he receives at False Bay TVET College, saying: "The students in the College are very helpful by assisting me to move around. The lecturers are very accommodating by sending me all the necessary materials that I require to complete my work."

Nicholas's story is true inspiration, revealing how his vision transcends the brick walls of his physical limitation, showing us that the only real restrictions that exist are those that we create in our own minds. When we tell ourselves "it is too hard" and "I can't do this" then that is what we will create.

However when we persevere and strive to go beyond these mental limits, this is true heroism.

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