

Oh What a Night!

The Work of the Academy for Community Leadership

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list of abbreviations and acronyms

AfCE	Agency for Community Empowerment, Sheffield
AfCL	Academy for Community Leadership, Barnsley
BACP	Bentley Area Community Partnership
CEDR	Community Education Resource, Rotherham
CLS	Community Language Services, Sheffield
NDDT	North Doncaster Development Trust
NOCN	National Open College Network
OFFER	Open Forum For Economic Regeneration, Sheffield
SEE	Social Enterprise Europe
SYWDT	South Yorkshire Women's Development Trust
SPRAC	St. Philip's Residents Association and Computers, Sheffield
VAR	Voluntary Action Rotherham
VAS	Voluntary Action Sheffield
WEA	Workers Educational Association
YETC	Yemeni Economic Training Centre, Sheffield - Now Hadfield Institute

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Introduction

It gives me great pleasure to introduce this book, one which captures the experiences of learners: the inspirational journeys they have taken and their ongoing contributions to the regeneration of their communities.

The Academy for Community Leadership, through which their learning has been made possible, was established in 2003 to support the work of community activists and to strengthen community activity across South Yorkshire.

The Academy has been funded by Yorkshire Forward, Objective 1 and the Learning and Skills Council and has developed learning opportunities in the following areas:

- Active Citizenship
- Community Leadership and the Environment
- Community Leadership and Disabled People
- Women into Community Leadership
- Governance, Leadership and Management
- Sustainable Organisations
- Creative Community Leadership
- Community Leadership, Housing and Physical Regeneration
- Double Devolution
- Learning Champions
- Community Partnership Programme

In supporting these programmes, the Academy has provided organisational development, networking events, conferences and seminars to meet the changing needs of the voluntary and community sector. Bursary and small grants programmes have enabled learners to direct the learning process themselves and to respond to the learning needs of their own communities. In addition, the Academy for Community Leadership has championed innovative and creative approaches to learning and development.

Alongside the commitment and dedication of our learners, I would like to pay tribute to the motivation and hard work of my staff team - Allison Johnson, David Hunter, Lisa Lister, Liz Pickering, Sam Williams, Sue Taylor and Trish Elwis - and the support of Northern College staff, especially Gina Hawkins, Jill Westerman and Joy Whistlecraft. Their commitment is mirrored by that of our contract holders, tutors and project support staff.

At a recent contractors event, a learner who had suffered from long-term health problems and through addiction was asked what adult learning meant to him. He replied that taking up learning had brought humanity into his life. This book is a testimony to the humanity of all the Academy learners and a celebration of the richness of all they have achieved.

Matt Livingstone

Project Manager

Academy for Community Leadership



Things to Say

I'm standing up to speak up
I'm singing out today
And I'll thank you not to shut me up
'Cos I've got things to say
I'll thank you not to shut me up
'Cos I've got things to say

Well I've been too quiet for too long
My head down in the crowd
It's easier to sing along
If you never sing too loud
I've always kept my mouth shut
And I've never rocked the boat
Too worried by the ifs and buts
To sound my own true note

I'm standing up....

I was silent all my school days
I knew the don'ts and do's
I never knew of other ways
Than minding p's and q's
But I've heard a different story
In the time I've been with you
If I cannot change my history
There's a future to look to

I'm standing up....

I've made new friends and good ones
And we've traded melodies
Tip-toeing through the pros and cons



Of these communities
And in this one if I may say
There's a certain harmony
And I've learned that singing out's a way
Of speaking up in key

I'm standing up...

Now I'm here to say a thank you
For your kindnesses to me
And I hope you'll all continue
To work full-heartedly
To reach out to the voiceless
And to pull the wordless through
Although the labour is endless
And there's always more to do

For the labour's always endless
And there's always more to do

I'm standing up to speak up
I'm singing out today
And I'll thank you not to shut me up
'Cos I've got things to say
I'll thank you not to shut me up
'Cos I've got things to say

(To the tune of 'Lloyd George' - Capstick's version:

Well he's kept me out o't work'ouse
and he's gen me life that's free
five shillin' a week for cheatin' death
is what Lloyd George gi's me)

Ray Hearne

What the Academy Means to Me: A Book in Four Hours



Mo Mowlam

Our evening's celebration has seen people stand up on the stage and say what the Academy of Community Leadership has done for them, and how access to a varied and exciting form of education has changed their lives for the better. So I have decided to write about how I first came across its host, Northern College.

I must be one of the few in the room who had visited back when it was a training college. My next encounter was when I almost became its Vice Principal - I very nearly got the job but ultimately the board made the right choice. But I continued to be involved over the years and especially during the Strike, where I was the 'gofer' who dealt with printers for the first of the Women Against Pit Closures books. That historical catalogue originated in the Women's Studies course at the college. I have written ghost stories about sex and why the statue outside lost his nose. I had the college's first art exhibition, and I taught there. Some of those who were my students, as so often happens at the college, remain my friends.

One friend in particular came to mind this evening as I watched person after person come onto the stage and say what they would do next. Doctor Marjorie Mowlam (wonderful, gorgeous Mo), who was the bursar at Northern College.

I see her often, though she is dead. For when I am in London and close to Trafalgar Square, I go into the National Portrait Gallery and look at her big, bonny, bewigged face and smile. When I first saw her she was rather thin, twenty-something, very fanciable and working in a wood-panelled room opposite the Academy's office. One day in the early eighties, I proposed to her. 'You're leaving your job. Let's work together away from formal education and publish things about people and their wish to better themselves,' I said.

'I'll think about it,' she answered. We were sitting in the sun outside the Chequers Inn near to Selby. 'I've been short-listed for a parliamentary seat in the North East. I won't get it.' With that she went off to bravely liberate Ireland from civil war. I went off to convince people that they should value themselves and leave written traces; so that someone - family, friends, the world even - can know that they were once here.

Mo would have loved to have been with us tonight because it was just her thing. Part knees-up and part serious, aspirational, academic exercise. To see a woman in a straw bonnet talking movingly about Marie Lloyd and how to use erotic songs to subvert power; a man from Iran speaking about the friendship all incumuns find in South Yorkshire; and a Rotherham councillor with a banjo carolling about pay rates. And to know that what

we were doing, what we were really doing, was doing in the Culter's Hall - a bastion of privilege to be sure. We were educating ourselves to aspire to being someone clever and more in charge of our destinies. It would have made Mo giggle.

The current government, like the ones before, it are barmy. They are cutting adult education funding at the very time when it should be nurtured. Though this entire book was written at speed, it bears the essence of a creative form of education which should sweep through all before it, if education is again to be meaningful. These stories should spiral out into the world, as blogs and emails. And though to print them all is expensive, it means that we have something in our hands to read that we have written ourselves, and so there is a chance that it will be read by many others whom we know, and also by those we don't but who would do well to listen to what we have to say.

After Mo's funeral there was a gathering at a Drury Lane theatre for friends and because I was on the birthday card list, I was invited. It was a triumph. Four Poofs and a Piano followed a video sent by Tony Blair with a rendition of 'It's My Party And I'll Cry If I Want To'. Comedian followed politician who followed singer; the serious was never far from the daft and witty. At the end, Neil Kinnock made a moving funeral oration. He spoke of her achievements, and they were many, and then at the end he asked us all to join hands and sing, as one, 'Always Look On The Bright Side Of Life'.

Optimism. Optimism. Optimism. I sang for it then and I saw cause for us to sing for it tonight.

Brian Lewis

Writer and Community Publisher, Pontefract Press

A Confidence Inside

I got an email from a good friend saying, 'The attached courses might interest you.' One was 'Launching Women into Leadership in the Community' and another was 'Women into Public Life.'

I looked at the details. Both really interested me. I looked at the first one and realised I'd missed the first session, so I phoned up South Yorkshire Women's Development Trust who were running it, and they told me the date was wrong. It was going to start the week after, so I went along.

I didn't know what to expect: how many women might be there, what style of learning might be used, what they'd be asking us to do. I was quite used to an academic learning environment, but the tutor, Amanda Wells, was so welcoming and down to earth that I instantly felt like this was a place to let it all out!

We were only six women, so intimacy was quickly built between us. Everything was done in such a way that everyone's learning style was catered for. But Amanda very deliberately challenged us to move beyond what we were familiar with - she wouldn't let you stop at the hurdle of your own limits.

For me, it was a really amazing thing. I'd always been someone who achieved, who managed everything, and who has been in control. But then suddenly, after having children, I lost confidence in interacting with the adult world: business, public life, with all that. At the time of going into the course I was trying to set up a business and I found every week was an intensive session of skill-building. Every week I walked away strong. I felt important, I felt that it was ok to have a voice - I had a voice and it was a valuable thing to have.

The knock-on effects of the course have been so many. In terms of business, I felt much more confident negotiating, contacting companies, and asking people to come on board with me. And in terms of community life too, I felt much more confident. I went to the Walkley Forum and raised the fact that women like me couldn't make the meetings - they were always in the evening.

At the same time, a local park that had been refurbished, suddenly got graffitied. I went and spoke to some of the kids in the park and it was clear they felt they had no input into anything. I suggested a meeting be held to discuss with kids the issues around the graffiti and other young people's issues. I realised from the course that every voice matters and the kids felt they didn't have a voice. I felt strongly that the kids should feel they too had a voice.

The course had two other massive impacts on me. As a family, we found ourselves in a difficult situation and ended up working through multi-agency meetings - it's like being called to the headmaster's office. But I was able to feel, even if we aren't getting very far, that this is our council and that if they're not treating us right we need to complain! Even if the word of professionals is taken above ours every time, I now have the skills to take it forward. I'm confident enough to be able to tell the council that their complaint procedure is inadequate.

The other thing is that the 'knit club' that I used to host in my kitchen once a week has now grown to 25 members! I was knitting in a shop and they asked if I wanted to knit there regularly. Now we have a weekly meeting in a chocolate shop on Eccleshall Road, with loads of passionate women coming and finding they have a place to belong and to make new relationships

Before I had kids I could have done it, but I had lost confidence. Because of the course I have relocated an intrinsic confidence, a confidence inside. It's all about the journey of learning and the journey of life - now I have confidence in the journey. In a culture obsessed with the end point - with money, possessions, all that - the course has given me a real sense of joy in the journey.

From putting energy into the journey, the benefits are phenomenal.

Bea Marshall

Women in Front and Women into Public Life, run by SYWDT

It was an excellent course, a Workers Educational Association (WEA) course: 'Politics and Public Life', about being a councillor and that sort of thing. Usually people find politics boring but I'm a political person I suppose, and Helen Jackson, the tutor, was so interesting. She taught us how to conduct meetings, how to be a good chair, secretary, that kind of thing.

We thought we were just going to sit and listen but Helen made us stand up and talk, and that gave us confidence, and it's all about confidence, especially when you get older. Everybody had to devise a project about some local issue or other and present it to the group. Then everyone else had to ask questions and challenge the speaker on the points they were making - really good practice for the real thing. We even went down to London to lobby our MPs at the House of Commons. That was a real eye-opener.

