

## What people say about us...

### BUSY MUM

Being a mum of two, finding any time to devote to myself is hard, but that's what I decided to do when I contacted The Learning Link last year.

I was looking to build my confidence with my written English and with my spelling, which I have always felt let me down.

The Learning Link let me work at my own pace, working from home and attending once a week to go over any work. They let me use their facilities and gave me lots of support and advice along with information on courses and grants available.

I think The Learning Link is a great place if you are wanting to get back into studying but are unsure of going straight to the college.

The staff are all great and very friendly. I have nothing but praise for them all, as they have improved my confidence and have even entertained my girls, who sometimes came along with me.

I would say to anyone who would like to do some studying or just to improve themselves, to give The Learning Link a try.

It's free and they really do help, you just have to let them.

MARGARET SINCLAIR

### ENROL NOW!

A chance meeting with Pattie saw us both enrolled in a computer class at The Learning Link - or as we have dubbed it The Late Learning Centre!

Thanks to our excellent tutor Robin, we are now both proficient at sending e-mails, downloading photos from our digital camera, making CDs and slide shows, surfing the net and adding attachments to our e-mails.

With our children and grandchildren very much in the computer age and living away from Orkney - being able to communicate via the computer has become absolutely essential.

It has opened up a whole new world which we were very loath to enter!

As we are both nearly septuagenarians, we are eternally grateful for all the help and advice given to us by the friendly staff.

We would recommend this centre to anyone interested.

If we can master it so can anyone.

So enrol now!

KEITH AND BETTY DONALDSON

### THROUGH THE DOOR

Initially I came to get help so I could help my son Nathan with his homework.

I was expecting it to be like college or school - but it's nothing like it.

I was so nervous I brought a friend with me.

Once through the door we had a cuppa (with very nice biscuits) and a chat about what I wanted out of The Learning Link.

A year later I feel more confident asking for help, with my reading, writing and general English stuff!

Everyone is friendly and down to earth. It's like going to a friend's house - although you still have to work!

I know how much courage it takes to walk through the door. I've done it and I would be more than happy to take that first step with anyone else who wanted help.

MARTINE BUSHELL

### A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT STORY

Up until about three years ago, I didn't realise I had a problem with my education. I had always worked in a factory and then as a kitchen porter - and just worked away manually. The only writing I had to do was to fill in a timesheet, I never had to read things or write anything else.

When I got a job at one of our local butcher's shops, it was a completely different story. Here I had to write things in the book like the weight of things etc... I was prepared that this was not going to be easy for me but I did it to the best of my ability.

One of the members of staff left the company and it became part of my job to make the sausages and all the puddings. I couldn't read the weights that had to be done and my son kept checking to make sure that I had put the right ingredients in the recipes. I found this very hard!

One day, a woman I was working with suggested I should go along to this place called The Learning Link who could help me. I did this - and even though I had to leave the job I was in because of my reading and writing, it was a brilliant move. Now I am going to work towards being a Scientist ☺☺☺ - thanks to the help of my tutor and the staff at The Learning Link who have given me motivation, skills and confidence.

BRYAN NEWLANDS

### SUNSET YEARS

I would like to tell you what The Learning Link has done for me and can also do for you.

Having returned to Orkney after many years overseas for our so called "sunset years", the one thing I wanted to do was learn computing, given that I now had time to do so.

My sister-in-law handed me The Learning Link telephone number one day and suggested I should ring. It took some weeks for me to pick up the courage to do so as I had once tried classes, but the internet jargon was way over my head and not explained.

A feeling of isolation eventually made me take the final step and the lovely lady who answered the phone assured me no-one is too old (thinking poor lady she hasn't met me!).

It was still with a lot of trepidation that I went along for my first class, always hoping there was not a lot of teenagers making me feel that it was too late, the brain cells had already gone!

What a pleasant surprise! Robin, our tutor, has the most unimaginable patience and the gift of not making you feel dumb when you ask the most basic of questions; that was a real bonus. There were no big classes, only a lovely couple, Betty, Keith and myself.

