



*Change your story...*



**Inspire! Adult Learning Awards**

2021 winners

**L&W** SEFYDLIAD DYSGU A GWAITH  
LEARNING AND WORK INSTITUTE

Dathlu 100 mlynedd | Celebrating 100 years



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

# Message of congratulations



**Jeremy Miles MS**  
Minister for Education and Welsh Language

I am delighted to have been invited to introduce the Inspire! Learner Awards 2021. Diolch am y gwahoddiad.

I recently had the pleasure of introducing the Inspire! Tutor Awards and was truly impressed, that despite all of the challenges of the past 18 months, the dedication shown by many tutors to make sure you, our learners, are inspired to learn has continued.

And here you are. Our very best. Ready to be rewarded and recognised for your dedication and personal determination to overcome significant challenges, to do well.

You are winners because you have demonstrated that, no matter how difficult, and challenging your individual circumstances might have been, you have taken charge of your futures to become active and prosperous citizens.

We have winners here that have turned negative situations into positives through learning; have overcome physical, and mental health barriers determined to move forward in their lives; shown dedication and support to work, and learn while nursing through the pandemic; and some who have excelled beyond their expectations progressing to further, and higher learning, and on into work.

I truly believe that learning is, and should be for life. Learning is a vehicle to support you throughout life whatever circumstances might present themselves.

The Inspire! Learner Awards are a fantastic opportunity for us to showcase some of our very best. To all who were nominated or won awards this year.

You are all winners! Be proud! Congratulations!



# Foreword



**David Hagendyk**  
Director for Wales, Learning and Work Institute

The Inspire! Awards are an important celebration for the adult learning community in Wales.

The challenges and struggles of the last eighteen months has reinforced the need to show the amazing work the sector does, but most importantly to celebrate the achievements of learners. We regularly receive around 200 nominations every year for the Inspire! Awards. The process to shortlist and then to decide the winners is incredibly difficult with so many learners worthy of winning.

For every winner, there are countless other stories not being told that are also worthy of celebration. So, congratulations and thank you to everyone who was nominated. And well done to those of you that have started your journey for the first time or who have continued with your studies. The stories of each of our award winners demonstrate the importance of adult learning to building the kind of Wales we all want to see. Whether it is helping people to overcome the impact on their lives from the pandemic, to make new connections in their communities, or retrain for a new career, adult learning is at the heart of building a fairer, greener, and more prosperous Wales.

Over the coming months and years adult learning will be an important part of our response to the impact of events internationally. We have all seen the images from Afghanistan and as we prepare to welcome families seeking sanctuary in the UK, we need to ensure there is adequate investment in opportunities for them to learn our languages and to help rebuild their lives here in Wales. I wanted also to highlight the award we have given in memory of our former Chair and a lifelong champion of adult learning, Hywel Francis.

Hywel was a powerful advocate for adult learning and especially the role of universities and higher education. As an historian his understanding of working-class Wales and the power of adult education to transform lives was unique and will be sorely missed.

I also want to thank our supporters for making the Inspire! Awards possible. To the Welsh Government for their continued support for both the awards and for Adult Learners' Week, to the Open University in Wales as a headline sponsor and to our category sponsors: Addysg Oedolion Cymru | Adult Learning Wales, Agored Cymru, and the National Centre for Learning Welsh.

The Inspire! Awards support Adult Learners' Week which has been running for more than thirty year and brings to life the Minister's vision of a second chance Wales. Their long-term support of the campaign is an enduring testament to the Welsh Government's commitment to education that is lifelong, accessible, and focused on those that need it the most. Mainly thank you to each of our award winners. Your stories have inspired us all and shown the impact that high-quality adult learning provision can have, we hope that you will all be active in the future as ambassadors for adult learning.



Gwobrau Addysg  
Oedolion 2021

Ysbrydoli!<sup>TM</sup>  
Inspire!<sup>TM</sup>

Adult Learning  
Awards 2021

*Award Winners*





## Fatma Al Nahdy

Different Past: Shared Futures Award Winner

Nominated by: Coleg Cambria



When Fatma Al Nahdy made the journey to the UK from Yemen in 2015, she didn't speak any English and due to the ongoing wars and turbulent situation in Yemen she had never attended school. Fatma could speak two languages fluently but didn't know how to read or write.