I then went on to a 'Women into Public Life' course, looking at the different roles women might play in the community - health committees, council panels, parent governors, in the union. But it was also about yourself. We had to pretend to be interviewed, to learn how to present yourself, and to identify good points and bad points about yourself, then we had to sit with someone else and go through their good and bad points. It's hard, but it's really good for you. I mean, I've been in the same job for twenty years!

You still get asked, 'What are you doing that for? Politics?' It's an age thing. You put people into categories, like what they should be doing and not doing. But both courses were a great mix of people and ages.

Both courses were too short, far too short, but yes, they did change me. I never thought I might be degree material; now perhaps I might think about it. Doing courses like these boosts your confidence in yourself.

Maria Taylor

Politics and Public Life, run by the WEA

I attended social auditing training as part of my job. It was over one day and was held at Northern College, a lovely venue. The course was enormously helpful; it was very useful to recap on my knowledge and practice, and I picked up lots of hints and tips. Some of the tips have been especially useful and I use them practically every day.

Anonymous

Social Auditing, run by SEE

Guiding Star

I lost my husband to cancer after working all my life, and left my job after 25 years to work in House of Fraser at Meadowhall from its opening. But I wanted to do something really useful. I heard about the Grove in Royston and got involved, taking courses in computing, numeracy and literacy, and working very closely with Jon Bates, the Neighbourhood Learning Net Manager there. I did the five week 'Learning Champions' course in Barnsley and met some wonderful people. I've kept Jon informed about the training and how it was going and I still let him know what's happening.

I'm now attending numeracy classes and working with people of all ages to support them to get them back into learning. I met Lynn Grist, a woman with a young son, Ashley, and told her that there was no such word as can't. She was a natural learner and is my protégée - she is now a Learning Champion herself. Lynn is a shining example of learning and how it can change your life. I've written to Tony Blair and to Gordon Brown, as I feel so strongly about adults having to pay for their learning and training courses. I won a Star award for the work I have done around Barnsley and went to London to get it, which was great. And although I have health problems of my own, I want to go on to do another, longer 'Learning Champions' course when I feel better and my eyesight is better. I now want to work with younger people - I enjoy meeting young people, helping them to grow up and learn.

I attended a meeting in Wakefield recently and found it really interesting. I met Michael Fraser, who appeared in a BBC play called Straight Forward. He told us his mother had been a prostitute and his father had beaten him and his brother and sister. They were left by their mother and taken into care, and he ended up becoming a thief and going to prison. After that, he sat down and took stock of his life. He began working, opened his own business and is now a millionaire. He does a lot of work with prisons and puts such a lot of his time back into people who have struggled like he has.

I've also visited Doncaster University, where I listened to a speech by a gentleman who had been a teacher all his life. He applied for a job at Strangeways Prison - though he never thought he'd get it - and now loves helping people in difficult situations. He bought an old cottage and refurbished it as a learning venue for ex-prisoners, showing how committed he was. Afterwards, I had to tell him how inspiring I'd found his speech and thank him.

Mary Jane Hemmings

Learning Champions Introduction, run by the Academy

The course up at the Broomhill Centre was called 'Food, Famine, Fashion And Fear' and looked at some of the evils which beset our world. Some of these have been around for thousands of years but others, such as the exploitation of people to feed the fashion industry, are new.

The tutor was called Graham and from the start I knew the course would succeed because it was inclusive and very open - quite unlike the systems I was used to in Iran. But that is what I had come to expect in South Yorkshire! Everything is open-minded and the people are warm and friendly.

The course was put on by the Academy in association with the WEA - that is how I know Ray Hearne, who is the Regional Organiser. We also worked with a tutor called Gus, who was very different from the tutors that I had come across before I came to England. They had seemed somewhat aloof. But at the Academy there is a welcoming friendliness - which a tutor must have if education is to succeed.

On average there were eight of us. I cannot give you all of the details but from what I remember there were a couple of Africans, two of us from Iran, a Czech, a Bangladeshi and two English people. On the face of it we shared little - we were from different continents and were of different genders. But we were united through two languages: English, and the voice of people who want a better world. I found everything rewarding and helped by the rest of the class and my teacher, I discovered a natural zeal for an area of education that I had not been interested in before.

Babak Kouravand

Food, Fashion, Famine and Fear, run by the WEA

Never Say No to a Free Buffet

My name is Nic Wray. I live in Sheffield, I'm pushing forty and I have multiple sclerosis. I've done all kinds of jobs, but my recent work history has been marketing - cutlery mostly, so it's great to be here in Cutler's Hall!

I've always been a fan of lifelong learning - in fact, any learning; I was a child who would read the Encyclopaedia Britannica for fun. Since leaving school, I've done numerous courses: more GCSEs, an A Level, first aid, assertiveness - I even got my wood badge in the Scout Association - and I'm currently studying for a degree at the University of Sheffield. In fact, I have a tutorial this evening, which is why I volunteered to be first on to speak. Yes, I've learned about time management too!

I'm studying part time for a degree in Literature and Creative Media. I had to do some performance as part of this and was told about the circus skills course by a friend. I wasn't working at the time and it sounded really interesting, so I thought I would give it a go. I was at a low ebb - my last part time job had taken it out of me emotionally and physically, I was depressed and my MS was making me really fatigued. Corinne said it would be free and there would be lunch provided. I'm not sure if she suggested it because she thinks I'm a drama queen, a clown or just into my food!

I've always done some form of voluntary or community work before but this was a completely new approach. The day was great - loads of activities, but no pressure to perform or excel, just gentle encouragement. I learnt to spin plates and wobbled my way across a tightrope. I fell off the rola-bola, took part in a human pyramid and laughed loads. Sometimes, I think as adults we forget how good it is just to let go and play. And lunch was pretty good too!

The taster day was designed to get people to sign up for a week-long course and it worked in my case - even finding out that the goal of the course was to put on a performance at Maltby Festival at the end of the week wasn't enough to put me off! The course covered a lot of practical ground, but also a lot of theory, about communities and regeneration and working in your community. At the end of it, all the participants had had a great time, and had gained a qualification too. The people on the course had a wide range of backgrounds and experiences, but we all worked well together and I have never laughed so much in a learning environment. My juggling isn't exactly great, but I don't think that was really the point. I think the circus skills taught us that you can do anything that you set your mind to and have fun doing it. You can always keep on learning in



different ways. Leadership skills aren't something a few people are born with; we all have some form of them within us.

After the course finished, I wanted to pay back what I felt I'd got and started volunteering at Swamp Circus, helping with administration and marketing. It felt good to be back in a work environment. I would never have linked circus and community work together, but it works.

Working as a volunteer gave me back my self esteem and confidence, as well as adding to my cv. So, when a vacancy came up at the end of last year for a Marketing and Development Manager in a 'Theatre in Education' company, I felt I had the sector experience needed to make an application. I was successful and now I'm working with schools, promoting our productions which deal with issues important to young people - alcohol, drugs, sex and relationships - and hopefully making a difference to their lives. I love my job - I work flexibly, which accommodates my health issues, and I feel I am making a positive contribution to my community. I've even done some more performance workshops and plan to get more involved with the MS Trust, to use my skills there.

I wouldn't be in this happy position had I not been curious and gone to the taster day. If there is a moral to this story, it would be: never say no to a free lunch: Never close your mind to opportunities, however weird they may seem: and never stop learning!

I'd like to say thanks to the Academy for providing the funding for the course; to Tim, Dave and Sarah at Swamp Circus; and to Malcolm and Corinne at the Open Performance Centre.

Nic Wray

speaking at the Cutlers' Hall Celebration

Leadership and Performance Skills, run by Swamp Circus

I suffered with ill health for a long time. When my son started school I wanted to be able to help him and to encourage him to learn as much as I could. The first course I did was a first aid course in Royston, Barnsley. I then went on to do both maths and English to City and Guilds Level 2, which gave me a lot of confidence. The first aid course was about six years ago and I've been training ever since.

I'm now doing the 'Learning Champions' course to try to understand more about the barriers that other people face, as I've experience of overcoming my own barriers. I want to be able to encourage them into learning and am doing this very successfully in my own community, as Mary will testify to. I work as an unpaid Learning Champion in Royston and support learners to access the Neighbourhood Learning Net and other training - whatever they want. They ask me in the street, in the school yard and anywhere else I go. The role involves working with all ages of people and I get on well with them all. Through my learning I have made many close friends and developed networks that will be important in the future.

I'm much more confident now and want to work in learning - paid work! - hopefully in my own community which I know so well. I am currently doing a Cache Level 3 teaching assistant course so that I can work in schools and liaise with and support parents in their learning. This involves two days a week on placement in a local primary school in a very deprived area of Barnsley. The children and their parents need very high levels of support to engage in activities that may lead onto learning.

I don't think I will ever stop learning in some form or another; I'm a bit of an addict now! But I hope this inspires others and shows them what we can all achieve if we try.

Lynn Grist

Learning Champions Introduction, run by the Academy

I used to work for St Philip's Residents Association and Computers (SPRAC). They were funded by Objective 1 and delivered training for the Academy during contract 1, so I have a great deal of experience of working with the Academy. My work covered the local areas of Langsett, Uppertorpe and Netherthorpe in Sheffield, as well as across the region and even into North Derbyshire.

I now work with people in local communities through Zest, signposting them onto learning of all sorts, right across the spectrum. People have done courses at Northern College in employment skills, security training and IT and some are about to start a digital media course in Uppertorpe at the Zest Centre. The centre has a library, café, swimming pool, gym, community hall, offices, and training rooms which will be used for the digital media course. The centre is well accessed and has paid staff to run it, though there are a number of volunteers who support the area. There is a Jobnet one-stop shop which encompasses the youth project; then there are Jack and myself who are learning advocates; Lyndsey and Andrew deal with the Jobnet service, getting people into employment; Jane is the volunteer co-ordinator; Luthfa is a family learning co-ordinator; and Judith is the office manager. On the next level is the North West Partnership, who deal with partnership working across the whole of South Yorkshire, and the 'Big Team' who have several offices across the region and support people to set up and develop their own business.

There needs to be some organisation there to co-ordinate learning. It's a shame that we are all struggling to get more funding and have to face the possibility of discontinued funding. Without this funding there will be no continuation and within two years we'll be back to where we were years ago, with no community growth or learning activity.

Richard Tinsley

Learning advocate with Zest

The Future is What You Make It

When we got our invitation to come here tonight,
It asked for any speakers to come - we said we might.
Talking in front of a lot of people is one of our biggest fears -
Here's hoping once you hear these poems we might get a few cheers!
Neighbours and friends offered support and stuck together;
We do hope this feeling will stay forever.

Staring at the same four walls,
Wondering if we have lost our marbles or our balls -
Our house is damaged by the severe flood,
Leaving it covered in mud,
I left behind everything, even down to a comb,
Heading towards a rescue centre (now our home).
Leaving many families forced to live apart -
Never are they far from us, deep in our heart
When, sat quiet, trying to hide our tears,
Wondering what and how we're going to cope with our fears.
It's scary wading through water in wellies,
Seeing what everyone has lost upon our tallies.
It's ever so ever so ever so sad,
No wonder everyone is so mad.
We should be thankful husbands have still got wives,
And children have got mothers and fathers.
If we think about all those puddles and puddles,
Our minds wouldn't feel so full of lots of muddles.
Instead we could be in our own homes, giving good night cuddles.