It has turned into a fantastic, informal, fun experience; I haven't laughed so much in years and wouldn't miss a class for quids, Robin explained everything in a language anyone could understand. It has also had the spin-off benefit for my husband, who is 75 and not able to get out much. Now he is able to listen to live radio overseas and read daily newspapers. He enjoys browsing and now spends more time on the computer than I do, proving you are never too old. The Learning Link welcomes you like family each time you arrive. So a big thank you to all of them.

M. S. KIRK WALL

## Learning is like "Pringles" – once you start you can't stop!

Two years ago I wanted to progress in my chosen career but I needed to do a qualification first. I was very unsure, doubting my abilities. I would use words like "...I wonder if I can," "...I will try," "...I hope I can do it."

I attended The Learning Link and, with help, I worked towards a numeracy qualification. I completed it in six months sitting tests at the Orkney College. I still had very low confidence in myself.

I started to study with the Open University in my chosen career. It was very hard and I still ask myself "...can I do it?" but I so desperately wanted to try to do this studying as I so love the work I do and have worked in my field for years gaining lots of experience.

The studying is for five years to complete my chosen subject. I am now at year three. I am only now starting to understand why I was not confident as at the end of last year I was diagnosed with dyslexia. I feel that this has reflected in my confidence for years towards learning.

I have completed highers in my career and am now studying at Diploma level pursuing my ambition. I have found it very hard, I think it is harder than it is for the average person. I find it very tiring mentally and hard work but I feel very proud of myself!

Dyslexia cannot be cured but everyone is an individual and with support you can do anything you want!

## Sign up for a new learning experience



Student Martine Bushell climbs up the ladder to success. Or is she taking a look at the new Learning Link sign? Whatever Martine is doing, she looks to be taking it in her stride!

I am over half way in my studies and learning to cope knowing that I will have to work extra hard to gain my qualification. I feel very emotional as to how far I have already come on my journey to pursue my career.

Learning is so like "Pringles" - once you start, you can't stop, this is how I feel!

A CARING PERSON

## Now that IS a GOOD idea!

It's that time of the year again folks when our thoughts turn to the start of the new learning year.

What can I begin to learn this September?

How can I keep those little grey cells healthy?

Who is going to give my brain a work out?

One answer is to give The Learning Link a call on (01856) 879200.

Or why not pop in to 1, St Rognvald Street, Kirkwall for a cuppa and a chat?

We have all sorts of ideas, ways, cunning plans and strategies to help you brush up on those essential skills of reading, writing, spelling, maths and basic computers.

Stuck in a rut at work? Homework headaches with children or grandchildren?

Find out how brushing up on those essential skills can change your life!

But don't take our word for it - read what our adult students think about us in this edition of Newslink.

Enjoy!

PATTIE HARTLEY

## THE LEARNING LINK

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## WHO WE ARE ...

The Learning Link is part of Orkney Islands Council's Community Learning & Development Service and is part funded by the Scottish Executive.



# A tale of two classes



Rodger with some of his ESOL students

## So what goes on at an ESOL class?

ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes provide support for those from other countries who have made Orkney their home, temporarily or permanently - even in my first two months in the work I have had students from three continents!

As to what happens in a class, every teacher is different and I can speak only for myself...

What we do in lessons depends so much on the students too. When students have no English, there will be plenty of pointing, miming and drawing to get ideas across - although even this can be difficult when cultures are very different (try explaining a "house" to someone who has lived all their life in a city full of flats!).

An ESOL group can be an extreme case of what school teachers call "mixed ability"! Certainly one of the challenges for me has been teaching a group whose English strengths vary enormously - often, though, students with the same mother tongue can help each other.

All the ESOL students I have met have been delightful to teach

- friendly, motivated and polite. The only drawback of this can be if students are too polite to tell me they don't understand...

Assessing students' needs is obviously important. I find it useful if my students can do some regular writing (yes, homework!) - I can help them individually with corrections, but best of all it makes sure I can focus on explaining the things they find difficult.

One of the enjoyable things for the tutor is the opportunity to be creative in responding to the students' needs. Some weeks I have a main focus, perhaps a grammar point such as when to use the right past tense - "I did" or "I have done". Another week we might check the students' confidence with the commonest 100 English words; a third week will involve responding to their writing; and so on.

