

National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
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Press Release
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FULL-TIME MUM GOES BACK TO SCHOOL AND WINS NATIONAL AWARD

Marie Theresa Harvey, aged 46, from Birmingham, has escaped an abusive background by taking literacy and numeracy courses and become a role model to her 8 children. Marie's remarkable achievement will be awarded with a Specialist Schools and Academies Trust Adult Learners' Week Award - from the organisers of the UK's largest festival of learning, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), as part of Adult Learners' Week 17th – 23rd May 2008.

Marie's childhood was full of abuse and violence. She missed out on the education that most children take for granted. Now she has eight children of her own and she is determined to be a role model by making up for lost time with her education.

Learning has transformed the way that Marie sees herself. "It has made me a stronger person," she says. Her journey started two years ago, when she joined a family literacy course at her son's school, Four Dwellings High School in Birmingham – a specialist science college, where she passed her level 1 and 2 literacy exams and her level 1 numeracy exam. "It made me realise what I had missed out on," she says. "Once I had started I could not stop. I wanted to keep learning – the more I did, the more I wanted to do. I've tried courses I would never have done otherwise."

She is a full-time carer for one of her sons, who has physical and mental disabilities and autism. But she has found time to take numerous courses including counselling, which she enjoyed, "because of everything I have been through".

She has made a new group of friends from her fellow students. "All our kids are doing really well at school," she says. "It means everything to me now and I am not going to give up. I will achieve as much as I can to help my children."

David Lammy, Minister for Skills, said, "I never fail to be inspired by the stories I hear about learner's achievements through Skills for Life. Marie'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 66 0800 and find out about the free courses in their local area."

Elizabeth Reid, Chief Executive of the SSAT, said, "I would like to congratulate Marie for her achievement in the face of adversity and her commitment and determination to return to education. I would also like to congratulate Four Dwellings High School for supporting adult learners. Marie was chosen from 50 learners nominated by specialist schools across the country and judges were inspired by the achievements of all the nominees."

She continued, "Specialist schools can make a particular contribution to adult learning and SSAT is determined to support the community dimension of the specialist programme. The SSAT and NIACE are equally committed to increasing the number of adults participating in learning, and to working with the community to boost the quality of education and skills."

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. Marie'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 Marie Theresa Harvey please phone Christine Smith on 0121 4220131 extension 124 or 07967 228156.

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. Marie Theresa Harvey will be presented with a Specialist Schools and Academies Trust Award at the Adult Learners' Week National Awards Ceremony at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre in Westminster, London on Monday 19th May 2007. 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.