Our Father, who is above,
Who shows people how to love?
Many homes have had such a scare,
It's been so amazing how many do care.
We would like to thank all who volunteer

By giving up their time to help by coming here.
Also we'd like mentioned those who donated.
I wish time and thanks could be backdated

There was a family from Toll Bar
You couldn't even move with a crowbar.
Last June we had our very own pool -
It badly affected the Toll Bar school.
Many families still sit and cry, but not tears of sorrow -
They're just waiting for news they can go home tomorrow.

When it pours down heavy rain, you can see the panic on some faces. Anger remains for a lot of people, because of what they lost, through no fault of their own. We're trying to rebuild a home of furniture, but many things can't be replaced. Every day is a day closer to getting home.

Remember, no matter what has happened in the past, the future is what you make it.

Julie Harvey

Toll Bar Community Forum

I was already a Learning Champion prior to starting the 'Skills for Life - Learning Champions' course and I honestly thought I wouldn't benefit from it, as I already knew all about it.

I'd been told about it by Dave Walton and Kathryn Taylor. It was taught by Sue Taylor at Quaker House in Sheffield for six weeks and covered barriers to learning.

Sue made me stop and think about other people in other situations. I realised I should stop to question what I was doing and not pre-judge people. It made me more aware of how localities are all different and have their own problems to overcome. It was amazing how much I learned and how much more understanding of the situations of others I have.

Now I am a better Learning Champion. It has made me more approachable to others, as they know they will be treated equally, fairly and given a chance. The people we work with as Learning Champions are going in the same direction. They've done one course and are going on to sign up for others and learning more and more. And the Learning Champions are deciding on their own learning now and signing up to go to other places like Northern College.

I never had a job before that I enjoyed going to so much - helping others is the main perk of the job. Sue has been amazing and I can't wait to do further courses with her. It's a terrible shame that after May there will be no more Learning Champions training from Sue and the Academy and their roles will be no longer funded. This would be a terrible waste of a fabulous service.

The Academy helps people who are lacking in confidence to overcome their fears and make that step into the great unknown, with a smiling, friendly face to support them. Learning is a very frightening thing to do - even going to the venue can be frightening. Some venues, like Westfield, are also in a very difficult area to access but now every course they put on is full. They will have absolutely no support after May when the project closes down.

The Learning Champions are as dedicated as the learners and never switch off: in the street, at the shops or anywhere else they are approached. They never turn anyone away at any time as this might prevent that person ever plucking up the courage to ask again. I love my job - May will probably bring around much unhappiness and tears, but the Learning Champions will never stop campaigning to bring the project back for the people of Sheffield.

Zoe Boston

Learning Champions Introduction, run by the Academy

Half a Bottle of Wine and Leftovers

We are retired, but are fully paid-up members of the Labour Party and we often get together. On one occasion, Joy Hart organised a leftovers luncheon for current and old members in a pub in Hillsborough. There, Helen Jackson manipulated us into joining her 'Politics and Public Life' course and one on 'Poverty and Pensions' at Hallam University. Ivy invited Sheila to Hallam and then Sheila decided to join us on the politics course.

So we joined the course at The Circle and we both enjoyed it. The course showed us how politics affects every aspect of our lives. This was the first course for me since moving to Sheffield, but Ivy has been actively involved in learning for at least 20 years. Sheila wanted to build her confidence to allow her to stand up in public and get her point across, and I actually managed to keep to my three minute speech!

There were different people there; some were refugees and asylum seekers and it was really good to have a mixture of different cultures. The Russian lady on the course was absolutely brilliant! We'd hoped to get a bit more understanding about how politics affects people in various ways and after meeting some of the people who have come into this country, we better understand why they did.

Ivy Marshall and Brenda Callaghan

Politics and Public Life, run by the WEA



Getting to Know Us

The group I work with enrolled to improve our working knowledge of each other and to improve how we run our local community organisation.

When you're from your own environment you get to know more about people. Being on a course, even though we all knew each other well, helped us to see each other differently. The new venue makes all the difference.

The day at Elsecar Heritage Centre was brilliant though the acoustics weren't too good. I still learn from each course I attend, no matter how long I keep going to them.

I'm great believer in lifelong learning; I got my first NVQ after I retired and became a fellow of the Millennium Commission in 2000. And all I learn is embedded into everything I do within the local community. I also think networking is so important; I recently attended a Respect Agenda meeting and met someone else who I hadn't seen for a long time.

Liz Booth

Governance and Action Planning, run by D Hunter



I enrolled on the MA in ‘Working with Communities’ at the University of Sheffield as I was coming to the end of my contract and I was looking for something to help me get other work. This was my dream course and the bursary from the Academy allowed me to start it.

Even though I am still attending the course, it has already helped me into more work; someone I met doing my research offered me my current job. I feel work in community development is not always measurable in terms of achievement, but this course gave me the confidence to make links with people involved in the field and although the course is academic, the people I have met have been a real influence on my personal development.

My dissertation in year two will focus on environmental work and working with children, although I still need to sort out funding for it. Lots of people in the group have been funded by the Academy. Lisa from the Academy took a lot of care to point me in the direction of fieldwork and put me in touch with the Wildlife Trust. I have done a bit of work with them, although not as much as I would like.

When I first came to the Academy I was lacking a bit of structure; this course has given me a framework to move forward. It is absolutely terrific and I would recommend it to anyone.

Mel Pearson

*Working with Communities MA, run by University of Sheffield
awarded Academy bursary*

The community I work in is currently embarking on acquiring a community centre. They need to be able to sustain it once it's acquired, so three of us did the Social Enterprise Level 4 at Social Enterprise Europe (SEE).

This course looked at turning the centre into a profitable venture that is also beneficial to the community. It has been such an eye-opener in terms of confidence - to think that your money-making ideas aren't so wacky, no matter how daft they may seem!

Members of the community are working together better now that they have this knowledge and confidence. I think this is a really important issue because the people we are talking about haven't been in either education or work for a very long time and for them to actually pluck up the courage to do this course, especially at Level 4 and come away with the qualification, has been a fabulous achievement. This will make them more effective as a community group.

I'd just like to say that the tutors and the quality of delivery of the course was absolutely first class. We were all supported; we were able to contact them at any time for help and advice. It was a fabulous learning experience.

I have been delivering adult education using my City & Guilds 7407 teacher training course and my current contract runs out at the end of June. So now I want to do my Certificate in Education to get back into education.

Kathryn Taylor

Sustainable Organisations, run by SEE

I left school in 1964 with no qualifications. By my mid-twenties, I was a trade union and community activist, but I struggled with the more complex issues.

In 1981, I was sacked from my job. This was a big problem, as I was married with two children and a mortgage. Some friends in the Labour Party suggested I should go to college, but at that point it seemed impossible. After much discussion with my family and encouragement, I applied to study at Northern College, believing that I would not be accepted. It took me two weeks to write the piece on the application form about why I wanted to go.

I was offered a place and started in September 1983 on a two year 'Liberal Gateway' course.

I moved to Sheffield in 1986 and did some voluntary work with Sheffield Co-ordinating Centre Against Unemployment (SCCAU). In September 1986, I started work at Heeley City Farm, where I gained my first trainer's award. I have now worked in the voluntary and community sector for 21 years and have gained a number of adult training qualifications. I am a community trustee for Zest, and have been a board member for other groups. And I have continued to attend information and training events organised through the Academy.

I am now employed by Zest as a learning mentor and am currently working with a client who has low self-esteem, but is considering applying to Northern College for an English course. When the client saw the number of short courses available she enquired as to how many of the courses she could attend! And in partnership with the WEA and the Academy, eight local people I work with have started on a digital media course.

The main purpose of my job is to involve people from the community in learning. Community-based education and training is an extremely valuable tool in my work to engage hard to reach groups and individuals in learning.

Jack Dunn

Training Advice & Guidance Worker, Zest

Someone from the children's centre at SureStart put me onto the 'Introduction to Community Development and Health' course. I had been struggling as My ex-husband left me when my first baby was two weeks old and then I lost my baby last year. From there I went on to do several other courses.

I enrolled onto the 'Women in Front' course at the Academy, which was a good experience for me. The tutors were absolutely first class; they are more like friends. If we had any problems they were always there for us.

Doing this course has opened my eyes to what's around me. You just don't realise what's on your own doorstep. I'm hoping to volunteer for SureStart soon and I've just started another course around stress management.

Paula Paling

Women in Front, run by SYWDT



Recovery

I'm a member of Bentley Area Community Partnership (BACP) and of North Doncaster Development Trust (NDDT), organisations for whom the Academy has been very useful. It has helped us to progress in the work we are doing and facilitated liaisons between the different sections.

This has been especially true in Toll Bar, which suffered devastating floods in June. As soon as the floods happened, Pam and I set up the one o'clock club. It was the only place in the community big enough to meet in; everywhere else had been flooded. David Hunter came down on day one with Lorraine Cryer and both have done a wonderful job since then of listening and supporting and being there.

A day trip for 16 people was set up to Northern College, where we had some workshops and a look round. The group decided to have a public meeting about Toll Bar and the floods and how they could progress. This was organised by the people in the community and was well attended. Lorraine took a computer down and I had some slides of a play scheme that I had organised in my capacity as a youth worker. The children on the slides are now the parents in Toll Bar! Lorraine got the group to talk. She also put some folders together, with press cuttings, maps, information about workshops and lots of other stuff. The collation of this is continuing in the club now.

The 'book in a day' idea of Brian's was put forward by David and the day was organised. And when the club we met in was done up, we decided to take the one o'clock club into the school, which had by this point re-opened. We are now making things for the school, like story sacks and cushions - all things that were washed away in the flood. We have continued to meet with Lorraine and David and other members of the community and the Red Cross, and Lorraine has requested a counselling course for the parents so they can be better at supporting other members of the community.

I don't know how we would have got through all this without David and Lorraine. In the future, we hope to take our groups back to Northern College. Julie has written lots of poems and we are also hoping to produce a second book.

Audrey Thompson

BACP and NDDT

I'm involved with Asian Old People's Caring Society. I enrolled on a Voluntary Action Sheffield (VAS) course with some others from my group. We are all retired: them from the steel industry and me from the RAF and then from working as Assistant Liaison Officer for Sheffield Council.

The training was very good; it has helped me and I am now doing another course with VAS on group management and public speaking. The courses have helped my group with their health and keeping fit and active, so we are cutting the costs to the NHS - we regularly take a group of about 10 people to the health club.

My learning has helped the community and my group; if I learn then I can teach others.

Ahmed Gull

course run by VAS

Two years ago, I started up a ‘Community Interest Company’: a social enterprise intended to help other community organisations. I’d spotted that they weren’t getting any help in a specific area. I knew that my skills and knowledge could help to fill this gap and I considered myself to be a reasonably good communicator. But I was pretty unprepared for things like talking to government agencies, to senior people in companies, and to large organisations.

