

# Voices of Adult Maths Learners



*"Everyone thinks, 'Oh no, not maths', but give it a go, it's not as scary as people think it is. Get on and learn."*

The photographs in this publication are kindly provided by the learners depicted and reproduced with their permission.

# Contents

<b>Foreword</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>1. About this publication</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Background and NIACE's position</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>3. Context</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>4. Adults maths learners' stories*</b> .....	<b>8</b>
Duncan Rothery .....	8
Lucy Gee .....	10
Peter Blair .....	12
Emma Gilbert .....	14
Mark Hobbs .....	17
Hannah Grant .....	19
Walter Snowden .....	21
Paul Brian Greasley .....	24
Kylie McKay .....	26
<b>5. Conclusions</b> .....	<b>28</b>

---

\*Some of the names used in this publication have been changed.

# Foreword

**My maths memories are of enjoying maths at primary and early secondary school, and hating it at later secondary – now I know this was because I had a poor maths teacher who, for two years, made me feel more and more incapable. I was one of those adults who used to say ‘I’m bad at maths; I hate maths’. But I have taught maths to adults and children, managed very large budgets, written complicated bids for funding and managed being a single mum! So I’m obviously pretty good at maths!**

This publication is one of a series by NIACE that uses real voices to highlight how learners feel, what they have done and the impact that learning as an adult has had on their lives. We feel that, very often, we listen to providers and teachers, managers and policy makers, politicians and the media, but rarely to the person on the receiving end... the adult learner. Hearing from these brave and capable adults enables us to reflect on how we support our

children to become confident in maths, how we help adults to recognise all the ways in which maths is integral to their lives and how great people feel when they gain confidence and can say ‘I’m OK at maths, it doesn’t scare me’.



**Carol Taylor, OBE**  
Director of Development and  
Research, NIACE

# 1. About this publication

**Research has shown that the biggest single factor in adults not taking up maths learning is fear.<sup>1</sup> The stories in this publication are personal accounts of adults who have overcome their own barriers and taken part in adult maths learning to improve life and work prospects for themselves and their families.**

The stories illustrate how these adults' involvement in learning has increased their confidence and enabled them both to continue learning and to progress at work. We hope that these stories will help to dispel the fear of maths, encourage the reader to reflect on their own experiences of maths learning and why it is

important in their daily lives, and inspire other adults to take up maths learning. We also hope that it will reinforce the important policy message that encouraging maths learning for adults is good for both the individual and the economy.

---

<sup>1</sup> NRDC Research Briefing, [www.nrdc.org.uk/download/asp?f=4022&e=pdf](http://www.nrdc.org.uk/download/asp?f=4022&e=pdf) (accessed 4 June 2013).

## 2. Background and NIACE's position

**In 2011 the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills' national Skills for Life survey found that the development of adults' abilities in maths lagged behind those in literacy. In the same year, NIACE launched an independent National Inquiry into adult numeracy learning.<sup>2</sup> As part of this Inquiry NIACE recommended adopting a new approach to numeracy, focusing on how adults use maths in everyday life. To put this into practice, NIACE has undertaken a range of work to promote maths learning.**

In 2012 NIACE launched the numeracy initiative Maths4Us together with a number of key partner organisations across the public and private sectors.

This has the following five key messages:

- Everyone uses maths everyday – and everyone can get better at it.
- Better maths means you can make your money go further.
- Improving your maths is infectious: children, grandchildren and friends will learn from you.

- The more able and confident you are with maths, the stronger your job prospects.
- Learning maths as an adult is different to how you learnt it at school.

A key part of the initiative's work is to promote awareness, develop training and resources and harness technology to improve levels of participation and achievement in adult maths learning. A significant aim is to train 8000 Maths Champions to encourage maths learning and challenge negative attitudes towards maths.

<sup>2</sup> Numeracy Counts – Final report 2011, <http://shop.niace.org.uk/numeracy-counts.html>.

NIACE worked with unionlearn to develop and deliver 'Maths Messenger' sessions in community and workplace settings for intermediaries such as housing officers, care workers, admin staff, volunteers, union learning reps, learning co-ordinators and union learning centre managers. The aim of the sessions was to enable participants to think about their own attitudes towards maths and their experiences of learning maths, as well as to take part in fun and stimulating activities that they could take away and use to inspire others to take up maths learning. In addition, NIACE has

published examples of innovative practice taking place amongst learning providers<sup>3</sup> and local authorities<sup>4</sup> to improve maths skills.