Her son was born not long after she arrived, and she was determined to build a better life for him. So, when she was offered the chance to enroll on an English as a Second Language (ESOL) course at Coleg Cambria, she was nervous but excited to take on a new challenge. Just five years later, Fatma has completed ESOL as well as a Level 2 Diploma in Skills for Further Study and a Level 3 Access to Higher Education course. She passed her GCSE maths and English and has continued to broaden her knowledge by enrolling on ECDL, beginner's Welsh and interpretation courses.

Fatma's goal has always been to become a nurse. She was recently accepted onto a nursing degree at Bangor University

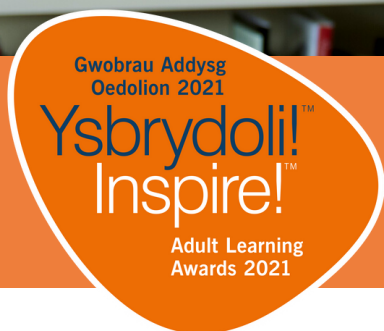
For Fatma, learning English was an essential part of getting settled and starting her new life in Wales, she said: "I was nervous for the first class. I knew I would be meeting lots of new people, and I was very shy at first. But it was a lovely class, my tutors helped me to see the fun in learning and after a couple of months I started to feel more comfortable and more confident. Learning English meant I was able to get out and build links with the community."

As well as the challenge of learning new things, Fatma is motivated by her desire for her son to have a better life.

"Now I can speak, read, and write and understand English very well. I can read letters independently, go to the GP without a translator and support my son with his schoolwork."

She continued: "My son is my motivation and inspiration. Learning during the pandemic was challenging because I was also home-schooling and caring for him. Remote learning is not my preferred way of learning, but I am doing okay. I've always wanted to be a nurse, all the courses I've taken up to this point are to help me reach that goal. It hasn't been easy, but now I'm closer than ever before to achieving my dream. I can't wait to start my nursing degree next year, I am very grateful to be where I am, and I'd like to thank my tutors for helping me get there. They told me I was intelligent; nobody had ever told me that in my entire life. They motivated me to continue on my journey to nursing.

When I arrived in Wales, I didn't know about any of the help that was available for me. I stayed in touch with the women who helped me and they're like family now, my son has two 'forever grandmas. My advice to anyone else thinking of taking up a course as an adult is to manage your time and focus on your goals – education is the key to life."



## Clare Palmer

Essential Skills for Life Award Winner

Nominated by: Vale Learning Centre



Clare Palmer left school at 14 with no qualifications. Clare was passionate about helping others and dreamed of a career where she could give something back. But, by the age of 18, she was a mum with a baby son to care for.

She worked as a hairdresser for the next 14 years to support her young family. When she moved back to Wales with her son in 2013, she decided to use her passion for helping others to become a care assistant. After six years working in the care sector, Clare dreamed of becoming a social worker. Knowing she would need maths and English qualifications to get accepted onto a social work university course, she joined the Vale Learning Centre and went on to complete her Level 1 Application of Number and Level 2 in Communication.

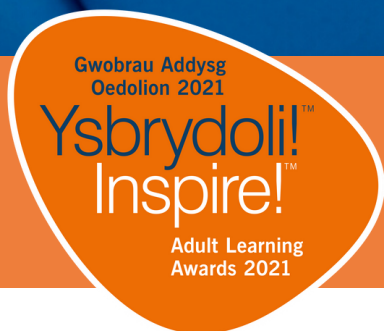
Clare discovered she would still need to gain an additional maths qualification to get into her first-choice university. So, a year after securing her first qualifications, she returned to the Vale Learning Centre to begin studying her Level 2 Application of Number. This came as she was working in the hard-hit care sector during the pandemic.

"I left school with no qualifications at the age of 14 and took my own path. I had my son, Taylor, at 18 and adulthood smacked me in the face. I love helping people. Putting a smile on someone else's face and making a difference in their life is a great feeling.

