

THE MAN BEHIND THE SCENES ...

Dr Malcolm Graves, the man behind the scenes at The Learning Link, has retired after 24 years heading the council's CLD (Community Learning and Development) team.

For Newslink, Malcolm takes a look back over his commitment to developing adult literacies in the county.

"My first involvement was back in 1987, organising evening classes. After about two years doing this, I started picking up some other work in adult learning (including adult literacies).

"There was no real funding for the adult literacies service and we were only able to see about six or seven students a year with the help of a small band of volunteers," he said.

When Malcolm got the job of Community Education Manager he sought the Council's approval to create the post of Adult Literacy Co-ordinator, so more specialised support could be offered.

A Scottish Executive report at the beginning of 2000 highlighted the need for work in adult literacies, citing some 800,000 people in the country having low skills and providing significant funding to tackle this problem. Funding was provided to increase the service.

That's when Pattie Hartley entered the world of adult learning in Orkney:

"Pattie was very clear about what she wanted," continued Malcolm, "a centre that was available to people locally.

"She wanted a balance between the service offered being more visible but allowing people to access it in their own way.

"Pattie wanted it to be promoted well, and that strand has continued so it is a service that's free, accessible and with no stigma," he said.



Dr Malcolm Graves - the smile says it all!

The Learning Link opened its doors in 2002 in Queen Street, moving to its present, larger building in 2006.

"With the new centre we could broaden the range of support offered," said Malcolm.

"We moved from a point when we started with a handful of learners until now, when we have a hundred or more students going through The Learning Link's doors each year.

"One of the strengths of The Learning Link is that people can make the most of their potential. It's easy to demonstrate the impact that The Learning Link has on peoples' lives when you hear their stories."

Looking back, Malcolm thinks that:

"Maintaining and developing the service has been a real achievement. The successes that go back over a number of years provide clear evidence of what The Learning Link and the adult literacies service in Orkney has achieved."

Much of that success has been due to the quiet but effective support that Malcolm has given to The Learning Link and we all thank him and wish him happiness in the future.

Bryan's story

My name is Bryan. I have been coming to The Learning Link for over five years. This year my tutor helped me to do a Food Hygiene Certificate at Orkney College. This is the first qualification I have ever had in my life. I am very proud of it.



Bryan Newlands

Core Skills Success

Over the past year we have been able to offer some of our students SQA qualifications (Scottish Qualification Authority) in Core Skills. To date five students have gained literacy and numeracy qualifications.

Students have used their new qualifications in a variety of ways. For some this has enabled them to access further education and for others it is the realisation of a dream.

Our students have said it was an ideal opportunity to work towards a relevant qualification by utilising their individual learning programmes and helping them improve their skills.

Scott's story

Before coming to The Learning Link, Scott Sutherland felt his life had got stuck in a rut.

"Without the help and support I received from the centre, I don't think I would have been able to move on with my life," said Scott.

"I think I would be still stuck in a hopeless situation."

Scott can now tackle new projects with confidence and enthusiasm.

"The skills I have learned are playing a big role in my daily life.

"My spelling, punctuation and maths have improved and I am reading more books than I have ever done before," he said.

Although Scott is unsure about his next step, he feels he has the confidence now to push the boundaries.

"I think learning at a higher level is an option. I've been inspired to learn more, now I know I can do it.

"I've taken on more challenges since going to The Learning Link and this has made me feel, not only more confident, but better about being myself," said Scott.

"I would say to anyone who is thinking of seeking help, just drop in to the centre and have a chat.

"They don't bite! They're there to help YOU," he added.

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Title page photograph: Warbeth, Orkney at Sunset - © www.visitororkney.com

NEWSLINK

Daring to dream

"Coming to The Learning Link reawakened my dreams and enabled me to find out who I am," said Lynn Barton.

Mother of three, Lynn began her learning quest two years ago, after reading a story in Newslink.

"It was a story about a young mum, who, in devoting her time to her children, had sort of got left behind," said Lynn.

"She wanted to rediscover herself and the story struck a chord with me. Her story made it easier for me to come to the Link.

"It was hard coming that first time, but you are made SO welcome and the people are really, really friendly," said Lynn.

"My tutor was so patient. She worked around my children, my work and made me feel I could achieve anything.

"I've been allowed to dream. I realise now that there is more out there for me.

