

Volunteering Story: The Learning Link

The Learning Link is a free service run by the Community Learning and Development Team at Orkney Islands Council, dedicated to helping adults gain new skills and increase their self-confidence.

The Learning Link currently has 4 Adult Volunteer Tutors who give their time to work one-to-one with adults, helping them to gain skills and confidence in literacy, numeracy and/or basic digital skills. Once an Adult Volunteer Tutor is paired with a learner they would usually commit between 1.5 to 2 hours of their time each week. The volunteers time is of great value as they can often be more flexible around supporting learners at times that are most convenient to the learner, such as evenings and weekends as well as through the daytime.

Chrissie Matthews, Senior Adult Learning Support at the Learning Link, said: “The Volunteer Tutors bring a wealth of experience as well as their time, and are a huge asset to our small team. They allow us to be more flexible and help more people in our community to improve their skills and confidence.”



The dedicated and skilled volunteers also receive formal training in how to help adults to learn new skills. One of the Adult Learners said about their experience: “Learning has totally transformed my life, not just academically – but in everything! My mental health has improved as has my confidence. I may be physically challenged but mentally I can move on. It has helped me ten-fold. I picked up the phone and enquired about an advertised admin vacancy which needed me to do a C.V. and covering letter, which I can do for myself now.”



In celebrating and recognising volunteers for Volunteers’ Week 2024, Chrissie said: “We would like to say a huge thank you to our volunteers for their time, dedication and commitment to helping others. They go above and beyond and we wouldn’t have the successes we do without them, so again thank you for being part of our team and gifting your time and skills to others.”

The Learning Link is currently developing a new training programme and will be seeking to recruit new volunteers to help with literacy, numeracy and basic digital skills, so watch this space!



VOLUNTEERS' WEEK

40th Anniversary

The Adult Volunteer Tutors kindly shared some of their experiences of being a volunteer at The Learning Link:

“I love it – being part of something that is so essential to life, so taken for granted by so many of us, yet so difficult and demanding for many others.



I have been a volunteer tutor for over 12 years, during which time I have taught both literacy and numeracy to a fair number of adult learners, ranging in age, ability and determination. We have laughed together and sometimes cried and many times we learn together.

I love to see a very reticent, reluctant new comer gain new skills, remember skills they have but have stored away in the back of their memories and learn how to put all that knowledge to use in helping their own children with homework; enabling them to apply for a job; obtaining a job and also progressing to a further stage in a job they already hold.

I admire the courage that it must take some of our learners to admit that they would benefit from help and actually to seek that help. A personal joy is to see the increase in self-confidence that is so visible when a learner gains or just refreshes knowledge to help them through life.”

CM – Adult Volunteer Tutor



“I started doing voluntary work 16 years ago after a shopping trip to the supermarket. Chicken soup, celery soup, mushroom soup all had the same picture on the front of the can - how difficult must this be for people who can't read?

I joined The Learning Link and completed my training and then started tutoring. I quickly realised the joy I felt when someone who tells me they can't do maths, shouts out during a session “I'm doing fractions!”. And she was – perfectly!

Many students have a problem with confidence and repeatedly after a few weeks, I watch them arrive, not with their heads down as they did at the beginning, but heads up, smiling and with the demeanour of a different person. My heart swells with pride!

I think I might have made their life a bit less difficult.”

LC – Adult Volunteer Tutor

#VolunteersWeekScot




**VOLUNTEERS'
WEEK**
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“For me being a volunteer tutor has quite a number of different aspects. Firstly, my own view is that there is a simple humanitarian obligation to help with another human being particularly in times of need. So being a volunteer tutor connects with my own values and allows me to put in into practice what I believe about community and relationships.

Naturally of course, I want to use the skills and experience I have to practically benefit someone else. So it’s not just about being a volunteer in general it is about using my specific skills and interests with the fit with someone in need of improving their language skills.

Finally, I enjoy the human interaction and the fun and laughter that we have during our classes. It appears that my student benefits from and enjoy what we do and I do too. I think the final satisfaction will come if I’m able to help my student achieve their own goals which are dependent on improved English.”

LC – Adult Volunteer Tutor



"From the early days when I first started as a Tutor, I lacked confidence in my ability to help my adult learners. Each of the Adult Learners present their own histories for not progressing whilst at school and why they have sought help from the Learning Link. Each of the Learners in turn have their own individual learning strategies so it is up to the Tutor to develop and adapt the learning materials accordingly.

The best response from the Learners has always been from those who have their own personal ambitions to learn and progress.

I try to arrange the learning Sessions at the Learning Link to fit in with the Learner's own availability and appreciate each Learner's domestic circumstances that inevitably governs what time and facilities they have for 'doing their homework'.

Each individual Learner presents their own challenges for the Tutor and each step of progress, however small, makes it all worthwhile".

MT – Adult Volunteer Tutor