

National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
www.niace.org.uk

Press Release
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For immediate release

CLARE GOES FROM SCHOOL CLEANER TO SCHOOL TEACHER

Clare Harris, aged 35, from Halesowen, started as a cleaner at Sunfield School and after many courses has returned there as a teacher for its disabled pupils. Clare's remarkable achievement will be awarded with an Outstanding Regional Learner of the Year Award from the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), as part of Adult Learners' Week 17th – 23rd May 2008.

When Clare took a cleaning job at Sunfield School in Stourbridge ten years ago, she knew she didn't want to do it forever. At the time it was just a job with hours she could fit around her daughter's school day.

A year later she became a classroom assistant at the same school. But she could never have predicted that starting a couple of modules at the University of Worcester to help her in this role would lead to her taking a degree and eventually becoming a fully qualified teacher. "I had left school at 16 and studying was difficult at first, but I was encouraged by the school and I got used to it," she says. The school allowed her a year off to complete her PGCE. "Becoming a teacher wouldn't have happened if I hadn't started at the school," she says.

Her life has changed since becoming a teacher, but she also feels that she is making a difference to her pupils, who have special educational needs. "I thought I had the temperament and the patience to do the job," she says. "My qualifications enable me to contribute in a positive way to the lives of the children I teach".

David Lammy, Minister for Skills, said, "I never fail to be inspired by the stories I hear about learner's achievements. Clare's hard work confirms my belief that improving your skills can be a life changing experience."

He continued, "The benefits better skills bring to learners and those around them are wide-ranging. On the personal level people become more confident and have higher self-esteem, and individuals can develop better job prospects. More widely this can lead to parents being better able to help their children with homework and learner's employers becoming more competitive. Any adults wanting to improve their skills can call 0800 100 900 and find out about the courses in their local area."

Rachel Thomson, Senior Campaigns Officer at NIACE, said, "In spite of the fact this is the 17th annual Adult Learners' Week we continue to be amazed by the quality of the nominations we have received. Clare's story is an indication of how learning can transform lives completely. All of this year's winners have shown a huge commitment, passion and creativity throughout their learning journeys. Their achievements are all the more inspiring due to the challenges they have overcome and they fully deserve to be recognised as outstanding and inspirational adult learners."

James Plaskitt, Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Department for Work and Pensions, and Minister responsible for ESF, said, "I am pleased that the ESF is again sponsoring Adult Learners' Week which provides a wonderful opportunity to celebrate learning and communicate how it can help people improve their job prospects. I hope that many more people will be inspired to take up learning opportunities after hearing the inspirational stories of the winners of this award."

Ends

To contact Clare Harris please phone Elizabeth Wood on 01562 882253.

For further information on Adult Learners' Week please contact:

Ed Melia, NIACE Press Officer, on 0116 204 4248 or 07795 358 870.

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Notes to Editors

1. Clare Harris will be presented with an Outstanding Regional Learner of the Year Award at the Adult Learners' Week National Awards Ceremony at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre in Westminster, London on Monday 19th May 2008. She will also receive an award at the West Midlands Adult Learners' Week Regional Award Ceremony at Kings Hall, Stoke on Trent on Wednesday 21st May

2008 from 10:30am – 12:30pm. Journalists and photographers are invited to attend both events. More information is available from Ed Melia, NIACE Press Officer, on 0116 204 4248 or 07795 358 870 or ed.melia@niace.org.uk

2. Adult Learners' Week, 17th–23rd May 2008, is the largest annual celebration of adult learning in the UK. It is supported by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, the European Social Fund, learndirect, the National Learning and Skills Council, Ofcom - the Office of Communications, the Quality Improvement Agency, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and City and Guilds. More details at: www.alw.org.uk
3. Adult Learners' Week 2008 will include the following national events:
 - Saturday 17th and Sunday 18th May: **Cultural Diversity Weekend**
 - Monday 19th May: **Adult Learners' Week National Award Ceremony** - QEII Conference Centre, London
 - Tuesday 20th May: **National Policy Conference** *Adult Learning and Culture* to be held at the London Chamber of Commerce
 - Wednesday 21st May: Quick Reads Learners' Favourite Award and Voice on a Page to be held at The Globe Theatre
 - Thursday 22nd May: **Learning at Work Day** – *What makes learning at work, work* at the Victory Services Club, Marble Arch
 - Friday 23rd May: **Silver Surfers Day**
4. A national helpline - **learndirect** - is available year-round for confidential advice and information about careers and courses. The call handlers will have access to the NIACE website and can give information about local activities during Adult Learners' Week. Calls are free on 0800 100 900.
5. Events for Adult Learners' Week 2008 are listed in the interactive online calendar at www.alw.org.uk/calendar where you can search by keyword, your preferred date and by the region you live in. Or call **learndirect** free on 0800 100 900 to find Adult Learners' Week events local to you.
6. The themes for Adult Learners' Week 2008 are:
 1. Globalisation and the changing world of work
 2. Environmental Sustainability
 3. Technological Change
 4. Citizenship and belonging in a diverse society
 5. Demographic change
 6. Poverty reduction
 7. Changing expectations and perceptions of the Third Sector
 8. Well-being and happiness

The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) is the leading non-government organisation for lifelong learning in England, and exists to encourage more and different adults to engage in better-quality learning of all kinds. It campaigns for, and celebrates the achievements of, all adult learners.