



## Adult Learning and Skills

### The benefits of participating in adult learning and skills

As the parent carer forum for Surrey, we represent the voices of families with children and young people up to the age of 25 with additional needs and disability. We know for many of our families that opportunities to participate in adult learning and skills are fundamental to a young adult's development and social and emotional wellbeing. Many of our young people may not have achieved formal qualifications at school which leaves them at a significant disadvantage to those who were able to. We know that for those young adults who are given the opportunities to engage in adult learning and skills at a level that is appropriate for their needs have a much higher chance of being able to achieve things such as; live independently, gain employment, join in with activities that help their local communities.

### The groups who stand to benefit the most from participating in adult learning and skills

As mentioned above the young adults whom we represent through their parent carers often are at a significant disadvantage to those who do not have additional needs and disabilities. Many will have had significant support in their childhood either through an education health and care plan or through SEN support at their educational setting. What we hear from families is that when they reach adulthood often that support reduces significantly or entirely and leaves vulnerable young adults with no clear path to move forwards, contribute to their local community and become more independent. Having appropriate opportunities to engage in adult learning and skills would offer many of these young adults the opportunity to gain vital skills to empower them to strive for their ambitions and live successfully within their community.

We know from speaking with families that there are significant advantages to a child or young person with additional needs and disability who would benefit from accessing adult learning and skills much younger - we hear time and time again how beneficial a hybrid school/college model would be for young people - combining the national curriculum academics with vital life and practical skills to prepare them for adulthood.

### The barriers to participating in adult learning and skills

Unfortunately for young adults with additional needs and disabilities there are often huge barriers to accessing adult learning and skills.

Some of these barriers include:

- **The Adult learning and skills not being accessible for the young adults** - for example the course may be at a level that is not understandable, there may be visual or auditory challenges that prevent access, the pace may be too fast. The environment could cause sensory challenges and often just the unknown is too much for some young adults to cope with.
- **Funding** - this is often the case for many young adults who may have had support funded in childhood find that when they reach adulthood this is no longer funded and they are unable to access this as a result.
- **Availability** - we often hear from families that adult learning and skills that would be suitable for their young adults needs are so oversubscribed that they have no choice but to wait.
- **Information** - many families don't know where to look or access adult learning and skills for their young person and are often sent from one place to another and still don't get the information that they need.
- **Knowledge of those delivering adult learning and skills** - we often hear from families that they have experienced teachers/instructors/coaches who have no experience or knowledge of additional needs and disabilities and don't know how to make reasonable adjustments

### Ways to overcome these barriers

Some suggestions on overcoming the above barriers for young adults with additional needs and disabilities include:

- **Training** - The most important thing is for everyone involved in adult learning and skills to be trained on additional needs and disabilities and reasonable adjustments - preferably have training within this from those with lived experience to get a rich understanding.
- **Information** - have information in an accessible place that is mindful of the varying additional needs and disabilities and is available in a variety of formats and easy read guides.
- **Environment** - Consider the environment of where adult learning and skills is being held - things such as acoustics, lighting, hearing loops, the way the room is laid out can all have a massive difference.
- **Funding and Availability** - It is essential that those young adults with additional needs and disability are not disadvantaged, and they should be able to access learning to enable them to achieve the outcomes outlined above, they will often need more adult learning and skills so this should be reflected in what is offered.
- **Starting Earlier** - As mentioned above having the opportunity to learn adult and life skills earlier would be hugely beneficial, and a move towards a hybrid type school/college model which incorporates these skills into a young person's life at the earliest opportunity would inevitably improve the outcomes for them.