In 2019, after completing a Level 3 Diploma in Health and Social Care, Clare gained more self-belief about how far she could take her career. She decided she wanted to take her passion for care a step further and apply to university to become a social worker. By the time the pandemic hit in March 2020, she had achieved Level 2 in Communication and Level 1 Application of Number. "From the age of 14 to 41 I'd done no maths or English, I was apprehensive at first and, honestly, I was terrible at it. But I threw myself into it and I know after just a few weeks that I'd had made the right decision, I did so well in the first couple of months that I went on to do the Level 2 in Communication. The course was only two days a week, which meant I could continue to work as a care assistant while I was learning."

At one point I was working up to 60 hours a week, sometimes working seven days in a row. We were exhausted. On top of that, I was trying to balance my own learning with looking after my son and keeping our house in order. I'm still not sure how, but we got through it. Reflecting on her experience of adult learning, Clare said: "It's been tough at times but I'm incredibly glad that I did it. My experience has been fantastic, I'd really recommend it. I'm closer now than ever before to achieving my dream of becoming a social worker.





## Liz Day

Starting Out - Welsh Beginner Award Winner  
Nominated by: Learn Welsh Cardiff



Liz Day was made redundant in August 2020, after her employer announced it would be cutting 12% of its workforce due to the coronavirus pandemic. Despite being a stressful time, Liz was determined to turn a negative situation into a something positive. So, after being made redundant, she began an intensive Welsh language course with Learn Welsh Cardiff just days after leaving her former employer.

Just over a year later, Liz is speaking Welsh confidently and has been awarded the 'Starting Out - Welsh Beginner Inspire! Award in recognition of her commitment to mastering the Welsh language in a short amount of time.

Liz said: "I'd wanted to learn Welsh for a long time but kept putting it off. It always seemed like there was something getting in the way. I loved my job, but I was ready for a new challenge. With redundancy I thought, 'there's no better time than the present.'"

Liz began her journey into learning Welsh when she started her intensive course with Learn Welsh Cardiff. "I had some self-doubts initially about joining the intensive course remotely and without any previous knowledge of the Welsh language. Despite that, I absolutely loved it."

"For the first time in ages I had plenty of free time and I wanted to put it to good use. I knew how long it would take to become fluent and I wanted to get there as quickly as possible."

After beginning her Welsh course, Liz started her own podcast and blog, 'Liz Learns Welsh', to document her journey and inspire others to learn Welsh.

Reflecting on her learning journey so far, Liz said: "I now feel more connected to the culture of this wonderful country. Although going through redundancy was worrying and upsetting, I'm so grateful for the chance to be learning again and excited to keep using my Welsh skills. It's easy to think that learning stops when you've left school, college or university – but that shouldn't be the case. Whatever you're interested in, don't be afraid to give it a go."



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## Josh Osborne

Starting Out - Welsh Beginner Award Winner  
Nominated by: National Centre for Learning Welsh



When Josh Osborne decided to move to Wales to live with his Welsh-speaking partner, one thing he knew for certain was that he wanted to learn the language and become a confident Welsh speaker. So, in May 2020, while completing his master's degree and still living in England, Josh started an experimental course being held by the National Centre for Learning Welsh.

On finishing the course, which combined learning with a tutor with online self-study, Joshua knew he wanted to carry on learning, so he could achieve his dream of using the language in his everyday life. So, he signed up to an intensive Welsh course with Learn Welsh Glamorgan, which is run by the University of South Wales on behalf of the National Centre.

He said: "My mum is German, so I grew up in a bilingual household. I never had a passion for languages in school, but when I made the decision to move to Wales to live with my partner and their family, it seemed natural that I would learn to speak Welsh. "My partner is a fluent Welsh speaker, and I felt learning Welsh would help bring us closer together, and open new ways of communicating, like everyone, I've found the past year or so incredibly difficult. I felt isolated and lonely. It really took a toll on my mental health. Learning Welsh has really helped me manage my mental health"

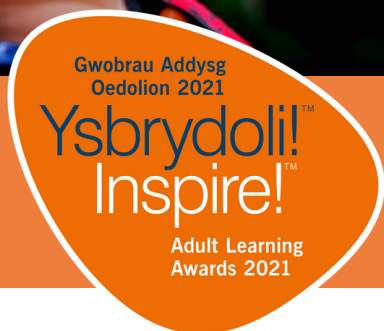
"I decided to start the intensive course which was designed to help people become fluent in two years. It's quite a big time commitment at nine hours a week so most of the people on the course are retired – I was the youngest on my course.

