

Mom on mission to aid prisoners

Algonquin grad hailed as 'wonderful role model'

By MEGAN GILLIS

Empathy for a killer inspired a single mom to become an award-winning graduate of Algonquin College's correctional worker program.

Lisa Roots' fascination with the justice system started at 13 when an older teen she knew was charged with murder.

"I know someone who killed someone," she said. "I became fascinated by the world of corrections and what happened to him. It put a face on the system for me.

"If I want to work with people, this is the group of people who need the most help and guidance."

Roots has since lost touch but wrote to the young man in jail.

"I wanted to let him know I have this belief we all make mistakes, some bigger than others," she said. "I don't judge people on that."

Warm, articulate and determined, Roots is the winner of the Police and Public Safety Institute Award for being a leader in the classroom, earning top grades and shining at her field placement at a downtown parole office.

Worked nights

A role model for her younger classmates, Roots is now an example to those who, as she says, didn't get dealt the same cards in the game of life.

She's landed a job with the John Howard Society, helping accused people who have no one to turn to for help getting bail. Her job is to make sure they stick to the rules.

Making her achievement all the more im-

pressive, the former restaurant manager earned her diploma while working nights and weekends and raising her daughter alone.

Rebecca, 9, cheerfully went to her grandma's when her mom was working nights and weekends and did without luxuries — her mom gave up the family car, for example — when money was tight.

"The last two weeks she said, 'Are you almost done homework?'" said Roots, 31. "I don't know if she'll recognize it now but I hope she'll see that it doesn't matter what age you are, if you want to do something, you do it."

Rebecca will now watch her mom go for an even loftier goal.

University scholarship

Roots starts part-time psychology studies at Carleton University in the fall after winning a \$12,000 scholarship.

Her ambition is to be a parole officer and her dream, to one day be the commissioner of the Correctional Service of Canada.

Roots has what it takes to be a leader, said Janet Crupi, co-ordinator of the correctional worker program. "She was a wonderful role model," Crupi said. "Not in an in-your-face way but by living it."

Roots is a natural leader, in the classroom and in the field, while managing a job and motherhood. Those skills will serve her well working with troubled people, Crupi said.

"In our jobs, we have to maintain rules and expectations while being a helper," she said. "It's a hard balance to walk."

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LISA ROOTS, earned her diploma from Algonquin College's correctional worker program while raising a daughter alone and working nights and weekends.

Jason Ransom

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