However, one good thing about the voluntary and community sector is that we’re pretty good at helping each other. I was offered the chance to go on a funded course called ‘Find Your Voice’, run by Harmony Training - something I’d never have done as a private individual. The course covered things like the way you hold your body and how this affects the energy of your voice; how a subtle change in your posture can give you added confidence; ways of calming presentation nerves; and how to project an authentic passion in your tone, so that your audience really listens to you. Would any of this be useful to a fledgling organisation, struggling to find established partners to pitch its offerings to and to find funding for its valuable work? You bet!

The ‘Find Your Voice’ course was also just the boost I needed and gave added determination, to carry, on to my flagging morale. The week after the course took place, I was booked to give a presentation on what Friendly Energy had to offer. I meticulously applied the techniques I’d practised and noticed a real difference in the way I felt about what I had to say. I found an increased passion in the way I said it and I even believe I looked better!

Anne Marples

Find Your Voice, run by Harmony Training

Although I have worked as a trainer in the community for 18 years, I never had any formal training in teaching. I work for a small not-for-profit organisation called the Agency for Community Empowerment (AfCE). We usually have very little left over to invest in staff, particularly in senior personnel that have considerable experience.

But at AfCE we believe that lifelong learning is a good thing - that you are never too old to learn something new and you should never be close-minded - and we do try to practice what we preach. Furthermore, the Government is raising the bar; anyone involved in training or teaching must be qualified if it is a publicly funded programme.

And now that AfCE is a National Open College Network (NOCN) approved learning centre, it is essential for our credibility to have the 'Continuing Professional Development' agenda at the heart of our corporate planning.

'Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector' (PTTLS) was the recommended route for me to follow. Initially, I resented having to go back to school to satisfy the bureaucrats, but if it had to be done I was determined to squeeze as much as I could out of this opportunity. The Academy provided the modest funding, which meant the board could give me the green light to proceed.

I quickly learnt that anyone who believes they know it all is a fool! I know my subject, having been a housing practitioner and community activist for the last 30 years. But the course gave me valuable insight into how everyone learns in a different way. This may seem obvious, but the approach trainers and teachers take to this problem is key to ensuring that all their learners can get the most out of their learning opportunity.

The dedication of those who work in the voluntary and community sector is often taken for granted and professional, constructive feedback and praise is often neglected in small community organisations. The PTTLS course presented an opportunity, for the first time ever in my career, to have a proper appraisal of my teaching and training skills by true professionals.

There are several quotes from my teaching assessment of which I am very proud. Of my teaching, they said, 'You presented a focused and professional session which will aid your learners in their professional practice... an excellent and very enjoyable session - you are a natural!' And they commented, 'You are a pragmatic and committed trainer within our community and you take your roles and responsibilities seriously.'



Vic Berry

PTTLS, awarded Academy bursary

Making Politics Real

I enrolled on the course because I am interested in politics, and it was local and free. I was also interested in seeing what Helen Jackson was like as the course teacher. I hoped to meet like-minded people but also those from a range of backgrounds.

The course helped me realise that there are loads of opportunities to get training that don't cost a lot and gave me a wider perspective on my area of work. I work with a number of community groups and I now have a better understanding of things from a community perspective, not just from a statutory point of view. The course helped to build my confidence and shortly afterwards, I got a job working with local councillors.

I really enjoyed being introduced to Northern College, where we did the residential part of the training. I want to do more of this kind of training, which has made politics real, as opposed to just theoretical.

Lucy Moffatt

Politics and Public Life, run by the WEA



I live in a community which has disintegrated and which has been neglected. I wanted to improve it; to get the young children a playground and to get the green spaces back. The children had nowhere to play because the builders were taking all the land.

So I became involved with Green Spaces. We have cleaned areas up, held festivals and exhibitions, and done all sorts of other work in the area. I also went on the Sustainable Projects training, among other courses, and got involved in work in Sharrow. We have been on an eco-friendly housing tour in Hull, which was excellent, and have visited Burngreave and Pitts Moor Wardens Area. We walked around Burngreave and saw the changes in the area because of the wardens. They've made a real difference - no prostitution, and no litter anywhere.

We are hoping to get wardens and to get permits for the area for parking this year. I have gotten so many ideas from the eco-friendly man in Hull and can now bring these into my community: solar power and natural toilets, homegrown produce, all sorts! Our aim is to get alley gates for everyone, to help prevent burglary, and we still need playgrounds and activities for the children in the area.

Our groups all come together as a team and share. Jean Cromer, who is retiring this year, has done a lot of good work in the area. Sometimes, when I feel disappointed, I look at the positive things we are doing and not at the negatives. We have done a lot of positive things in the area.

Eunice Batty

Sustainable Projects, run by U-Scape

Ask me why I went on the course; I have a very loud voice, have no issues with confidence, and my husband says I have no problem using my voice! No, I went on the course to learn to control my voice.

We learned how to warm up our bodies prior to speaking, and I learned lots of ways to calm my body down and to project my voice. This has helped me to speak in public. Following the training, I found myself listening to a group of 19 year-olds give a presentation and was able to pass on the skills I had learned.

Although the idea of getting up on a Saturday was not mine or my husband's idea of a cup of tea, I really enjoyed the training. The tutor was fabulous and so was the organisation; there were no issues. The people I met, the warmth, enthusiasm and the energy, made it worth it - it would even have been worth paying for!

Suzy Cornwell Ball

Finding Your Voice, run by Harmony Training



I had been out of work for a long time with a back injury and although I had attended several short courses over the last three years, I felt isolated. But after these courses, I was inspired by the Learning Champion in my area to become one myself, so I signed up for a course with Sue Taylor.

The course made me feel confident that I could help others. It made me aware of the situations they might be in and where they could get their lives back on track. I could empathise with these situations and wanted to help; I had been in the same situation but was now a success story and my experience showed it was possible to break down barriers to learning.

I am only in my post while May and then the bridge that we have formed between colleges and service providers will disappear. There's going to be nothing there to help people access courses and I feel there should be something in place beyond this time; there should be somebody at grassroots level who is approachable and who can advise people about potential pathways to get them back into education and employment.

Sarah Moohan

Learning Champions, run by the Academy

A Safety Net that Worked

I have attended various courses with SureStart, such as 'Parenting Skills through Education', and have worked with Rotherham Mind and with Threads, which helps those with mental health issues get back into work.

My most recent course was a dad's group. I am a father of six and I attended the course because I wanted to spend some time being re-educated in how to deal with the issues which come up when you are a parent. I also wanted to learn more about how to interact positively with my children and how to help them with their lives and education.

The SureStart course has opened lots of doors for me. It got me onto parenting classes and showed me how to work with my family better. I now spend more time with my children and family and I no longer drink. Now, when I have problems, I know I can go to certain places where people will help me. I didn't even know about these places before. SureStart means I am not on my own. For example, when my wife had major surgery SureStart took the pressure off by helping out and making things much easier. The course was a safety net that worked.

Since going on the course, I have been helping out at a volunteer centre which works with people who have problems with separation or relationship breakdowns - I am one of their listeners. I realised through SureStart that my own experiences in relationships and with my children could be passed on to others and could help them. I hope to get back into paid employment after doing some more voluntary work.

Attending the courses has made me more open to my community. I used to stay in all the time, worrying about my family and how I could protect them. Now I am much more aware of what the community has to offer and what it can do for me and my family.

If I was a millionaire, I would donate lots of money to SureStart - I have benefited greatly and I would like others to as well!

Kevin Priestly



A Gateway to Opportunities

I have been an interpreter for four years, having completed the second and third level WEA qualifications. I really like my job, as it involves helping the community, working with people and providing important services that people need. However, the WEA qualification would not qualify me for work at the national level. I can do community work, which is limited to agencies which provide a community service; it does not include working with the police and courts, which is work I am particularly interested in. To work with the police, I need the diploma.

The course is ongoing and I have my exams in June. Once I know that I have passed, I will register with the National Register of Public Service Interpreters, and that will enable me to get work with lots of different organisations. I believe it will be a gateway to many opportunities.

The course has changed my life. I have met many people, of different nationalities and these people have similar aims, similar dreams and similar goals in life to me. When I am looking at jobs or courses, I might find something useful for a classmate and I will forward it on to them. Everybody in the class does this - it is a great group of people. Most of the people on the course live in Sheffield and it really helps to bring different sections of the community together.

As well as bringing me together with lots of different people, the course has helped me to be more responsible and professional in what I do. It has also given me lots more confidence and of course it was a crucial step for my career as an interpreter.



Renata Valickova

*Diploma in Public Service Interpreting, run by CLS
awarded Academy bursary*

I attended a business course run by Prime, as I was interested in starting up my own photography business. I wanted to get the skills I would need to set up on my own. I already do lots of photography, particularly for the BBC, but I wanted to be able to do more on my own and perhaps to earn more money from it, to complement the photography I do voluntarily for organisations such as Voluntary Action Rotherham (VAR) and Magna Science Park.

My learning has enabled me to earn a few shillings here and there and although I have not set up my own photography business yet, I feel that I now have the skills and knowledge necessary to do so.

Ted Quinn

course run by Prime

Positive Changes

I live in Phoenix House and am on a 12 month rehabilitation course for people recovering from drug and alcohol addiction in Ranmoor, Sheffield.

I attended a circus workshop. Before I went on the course, I was suffering from a lack of confidence and would hardly speak to anybody. In fact, I actively isolated myself within Phoenix House, sitting on my own and keeping myself to myself. After some time in the house, one of the managers asked if I wanted to go on a circus workshop. I was keen and hoped that my attendance on the course would help me to gain confidence and also to learn something.

The circus workshop was a one-day course. The first half of the course involved acting. I wasn't really looking forward to it because I felt very nervous about getting up in front of the other 30 people. However, there was no pressure and everybody was just messing around and having a good time. I soon found that I was coming out of myself, much to my surprise!

In the second half of the course we were introduced to basic circus skills: stilt walking, juggling and spinning plates, amongst others. I used to be able to juggle but had completely lost the skill. However after a brief refresher, I got right back into it.

In the mornings at Phoenix House, somebody does a little weather report and somebody gets up and sings a song, always choosing someone else to sing with them. When they used to choose me I would always say, 'No, no, I'll do it tomorrow,' and never actually do it. Now, I can't wait to get up there and sing and I will be getting up today and speaking as part of this celebration of the Academy. I would never have done this before going on the course. Having done the circus workshop, I am really excited about going on more courses. I will be leaving Phoenix in two months and I am hoping to go back to college.

I am amazed that from the one session I can see such big changes in myself. I feel confident and much happier. My family has also noticed the difference in me; they say that I always used to seem sad and would often be feeling sorry for myself. They are pleased that I seem so much happier. I am now more outgoing and I wake up and look forward to the day. Having seen all of these changes from just one session, I can't wait to be involved in more courses and see more positive changes in my life.



Mark Jonas

Circus Workshop, run by Swamp Circus

Education is a Lifelong Process

I am a nurse at a nursing home in Sheffield. In my work, I am often called upon to be a team leader, so I was looking to improve my management and leadership skills. I found out about the basic management course myself, from the *Burngreave Learner*.

