

This story was filmed and recorded during early February 2006 for 'Hear all about it!'

This campaign is a wonderful selection of inspiring adult learning stories told by the learners themselves. The highlights from James' interview which can be watched and read; this is the transcript of the whole interview. The on-line learning champions would be delighted if His stories were used to promote learning in your organisation, college or charity. You can link you webpage to the West Midlands Learning Directory – Hear all about it! page

www.wmld.org/pages/hear_all_about_it/.



James' story -

"I live and work in Birmingham, I do a lot of voluntary work. I work for the coalition as a volunteer on their management team. And I also run my own little company of volunteers helping disabled people and elderly people with any problems they have. I try to sort them out for them.

When I left school, I left without any reading and writing skills at all. And through my learning in life, it didn't really matter, because you learn how to cope with these things, you've got coping skills. And I always say that we're our own worst enemy, because of these coping skills we don't think we need the reading and writing part of it. But I've got MS myself, and I had to pack in work. And thinking about what I could do, it all revolved around reading and writing. So I thought I'd better try and get these skills on. And I was tested for Dyslexia, and I found out that I had that pretty bad. My reading and writing skills are still not very good, but I go to a lesson at the Clock Tower Arben on a Thursday afternoon for reading and writing. And now I've started going on one evening a week, again trying to get my writing and reading skills up, by using a computer, which helps me with my computer skills as well.

I think it was about 2003, at the clock tower where I was doing my lessons; they put me forward for a personal award from NIACE. I didn't think I stood any chance, but I did win it. From that, we went to the award ceremony, and I've done one or two little things. I think it was last year that I was one of the judges on the panel for the personal awards. And I did a radio for learners, which was quite good. You know, you don't get on the radio too often, but I enjoyed that. Any time NIACE wants me, I'm more than willing to volunteer for them. Because I think what they're doing for people, not only with learning difficulties, but educational wise, they're doing a tremendous job. It makes you want to go forward, knowing that there's someone who really cares about what you're doing.

I had to pack in work through MS and to tell you the truth I thought well that's it, I can have an easy life now. And I think I spent 3 or 4 weeks at home, doing the usual thing, you know just watching daytime TV. Looking at paint drying. I just couldn't take it, you know, so I went around to various places trying to get something to keep me going. And I ended up at the clock tower doing the English lessons. And in one way that probably saved my life. Because up until then I'd always worked, and I didn't like not working. I'd always said I couldn't understand people being suicidal but I know where it comes from now because I was nearly that person. So the English lessons saved me and put

me in a different direction, where I could be of use to people – you know other disabled people and that.

The clock tower is mainly for adult learning. They do all sorts of learning there – computer studies, dance, English. And they also do English for people who have just come in to the country. And also for people like me, who haven't had a good education in English. And in the lessons, it goes from severe, to just wanting to learn how to spell a bit better. Or read a little bit better. So they cover a wide variety of lessons. I found myself, once I got in to English lessons, I wanted to learn more. And that's why I've taken on the other part of it; you know the computers, because you've got like a hunger to learn. And once you've started, you can't turn back.

I have a Basic English class, and that's taking me from learning how to read and write and spell. And then I did a computer course, which again is teaching me to read and spell, but also it's giving me the computer skills. And it's through winning the award from NIACE that I thought; yeah I can do a bit more. And as I touched on earlier, I was one of the judges for one of the awards. I've got a computer that helps me to read and reading some of their stuff, I feel very humble really, to be a NIACE receiver.

When I went to the clock tower, and this'll sound funny to people, I actually went there to learn how to write my address. As I say you get this hunger for it, so I carried on. I went in for an award with the clock tower, which is Entrance Level One, which I won, and they put me in for award from NIACE, which is the Personal Award – it's called the achiever's award. And some of the people that have gone in for it, you know I didn't think I'd done anything really to warrant the award. All I'm doing is for myself, But the people at NIACE must've thought it was OK.

Well, when I was at home, I just sat there thinking what I could do with my life from then on; it does make you feel suicidal. Being a worker and then being put on the scrap heap. I couldn't see any way forward and then I went to the clock tower and that really gave me a boost. But being put forward for a personal award. For a person that's never achieved anything, academically, to receive that award I felt absolutely brilliant. My 2 daughters have both been to university and they've both done their degrees and it was great watching them receive their degrees. And that was the same feeling I got when I received mine. It was like receiving a degree from a university. And I feel very lucky and very humble to been in the ranks of these achievers.

I'm going to carry on with both of my English lessons. But I have personal achievements to go for. I started up a little group of my own called disability support group limited, where we go around helping people with disabilities and also elderly people because their disability is old age. I'm going to continue with the English lessons, but I'm also going to do more work with the disability organizations. I hope to be able to get some money, either this year or the next, so I can widen that, to be able to afford an office and a couple of workers with me, because at the moment I'm doing it all myself. And I'm

balancing all 3 at the moment as well as working on the management team as a coalition of disabled people in Birmingham.”

This project was managed by jo.knight@niace.org.uk - who can be contracted for more information. She works for NIACE (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education). Birmingham and Solihull Learning and Skills Council funded the project.

