

National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
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Press Release
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For immediate release

TROUBLED YOUTH TURNS ROLE MODEL AND WINS LEARNING AWARD

Isiah Williams, aged 50, from Coventry, left school with no qualifications, but transformed his life by getting a degree and starting a career in the Youth Offending Service. Isiah's remarkable achievement will be awarded with a Regional Individual Learner Award from the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), as part of Adult Learners' Week 17th – 23rd May 2008.

As a young man Isiah Williams thought that education had nothing to offer him. He was young with no qualifications and thought that society had written him off as a stereotype of disaffected youth. But thirty years on, he has left the stereotype behind and is educated to degree level.

It has been a long journey, through a career as a DJ, then selling records and Caribbean food. But joining Coventry Youth Offending Service as a Young People Support Officer gave him the boost he needed to get his education back on track and achieve his Professional Certificate in Effective Practice (PCEP). "I particularly wanted to gain the PCEP because it would give me professional parity with my colleagues and provide a foundation for career development within the Youth Offending Service," he says. "I had come to a point in my career where I felt ready for the challenge of an academic study programme."

Now he is a role model for the young offenders he works with, many of whom are starting their adult life with similar difficulties to his. "Achieving the PCEP has given me greater confidence, professionally and personally," he says. "It has also deepened my understanding of the way the structures and systems of society operate – and how necessary that understanding is. It has confirmed my belief that education is the key to freedom."

David Lammy, Minister for Skills, said, "I never fail to be inspired by the stories I hear about learner's achievements. Isiah'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. Isiah'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 Isiah Williams please phone Angie Parks on 024 7683 1414.

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. Isiah Williams will be presented with a Regional Individual Learner 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. 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

7. 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.