"I've gained qualifications and, more importantly, the confidence to change my job," she said.

Lynn is now training in pharmacy while working at a local chemist.

"My dream is to work in a third world country and the training I'm going through now will help me pursue this ambition.

"My tutor at the Link was so flexible and really believed in me, so in the end, I believed in myself," said Lynn.

"They guide you and they do chivvy you along - if you need it!"

Now Lynn, who has found the whole learning experience so worthwhile, wants as many people as possible to experience it.



High flying Lynn Barton

"I would be willing to come along with anyone wanting to take that first step.

"I would like to show them the way to The Learning Link," she added.

It's official - we deserve a big hug!

The Learning Link was recently included in an inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectors of education and has been given an excellent bill of health.

The inspectors focussed on a range of organisations providing services in the West Mainland. Under the section 'impact on adults' they awarded an excellent - their highest award.

Managing Inspector Jim Rooney said of his report: "We describe how well learners are doing and how good the

learning community is at helping them learn.

"Young people and adults are accessing a very good range of high quality learning and participants are benefiting very well from their experiences."

Mr Rooney went on to say: "Participants (at The Learning Link) are achieving well and cite employment, progression to college and further learning, improved relationships and reduced isolation as a result.

"Participants are able to review their learning and achievements on a regular basis and have increased in confidence, improved their skills and aspects of their family and community lives."

Commenting on our volunteer tutors, Mr Rooney said: "They are very well supported and benefit from accreditation, locally developed training, which is reviewed annually to ensure that it meets the needs of learners.

"Achievement of participants

and volunteers is celebrated on a regular basis," added Mr Rooney.

And what do our adult learners think of this accolade? Here are some of their replies:

"I always knew you were good, but now it's official."

"That's brilliant! No, sorry, I mean that's excellent!"

"Well done all of you - you deserve it."

"Now that does get you a big hug!"

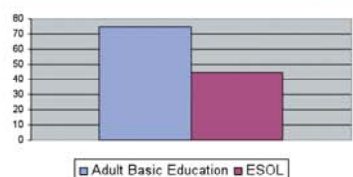
CRUNCHING THE NUMBERS

Below is some statistical information about the number of adult students who come to The Learning Link. This is broken down into adult literacies learners and those migrant workers seeking to improve their English and helping them to integrate into the community. (ESOL - English as a Second or Other Language.)

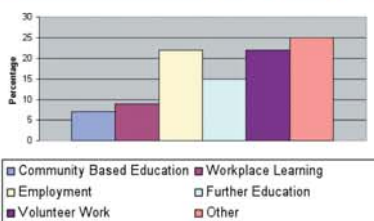
The second diagram identifies the impact we have had on our learners. It shows how learning has had a positive outcome in their lives.

For some, this could be progression into further/higher education or better job opportunities. For others, it could be improved confidence, social integration and community involvement.

Who comes to The Learning Link



Where learners go (in percentages)



Since the launch of the Scottish Government's initiative in 2001, well over 200,000 adults have improved their reading, writing and number skills. This strategy has been internationally celebrated for its learner-centred approach, where learners can achieve their personal goals, make positive changes in their lives and progress to new opportunities.

Building on this work, a new report outlines the government's plans to improve literacy and numeracy skills of Scotland's adults, over the coming ten years.

Adult Literacies in Scotland 2020 (ALIS 2020) sets out in detail how a continued improvement in adult literacies will impact on our future society.

Specifically for adults, the Scottish Government's vision is:

"By 2020 Scotland's society and economy will be stronger because more of its adults are able to read, write and use numbers effectively in order to handle information, communicate with others, express ideas and opinions, make decisions and solve problems, as family members, workers, citizens and lifelong learners."



The gathering of the tutors: Pictured above are our 'established' tutors meeting our newest recruits at the end of our volunteer tutor training course earlier this year. Along the back row: David Hartley, Fiona Craighead, Dick Rouse, Louis De Bruijn, Bill Braby, Caraline Johnson, Lesley Campbell, Aileen Neish, Carol Rae, Catriona Matheson and Louis Collins. Towards the front: Jack Drever, Annie Manson, Lynn Johnson, Pattie Hartley, Una Gordon and Robin Jamieson-Caley. Not in the picture (literally!) are Michael Lee, John Ruscoe and Chrissie Matthews.