Josh's employer, British Isles DBT Training in Wrexham, was supportive of his desire to learn Welsh, giving him time in the working week to study and practice. Josh said: "I'm now about to start my next six-week course, which runs for four hours a day from Monday to Friday. It's crazy to think that this time last year I couldn't even say 'Dw I'n hoffi coffi' (I like coffee), but now I'm only months away from being able to hold my own in any Welsh conversation."

"My advice to anyone thinking of learning a language is to go for it. You won't regret it and there are loads of benefits. The courses are designed to be accessible, and you can learn quickly.

"I've found every aspect of my Welsh courses very rewarding – it's helped me through a pandemic, brought me closer to my partner and allowed me to feel more immersed in Welsh culture.





## Phyllis Gregory

Ageing Well Award Winner

Nominated by: Gower College Swansea



Phyllis Gregory has always been a keen writer and poet. Over the course of her lifetime, she's entered and won multiple competitions. When she started experiencing shaking hand syndrome, Phyllis found herself less able to write poetry by hand. Determined to keep doing the thing she loved, Phyllis saw this as an opportunity to learn to use a computer and enrolled on a Digital Literacy course at her local library.

For Phyllis, improving her digital literacy was about more than learning how to use a computer. At the age of 92, it helped her to get her words back.

Phyllis said: "I've always loved writing. Entering competitions was a hobby and it was fun winning prizes over the years, but I write because it's my passion. Some of my poems and drawings are funny, some are about things that I've seen or read about that moved me. "But as I got older my hands started to shake so badly that I couldn't read my own handwriting. I had to stop writing by hand, I still miss it greatly. I could use a typewriter, but it wasn't very efficient. I felt like I'd lost my words. "The world is changing. Shops are closing and more things are moving online. It's quite daunting for someone my age. I worried about trying to use a computer and doing the wrong thing. So, I decided the best thing to do would be to learn how to use a computer properly."

Phyllis enrolled on a course at her local library, where she had support completing her Entry Level 1 and Entry Level 2. By 2019, Phyllis was more comfortable using a computer. But when the pandemic forced libraries to close, she wasn't ready to stop learning.

She continued: "People think that once you get your free bus pass, that's it. But I'm the kind of person who can't sit still, I like to be doing things. Joining the course was daunting, but the tutors were fantastic and made me feel very welcome. I had every possible support from them. I found it to be an enjoyable experience. "I have my words back, which is wonderful, but I've also made new friends. My hearing has deteriorated lately, but the college and my new friends have made sure I can keep learning. My tutor, Ruth Benson, is full of patience and empathy. She made it possible for me to carry on – I can't thank her enough."

"Learning is so important, especially as we get older. It keeps our minds busy and engaged. If there's something you want to learn – or you just want to keep busy – do it. Learn Welsh or find a course in something else that you've always wanted to learn. Don't think you can't do it – you can."



## James Atkinson

Health and Wellbeing Award Winner

Nominated by: Working Skills for Adults 2

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council



James Atkinson has autism spectrum disorder. Growing up, he struggled with confidence and found social situations challenging, eventually leaving school without GCSEs in maths and English.

After leaving school he started a college course in engineering, but a year and a half after starting the course he knew it wasn't the right fit for him. Determined to find work, James went through People Plus, an employment support and training services company and secured a work placement with Elite Paper Solutions, eventually landing the position as a delivery drivers' mate.

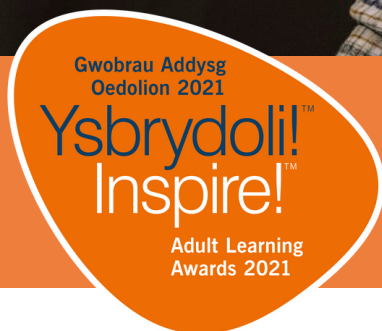
The position was life-changing, filled with confidence, he was inspired to go back to college to study ICT and work towards a degree in computer science at university. James has been working towards a level 2 qualification in essential communication skills and level 2 essential application of number skills alongside his Level 2 ICT course.