NIACE will continue its work on adult numeracy to influence policy makers and support practitioners, frontline workers, intermediaries and researchers. NIACE is working towards changing the culture in which it is acceptable to be 'bad at maths' and dispelling the fear felt by so many adults, often brought on by a prior poor experience of learning maths.

---

<sup>3</sup> *The Vital Ingredients*, L. Dixon and S. Southwood, <http://shop.niace.org.uk/adults-learning-maths.html>.

<sup>4</sup> *Making Staff Count*, S. Southwood, <http://shop.niace.org.uk/making-staff-count.html>.

# 3. Context

Which do you think is the best deal?

*Buy one, get one free; three for two; or 50% off?*

*200 free minutes and 200 free texts or  
150 free minutes and 500 free texts?*

*A repayment, endowment or interest-only mortgage?*

How important is it to be able to work out the answers to these questions? The financial decisions we make have an impact on our day-to-day lives and our long-term futures, but 17 million adults in the UK have difficulty with numbers.<sup>5</sup>

Too many adults have had their confidence in maths destroyed by their school experiences and we urgently need to attract them back into learning. Maths learning should support adults to be confident, competent and comfortable in knowing when

and how to use maths in their daily lives.

Maths skills and the ability to think mathematically are fundamental for life, work, active citizenship, digital inclusion and effective lifelong learning for all. Research suggests that adults with good maths skills are likely to be in better health, have better employment prospects, earn more money, have easier access to higher level qualifications and live in better quality housing.<sup>6</sup> Lower level numeracy skills are

<sup>5</sup> Department for Business Innovation and Skills (2012) *The 2011 Skills for Life Survey: A Survey of Literacy, Numeracy and ICT Levels in England*.

<sup>6</sup> Carpentieri, J. D., Litster, J. and Frumkin, L. (2009) *Adult Numeracy: A Review of Research*. London, NRDC (commissioned by BBC RAW).

associated with lower wages: on average, individuals with fair or poor (Entry Level 3 or lower) skills earn roughly £8000 less in their lifetime than those with Level 2 numeracy or above. Individuals with Entry Level 3 numeracy are less than half as likely as those with Level 2 or above to earn more than £20,000 a year before tax.

During Adult Learners' Week – and as part of our broader work

– NIACE time and time again uncovers inspiring stories of adult learners who are overcoming their fears and moving forward, giving themselves and their families the chance of a better life and access to more opportunities. This publication tells the stories of some of these learners and demonstrates what works for the adults who have overcome many challenges to improve their maths skills.

## 4. Adult maths learners' stories

### Duncan Rothery

*Adult Learners' Week Winner 2012 –  
Individual Regional Awards, North West*



**“The Duncan of the old days who used to run away from maths is gone. I’ve learnt to be different.”**

I had worked for over 30 years as an international HGV driver when I began to lose my sight because of a degenerative condition. I loved my job, it took me all over the world to countries I would never have been to otherwise. I needed maths as part of that job but always used a calculator – me and numbers never got on and I was absolutely petrified of maths. I could put 2 and 2 together, but when it came to doing anything fancy like working out area, I was hopeless. It came from my

childhood; I didn’t do well at school. The teacher used to stand behind me and rap me on the knuckles if I did something wrong.

I’m a married man with a family and home and when I got married I had promised my wife that I would always provide for her, so when I was unable to work anymore I was devastated. I sank into depression – getting up with nothing to do was unbearable.

Eventually, I went to Whitehaven JobCentre where I challenged the

disability employment adviser to find me a job and she suggested I retrain. I was given a choice of colleges but the one that fitted my needs the most was the RNIB college in Loughborough. I stayed in halls for a month and came home at weekends. I realised I had been handed an opportunity and that if I didn't make the most of it I'd always regret it. I did a lot of extra study in my own time and pestered the tutors for homework. Now it's paying dividends.

I learned to use maths on a computer with assistive technology called JAWS. I took Levels 1 and 2 in literacy and followed up with Level 1 maths and I started to do Level 2.

The atmosphere in class was very different to school; it was very relaxed and unpressured. All my family are well educated and successful in what they do. This

was my inspiration to grab my chance, work hard and tackle my long-term fear of maths.