The course was 12 weeks long, with two hours each week. It has made me look at myself as a different person; a person who can speak out, who can do something instead of sitting back and waiting for everybody else to do things. I now feel very confident about taking the initiative and making suggestions. If there is a problem or an issue, I always say I will give it a try, instead of passing it on to somebody else. This has really boosted my confidence.

I am now considering further courses, to see if they will lead me on to anything else. Such a positive result has reaffirmed for me the fact that education is the key. I have encouraged my children and others to keep up with education and to read more.

My expectations of the course have been fulfilled. It was a good opportunity to meet people and to see what their experiences have been. It has brought new insight into my world through seeing such variety and through seeing the way that different people think. Education is a lifelong process. I would encourage anybody to learn what they can; you can always learn something new and that something will help make a better person of you.

Joyce Liyayi

Basic Management, run by the YETC

We received an invitation to the weekend long course on migration, perhaps because we had applied for a prospectus for Northern College. We were interested in learning about something that we didn't know much about and also in getting more involved with the College, as we had already done computer courses there and liked the learning atmosphere.

The course impacted on us greatly. It changed our perception of migration. We realised the difficulties faced by people forced to migrate because of various situations in their countries, such as political leaders, or issues relating to freedom of speech. There were several people on the course who had migrated and they spoke about their experiences, which was very illuminating.

We found the environment extremely conducive to learning. The people on the course were a real cross-section of the community, but everybody went with a common aim - to learn. It worked really well; everybody brought different experiences and ideas and we could learn from one another.

There were various different exercises, including one which highlighted for us how the media can report to sell papers rather than report the truth. So we learnt to question what we read and not always believe everything.

The course made us more tolerant of people within the community who have had to migrate and also improved our understanding of situations in the community. We really enjoyed learning amongst the enthusiasm you get with groups at Northern College.



Glenice and Roger Biggin

Campaigning Camera, run by the WEA

I had started a job as a community support worker. About six months into it, I was offered the chance to go on this course and because I was new in the job, I was keen to extend my skills. I also wanted to get some understanding of what social enterprise was all about. I had gone from being a Learning Champion to support staff, so I was getting to know more about community work. In my job, being able to find sustainable incomes for our community was quite high on the agenda. Besides, I also wanted to give it a go!

I found in the first session that I was completely bewildered and baffled. However, as the course progressed and I went away and read up on it and spoke to work colleagues, I got really into it. I learnt how to start up, develop and run a social enterprise.

I am now a director of Woodhouse Social Enterprises Ltd, an achievement I never thought would happen. Through my job, there have been opportunities to take this kind of training to other community groups at a basic level. Within this enterprise, I am also able to support other entrepreneurs.

I am more confident now. If I am part of a committee or an organisation, I have the confidence to speak up, even if it is not about it. And if anybody talks to me about starting up a business, I know all about social enterprise! I knew I had the ability before but still doubted myself - it has been a big learning curve for me.

I am still in touch with the tutors who ran the course, through my work. This is the first course I have attended that has really enabled me to do something I would never have done before. It has opened up my mind to more opportunities and I now think that if I want to do something, I can.

Frances Taylor

Social Enterprise Development, run by SEE



I'm very involved with 50+ Sheffield, as a congress member and as the Complaints Officer. There's 84 congress members and at the AGM I have to speak to all of them. So I enrolled in a ten-week 'Politics and Public Speaking' course last summer, which I found very interesting and worthwhile. It looked at how to deal with the media and how to speak clearly in front of a group; how it's important to be concise and clear and confident.

We were a good group, with a range of personalities and from all sorts of community and voluntary groups. The teacher, Helen Jackson, was really good. As part of the course, a Northern College trainer who had worked with the media held mock a interview for each of us, complete with a tape recorder. I felt myself confident, although I did think, 'What am I going to sound like?' but in the end it was ok.

We've since had an AGM at which I spoke and I have also spoken at monthly meetings, which are held at the Town Hall. I've definitely felt more confident in myself speaking in public and would recommend the course to others. Before, I was a bit nervous, but it's eased me off a bit in speaking - I'm more relaxed. I've also progressed on to Sheffield Castle College, where I'm studying English and maths. It's going really well and again is making me feel more confident - I'm up to a B grade at GCSE level and am enjoying both subjects.

Brian Walker

Politics and Public Speaking, run by the WEA

I work for BACP, a group consisting of local tenants and residents, faith groups and workers from scout groups and from schools. Northern College's involvement with BACP began a bit before my time, when we put in for an Register of Interest for Objective 1 funding. I've been here for three years, firstly as a TARA representative and now as chair. After we got funding, the College stayed involved and David comes to monthly meetings - Matt did too until he got promoted! They've always offered us training, for example in Toll Bar, although Pam, who's the secretary, will tell you more about that.

I initially got involved with the TARA as I had problems with my council house and so went along for the meeting - I'm a carer for my wife, who's disabled, so I'd rather be sorting something out than sitting at home, looking at the front door and going mad. And someone's got to make it a better community. Of course, I couldn't rightfully take my own case on, and as a representative I had to be less pushy about it in some ways, so it's only just got fixed after five years! But after six months in the TARA, I had become chair. So I've done a course very similar to the one-day course offered at the Academy, about community leadership. It looked at 'chair training'; how to be one and what your duties are. I was recently looking at going on a course there - the Academy always offers good stuff.

Kevin Millington

BACP



We work for South Sheffield Partnership, an umbrella organisation that links together and supports community groups across the most deprived neighbourhoods and aims to strengthen the community voice in regeneration programmes.

Hafran and myself went on a one-day marketing course, after the Academy asked us if we were interested. It was the first external training we'd been on as a staff team, and I thought it would be useful to the organisation. In the morning, there were two groups of us and in the afternoon there was a close focus on just our group. Although I'd already become aware of most of the learning, the course was very useful because it brought us all together to do something as a team. It made one of our colleagues realise that marketing isn't all about sales! We were also hoping to get help with a marketing plan and though the one we were given was quite vague, it gave us a shared understanding and meant that people would want to put time into developing our marketing strategy.

I've also been on a course called 'Women into Public Life'. I really wanted to have more confidence presenting myself and information and had always been interested in governance. The unit I took was about professional presentation skills and being a board member. I'm now a director of two organisations and am in the process of setting up my own business. I wouldn't have gone down that route without doing the course; I have a better idea of how businesses run. As a director, you're the boss of the chief executive and you have to understand how to keep the business solvent! It also gave me the confidence to apply for higher level jobs, for which you have to give a presentation in the interview. I'm now fine doing presentations and have been offered three jobs!

I also received a bursary to attend a leadership skills course, which has introduced me to new networks and I'm now working with other emerging leaders in Sheffield. One person I'm meeting with now will hopefully provide funding for our projects and we're hoping to hold a 'marketing in Sheffield' meeting soon. It's important that the community organisations have access to this sort of expert training; it would have cost us £1,000 to arrange it ourselves and we just couldn't justify that from our budget.



Sara Robinson and Hafren Williams

Marketing workshop, run by Dennis Healy Associates

Women into Public Life, run by SYWDT

Leadership course run by Common Purpose

awarded Academy bursary

Gudi Nuf

I'm the manager of the Dawn Project. We work across South Yorkshire with people who are divorced and separated. I went on a one day course run by the Unlimited Theatre Company about leadership, film and drama with the gang from the Academy and one or two others like myself. I used to work for the Academy and so they knew I was interested in the creative arts. It appealed to me; the idea of a course that wasn't too dry, one that approached things from a drama point of view. I hadn't done much on that before, but was exploring art therapy and so the course was a great opportunity to explore another aspect of that.

To start with, it was intriguing. They sent us each a DVD to watch beforehand - mine was the *Inn of Sixth Happiness*. It was a really old film set in China; all the films were old classics. When we got to discussing them during the course, we all thought the characters were expressing leadership skills. Though we'd watched different films, we were all saying the same thing and a model began to emerge. We developed it into one script that we could lay onto every film pro forma.

The script became the idea of the journey: the character leaves home for an adventure, fights their nemesis and then returns with gifts, perhaps of treasure or wisdom. And they realise they're a different person. The idea is that once we set out, we can't return the same; there will be changes. That was a lightbulb moment for me and I began to see myself on that journey.

The clown idea isn't because of the clowns running our community, or because being a leader means juggling lots of responsibilities. It came from the art therapy. After experiencing a slew of problems, I was referred to a therapist and was hoping that the creativity I felt within me could be expressed. My own nemesis was a lack of confidence and perfectionism, but I've since learnt that the opposite of play isn't work, it's depression.

Now I can start something, even if it won't be perfect. It'll be good enough and I'll do it. That's where the name came from. In bringing the clown into my professional work and professionalism into my clowning, I'm actually a better manager and it's a more authentic voice that comes out. I've been able to bring my project management skills to Green Top, a circus group that works in schools and I've found more drive to source funding for the Dawn Project. I work in the voluntary sector and who knows what will happen next.

Peter Hurley aka Gudi Nuf

Value Based Leadership, run by Unlimited Theatre



I'm part of Toll Bar Forum, a community group of local residents. We organise fun things and also tackle problems in the village to bring the community spirit out and help things get better. So since the floods, we've been really busy.

We've worked with David and Matt on different projects and when we were flooded, it was a natural progression for them to come and help us. David suggested the 'Book in a Day' as a way of bringing people together to share their experiences, which is all part of the healing process.

I've been on a two-day course, all about developing your community group. Audrey and I stayed overnight at the college. The food was good and we had a lovely wander round the grounds. During the classes, we went through being a community group - the different roles and responsibilities. It was useful because it was different groups, not just us and you find out what other people are doing and that the problems you're having are pretty universal. You start to think it's you that isn't working these things out but we now realise that's not true - we're all in the same boat. And of course they talk to you on your level. College doesn't have to mean higher education; it's still education but it's on your level.

We've since done another course in Toll Bar, about funding mechanisms and the role of a chair person. David and Matt now provide us with support in the background, which is essential for people like myself, who's a complete novice. They're someone to talk to and will help us set out a reasoned argument about how things are. When you're trying to negotiate with the council it's tough and Matt and David can tell us if we're on the right path or if they'll just not go down that road.

We've also been on a day out to Northern College to get residents more aware of the building and what happens there. Lorraine from the College is doing low-key counselling, which is all part of the stress release for residents and we're trying to organise a counselling course for residents in the near future.

I retired in February and we've only just got back into our own house, so now I'm taking stock of things. I'll definitely be on that course.

Pam Sutton,

course run by D Hunter

Just Waiting for the Opportunity

I'm a member of Conversation Club - we're a social club that encourages people from other countries to get together with volunteers and practice their English, in a really friendly setting.

We had a little drama group and I wanted people to come to that, but it's very difficult to get people to try something you've not done yourself, so I thought I'd best have a go. That was last summer.

On the course I attended, we practised a few scenes in the first half of the week, then on day four we put together all the bits and we had a whole performance. On Friday was the dress rehearsal and on the Saturday we performed at Maltby Festival!