Increased learning
↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓
increased earning power

In her foreword to the Adult Literacies in Scotland 2020 report, Minister for Skills and Lifelong Learning, Angela Constance MSP, said that low reading, writing and number skills "are often linked to poverty".

Here, at The Learning Link, we have seen adult students increase not only in confidence, but also in their wage packets.

As it has already been noted, there is a direct link between increased learning power and increased earning power.

Several of our students have progressed from mundane, repetitive jobs, to work which gives them interest, responsibility and a chance to shine.

Others have worked their way up their chosen profession, gaining qualifications, moving into higher pay grades, giving them a chance to be part of the decision-making team.

Many of our adult students report their learning has given them the confidence to look for jobs which they wouldn't normally even consider.

For others, working with their tutors has opened up opportunities. It has enabled one student to tap into funding to pursue his dream job. (See Willie's story below.)

So, if you are reading this and wishing for a better tomorrow, drop in and see us or give us a ring and see what the future holds for you.

This number - 879200 - could be your lucky learning lotto number!

Kelly's story

Like many of our students, Kelly Scott, heard about The Learning Link by word of mouth.

"I first heard about the centre from my neighbour," said Kelly.

"We got talking over a coffee and she told me about it."

Once Kelly understood what it was all about, she was interested enough to take the next step.

"I was very nervous and was very scared because I have very low self-esteem and lack confidence in myself.

"When I met my tutor Chrissie she asked me what I was good at and I replied nothing!

"Chrissie then asked me who got the children organised in the morning and after school, who ran the house, who did the shopping and prepared the meals?"

"I replied that I did all those things. It was then I realised I could do quite a lot," said Kelly.

Kelly continues to come to The Learning Link once a week and has noticed her confidence increasing.

"My confidence has started to blossom and I realise I really can do

things when I put my mind to it!

"I have passed my Core Skills Level 3 in English and I'm currently working hard on my maths," Kelly said.

"I have even found my voice when I need to use it!

"I can now say that I am a very proud Mum of three beautiful children and also work three days a week as a phone operator for a local taxi firm."

Kelly would really like other people to have The Learning Link experience and adds: "If there are people out there like me, grab yourself some courage and do it.

"If I can do it, anyone can. Don't ever say you can't because, trust me, you can!"



Kelly Scott - grabs the nettle!

Did you know ... ???

- Ants do not sleep.
- Many years ago, in Scotland, a new game was invented. It was ruled "Gentlemen Only... Ladies Forbidden"... and thus the word GOLF entered into the English language.
- The first couple to be shown in bed together on prime time TV were Fred and Wilma Flintstone.
- Coca-Cola was originally green.
- It is impossible to lick your elbow.
- An apple, onion and potato all have the same taste. The differences in flavour are caused by their smell. To prove this - pinch your nose and take a bite from each. They will all taste sweet.

With thanks to Steve Wright's Book of Factsoids and the Yahoo Did you know? Website

Willie's story

After years of frustration with his English skills, Willie Gibson finally decided it was time to seek help.

And in less than two years his learning has paid off because Willie has been awarded the coveted Slater Scholarship with its bursary of £16,000.

The scholarship, which is awarded annually, will enable Willie to complete his maritime studies and hopefully obtain an officer of the watch qualification.

"If I hadn't been coming to The Learning Link, I probably wouldn't have gone for the scholarship," said Willie.

"I wouldn't have been geared up enough to do it. I also think that mentioning I was getting help with my English definitely made a difference to my application form. I think that's what tipped the balance," he said.

Willie, says that he has been very frustrated with English skills for years and just suddenly decided it was time to do something about it.

"I was a bit apprehensive about coming and worried about how it was going to be, but it was more relaxed than I thought it would be. Meeting my tutor, Robin, was very smooth, almost painless!" he said.



Willie Gibson - scholarship success

Another surprise for Willie was that he didn't have to pay for his learning.

"I did wonder what I was letting myself in for and I didn't know it was going to be free - that was a surprise."

And what does winning the scholarship mean for him?

"It's absolutely brilliant. I wouldn't be able to afford to do the qualification without the bursary.

"It's taken away all the money worries we, as a family, would have had to face.

"I'm proud to be able to speak about my achievements since coming to The Learning Link and I hope that after reading my story it will encourage people to seek the help they need," added Willie.