At the end of the course they found me work experience at a high-security transport firm. The college provided JAWS so I could work effectively. Whilst I was there my maths learning helped me to design a two-part Excel spreadsheet. Part 1 worked out running costs of the vehicle fleet Part 2 worked out a maintenance programme for vehicles and plant. I specialise in using Excel to plan and cost work and I have now been offered a permanent job in another department working on project management.

I definitely would like to do more learning although it's harder when you're working. The Duncan of the old days who used to run away from maths is gone. I've learnt to be different!

## Lucy Gee

*2012 Adult Learners' Week winner –  
Individual Regional Awards, Leicester*



**“Everyone thinks, ‘Oh no, not maths’, but give it a go, it’s not as scary as people think it is. Get on and learn.”**

Before I took up adult learning I had had an unsettled time of moving house and jobs and being in an abusive relationship which had affected my confidence quite badly. I had achieved five GCSEs at school, including maths, but my lack of confidence prevented me from continuing to learn.

I was persuaded by the head teacher at my children’s school to get involved in a Foundations of Literacy course, followed

by a Foundations of Numeracy course. I found the learning was fun and relevant. The sessions lasted for two hours – one and a half hours spent discussing what we had been doing with our children and half an hour with the children playing games and going over what we were learning. We had to put together learning journeys about what we did with the children and keep a photo diary about what we were doing at home. We played snakes

and ladders, which developed counting skills, and experimented with different types of chart; for example, tally and bar charts by looking out the window, counting cars and recording colours. This was really good as it promoted learning in the house and encouraged my children to do their homework since I had homework to do as well.

For me, the main factor in taking part in learning maths was that it was at my son's school so I was already there and the teacher was really lovely. She didn't push us to do anything we didn't want to do but encouraged us as well. She made me want to learn and went out of her way to explain things.

I went on to further study by doing an Access to HE course at North Warwickshire and Hinckley College of Further Education. This included Level 2 maths but was a whole year's studying which you had to pass in order to pass the

whole course. It took the form of five follow-on modules with an exam at the end of each one. As I passed each one, my confidence grew.

I've now started a degree course in Education Studies at De Montfort University which is full time and I'm really enjoying it. Without building my confidence up I never would have made it this far. It had been such a long time since I was at school and things have moved on, particularly with technology. My long-term goal is to finish this course and do a PGCE to teach children.

If anyone asked me whether they should take up maths learning I would say, put aside any issues. Everyone thinks, 'Oh no, not maths', but give it a go, it's not as scary as people think it is. Get on and learn.

## Peter Blair

*2012 Adult Learners' Week winner –  
Individual Regional Awards, North East*



**“...the practical ratio of two ears and one mouth, which encourages us to listen twice as much as we talk, is the best bit of maths to use.”**

I had a stroke when I was 57 which caused damage to my brain. I lost the ability to read, write and to do maths. I couldn't even switch on a computer. Now I struggle to remember things and have had to relearn everything from the beginning. Prior to this I ran an independent financial advice business and I am told I had very good maths skills; I can't remember of course. I also have hemianopia (sight difficulty) which causes hemianopia alxia, which is a reading difficulty.

I began to learn again at a local brain injury charity and began with c-a-t for reading and writing, the same things I had learnt as a child. I worked through the Adult Learning Alliance to improve my literacy and numeracy and undertook a learning styles assessment which signposted me to further learning. My learning style was kinaesthetic and so I enrolled on a cookery course for the disabled at Leisure Choices, which is funded by the local council. My learning was different in

that I wasn't frightened of maths because I had forgotten everything I had learnt before and I was starting from the beginning again.

I found Level 2 maths difficult because it involved a lot of reading, but I managed with advice from a tutor to adopt a strategy of doing all the shorter questions first and coming back to the longer ones. This worked well and I passed Level 2.

I was elected recently as Public Governor for my local NHS Trust in Northumbria. Maths is included as part of my work – I have to read, understand and question the quality account, checking performance figures. In my everyday life, learning maths again has helped with shopping. I am told that I used to like to add up the cost of everything I buy in my head and I still try and do this, to see how close I can get to the actual cost. The key to memory loss and to retaining information is to keep practising.

I occasionally do spreadsheets to practise. I have been taking part in the cookery class for four years and maths learning has helped with measuring and weighing and timing.