Before the course I was a bit nervous, but as we went on I was astounded that you could just start from nothing with a group of people who didn't know each other. We all worked together and really supported each other. Everything led together and seemed really natural and we put a performance together in no time at all using our new skills.

What I'd like to do is persuade other people to do the same thing and get a group together out of the club. We're just waiting for the opportunity.

Elizabeth Birks

Leadership and Performance Skills, run by Swamp Circus

The Community Worker and the Businessman

Community worker: Hello there! Haven't seen you about the area for a long time.

Businessman: Nice to see you! How are you getting on?

cw: I work in the community - I've just finished a course on the environment and global warming that was really interesting.

b: So you work in the community! That's good. We need people to work for free. And to help others, of course. I'm a bit busy myself - travelling abroad, flying about and keeping the business running.

cw: So you're a gas guzzler, totting up your air miles and causing global warming!

b: Yes, but I pay my taxes and keep the economy running. Besides, the more I fly the cheaper it is for me.

cw: I try to save energy. Our building has won an award for energy saving.

b: But don't you know that 'global warming' is just from minimal air pollution? Besides, it's just a way to take further taxes off people and to keep the poor spending money in this country, instead of flying abroad.

cw: But our communities want to help fight global warming, keeping emissions from cars and planes down to a minimum!

b: So other countries can ignore their pollution, while here we must bow down, even though we're suffering hardships?

cw: We *can* make a difference and stop pollution - by using different power sources. *(pause)* By the way, what is your business?

b: I hope that we can, I will make a mint. I sell solar panels.

Ron Murkin and Steve Tracey



Meeting up with Rus on one of the courses run by the WEA and the Academy did a lot for me. I now have a range of skills which I would never have learned without the twelve week course and the making of our film, *A Life In Homelessness*. I can interview, work in a team or as an individual and access the internet. But what is most important is that I have gained confidence in myself and have come to believe that with some effort on my part, I could go somewhere and have a career.

I live at New Beginning in Balby, Doncaster. 30 people call in and there are eight people who live there, as we try to stop heavy drinking and drug misuse. That is what the film is about; our struggle.

Technically, it is good. Before the course I had done a bit of home movie-making - weddings, friends, parties, that sort of thing - but now I have the language to enable me to use cameras in a totally different way. I find new angles, fade in and out, vary focus and a hundred other ways of telling a story in sound and vision.

What has it done for me? It has rearranged my mind space. I now feel empowered to think about the chance of a better life.

Simon Lanelly

Active Citizenship through Digital Media, run by the WEA

You Are Never Too Old To Learn

I was thrown in at the deep end, when I was asked if I would like to take part in an Institute of Leadership and Management Level 5 award in ‘Understanding Social Enterprise’ at short notice. I did; I believe that going back into education has opened up a whole new world for me and given me the confidence to do much more with my life. I now have the confidence to travel alone, whereas before I had never even travelled abroad.

My learning story began when I went to college, at the age of 51, to do a two-year ‘Access to Higher Education’ course. Then, at the age of 53, I went on to study Health & Human Sciences at University of Sheffield, graduating in 2004 with an honours degree and winning the faculty prize; I was also the first undergraduate to run my own seminar in the faculty!

After university, I decided to set up my own training and consultancy organisation, offering workshops in equality and diversity. Since then, I have become a board member for several third sector groups and have met with much praise and recognition for my work. In 2006, I was elected a fellow of the Royal Society for the Arts.

As the title states, ‘You are never too old learn.’ Never let age be a reason from stopping you from doing anything that you want to do.

Carol Robson

Understanding Social Enterprise, run by N Coulson

I first went to Northern College twenty years ago but in the intervening period, for a lot of complicated reasons, I was forced to stay at home with my son. When at last he was able to go to college, I found that I had time to do something for me, though in the intervening period I had lost a lot of my feelings of self-worth.

But it was not too late. The first course I went on, at St Cecilia's Church in Sheffield, was to rebuild my confidence and there I met Jane McClaren, who introduced me to the Academy. She was teaching a course called 'Women in Front' at Shirecliff Common, which I joined.

I soon began to remember how much stronger I had felt when I left school. For years, I had reluctantly been forced to be a leader in my home, but here at Shirecliff, I learnt more about leadership outside my comfort zone and its hidden qualities. There are several sorts of leaders. There is the autocratic sort, the person who gives out orders and expects them to be obeyed. That is not my style. I discovered I was the sort who would take charge when there was a need for someone to do so. I have come to recognise the existing leadership skills that I have and that I can build on.

We had a weekend away, an experience which was new to many of the women. I discovered that I am capable of diffusing tension among the group through humour. One woman fell over and got dirty and we could see that she was upset but I made a light remark - something to the effect that you can't be truly happy until you are truly mucky. It was a little thing, but as I did it I knew why I was working in that way.

I was able to stand outside myself and watch, as we had been taught to. For me to learn to stand back and not get emotionally involved has required the sort of structured learning experience the classes gave me. There was a man who I had to work with on a committee who could really get up my nose. He made sexist remarks like, 'Women always want something they can't have,' or would ask, 'Is it that time of the month?' Initially, he got to me and irritated me; now I am much more able to think, 'That poor man.'

The course was a renewal process in every way. I have a degree from long ago but this has not stopped me from being proud that I was the only person to have finished Level three. One of the problems I find is that now I have this knowledge, people I have worked alongside want me to use it! I am constantly being asked to volunteer and could spend a high proportion of my life in committee work. However, I now know that, if I am to retain my sense of self worth, I have to keep some time for myself. I have learned this.

Alison Dean

Women in Front, run by SYWDT; awarded Academy bursary

My Turn Now

A leaflet came to our community office about the MA in 'Regeneration in Communities' at the University of Sheffield and I thought it looked really interesting. My friend told me about it and we went along to the session to have a look.

I'm really interested in regeneration - my background is community regeneration - and I started to question if I had been involved in these changes or if they had just happened naturally. This course made me think about it. I sit on various committees but at the end of the day I don't have the bit of paper that says I'm qualified to do it. This is the course I was waiting for. Most of the people on the course have been working in the community.

I'm just finishing my first year, the last piece of work to be handed in May 2008. I've passed all my other work. There was a lot of reading, but I've lived through most of it so could understand it quite easily; it was part of my personal history. We all support each other on the course which is great. It's all mature adults attending. I'm the oldest on the course but that's fine and we all get on well together.

I'm on the Community Empowerment Network with the Open Forum for Economic Regeneration (OFFER) in Sheffield. I'm using some of the information I've learnt on the course in my involvement with this network and since I've been on the course my IT skills have improved tremendously. It's wonderful how easily I can find information now.

The course has given me more confidence, but I think the biggest impact has been on other local women who are interested in what I'm doing. I'm trying to encourage others to engage more in learning. Part of the difficulty for me is actually funding the course, but then again I have also had to care for members of my family and the course has been a bit of a welcome distraction for me and helped me get through this time.

Over the past 20 years or so I have been encouraging others to engage in learning and this course is now my turn!

Chris Gardner

*Regeneration in Communities MA, run by University of Sheffield
awarded Academy bursary*



We were on the same non-residential course at Northern College. It was about social housing and took place over seven weekends. John Grayson ran it, assisted on occasions by Daniella and it ran from 9.30am and finished at 4.30pm. When we started there were about 13 of us but as time passed the numbers dwindled down to eight. That often happens. It is a big commitment to give up so many Saturdays and Sundays if you work in the week.

The course's subject was 'Tenant Participation and Neighbourhood Renewal.' Its strength lay in our diversity. The youngest person there was in her twenties and at the other end there was a pensioner. Some were professionals in the social housing arena and others were residents (you mustn't call us tenants these days, it's not pcl).

There was a sound structure. After an introduction to the history of social housing ,we went on to look at various models of housing management. At each stage there were assignments. When we 'went international', we both picked housing in Sweden and in that way came to know each other. We've learned that the Swedes have very much the same problems as we have in this country; they have cut their social housing so drastically that they are having to reconsider 'new builds' on a massive scale.

Christine Malliner and Kath Chambers

Tenant Participation and Neighbourhood Renewal 2, run by AdEd

I work for the NOCN, where a number of us decided to do an Introductory Diploma in Management. After ten years, I needed to sharpen up my skills and this twelve session course was held in the work place, so it was relatively easy to do. We were given assignments and earned an award from a chartered institute.

I learned more up-to-date business theories and applied them to my job. And we all benefited in a collective way. We saw that although we worked closely together in a relatively small organisation of twenty people, we didn't know all that much about each other in a work sense. I feel that all of us worked comfortably on a personal level but that should be only part of our rapport; we needed to be a business team. More joined-up understanding of our work has brought us greater job efficiency!

Jane Ellis

Basic Management, run by the YETC

Just a Beginning

I attended the 'Big Environment Debate - What's In It for the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME)', because I didn't know much about the subject. It didn't have much to do with my work - I am employed by Sheffield City Waste Management - but because of my family background I wanted to take part.

The main focus was on the use of public parks and how difficult it is for the women of the BME to use them. Some of them were scared but there were also problems with cultural reference.

We recognised that there had to be a debate about their uses and the need for women to feel protected when they venture out into territory which makes them feel unsure. There was also a more wide-ranging discussion about the environment in general, especially the problems posed by climate change.

I know that I have an ability to do things that other members of our community do not do, as I am more westernised. I realise that a lot more effort is needed if our women are to find even small freedoms, such as walking in the park. A one-day taster course is just a beginning.

Nhiggit Yasmeeen

The Big Environment Debate, run by D Hunter

What the Academy Means to Me: A Book in Eight Minutes

The idea for a 'Book in a Day' goes back to the days after the Big Coal Strike when, with colleagues from the Yorkshire Art Circus, Brian Lewis used to lead workshops in the Yorkshire and Nottingham coalfields; trying to get people to say what they wanted and to help bring about a bit of community cohesion, as 'the audience, collectively, knows more than the speaker.'

Brian says, 'When asked to address an international conference on community publishing, I was also asked to speak about doing a 'Book in a Day'. I said, 'I could do a book in eight minutes if you can get me pencils, paper, guaranteed silence and you will lock the door.' The 101 people in the audience, from all over the world, all contributed and from the living bones of their personal testimonies we were able to resurrect an agenda for working with young people through creative art.'

What follows is the writing produced by Academy learners during a 'Book in Eight Minutes' session held at the Cutlers' Hall celebration. It was a rushed session at the end of the night, yet from it we have collected another 5,000 words of personal testimony to add to our 'Book in a Day' - or 'Book in Four Hours' in this case. Many contributors would have continued writing long after the set time was up and others were eager to read out what they had written. And they have included some words of criticism - as important as the praise.

If you like what you saw, please use this method within your own organisation, although, as this is the way we put butter on our bread, please acknowledge us either by name or as Pontefract Press. And please take the time to see what was written, so that local knowledge on approaches to adult education can be shared.

Laura Boughey

Editor, Pontefract Press

Learning with the Academy has given me a new lease of life. I have brought four children up and encouraged them to do well at school. This has paid off and they are all doing well, the oldest gaining a university degree.