I am also learning a lot about my own language! Native English speakers like myself have absorbed the language from babyhood, and we use it instinctively without having to think carefully what the rules are: for example, why do we say "How much rice?" but "How many eggs?"

**ROGER DAVIES**  
ESOL TUTOR THE  
LEARNING LINK

## Oh no! The cat's in the washing machine!

So what has four legs, four arms, two heads and dances round the room as if discovering the proverbial cat (see below!).

Answer: Pattie and Michael in the thick of the Wednesday afternoon English class for Chinese migrant workers at The Learning Link.

For at least three years we have had connections with the local Chinese community, helping members pass their UK Citizenship Test, pass their driving test (yes, we are flexible and versatile!), and generally helping them to adapt to life in Orkney.

So when the call came in that there was one Chinese employee of the Empire Restaurant in Kirkwall wanting help with her English, that redoubtable double act, Pattie and Michael sprang into action. In the event, the one turned out to be at least five and with one bound we had the nucleus of a new language group. (Group work being the in-thing at the moment; it's supportive and fun for the students, and an efficient way of using tutors' time.)

Needless to say, with word getting around of the incredible acting skills of P and M (yes, successful teaching includes the most amazing variety of acted out situations to get a linguistic point across), the group now often numbers nine, including two-year old Emily, who comes a long with her mother or aunt and sits most happily, often joining in with the occasional surprisingly relevant contribution. The group's linguistic skills are improving rapidly, and Pattie's dancing skills are a joy(?) to behold...

And the cat, you might ask? Oh, just part of several picture stories (graphics by the ever-versatile Linda, our long-suffering Administration guru... yes, Linda, those art classes at KGS did come in useful eventually...) which are invaluable in eliciting verbal responses from students and building confidence through fun and laughter. What better way to learn?

**MICHAEL LEE**



Our Chinese group: Bing (holding Emily), A Qing, Tina, Xiao Yun and Andy.

# High flying Edwina

*(Or the one who got away)*

Well yes, I'm afraid to say, I left The Learning Link in a bit of a state...

... What I remember of that last day and evening and the next day is shrouded in a mist of sadness, incredulity, delight, humility and warmth - and yes, OK, quite a few litres of white wine too! It was a special time, with special people and special memories.

It started with me being told (by Pattie, who else?) to be ready for 12 noon on the dot, at my house. I waited with some trepidation, well knowing Pattie's fertile imagination! However, a very smart and polished Robin became my chauffeur for the day and arrived with an equally polished car, a tiara, a silver sash, a glass and a bottle of Babycham!

It turned out that I was going to be, not exactly a queen for the day, but more a princess for the afternoon. I sat in the back of Robin's car and regally waved to all who didn't know me and arrived at St Rognvald Street to a sumptuous buffet, champagne and lots of friends of all ages.

From the warmth of this 'family' of colleagues and students, who are all friends, I was leaving for an unknown future in Stromness! My new job couldn't have seemed more dramatically different and I knew I was facing not just a new challenge, but a whole cliff-face of learning.

The time comes when full-time work becomes a necessity and I was fortunate enough to get a good job in a worthwhile industry. I couldn't leave a job that had given me the privilege of meeting so many interesting and wonderful people, for anything mundane and boring and unfulfilling. And I am glad to say I haven't!

My new role as a Client Relationship Officer at the European Marine Energy Centre (EMEC) in Stromness has been a rollercoaster of new experiences.

Within the first few weeks of joining, I was filmed on the new promotional DVD for EMEC, was organising the layout and art work for a stand at an exhibition in Aberdeen and was in London at The Natural History Museum having lunch with the dinosaurs!

So what is EMEC? Orkney is home to the world's first wave and tidal energy test centre! YES, THE WORLD'S FIRST!

If you want to find out more, go to: [www.emec.org.uk](http://www.emec.org.uk) and you will also be able to download a DVD.

So, a very different life! I do miss The Learning Link though, with all its warmth and friendliness and of course, the biscuits.

**EDWINA COOK, FORMER SUPPORT WORKER  
AND NOW A RENEWABLES HIGHFLIER.**



Edwina Cook