As part of my work for Northumbria NHS I visit North Tyneside General Hospital to talk to families of stroke victims about my experience. Statistics often go over people's heads; the practical ratio of two ears and one mouth, which encourages us to listen twice as much as we talk, is the best bit of maths to use when working with these families, and probably more generally in life too.

I found it difficult after finishing my Level 2 maths to continue with my maths learning so I relied on my own strategies. I volunteer for AgeUK at an internet café and help people to use computers. You have to find your own way of staying involved, keeping it going and continuing to learn.

## Emma Gilbert

*Leicester Adult Skills and Learning Service*



**“I have remembered ratio by thinking about how I colour my hair: 1 brown: 2 red: 1 peroxide.”**

I am dyslexic (difficulty with words) and dyscalculic (difficulty with numbers/maths) and I believe that in my case the two disabilities are linked. I used to work for a large retailer and, before that, in the care sector. My dyscalculia means that I struggle with things involving numbers and remembering sequences, such as using the checkout till, completing timesheets and putting clothes back on the shop floor in the correct place and the right order of size. This led to me losing my

job as I needed more time to remember and undertake these kinds of task.

When I was at school I struggled with maths. I never grasped my times tables. I have had to develop strategies to manage maths. My dyscalculia means that I struggle with day-to-day tasks; for example, understanding bills, dealing with banks and adding up, particularly to check that statements and bills are correct. If I see a list of numbers,

such as phone numbers, I find it difficult to remember them so I group them together as two-digit numbers to make it easier; for example, 25 – 37 – 56. I have learned to use ‘rounding up’ as a strategy to help with working out prices. Managing a budget is also really hard, particularly when the amount of money I have is limited by being unemployed.

Learning maths as an adult has helped tremendously with my confidence. The key to my success has been continued support both inside and outside the classroom with anything I struggled with or wasn’t confident about, with specialist adult tutors who have an excellent understanding of my disabilities and their impact on my learning. I have been able to learn step by step, starting initially with a five-week course, ‘Learning with your dyslexia / dyscalculia’ and later enrolling on a whole-year course working towards Level 1 maths.

In class I use a highlighter pen to pick out the key things I need to work out in a maths activity. I use squared paper to help keep my calculations in the correct place for hundreds, tens and units and to measure and work out area, so I can understand the concept of cm ‘squared’. In exam conditions for functional maths, I am able to use a calculator, be in a separate room from other learners and have a reader, but this adjustment depends on the awarding body.

I struggle to understand the 24-hour clock so I use the notes section on my mobile phone to record what 13:00 and 14:00, etc. mean. I have remembered ratio by thinking about how I colour my hair: 1 brown : 2 red : 1 peroxide. I struggle to work out how much petrol I put in my car and I brought receipts into class so my tutor could help devise a way of doing this that worked for me. I also struggle to read transport timetables and understand them.

I have been able to talk to other learners to encourage them to take up maths. I really enjoyed this and want to do more to raise awareness. During a recent Ofsted inspection, I explained all about my achievements to the inspector. Dyscalculia is an invisible disability. I am passionate about recognising disability and I want to tell people we are not stupid!

If someone was thinking of doing some maths learning but wasn't sure, I would say, give it a go. It can be fun. It might take longer to sink in but you are never too old to learn and once you've mastered it you will feel good. I can now put on my CV that I've got a maths qualification.

## Mark Hobbs

*Maths tutor*



**“You couldn’t have a society without maths, it is in everything we do and in nature’s patterns too...”**

I did A-level maths when I was at school which helped me to get onto a degree course in physics. Unfortunately, I was hit by a really serious physical illness which meant I had to give up my degree course – it took me two and a half years and several operations to get over the condition. After this I did sales and management jobs and closed the door mentally on continuing with my maths learning. My confidence and energy were seriously affected.

When I met my wife we decided it made more sense for me to stay at home and look after the children. My wife’s mother was a maths teacher. We were talking one day and she gave me some maths exercises to see if I could do them. I found I could and she persuaded me to give it another go. I enrolled with the Open University (OU) and did an initial course which I passed with distinction and this encouraged me to continue learning. It was very demanding as I had a baby

to look after at the same time but I managed to continue to Level 2 the following year and Level 3 after that. I continued to get distinctions, although the third year was a lot tougher. By 2007/08 I had gained a first-class honours degree. I proved to myself that I could have done the same all those years ago if I hadn't been ill.