Now it is my time. I have studied a couple of courses and I am looking at further courses. My interests are Health, Social Care, and Counselling and I'm determined to continue and gain a degree.

I have found the support I have had from other adult learners brilliant. All I can say is go for it - it will give you a great boost and a real sense of achievement.

Tina Wordsworth

Learning Champions, run by the Academy

I attended a newsletter course at Northern College and at the end I was the only one of our group who failed to get a certificate. On asking the tutor why, the answer was that I had not written enough notes. My reply was that I was the one who inputted all the details into the computer. This made me angry; I produced the draft newsletter but I never got a certificate. However, thanks to Pam Wiseman at Adult Community Learning in Sheffield, I went on to develop our first newsletter, *Arbourthorne View*, which I delivered for two years.

Anonymous

Creating a Community Newsletter, run by the WEA

Learning has helped me to get involved, especially in social and community volunteering. It has also given me confidence in myself and helped me to be more creative.

Anonymous

After having an accident at work, I felt that my life was over. I could no longer follow my dream of being a nurse. I felt completely isolated and useless; I believed I was a failure.

After attending some short courses, my confidence began to grow, but I still felt incomplete. Then I attended the Learning Champions course delivered by Sue Taylor. She gave me back my belief in myself and taught me that everybody has some sort of barrier to learning to overcome, whether it be academic, skills-wise, or in other ways. I have really grown in confidence through this; it was inspiring.

After applying for the post of Learning Champion in the Waterthorpe and Westfield area of Sheffield, I realised I not only needed to voice my opinions but that of other learners too. One of the biggest achievements in my life is the difference I can see that I am making to other people's lives. I'm helping to bring my community back into education and employment.

The funding for these sort of projects needs to carry on. The Academy really does change lives and communities.

Sarah Moohan

Learning Champions, run by the Academy

I became a Learning Champion after doing a few courses. I went on the 'Learning Champions' course at Quaker House, where the tutor was a fantastic lady called Sue.

I love my job and my life; it means so much to me. After having my children 15 years ago and being a cleaner, I have finally been inspired.

Unfortunately, the funding for my job will run out in May; Learning Champion no more. But who loses out: me, who's out of a job, or the learners who don't know about the courses? I know I will get another job, though not one that I love like this one, but who will tell the people about the courses which will still run? There's money for the courses but without Learning Champions, how will they canvas the people?

It's the communities that lose out. It's our role to get people back into education, then into work - and all the while we are going to be out of work!

Zoe Boston

I work as a volunteer for Home Start Rotherham, a charity offering practical and emotional support and friendship to families with at least one child under the age of 5 years and in a stressful situation or suffering problems.

I was offered training by the Academy in January 2008 and attended courses in confidence building and in stress management. I found both courses extremely interesting and useful in my work with families.

Building my confidence and facing my gremlins has helped me to pass on this experience to people in similar circumstances. The course that taught ways of managing stress in different situations was wonderful and the lessons I learned on that day will help me in my work with families experiencing stressful situations in their family life. Very valuable courses on both days!

Janice Marriott

Women in Front, run by SYWDT

The Academy has given me the opportunity to rediscover important things; what it is that I believe is important and that my beliefs are worth speaking for. I also heard other people's stories. It didn't matter if they were good stories, happy stories, sad stories or troubled stories. All were important and all came from people who knew deep down that they had something worth fighting for, something worth struggling for and something worth carrying on for.

It is organisations like the Academy that give people all those opportunities to be heard and to find or re-find the confidence to speak. If you can make a difference to one person, then it is all worth it.

Anonymous

I work as a Learning Champion in Sheffield and my involvement with the Academy is through a Learning Champions forum. When I started attending the forum meetings, there was only two or three other members.

We invited Sue Taylor from the Academy to our meetings and she is now a regular attendee. Sue gives us support and arranges training, such as the 'Learning Champions' course, which gives us the opportunity to have a qualification. She is understanding of barriers we face in the community when we try to reach other potential learners and gives us advice and guidance. Sue also chairs our meetings, which is a great help.

It's really good to be meeting other people in the same work as myself and to gain knowledge from their experience.

Jane Miles

Learning Champions, run by the Academy

I went on a day course called 'Women in Front', about stress management and assertiveness. As I entered the room in the Vestry Hall, Burngreave, I was overcome with its beauty. It was clearly a room that had been 'done up', but it felt so light and airy. The tutor - who's name has sadly escaped me - was a woman with short grey hair and a lovely smiling face. She welcomed me and showed me where the tea making stuff was. Great! Tea is a large part of my Yorkshire culture! No matter what happens in our Sheffield it's 'Lets have a nice cup of tea.' There was de-caf, green and even soya milk, which was great as I'm vegan. Other women started to arrive and we started chatting.

I suffer from fibromyalgia and one of my reasons for going on the course was to help manage my stress, as this really does make it worse. And I wanted to be more assertive and learn to say, 'No, I can't do that.' With a family of three kids and a husband, that's something I could not easily say, but I can now.

After the course I felt great, super. I went home that night and got ready and went out - something I never used to do. I am still finding that the course is helping me. Thank you.

Valerie Garvey

Women in Front, run by SYWDT

The Academy, to me, means an innovative way to learn. It is a safe and sound environment to learn, to take in skills and to understand others. It is a place to have a voice and to feel empowered to go into the community and tell others about adult learning and hope they will take up the chance to learn. It is also a place to build lasting friendships that follow you through life.

Anonymous

The Academy offers an opportunity for ripples to spread and the message to get out there, to inspire those who are ready to learn and provide impetus to drive them forward. There are still people who haven't started that learning journey yet, and don't know how exciting it will be for them, when they're ready to take that step. But when they are, the Academy needs to be strong enough to support them and have enough vibrant offerings to sustain their interest. It needs to continue to be well resourced, or it will fail to attract these people. It needs to continually add to what it has to offer, to provide routes of progression and a real sense of achievement.

Financial costs should not be a barrier to people learning; the bursary scheme should continue as far as possible.

Anonymous

Learning with the Academy has meant loads to me; it has had a big impact on my whole family and my community has also benefited. I plan to go on to do more learning and soon I hope to gain employment.

I have found a new meaning to life and cannot stop telling people about learning. I now promote learning wherever possible and try to help people overcome their own barriers so they can start on the learning journey.

Lynn Grist

Learning Champions, run by the Academy

The Academy has given me a new identify. It's more than an organisation; it means a family to me. It's not just about becoming more intellectually clever, it's also about becoming mature socially and emotionally. It's about understanding who I am and what I'm going to do.

It's about being a hero and playing an important role with skill. It's about letting go of the past and learning from it, without regret. It's about creating my fortune by planning for the future. It's about living in the present. It's about loving myself so that I begin to respect others. It's about taking responsibility for what I do.

Babak Kouravand

Globalised Word, run by the WEA

I nearly didn't come along to this evening, because for many years I would cry, not only about my hardships, but also for others. The only other time I cry is when I'm watching a weepy film.

And I nearly did cry all the way through the evening, but it was the happiest crying I've felt for years and years. Thank you.

Anonymous

Well, when I first heard of the Academy, it was all a coincidence. A friend mentioned it to me when we were dancing salsa at one of the Tuesday nights out at the forum.

I thought I'd give it a try and ask them for one-off financial help for the course. As a full time student I have no money to pay and I hadn't found another course which would, I hoped, help my life flourish or develop.

Good news was, they did. They understood my needs and now, thanks to the Academy, I am studying for a Diploma in Public Service Interpreting and I can't wait for the moment to send them my certificate and say a big 'thanks' - without I would not have been able to do it!

As well as the financial support, they have been very caring and attentive. They want to make sure that people are happy with what they've got all the way through.

Today, I realised it was about more than learning. It was about belonging and the community. The one we all are part of and which we return to, to use the skills that we've gained.

Renata

awarded Academy bursary

We learned to understand others' difficulties and dangers, and what spurs them on to search for something better; to improve their life and the security of their family, despite of oppression and injustice. We learned about false reporting and myths meant to sell newspapers at the expense of truth and accountability and at the expense of other human beings' feelings, reputations and well-being. This really took the blinkers off our perceptions of situations which we had held preconceived ideas about. It helped us to realise we are one family in the end.

Roger Biggin

Campaigning Camera, run by WEA

The experience at the Academy was fully enjoyable. Friendly faces everywhere; I made new friends, found a pleasant place to learn and it helped me build my confidence enough to go help in the voluntary sector.

Everyone signed a card and put towards a beautiful gift for me when I became unwell and couldn't finish off the course.

A very big 'thank you' for allowing me the opportunity to take part in this short course and have my first experience at Northern College. I've since been back and done other short courses - all very enjoyable!

Yvonne Moreland

Women in Front, run by SYWDT

Ours was a community group that was all in pieces, then the Academy came along and helped the troops to achieve. We learnt about working together and the skills to get grants, to design projects and to put them into practice. We also looked at ways of sustaining them, giving opportunities to hurting and damaged communities who have suffered pit closures and flooding. The patience and understanding of community learning staff have given new beginnings to many people in those communities by helping them to take responsibility for their own future. The support of the Academy and Northern College is crucial to the future of these communities.

A.T. Doncaster

Since I have been involved with the Academy, I have experienced a lot of things that I never knew or thought I could do. When I was younger, I was a fat child and was always the butt of other kids' jokes. My lack of self-esteem stopped me from learning a lot and I was always left to play by myself. I was never given the chance to have fun because no-one wanted be with a fat person.

As I got older, I tried hard to fit in with people and felt that I had to give myself goals to reach to be accepted. Work was challenging because I had to wear a different overall because of my size.

I am now reaching 50 years of age and have done quite a lot of different things - I am involved in clubs on my estate and I go places where I feel wanted and encouraged. Meeting people from the Academy has given me a lot of help to push myself into helping others and being accepted.

Roxy

When I was younger, I loved school but as I grew older I wasn't 'in with the crowd', so I isolated myself and dropped out of school at 13. I had a tutor but it wasn't the same. So I left school and my tutor with no GCSE's or anything. As I started rebelling, education didn't matter to me as I did my own thing.

But things can't stay the same. As I got older, finding my feet and trying to find work, it came to me that qualifications did matter in a way, but I wasn't sure what to do. Then I became a mother at 19, needing to support and look after my daughter. Things didn't go right for me and I ended up giving my mum custody.

Then an opportunity came along to rebuild my education with the Academy. I decided to do food hygiene as I couldn't make beans on toast without burning it! That gave me a brilliant opportunity to get a qualification under my belt. It has helped me a lot - I now have a few job interviews in catering, which before I wouldn't have got.

Roxanne Norman

The Academy means learning in a fun way, which makes learning an easy process. Everyone gets the most out of the experience and this encourages you to come again for more. The atmosphere is good, not the usual classroom set-up that we remember from school, but entertaining, so that you are learning without knowing you're doing so.

Anonymous

Last June, the town where I live was flooded. There was a day trip over to the Northern College and we were shown around the gardens and the college. We were met by a friendly face - David Hunter - who escorted us around. We had a discussion about what different courses were on offer and since the day over there, we have been in regular contact with David, who has given us ongoing support within our community. There is a small group of residents from various backgrounds, who are attending a course sometime in June 2008 in counselling. Many of us are going to use this in various different situations and that's thanks to Northern College.

