

Linking experience with reality

GLADYS AND CRAIGIE' STORY

After purchasing a computer, we decided to enroll at The Learning Link to learn how to use it. This was after hearing very positive comments about the place. We made an appointment and went along. We were greeted with an enthusiastic welcome from our tutor and the rest of the staff.

We had no confidence in our ability to work the computer, but after regular instruction from our tutor and with practise - we can now send and receive e-mails, download pictures, send attachments and much, much more. It has opened our eyes to no end of possibilities and has widened our horizons.

The patience given to us by our tutor was second to none, and she remains a firm friend whom we can call on at any time.

"So a BIG thank you to The Learning Link!"

Not forgetting Linda - who was always there with the tea and biscuits!

The Learning Link is a credit to the staff.

REGARDS CRAIGIE AND GLADYS FOTHERINGHAM

LES'S STORY

Everyone wants to feel they're making a difference. Helping someone improve their literacy and numeracy skills is probably one of the most significant differences you can make in helping another person improve their quality of life.

Bryan and I have been working together now for the best part of a year and I am constantly amazed at his cheerfulness, enthusiasm and initiative in relation to his own progress.

Immediately after beginning some numeracy work using a calculator, Bryan went out and bought his own to practise at home.

Soon after starting to use the computer to improve his literacy skills, Bryan turned up with his own laptop computer!

It's been a pleasure to see how much progress he has made over the year and to feel I've been able to make a contribution to the journey.

BY LES COWAN (TUTOR AT THE LEARNING LINK)

MARGARET'S STORY

Are you afraid of computers? Short of confidence, or think you are too old? If you say 'Yes' you should go to The Learning Link. I was all three but got myself through the door and have never looked back.

You are taught on a one-to-one basis and they don't push you harder than you are able to cope with.

I tried evening classes quite a few years ago but gave up. The reason was there were a lot of people in the group and I didn't like to tell the teacher they had left me behind. I just couldn't keep up so I left.

Coming to The Learning Link was my last try and I'm so glad I did. I'll never be a computer expert but am happy just to be able to do the basics.

Having come through the door for computers I now have joined a creative writing class at The Learning Link - and I would not have done that a few months ago!

It's great. It opens your eyes to such possibilities and we have such a great time. All of us look forward to the group and can't wait until the next one.

Life is just full of possibilities now.

BY MARGARET MARWICK

KIRSTINE'S STORY

I have always struggled with maths. I can count to get me through day-to-day life and I've always worked and dealt with numbers, but I never felt confident and would totally avoid percentages and multiplication.

Fractions would bring tears to my eyes because I had didn't have a clue what to do. I was embarrassed to tell people as I thought they would think of me as being 'stupid.'

It was when I had my daughter that I decided to change my lifelong struggle. I didn't want to be like that Dad on the Big Plus advert: telling her I didn't have time just to avoid helping her.

I was so nervous the day that I phoned The Learning Link but as the phone rang I took a breath and said 'hello...' that was it! I had done it!! I had taken the first step to change and hopefully stop history repeating itself.

The receptionist was lovely and said someone would call back, and the next day Chrissie phoned and asked me to call into the office. Chrissie and my tutor Lesley couldn't have been more helpful and encouraging.

After our meeting, my first lesson took place at the centre and at a time which suited us both.

Lesley is fantastic and very patient going over any points which I didn't understand and just for someone to sit and take time to show me properly has made all the difference.

It's an ongoing process but I'm enjoying each week. The Learning Link has definitely changed my life and for that I will always be truly thankful.

BY KIRSTINE SNODGRASS

M I K H S Q U O Y L O O
L R I Y A S N O R T S B
O E R Y W R E T O A B G
H N K D E E R N E S S R
K D W I M X S A N Z A
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D S T R O M N E S S Y A
N Y A R R U B I R S A Y
A K C I W R A M F S U Q
S S E N R E K N A T S M

WORDSEARCH

Find the following words:

BIRSAY	KIRK WALL	STROMNESS
BURRAY	MARWICK	STRONSAY
DEERNESS	QUOYLOO	TANKERNESS
FINSTOWN	RENDALL	TOAB
GRAEMSAY	SANDWICK	WESTRAY
HARRY	SHAPINSAY	WYRE
HOLM	SKARABRAE	
HOY	STENNESS	

The Learning Link's going online!

Some of our students and teachers have kindly donated stories which will be used on a website giving information about The Learning Link. Angela and Linda are presently finalising this and we will be online very soon! There's already lots of interesting things on the site - which we hope you will all enjoy - and we are always on the look-out for new stories, ideas, worksheets or great website addresses.

Out 'n' about

We have recently completed a very successful outreach project at The Blide Trust. This was to build people's confidence and encourage them to access the Internet. It was also a chance for them to explore ways of using computers in everyday life. So far we have covered individual projects from searching for information on holiday destinations - to researching war graves - not bad for some people who couldn't turn a computer on before! Staff, volunteers and members of the Trust have all been involved in the drop-in sessions, and this has enabled us to reach more people in the community. The beauty of the project is that they can travel the web within the comfort of familiar surroundings. If your organisation would be interested or would like further information please just contact Robin at The Learning Link on 879200.