I had considered teaching in schools as I had done some voluntary work at a local school, but in the end I decided to do some teaching for the OU and began with a Level 1 course. I found out you could study for free if you worked for the OU and took up a Masters level course. I thought I would have a go, even though some of the maths looked a bit freaky! Other people were achieving 50–60%, which was a pass, which encouraged me – I managed to get a distinction.

Teaching for the OU has enabled me to help others. I teach disabled learners and those with mental

health difficulties as well as going into prisons to work with offender learners to A-level standard.

I've had to come to terms with messing up my life first time round and I want them to have a chance and see that you can still achieve. I try to help them to think positively – it takes guts to have a go.

If you asked me 'Why maths?', I would say that for me, maths is a way of life; a habit – like a good book that you can't put down. It's a fundamental truth. If you talk about philosophy, politics, they are all theories, but maths is the bedrock of all of it. There is still a lot to be discovered through maths and there is an 'elegance' to this process. You couldn't have a society without maths, it is in everything we do and in nature's patterns too; for example, a sunflower head, the way the seeds are arranged. Taking up maths learning is about having the confidence to pursue your goals.

## Hannah Grant

*Adult Learners' Week 2013 nominee*

**“I understand what 5% off means and so I can save money.”**

I started my learning journey in September 2011. I did not gain any qualifications at school as I had a terrible childhood, without the support of parents, and turned to alcohol for comfort at the age of just 13. Up until that time I had been quite good at maths at school but circumstances meant I drank my education and life away to escape the agony I was in. I have always felt incomplete and distraught that I could have achieved so much and had an amazing career had my life not been so disastrous. Until my son was born three years ago I thought I had lost my chance at everything.

It was not until I had a work-focused interview last year at the

JobCentre that I was told it really is not too late; I realised I could be the person I always wanted to be. I have always seen myself in an office – my own desk, computer, lots of paperwork – but realised I needed a maths qualification to do this. It felt like a distant dream as I thought I could not afford the funding to get the qualifications for the work I had always wanted. However, I was told where I could go for free Level 1 and 2 English and maths courses. I was ecstatic; there was hope for me yet.

I enrolled on a family numeracy course at a nearby school which focused on supporting our children's learning and our own as well. My confidence grew when I

was able to help other learners in the class. Everyone on the course felt the same about maths; it was new to them as well. I had no recollection of maths from school, so it was like learning from scratch: percentages, ratio, decimals, fractions, etc. I really enjoyed it. The teacher was fantastic, she was so patient, and provided tasks set in real-life situations like working in a bank or an office.

I am now doing an ITQ course which I began in January 2013. I was granted fee reduction which has made this possible for me. I hope to achieve an ECDL computer qualification through this course. If I hadn't done some maths studying prior to this I wouldn't be able to manage the spreadsheet work using Excel, which I really enjoy.

I can now support my daughter as she is doing her English, Maths

and IT GCSEs without feeling confused. I can be encouraging and supportive now I know what I am doing! Doing courses has really had an impact on my life and my children's lives, as well as others around me, as the change in me has been immense. I can now go into town and understand all the sales maths that before was totally alien to me. I understand what 5% off means and so I can save money.

I would certainly advise anyone who has missed their time in secondary school for whatever reason to get back all they have lost because, with a lot of hard work and determination, it can happen. After the ITQ course is complete I am going to do a business course at Bolton College and then, armed with everything I have learnt, I am optimistic about finding a job.

## Walter Snowden

*Adult Learners' Week nominee 2013*



**“Finally, I’m making the most of an opportunity to learn maths that I never had at school.”**

I left school at 15 years of age in December 1956 with no qualifications. Maths at school was an awful experience – the final two years had been really difficult. I didn’t understand logarithms or what they were for and the teachers weren’t interested in you if you couldn’t do it.

I did lots of maths as part of my plumbing apprenticeship with Cartwright Brothers in Cheshire. The apprenticeship lasted for over five years and I gained the

PTC certificate and first year UCLI Welding certificate. In plumbing you have to work out area, water pressures, gas pressures and pipe sizes. We used addition, subtraction, multiplication, geometry, algebra. There is a lot of maths involved but, because it was part of work, I just did it. I enjoyed it as part of work, much more than at college.