Julie Harvey

Community Organisation, run by D Hunter

Once upon a time, ^{19 years ago, a life was brought} into the world. Her name, 'Zoe', meant 'life'. Zoe walked along the pathways of life, facing barriers, highs and ultimate lows, focusing only on the negatives, not seeing the best. But something made her confidence soar. She needed a hand, just one, and she grabbed it with both hands.

Zoe Clarkson

Managing Meetings, run by CEDR



The Academy gave me a second chance to achieve my dreams and realise my ambitions. After leaving school with no qualifications and having travelled extensively as a child, I had always felt that I had missed out, until sometime later I accidentally came upon a poster advertising Northern College. I never thought for a minute what a life-changing event it would be for me.

As well as equipping me with the skills to pursue my academic aspirations, it also awakened my passion for politics, particularly women's politics. On my course I also met my husband - my soulmate. He was on a trade union course, and I was on the Women's Studies Diploma, so our debates were never dull! Northern College inspired us both to go on to do our degrees and after 16 years together we are still both committed to lifelong learning and to helping inspire others to take that first step.

Brioni Ball

Managing Meetings, run by CEDR

The Academy has allowed me to gain a higher level qualification at 58 years of age, when I left school at 15 with no qualifications.

My dad, who is 85 years of age, is really proud of me, along with lots of my women friends. I have been a carer for the last year because my mum had dementia and I looked after her until she died. I still look after my dad. But I needed something else to move me forward and get my brain working.

The Academy provided the funding for the first year of my MA in 'Working with Communities', where I have made many new friends, who have lots of experience and know-how!

Chris Gardner

*Working with Communities MA at the University of Sheffield
awarded Academy bursary*

I had a longing to learn something new and to find a way through to higher education, so I looked through the *Burngreave Learner* magazine and saw courses advertised. I was interested in the course on leadership and management, offered at the Hadfield Institute. I was encouraged to join the course by the person I spoke to on the phone and the tutor I met there was friendly and offered lots of support.

I had the opportunity to meet other people from different sections of the community, which helped to create a varied stage for learning. The course itself was challenging, as we had to think up ways of doing things or imagine we were the manager of a place. It brought out the creative side of us and we brought and shared ideas. It was very enterprising and most of the learners showed a lot of enthusiasm and commitment. The tutors were very friendly and supportive, always there to help and encourage us. The course really helped boost our confidence!

Anonymous

Getting qualified means, for the first time, I get recognition for the hard work I do in the community and the Academy gives me access to a network of community contacts and trainers. I work in a beautiful office and college and grounds, earn a bit of cash to open new doors and work in a great place to go to learn.

Vic Berry

Academy Bursary

The joining together of experience, dedication and learning can give a satisfaction and stability to people in society. It can produce strength and powers of understanding in communities and give learners feelings of self-belief and self-expression. It shows that confidence can bring qualifications, support and quality of life.

Anonymous

I have worked in adult education all my working life; first for a trade union - the GMB - and then, for the last 21 years, with the WEA.

How did that happen? As a student, I was politicised and became a socialist. Somewhere along the way I bumped into the Oxford WEA Industrial Branch, which was based on the trade union movement. I was inspired.

I did an MA in Industrial Relations and ended up with the GMB; a middle class boy in a real TU! Fantastic. Challenging. Life changing. And what fired me up? The notion of education for social action and change.

And that's what I've plugged away at - with my good comrades - ever since. But just once in a while an opportunity presents itself which is qualitatively different. The Academy proved such an opportunity.

For a year and a half we've had funding for generous, properly resourced political education and the Academy is the enabler and the provider. What it has meant for me personally is re-invigoration, excitement and a cast-iron reason for working. Far more important is what I hope it has meant for the 600 plus students who have passed through our courses. And think of the other 600 or more lives they will go on to touch!

And yet the government continues to focus on a narrow, incremental, training-for-jobs agenda. How depressing. No wonder it's all at sea. The funding will end and some of the work will die. But some will live on. You can't kill an idea and this type of education will continue. Let's hope that one day soon, active citizen education will be recognised as being every bit as important as 'skills for life' or 'training for work'. Keep up the struggle.

Jol Miskin

Tutor, WEA

To bounce back into life, with a sense of realism and belonging. To feel valued, needed, with life skills, vision and drive to pass on. To encourage and enable all age groups to feel cared for and alive. With love and fellowship, fun and laughter. To meet life's challenges. We can all learn to love, accept and give power to each other and our communities. Northern College and all organisations out there like it - thank you!

Gail and Girls

If you don't use it you lose it!

My story starts in my fifties, when I did a course at Northern College. I was introduced to computers and enjoyed it so much that I went on to do many courses involving computers. After that, I was asked by Agewell if I would teach older people basic computing. I had never dreamt that I could teach, but as I felt passionate about what I had been taught, I wanted to teach it to others. I wanted to inspire them, to let them know that even though they were older people they too could learn. My philosophy in life is, 'If you don't use it you lose it.' For me, learning is for life; in 2006, I won the National Senior Learners Award for Learning from the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE). Thank you!

Pam Haywood-Reed

Introduction to Managing and Recruiting Volunteers, run by VAS

My 'Private Benjamin' moment. It came to me when, lost after a bereavement, someone eager to tick the right boxes said, 'Why don't you go on this course we've got?' I suppose they needed the funds.

Anyone who told me I was going to do a computer qualification and attend a gym for six months would usually have gotten a quick two-word reply, but I was so eager to find a direction, my mouth said 'yes' whilst my brain was saying 'noooo!' So I stuck it out and liked it, then I found another course and did tiling, plumbing and that sort of stuff. Then I did 'Women into Public Life'; 'I'll do that,' I said - there was food on, too!

On the course, I met a lady who had some children with her husband in her home town in Africa and some with her in England. Whilst on the course, she had news of a terrible beating that her husband had received for his political beliefs and still, her faith kept her whole, sustaining her. I am not a Christian, but meeting someone with her passion and conviction made my problems seem small. She inspired me and so that is what the Academy means to me - inspiration.

Anonymous

The Academy helped me regain my confidence after experiencing bullying at university. I owe a lot to them. Whilst studying my MSc I found it difficult to interact with others and I was treated as different. The course helped me get over these barriers and I am now going self-employed. My confidence is still growing and the more courses I attend, the better I feel within myself. Without the Academy I would not be at the level I am now.

Anonymous

The Academy funded a course I did. It meant I met people I'd never have met and talked with people I'd never have talked with. And I also liked spending time with me, on my own; wandering the grounds of Northern College, finding seats of solitude looking over the hills and getting muddy shoes before breakfast during the free residential weekend. These were the best things about doing the course in 'Politics and Public Life' - spending time with me and with other people!

Anonymous

Involvement. Being together in one thought for togetherness. Aiming for happiness to bring harmony into family life. Creating learning skills and giving chances to people who have lost their way in confidence, happiness, friendship and peace. Love.

Find this in ourselves and we can help others to find it.

Eunice Batty

Sustainable Projects, U-Scape

The reality that the Academy was beginning to achieve things, to reach people, even touch them, was brought home to me in the autumn of 2007. I was invited to run a couple of song-writing workshops at the Academy's conference, held in what had been an old Engineer's Workshop at Elsecar. I thought, 'I'm up for anything'. I was amazed when 20 odd people ended up sitting there for the first session and then another dozen for the second. People from groups across South Yorkshire, in about twenty minutes, wrote anthems for their own communities. It was wonderful: from 'Don't Knock Donny' to 'the ballad of Blacker Hill', 'In praise of 'Dinnington' and a poem about the Arbourthorne.

Ray Hearne

Regional Officer, WEA

The Academy is responsible for my becoming a part of community development in Sheffield.

It was through the original funding of the Academy, during Contract 1, that SPRAC were able to employ me and reach many learners. The Academy funded SPRAC for two years and we helped hundreds of learners to find their voice in their community.

Without my experiences and knowledge from SPRAC I would not be able to do what I do now with Zest. If anything is worth the money these days then it's the work done in the community by organisations like Zest and SPRAC - they must be market leaders!

Richard Tinsley

Learning Advocate with Zest

To me, the Academy is about empowerment through innovative teaching methods, in a 'can do' environment.

I have completed three courses during the last five years. 'Women into Public Life' opened new doors for me and produced a change of direction in my career. I gained the confidence to sit on the board for South Yorkshire Probation Service and I commenced a PGCE.

Studying turned to working, on the Academy contract with Community Education Resource (CEDR) in Rotherham. My confidence soared and I applied for a new job with South Sheffield Partnership, working with Craig Pugh and Sara Robinson - former staff from the Academy.

My learning journey has continued through both experiential learning and observing the people management skills of my team. Our links with the Academy have not ended; we have been funded to complete a marketing course that I could not have done without their sponsorship. Again, the Academy came to our aid through a funded CEDR trip to Bradford, looking at alternative methods of empowering the community to engage in procurement.

The early confidence and personal development workshops that were part of the 'Women into Public Life' course have come to complete fruition, as I now also work part time as a freelance consultant and trainer.

Florence McCready

*Women into Public Life, run by SYWDT
awarded Academy bursary*

The Academy opened up the opportunity for me to achieve relevant qualifications. Working for a youth organisation with few funds but a real drive for development, the Academy enabled me to get qualified for free. It fulfilled my passion for learning that had been lying dormant since I finished university, two years ago. It enabled me to develop skills in management that I could apply directly to my job. From speaking to others, I learnt so much and was able to bring so much to my organisation.

The Academy provided courses with excellent tutors, some very nice buffets and a national qualification. Even when the buffet was not great it really brought the group together! I think the Academy has been fantastic for helping people who work in the community and voluntary sector develop their skills and continue to deliver excellent services within the communities in which they work.

Francesca Redmore

ILM Level 4 Management, run by VAS

The course made me think differently about a number of important things: that it's alright to ask for help when we need it, not to be afraid to make mistakes and the benefits of working in a team - that you don't always have to go it alone. It taught me to respect that we are not all the same and that different approaches can make a whole thing work. It taught me not to judge others.

I would particularly like to thank those people without whose encouragement I would not have bothered to go on the course, or indeed have had the confidence to speak in front of 150 people tonight.

Anita Guy

Denton Green Visit, run by CEDR

Standing alone is ok, but it isn't very exciting. What I needed was something to get my mind working. Being surrounded by my peers, who happened to be rather marvellous managers, I observed some surprising traits. They mirrored all the things I was thinking. I bounced off the ideas and concepts, to make myself reach higher.

Confidence is a many-legged spider, who walks into different situations: With all those legs he can go anywhere and feel at home.

Meeting allies on the same journey gives you the opportunity to help them. By giving someone a leg up, you become connected; part of a movement, each person helping others to move. It doesn't matter where we are going, just that we don't become stale and still. With so many eyes to watch for a road and so many minds to think of new directions, with so many roads to creativity, how can we do otherwise but find ourselves in a better place?

Will Ferraby

Banner Theatre Event, run by the WEA