James said: "I've always loved learning; I find it so satisfying. The knowledge that I'm grasping new things feels very powerful and gives me lots of pride. Because of my autism, I struggle with social situations. This made school and college very challenging. It wasn't the best learning space for me. "I ended up leaving my first college course sooner than planned, but I wanted to find a job. Speaking with customers every day brought me out my shell and helped with my social anxiety. It's given me loads of self-belief. Working with Elite even gave me enough confidence to get a job working at a bar in Merthyr. I love the work and getting to speak with people."

In September 2020, James enrolled on an ICT course at Merthyr College. "When I first started college, I noticed I was quite comfortable in my level 1 and able to answer loads of questions. I had a massive boost of self-belief when they moved me up to level 2 after only four weeks of being there. Balancing my ICT course with essential skills training and two part-time jobs can be very tiring, but I wouldn't have it any other way. I'm working towards something that's going to make my life so much better and make me so much happier. My essential skills training has been so useful.

My writing has improved massively, which helps me to be much more articulate with my exams and coursework for my ICT course." Reflecting on the importance of adult learning, James said: "It's really satisfying to know how many doors this might open for me. With each piece of knowledge I gain, I'm helping my career. I have some regrets about my time at school, so I'm finding it that much more special to have this opportunity to try again."





**Daniel Jones**  
Into Work Award Winner  
Nominated by: Itec Training Solutions



Daniel Jones was faced with uncertainty about his job prospects, a lack of confidence in himself, as well as difficulties communicating with new people after leaving college. Determined to improve his skills, he completed the Employability Skills Programme with flying colours. From there, Daniel landed a Job Growth Wales placement. Just two weeks into his placement, Daniel secured a full-time role and is well on his way to building a successful career in IT. Daniel said, "I can't believe how far I've come in the past couple of years. I've always had a passion for IT because it's new and cutting-edge."

Daniel was confronted with setbacks after leaving college, but refused to give up on his ambitions of finding employment in IT. He continued: "It quickly became clear to me that I needed way more experience to get into work. The start of the course was tough. I realised I needed lots of improvement. When we started I was very shy and reserved.

"Going through the course and meeting new people every day really helped to build my confidence and prepare me for life after college with training on things like CV writing and interview prep. I use loads of these skills to this day."

Daniel said: "It was strange and slightly daunting at first getting used to a 9-5 working environment. Thankfully, I had two colleagues on the support desk who showed me the ropes and were extremely supportive.

"I loved the challenge. There were lots of different things I had to do, it empowered me to know how to diagnose issues and resolve them as quickly as possible." For Daniel, things kicked up a notch during to the pandemic. "I had to become even more self-reliant and independent. The rest of my team were dealing with the stresses of getting all the infrastructure in place to support remote working. I knew I needed to step up to help them so began picking up even more tasks and responsibilities."

He continued: "It felt amazing to have finally reached my goal of a full-time position in IT. All the hard work paid off. I couldn't have done it without the experience, confidence and people skills I've gained since leaving college. "If I could give my younger self a piece of advice, I'd say you don't always need to rush into full-time work. That's what I tried to do and it demotivated me because I wasn't ready."

"Gaining the experience and skills before going into employment really set me up for success and I can't recommend it enough to other young people in a situation like mine. "I had such a tough time before I started learning, I didn't know where my life was heading. Having a purpose and clearer career path has changed everything."



## Wilnelia De Jesus

Young Adult Award Winner

Nominated by: Gower College Swansea Training



Despite leaving school after her GCSEs to support her single-parent family, Wilnelia De Jesus managed to rise through the ranks of legal company Greenaway Scott to become a Practice Manager at the age of just 21. Whilst working as a Practice Manager in 2018, she started a 'Leadership and Management' apprenticeship to give her the skills to progress her career.