I eventually left my employer to gain more experience in my field with different contractors. When

I got older I was employed by Shell Oil at Stanlow oil refinery as a pipefitter and then a plumber and the company encouraged me to gain qualifications. I studied for my plumbing qualifications at evening classes three times a week for four years and passed them all.

I became the foreman pipefitter on construction for Shell Oil and after a while I became a maintenance engineering supervisor for the R&D department. This lasted for many years but I was made redundant, along with many other colleagues.

Eventually I gained employment with Chester City Council as a heating technician and progressed to plant supervisor. Before I retired from the council I passed my HNC in Building Studies at evening classes. I have always known that all the jobs and studying I have done have included maths but it made sense in this way.

I really enjoyed learning and with encouragement from a tutor, once I was retired, I started a three-year degree course in Construction Management and gained a B.Sc. (Hons) 2:1. The maths in that was economics and making a profit. Part of the course included forming our own company and presenting this to a panel of senior lecturers. This included maths in the form of costing start up, design and outlay. My own role was as a health and safety manager, another job that includes maths, such as how much weight you can lift safely, costings for site welfare facilities, how much health and safety training would cost and costing for auditing and welfare facilities.

I finally decided to work towards a maths qualification. I went to West Cheshire College in 2010 to take a Level 1 Adult Numeracy course. It had always bugged me that I didn't achieve a maths qualification at school, despite

all the higher learning I had done. I felt lost at first, but we had excellent tutors who were helpful. I got one-to-one support even though it was a big class. I found it was fun, the tutor wasn't afraid to have a laugh with us and she never got flustered or lost patience. I enjoyed both years of learning maths.

Last year I studied for Level 2 adult numeracy and passed. From September 2012 I started studying GCSE maths foundations, as I wanted to keep up to date with this subject. I prefer learning with mature people and night class suits me. Finally, I'm making the most of an opportunity to learn maths that I never had at school.

## Paul Brian Greasley

*Adult Learners' Week nominee 2013*

**“I’m 49 and it’s been a real eye opener that I can sit down and take it all in – it stretches me and makes me think...”**

As a child I never attended school very much. My family moved around a lot so I missed out on learning maths at school.

As an adult, I came to Weston in Somerset in 2010, not knowing where my life was going. I was admitted to a treatment centre to help with my addiction to alcohol; my life had become chaotic and suicidal and I had lost my family and my self-worth. However, I gradually began to pick myself up and I enrolled at Weston College in a subject that I enjoyed, Health and Social Care.

This subject does involve quite a lot of maths. As a nurse you

are responsible for giving out medication which requires things like changing from, for example, 1mg to a fluid measurement. You have to work out dosages, so use addition and subtraction. I found I could manage this well. You also have to have a good knowledge of the whole of the human body, you have to measure blood pressure, fill out forms and be able to take readings from charts and graphs. You have to be good at measurement; it goes hand in hand with the job.

At first I struggled with learning but, with support and encouragement, I achieved

distinctions in all my assignments, building on my confidence and feeling of self-worth. At last I am able to do tasks and daily chores without having to rely on alcohol to even function.

My aim was to enrol on a university course to train as a mental health nurse. For this I chose to work towards GCSE maths to help me get onto a course. The thing that surprised me the most about maths was how different it was to what I had thought. The first time I looked at algebra it didn't seem to make sense, but now it does. I'm really enjoying my course and have one last paper to pass. I'm 49 and it's been a real eye opener that I can sit down and take it all in – it stretches me and makes me think... You can always find the answer, it's facing that challenge of finding the right answer and how you get there.

Whilst at college I have been working as a student representative and also a college ambassador. My maths skills have helped with

this too. As ambassador for the college, I attend functions at schools and it has been really good for my confidence. I attended a technology day at one of the schools, along with groups of children from 18 different schools in Somerset. They were given the task of building a wind turbine. I was able to help one of the groups that was really struggling – it involved lots of angles, measuring degrees and getting the struts right on the turbine. I really enjoyed it and was pleased to be able to use my maths skills to help them.

I would advise anyone thinking of doing some maths to just do it! Get over that initial feeling of 'it's like going back to school'. If it was someone my age, in my situation, I'd say look to yourself and what it's going to do for you. I'll get a certificate and I will go on to do more maths. Maths is in everything we do, it's all around us. Persevere and you'll realise you can do it too!