What will YOU be doing ...

... on these cold, dark winter days and nights? Perhaps you and your brain will be hibernating? Or perhaps you could plan for your future? Perhaps give those little grey cells a wake-up call! It's never too late to take that first step towards the new you! Want to change your job, improve your prospects or enhance your qualifications? Don't just sit there - give The Learning Link a ring on 879200 - and change the way you think.

TAKE CARE - IT'S CATCHING!

When Angie Cooper comes into a room, it's a bit like experiencing a mini tornado.

Although petite, Angie's enthusiasm for life is massive and a teaching session with her never goes according to plan!

I met with Angie over a year ago and was amazed at her passion for her job. Angie is a care worker who really, really cares. She is not only a compassionate carer but she is fascinated by the myriad aspects of the job.

Her thirst for knowledge about ANYTHING in the caring field, made my task of helping Angie to become a fluent reader, a real joy. Angie, who is dyslexic, always experienced problems with reading and writing. But with her huge determination and her passion, Angie's reading is fantastic.

She can read with fluency and understanding and is



Looking into a bright future dragon slayer Angie Cooper with tutor Pattie Hartley.

using these skills to work on her care qualifications.

"I always had trouble with reading but now everyone is noticing how well I do it," she said.

"Not just in work but up at Orkney College. One of the lecturers there, who helped me years ago, just cannot believe how far

I've come."

Angie has done other care qualifications in the past using audio tapes and with the help of scribes - people who write Angie's thoughts and answers. This is the first time that Angie is going to lectures, completing her assignments on the

computer with the help of specialist software and reading and writing her own reports.

"You've no idea what it makes me feel. I know it's been a long journey. It has literally taken me years. But look at me now - look what I'm achieving - look what I'm now able to do in work," she said.

"It's just incredible really. The specialist software I use is called 'Dragon', which is funny really because my tutor here at The Learning Link is a bit of a dragon as well!"

Pattie: "It has been a real pleasure helping Angie. She has a huge personality and a determination to match.

"What's amazing is making a connection with someone and watch them go from strength to strength - watch them bloom in fact. "It's the best thing in the world."

BY PATTIE HARTLEY

THE LEARNING LINK

1 St Rognvald Street, Kirkwall

Tel: 01856 879200

Email: enquiries.learninglink@thelearninglink.org.uk

WHO WE ARE ...

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

Anyone for tennis?

Jack (pictured below) is one of our volunteer tutors who believes in getting into character! We invited him and all our other tutors to a 'Wimbledon Tea' at The Learning Link during the summer.

Jack turned up in his whites but I notice it's a fruit punch in his hand and not a tennis racket!

The idea behind the Wimbledon Tea was first and foremost as a thank-you for all our tutors' hard work during the year. It also acted as a base to launch a series of workshops which will take place during October and November.

The workshops are 'refresher sessions' in areas such as helping adults to read and write, new innovations in dyslexia, looking at ICT as a learning tool for adults and exactly what is ESOL? That is, English as a Second or Other Language. We are also extremely excited about a Maths Wizard, based in Learning Connections, who is coming up to run a numeracy workshop.

It was great to see all our tutors together - both the 'established' ones and the ones slightly newer to the centre court of adult literacies.

The punch went with volley, the strawberries and cream were the winners of the mixed doubles and the shortbread was a deuce of a biscuit!!

BY PATTIE HARTLEY



NEW TUTORS



DOREEN SINCLAIR

February saw the completion of our latest volunteer tutor training course for the SQA PDA in Delivering Adult Literacies, with portfolios and assignments handed in for assessment at the end of a demanding but enjoyable thirteen weeks.

This year we had five new tutors on the course (picture above: Doreen Sinclair, Lesley Campbell and Les Cowan) who were all successful, so warmest congratulations to them.

They are all up and running now and paired up with students and appear to be enjoying the experience!

"Adult learning is an adult to adult equal partnership," said Lesley.

"Just because someone has difficulty with one skill, doesn't mean they don't have other skills which can easily be better than mine.



LESLEY CAMPBELL

"Both students I have worked with this year have other skills which I can only dream of," she added.

Jack Drever, who is another tutor (pictured left), said the training had given him the skills and confidence to become a successful tutor.

"It was hard work but I cannot think of a better way to invest in the future than helping someone to equip themselves with reading and writing skills," he said.

Doreen is enjoying being a tutor.

"Adult students who come to The Learning Link have a huge variety of skills and abilities but they undervalue them," said Doreen.

"Part of my job is to support the student in valuing the skills and strategies they already possess and then build on them.

"I personally have learned a lot from being a



LES COWAN

tutor. After 60 years of believing I couldn't 'do' maths I have now gained the confidence to study for Intermediate 2 Maths.

"Like many adult students at The Learning Link, my self esteem is rising and I get so much pleasure in realising that I can achieve success in an area where I once felt a failure - just like my adult student," she added.

The SQA PDA has been extensively revised over the last two years, and is now a very worthwhile qualification to get, with much more emphasis on the practical side of Adult Literacies teaching, so if there are any more budding volunteer tutors out there who would like to be included in our next training course starting in September 2009, we would love to hear from you.