Wasting no time in utilising her new skills apprenticeship, Wilnelia put her knowledge into practice, navigating the multi-million-pound group through the operational challenges of a pandemic. Wilnelia said, "I hope my story can show other young people of colour to disregard career stereotypes. You can do anything you put your mind to if you're willing to work hard enough. Growing up in a Portuguese speaking household, we ate Portuguese food, watched Portuguese TV and listened to Portuguese music. In primary school it sometimes felt like a setback and a communication barrier. Now though, I realise that being bilingual is a massive bonus and it has loads of benefits.

"I'd always been passionate about the legal sector - I dreamt of being a lawyer. But I left school after my GCSEs because I needed to support my mother, who's my biggest inspiration. At 18, I landed a job at Greenaway Scott as an apprentice and receptionist - it was the best thing to ever happen to me. I was surrounded by some remarkable characters who filled me with confidence in myself and how far I could take my career.

Wilnelia began her journey into higher education when she enrolled as a learner onto the Leadership and Management Apprenticeship in 2018 at the age of 23.

"Initially, I was overwhelmed to have so much responsibility in a multi-million-pound company." Despite some setbacks, Wilnelia excelled in her course. Since then, she has completed another 'Project Management' qualification and is soon due to enroll on a Level 5 Management Diploma. Wilnelia continued, "It was a baptism of fire. Balancing a full-time - and often intense - job alongside a challenging qualification wasn't easy. At first, I was plagued with doubts - I struggled to believe in myself and find a work life balance. I stuck with it, and I'm so grateful that I did."

Reflecting on her adult learning journey so far, Wilnelia said: "Even though I haven't taken a traditional educational path with A-levels or university, I've been fortunate to be surrounded by a great support system at work. I'm going to continue learning, I haven't come this far to stop now. Knowledge is power, so whatever I can do to better myself and get to the next level - I'll do it. I'm really proud to be a person of colour making waves in this sector."





## Claire Gurton

Family Learning Award Winner



Claire Gurton was just 22 when she lost the sight in one of her eyes. She didn't know it at the time, but she was suffering with neuromyelitis optica (NMO), an autoimmune disease affecting the eyes and spinal cord. Claire continued to work for another 20 years, until four years ago when her health deteriorated, and she made the difficult decision to leave her busy job at the YMCA. She lost the sight in her other eye and developed some mobility issues, deafness and tinnitus, all of which caused her to become anxious and lose confidence.

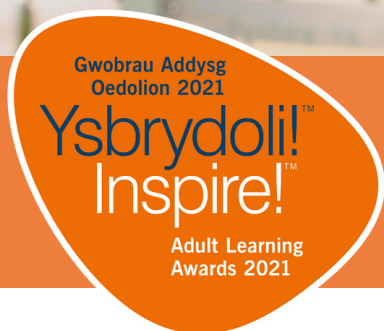
When her seven-year-old son Mackenzie's school started advertising Families Learning Together classes, through Cardiff and Vale College, Claire was apprehensive. Seeing the classes as a positive way of helping Mackenzie, who has ADHD and other neuro development issues, to improve his concentration and keep up with his classmates, Claire persevered. Now, Claire and Mackenzie have completed six classes and are planning to continue learning together. Mackenzie's teachers have noticed an improvement in his concentration and schoolwork, and Claire has a newfound confidence in her abilities.

She said: "Mackenzie was only recently diagnosed with ADHD so he's getting a lot more help now, but before he was medicated, we really struggled to get him to concentrate. You can't just teach him from a piece of paper, he needs to be actively engaged.

"He's behind his classmates at school. Going to classes together seemed like the perfect way to help him catch up and bring me up to speed on what he's learning so I could help more with his homework." She continued: "I felt really nervous and anxious. I hadn't done any learning in a long time, I wasn't sure I would be able to do it. And I didn't know what impact being blind and deaf would have on my ability to take part. I asked my husband to come with us to the first class, but I felt so supported that Mackenzie and I and guide dog Peggy went on our own after that.

"We started with a Literacy and Number Skills course. We did eight during the first lockdown. I was shielding so it was great to have something to occupy our time. It was a bonding experience for us, and we learned tips and tricks to help with homeschooling. In work, you get recognition for working hard. Every day you feel like you're achieving something. When I stopped working, I lost that. Going back into learning has helped me in so many ways.

