

### **What learning means to me**

When I was 22 I suffered a period of drug-induced psychosis and found myself in a psychiatric hospital for 3 months. My world pretty much collapsed at this time and I had no prospects. I recovered completely from the psychosis but I continue to have bouts of depression which has made commitment to full-time paid employment tricky. The supportive workers at the Milton Keynes branch of the mental health charity MIND suggested that I sign up for an English GCSE course with ACE (Adults Continuing Education) so that I could improve my concentration, occupy my time and also develop my childhood interest in reading and writing.

This small step into learning required me to attend a class once a week and indulge my hobby of reading. I spent no more than 2 hours a week doing homework which I enjoyed and I didn't have to work too hard to pass the course with a good grade. I was apprehensive at the beginning of the course but I found there to be people of all sorts of age, experience and ability in my class and we had a great, sociable time learning.

I completed my English GCSE in 2001 and since then I've studied more courses. From my experience I can state (without doubt) that learning has provided me with an antidote to my depression. I still suffer serious bouts but, because adult education is structured and taught with an understanding of the some of the problems students may encounter, there is considerable flexibility; students with ACE learn in a non-pressurised environment, their self-esteem and confidence is increased and with so many different courses to choose from I'd advise anyone to try something.

I was one of many who, for whatever reason, did not succeed at school. The static and over-traditional institution of education simply didn't stimulate my enthusiasm and I never reached my full potential. Today after choosing my own course of learning I have achieved my potential and have been offered a place to study English at the University of Nottingham. I didn't know when I started my English GCSE that I would finish my self-education with 4 'A' levels but this has happened. This is evidence that taking one tiny step in a positive direction has led to a whole of world of opportunity opening up, I find myself in a position where I am far better off than I was before I got ill.

I have met 80 year old students who want nothing more than to keep their brain stimulated; 17 year olds who are more suited to learning in an adult environment; people of all ages who just want to have a go at learning; people like myself who simply took the hand of learning which was offered to them. I am yet to meet a single person who, having taken a course of adult education, has not considered it a positive experience.

**Tony McConnell**