Not pictured is recently qualified tutor Wendy Barr, who is currently tutoring an adult student on the island of Shapinsay.

A friendly bunch!

In my place of work, I lacked confidence and experience in my written work. So I went along to The Learning Link to see if they could help. I also wanted to learn how to use the computer/laptop.

I was very nervous at first but was soon put at ease with a warm and friendly chat. An appointment was made to attend one hour a week. Since then I have never looked back, my only regret is that I should have gone to The Learning Link years ago.

I have gained experience in my written work by writing short stories and I have also received my Certificate of Achievement in SVQ2 in Health and Social Care.

I also enjoy photography, so I have learned how to download my photos, burn them on to a CD and I have had the experience of doing a PowerPoint presentation.

You can see what I have achieved in a short time, so don't hesitate, take the first step, phone (01856) 879200 The Learning Link. They are a friendly bunch and will point you in the right direction.

BY SANDRA COLTHERD

Since writing this, Sandra has enrolled at Orkney College and is beginning the European Computer Driving License (ECDL) course.

A way to go Sandra!!!

It's a 'B' for Michael Lee!

In December 2007, the Scottish Government announced that they were making funds available to enable tutors working with students from other countries to gain the CELTA (Certificate in English Language Teaching for Adults) qualification, run and accredited by Cambridge University. This is the most highly valued worldwide of the various qualifications available in this field, and normally costs over £1,000 for the tuition alone.

On this one-off occasion, everything, including travel, course fees, subsistence and books were all paid for by the government, so it really was a chance in a lifetime for anyone interested.

Interviews and assessments were held in Inverness in January 2008, and a total of ten applicants were selected including one from Shetland and two from Orkney: Kathy Burnham from Orkney College and our very own Michael Lee from The Learning Link!

Michael says that one of the scariest parts was the aptitude and pre-course task that had to be done before the face to face interviews to weed out those who were not suitable (memories of school exams....er...what is an adverb??)

In the event, everything was ok and Michael spent the next fifteen weeks (every Friday and Saturday) in training sessions, completing assignments and doing a total of nine hours teaching practice with two groups of foreign students of differing levels, and putting up with the inevitable delays in flights from Orkney to Inverness which meant catching up on missed input sessions.

But the two tutors on the course were both excellent and very supportive, and Michael emerged at the other end with a Pass B, which only 25% of people on the course gain, so congratulations are due!

As well as his one to one work with foreign students, Michael is also now running a weekly evening class at The Learning Link for migrant workers, with a steady attendance of between six to eight students from Poland, Slovakia, Spain and Israel to keep him on his toes!

To write or not to write ... that is the question ...

... And the answer is at the creative writing group currently working at The Learning Link on Monday evenings.

The group, which was the brain-child of Support Worker Chrissie Matthews, was set-up because so many students wanted it to happen.

"So many of our students come here to get help with one thing and then they discover they want to learn something else," said Chrissie.

"Just talking to a few people led to the group forming and then we had to find a very special tutor to run the course," she said.

Fortunately, a specialist creative writing tutor was on hand and now Kathy Burnham and the 'Monday group' are half way through their 10 week project.

"It's a great group and we really work as a group," said Kathy.

"We cover so much ground each session and I'm confident that everyone will produce something



From the left: Kathy, Joyce, James, Anne, Marian and Margaret.
Missing from the picture is Tracy Hawkes.

extremely special by the end of the course," she added.

Wanting a bit of 'me time' was one of the reasons the group attracted Anne Leslie.

"I wanted to come to find out if I was any good. It feels great to be putting me first for a change," said Anne.

Marian Rendall was also looking for a challenge.

"I wanted to do this for personal achievement really," said Marian.

"Back in school I just didn't take it in - there was a mental block," she said.

"I now feel that this block has come down and that nothing is impossible anymore," added Marian.

These sentiments were echoed by the entire group who all said the creative writing Mondays were infinitely better than any 'soap on the box'.

"I feel much more confident in my abilities and I just want to learn more and more," said group member James Budge.

Margaret Marwick also feels that her confidence has increased.

"Our tutor has tons of patience and every week is well organised with new challenges," she said.

"It's great that we can go back over a topic that was a little bit tricky without fear of being thought stupid," added Margaret.

It's time to take a stand!

After a lot of discussion and coercing the Co-ordinator, we now have the green light to set up a stall at the infamous County Show in 2009. This annual event is an ideal opportunity to get out in the community and attract some students and new tutors. It is intended to organise the event in conjunction with our partner organisations - Orkney College, Library services and Careers Scotland.

This is a great opportunity to reach all age groups and abilities in a fun packed setting - and I need your help.

I have quite a few good ideas and some freebie gifts for the event but I'm looking for some of your ideas to make this a memorable occasion! I also need folk to assist in any way they can.

If you have a knack for face-painting or similar, I would love to hear from you.

You may have some ideas of your own that will draw the crowds - if so don't be shy, give me a call or just pop in to the centre and let me know.

All donations of your time and ideas will be most and gratefully received!!

BY CHRISSE MATTHEWS