"I always thought I wouldn't be able to do the same activities the other parents can do. Now I know I can, I'm much more confident and independent. I've made new friends and improved my own basic skills. I'm proud of what Mackenzie and I have been able to achieve."



## The Open University Nursing Students Skills at Work Award Winner



Nursing students at The Open University (OU) in Wales who decided to support frontline NHS workers during the pandemic while still studying have won a major award. The pre-registration programme taken by nursing students at The OU in Wales is spread over four years. The students are already support workers, completing their BSc in nursing alongside their existing, demanding jobs.

When the coronavirus pandemic began in the spring of 2020, the Nursing and Midwifery Council was asked by the Secretary of State to release nursing students to support the NHS. Under this arrangement, nursing students in the second and early third stages of their degrees were eligible. Apart from those required to shield for health reasons, every one of the eligible nursing students at The OU wanted to be part of the response – despite having to balance the demands of working long hours on the frontline with continuing their studies when they returned home.

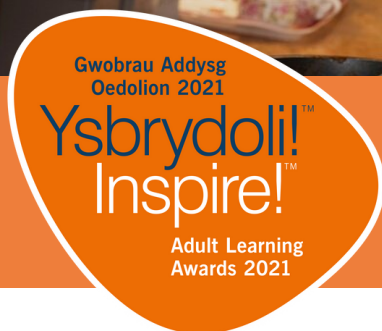
Ewa Smaglinska moved to North Wales from Poland in 2010 and is studying to become a mental health nurse. She said: "It has been very hard during the pandemic. To be recognised for how we pushed through and overcame this, whilst balancing our studies, feels amazing." Ewa continued: "Before the pandemic, I finished my first year of nursing. When I received the request it was an easy decision for me. To be able to help others and save lives is more important than anything. For nursing students, the coronavirus pandemic was an opportunity to play our role in a historical global moment, and to develop our nursing care skills in a way we would perhaps never experience again."

After her planned placements were cancelled, it was with the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) that Ewa began her work on the mental health ward.

She continued: "Things on the ground were moving so quickly. Our understanding of coronavirus was changing, medical practices were evolving, the number of patients was rising rapidly, staff were themselves in and out of work as a result of having Coronavirus as well. "I was always worried about catching the virus and bringing it home. There wasn't much of a personal life either – it was just work, study and then sleep. But these are things we all went through, and I always felt proud to be doing my bit to make a difference.

"We got through it by being committed to helping people and trying to be as positive as possible. I couldn't have done it without the support of the registered nurses. They treated me as an equal and valuable member of the team – I can't believe how much knowledge and experience I've gained by being surrounded by them."





## The UNISON WULF Project

Life Change and Progression Award Winner



The UNISON WULF Project aims to increase the skills, confidence, wellbeing, and employability of the public service workforce across Wales.

During the pandemic, the UNISON WULF Project adapted its services to deal with increased pressures being put on people working in the public sector. The project staff worked hard to make sure the service could be delivered entirely virtually, and to a much wider remit of people. It was able to support over 2,500 front-line NHS, social care, school support staff, Police Community Support Officers and other key workers from all parts of Wales through a wide range of learning opportunities such as webinars, e-learning and grants.

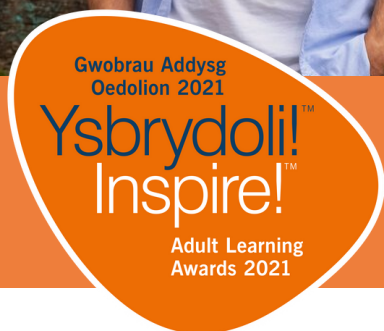
Richard Speight, Area Learning & Development Organiser at UNISON Cymru Wales, said: "We try to focus on lower-paid public service workers such as teaching assistants and care workers, who often don't have the training and educational opportunities offered to higher paid colleagues. Before the pandemic, our main focus was more about providing our learners with essential skills like literacy. Now, our remit has expanded to be far wider and more employment specific." When COVID hit, the first task was to ensure all social care workers in Wales had free access to coronavirus-specific infection control training, quickly rolling out a free e-learning course to over 800 people.

