

**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 Keith’s 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/](http://www.wmld.org/pages/hear_all_about_it/).**



Keith’s story -

“I’ve been in the Bakery trade for 20 years, doing different jobs, from hygiene, up to actually now running my own section. When I’m on shift I’m a team leader. Over the last 2 ½ years, I was a quiet person, the works got Train to Gain to come into work. I wasn’t able to read or write very well at all, and this woman called Lisa Pearson was the teacher who taught me there. And the company there backed me all the way. And from there I went on to college. And I’m still there at college now, and I’m still learning.

My company lets me have the time off work to be able to go to my lessons. And my life’s improved in a kind of way, and my attitude has got a lot better. My confidence has improved by 100 percent, where as before I used to always be at the back and I would never ever say anything. But now I’m there the management at my bakery leave me to run my own section. They listen to what I’ve got to say now, where before I wouldn’t say anything. They let me run my own department the way I like to run it. They even bought me a special pen, for some of the documentation, where I couldn’t read the word; it actually reads some of the words for me.

I always knew there was something wrong with me, but in that day and age people didn’t know about being Dyslexic. I was always in school; I was in a boy’s school. Everything I did there was 100 percent, but trying to learn to read and write I could never get it. It was like, ok, yeah right; go to the back of the classroom kind of thing. You know, we’ve tried and we can’t do anything, but when I was in sports, maths geography things like that I could do it, but to put it on paper, I couldn’t do it. And that was a real annoying thing. I left school and I knew there was something wrong with me but it wasn’t about then and so I just carried on with life as normal. And like I said, I went on a training course scheme where I was in the building trade for 2 years, but then I got a job in the bakery and I worked there for 12 years. Then I had 2 years out, because I had personal problems with being stressed out because of my problem, because work was getting more advanced and there was more paperwork coming in to it. And I was stressed out and off ill for over 2 years and when I got over it I went back to the same place and they took me back straight away. From there I started again doing my normal job, but worked up to start doing more on the bread side of things.

It was very strange, but I thought 'this is my life, and I'm not going to be able to read or write. Having 2 kids and watching them grow up, one of the things I'll always remember is going to the school with one of my kids and the teacher, she gave me this form and said 'can you fill this in now?'. And I had to ask my 6-year-old son to help me fill in this form, so that was a bit heart breaking. Then Train to Gain visited me, I said 'you can't help me'. I said I'd tried night school. Don't think I haven't bothered because I had tried night school, but it didn't work. I could never understand what a letter was. It didn't sound right in my brain, but she took me to one side. I was nervous, scared and frightened, thinking that she'd think I was an idiot . . .stupid. She calmed me down. I was anxious, but she realised what was going on. She pulled me away from the rest of the class and we had a one to one lesson, all on our own and it just started off from there. She just broke me away from the rest of the group, and we just went all out. I haven't stopped to this day. I get my books out, and I take them to work everyday with me. Every time I'm on break, I'm there, studying.

My mates, no one, ever knew what I was like. They thought I was clever, brainy because I came across like that. But no one knew that I could hardly read or write so when it came to breaks in the canteen and they'd got the papers, they'd say 'oh, read this'. I was pretending to be able to read it. It was like a big secret. And I had an article about it in the paper and it was called 'my secret' because no one knew about it. After I'd had that done everybody at work said well done, you know, they all saw me in a different light. I was a bit worried that they were going to call me things, but they didn't and everyone said I was quite brave in what I was doing. And people have come up to me and asked me what I'm doing, didn't I go to school? But it was because they wanted to find out, why couldn't they do it? So everyone was getting involved in it as well, because they thought, if he's doing it then why can't I do it as well?

And it just went on from there, It's a life changing experience because I've got a 6 year old son and I can sit down and read to him, instead of him reading to me. And my other son now, he's eight, and he's very clever, for his age. You know, he can read and write and everything. And my little one he's coming on now, because we had a bit of a worry at the start because I think he followed after me, you know, dyslexic. But every night we sit down and read to him, and he reads his books and he's coming on well.

And it's probably because of all this that I'm able to help them as well. When I got my little reading pen, it was 'can I have a go, dad, can I have a go?' It's that loving part, that a lot of people take for granted reading and writing. It's so precious. Because when you read a book for the first time and you understand it, it's beautiful. And I read a book called The Lost Garden. I saw the film, but when you read the book, it's completely different. Because it gives you what the child felt like. That's the pleasure that I lost, that I've got back now. I'm not able to read top of the range books and things like that, just short stories. But it's just so nice to be able to pick up a book and feel what that person's written. And when you just watch a film, you just go, yeah ok, I watched the film. But the book is completely different. It gets your heart and it

makes you cry when you get to the end of the story and he's able to walk and his dad sees him for the first time. And the way they put the words. It's so more beautiful than what it is on the film.

I had one to ones with my teacher called Lisa Pearson and she was just starting off as well, training to teach a dyslexic person so it was new to her to find someone at my level, how bad I really was. I mean, we started off at A and worked our way up, working on the vowels and everything else. And just slowly each time we did it. But it wasn't just like she gave me something. She made sure I understood it and kept going on and on and then we'd go on to something else. And you know, I owe her a lot and I'm grateful for what she's done for me.

It's just the way everyone at the college has supported me. No matter how many people say, you're Keith Boulding, I just turn round and say I was taught by Lisa Pearson and they say 'you're Keith Boulding, and we know all about you'.

But the reason why I've come here today is because if I can share my experience on how scared and terrified I was to some other people that are in my nightmare, and think they can't do it. Well, they can. Because I always thought, this is it. This is my life. I'm going to go to work in the morning, clock in and come home. And that's it. But it's opened up a lot more. I mean I do projects at work. Set up new machinery, train people. I mean I was training another team leader how to do his job. And he can read and write. He's excellent, but the experience was with me because I'd been on the plants. And you know, everyone I work with, they don't say – why should you be training me? Because everyone takes me for whom I am now. I don't just go in to a room now and say I can't do it. I have a go at it. Where before, if someone asked me to fill in a form, I used to be out the door. But now I just go over to the person and say sorry, can you help me.

I took my forklift license the other week. Some of the questions I could read, but I asked him to help. Where before, I'd be embarrassed. And I'm not embarrassed anymore. I don't think anyone who has got Dyslexia should be embarrassed, because we wouldn't be who we are if we didn't have it. We've got our own qualities in life. People take things for granted. We don't.

People say at work – when are you going to be a manager? I'm hoping to be able to learn how to use voice-activated computers, where instead of me actually writing it actually writes it for me. It'll be something that I can actually ask my company to be able to look into for me. I'm not a shop floor worker no more. I want to be someone who can say I've moved on. And nothing's going to stop me.

And if someone says to me what was I going to be in 5 years time – and I couldn't read or write – I'd have said a shop floor worker. But If they'd ask me now what I'm going to be in another 5 years I can't answer that question because I don't know what I want to be. I've realised that there's a lot more out there than what I thought. I've got a lot more choice now. More openings

are appearing all the time. But I know that I'd like to be able to stay in the business that I am. I've got a lot of experience there and a lot more to offer. But if someone says will I be a manager in 5 years, I'm thinking to myself – yeah, I will be. Because I've already moved off the shop floor in to a team leader role, in to the next step.

This project was managed by [jo.knight@niace.org.uk](mailto: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.