## Kylie McKay



**“My eldest is eight now and bringing maths homework to me and I really didn’t want to have to go to the school to ask them to explain it to me.”**

I had a difficult time at school. We moved around a bit and this was probably quite disruptive – we moved when I was in Year 9 and then again when I was in Year 10. I didn’t really attend in Year 11 so didn’t manage to get any GCSEs and didn’t really learn any maths. I have always wanted to work with children and started a course at the children’s centre when my oldest son was just nine weeks old but it was also around this time that I started suffering with depression so I didn’t complete the course.

It was in 2008 when I started at Alfreton Adult Education Centre. At this time I had two children and was coping on my own and still struggling with depression. I really remember starting because it was quite a big deal for me and Gail was so lovely and made me feel very welcome and supported. I am working towards my Certificate for the Children and Young People’s Workforce.

I have really enjoyed all the courses I have taken part in at Alfreton and I feel they have

helped to improve my confidence – just this week I felt able to speak out and volunteer myself during a first aid course where I didn't even know the tutor. It has also made me feel more confident in parenting my own children and supporting them in school.

During the course of a year, I was able to achieve my Level 1 maths and move on to Functional Skills maths. Unfortunately, due to a family tragedy, I didn't succeed but I am determined to pick it up again when I have a bit more time and I will pass it eventually. Functional Skills was interesting because you had topics that you might have to do at home; for example, planning a party, working out how much food to buy, how much it would cost, and how much extra to buy in case more people turned up.

Learning maths has helped me save money. Now I can understand what 50% off means in the sales. I use maths when I am cooking so I understand the measurements, grams and kilograms, etc.

I wanted to learn maths mainly to help my children. My eldest is eight now and bringing maths homework to me and I really didn't want to have to go to the school to ask them to explain it to me. Now I don't have to do that because I do understand it. It has really helped me to feel a lot more confident.

I have learnt more now than I ever did at school and if anyone asked me if they should go and do some maths learning I would say, 'Go for it'. It has really helped me a lot.

# 5. Conclusions

The stories presented here show that maths learning as an adult can have a positive impact in different ways. It can help the learner to overcome health difficulties, be more confident generally, manage finances and everyday activities more effectively, enjoy challenges, have more social contact and opportunities to progress at work and take up further learning. The stories support the key messages of Maths4Us.

- Everyone uses maths everyday – and everyone can get better at it.
- Better maths means you can make your money go further.
- Improving your maths is infectious: children, grandchildren and friends will learn from you.
- The more able and confident you are with maths, the stronger your job prospects.

- Learning maths as an adult is different to how you learnt it at school.

The stories show that maths learning presents a challenge for many adults who have had a previously negative experience at school, perhaps because of a particular teacher or a feeling that the maths being taught was not relevant or useful. More often than not, in adulthood this has developed into a fear that maths is something complex and difficult rather than being about the common sense decisions that adults come to every day.

The first steps into learning can be the biggest hurdle for those adults overcoming their 'fear' of maths. All of the stories demonstrate good practice in adult learning provision, for example:

- easily accessible provision;
- learning in a like-minded adult environment;

- an encouraging, supportive and good-humoured approach from the teacher to make learning enjoyable;
- flexible provision that fits in with other demands on learners' time;
- a trusted person to encourage first steps into learning;
- promoting independent learning;
- one-to-one support that extends beyond the classroom; and
- learning that sets challenging activities and relates to learners' lives and interests.

Our story tellers are positive about their maths learning and would, without exception, encourage other adults thinking of taking up maths to do so.

© 2013 National Institute of Adult Continuing Education  
(England and Wales)  
21 De Montfort Street  
Leicester LE1 7GE

Company registration no. 2603322  
Charity registration no. 1002775

The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) is an independent charity which promotes adult learning across England and Wales. Through its research, development, publications, events, outreach and advocacy activity, NIACE works to improve the quality and breadth of opportunities available for all adults so they can benefit from learning throughout their lives.

[www.niace.org.uk](http://www.niace.org.uk)

Follow us on  @NIACEhq

To download a PDF of this publication and for a full catalogue of all NIACE's publications visit <http://shop.niace.org.uk>

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without the written permission of the publishers, save in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Acts 1988, or under the terms of any licence permitting copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency.