

National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
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Press Release
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For immediate release

SISTERS VOLUNTEER IN PRIMARY SCHOOL AND WIN NATIONAL AWARD

The Bloomer sisters - Helen, Sam and Eve from Halesowen, have gone from reluctant learners to teaching assistants. Their remarkable achievement will be awarded with a Family Learning Award from the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) as part of Adult Learners' Week 17th – 23rd May 2008.

“We left school with no qualifications to have babies and we have decided we need to do something better than nappies and housework.” Helen, 39, is blunt about their reasons for getting into education. There were a lot of nappies to escape: between them, Helen, Sam, 41, and Eve, 35, have 18 children and five grandchildren.

At first Helen in particular was against the idea of getting back into learning after so many years. But she was won over by her sisters and a sense of family responsibility, and now reels off the qualifications the family has done together.

“We have level 1 and 2 literacy, classroom assistant level 1 and are now working on a teaching assistant NVQ level 2 and level 1 and 2 adult numeracy,” she says. “Hopefully this will help us to get jobs in schools.” You could say that they already work in a school – they do a huge amount of volunteering for Calson Community Primary School, organising after-school activities.

The family's achievements are remarkable because of their commitment and the number of them involved – Sam's daughter Natalie Hunt, 25, is also a keen learner. Working together as a family is what has made them succeed as learners. “Learning together has been enjoyable because we have supported each other,” says Helen. “We have managed to stay to the end of all our courses. Our children and family are very proud of us and what we have achieved.”

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. The Bloomer family'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."

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. The Bloomer family'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 the Bloomer family please phone Theresa Naylor on 01384 813 944 or 07900 161 591.

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. The Bloomer family will be presented with a Family Learning Award at the Adult Learners' Week National Awards Ceremony at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre in Westminster, London on Monday 19th May 2008. They 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
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.