This offer, delivered through eLearningForYou, allowed care workers to join the sector and keep their professional development up-to-date during the crisis.

Richard said: "For many of our tutors, learning how to deliver engaging webinars was really difficult. Thankfully, we had the in-house knowledge to equip our tutors with the expertise to make this transition from classroom to webinar a smooth one." Since March 2020, the Project has delivered over 150 expert-led webinars. These have included 'Resilience' and 'Secondary & Vicarious Trauma' courses for Denbighshire Council's rapid COVID-19 redeployment pool, 'Aspiring Manager' courses for Ceredigion care workers and British Sign Language courses for NHS staff.

"None of this success would have been possible without the collaboration between our team, trade unions, employers and the individual themselves.

"We have strong relationships with trade unions and public sector employers who encourage workers to attend these sessions. It shows workers their development is valued so they're given the confidence and freedom to upgrade their skill-set."



## The Wallich Life Change and Progression Award Winner



The Wallich has been housing and supporting people who have experienced homelessness for over 40 years. As well as helping its service users to find housing, it creates learning and employment opportunities to help break the cycle of homelessness.

The Participation and Progression team runs four programmes to help service users gain essential skills and work experience – The BOSS Project, an employability and well-being programme for those with a criminal record in South Wales; a Peer Mentor Scheme to actively engage service users; WISE, a structured employability programme and a Creative Arts programme. Previous service users are heavily involved in designing and delivering the programmes run by the Participation and Progression team. David Bennett, who manages the BOSS Project, says "this is key to their success."

"People who have experienced rough sleeping and homelessness can be mistrustful of others – especially people in positions of authority. All our programmes are at least partly run or delivered by people who have lived experience of homelessness. We find this helps to engage service users and build trust, but it's also inspiring.

"This was one of the drivers for setting up the Peer Mentoring Scheme. We currently employ six peer mentors across Wales. By offering service users support from someone who has 'walked in their shoes' and who understands the barriers they face, we've seen an increase in positive engagement and outcomes for service users. Similarly, the BOSS Project is delivered by people with lived experience of the criminal justice system who support clients to find employment, complete qualifications, and access counselling services. This also helps to create an employment pathway for previous service users. Employing people who've experienced homelessness or rough sleeping, or who have experience with the criminal justice system is really important to us."

David continued: "We've seen some exceptional outcomes from WISE. In the last two years, 15 people have gained stable employment after completing the programme, with 11 more actively seeking employment. Almost 80 people have become digitally included or improved their computer skills and 28 have gained industry standard qualifications.

"There are lots of benefits to learning and the 'soft outcomes' are just as important. Like the 44 people who say they have improved feelings of stability and control, and the 15 who have improved mental health and wellbeing. Danielle, 39, graduated through the WISE programme, she said: "The Wallich gave me a chance when no one else would, who saw my potential regardless of my past, and helped me become the woman I am today. I just want to say a huge thank you to everyone I have worked with. You're all amazing people, keep doing what you're doing!"





## Stepping Stones – Next Steps Education Group

### Hywel Francis Community Impact Award



The Next Steps Survivors Education Group was set up for women who were survivors of abuse to learn new skills, improve their confidence and increase their overall wellbeing. Since it was set up two years ago, the learning group has given women the skills and self-belief to find employment, apply for university and help their children with their homework.

Shirley McCann, volunteer and events manager, says "The women are all survivors of physical and mental abuse who carry the lifelong effects of the trauma of their abuse with them in their lives. Some didn't go to school regularly and have little education. School wasn't a place of comfort or inspiration for them. All are lacking in self-confidence and self-esteem and many also experience poor mental health, unemployment, disability and isolation. "

For these women, every day is a battle. Lots of them struggle with simple things we would all take for granted – things like helping their children with homework or going shopping. Some of them were unable to fill out application forms or use computers. So, we listened to what they needed and set up weekly maths, English and IT classes."

For the Next Steps Survivors Education Group, learning has a wide range of benefits. As well as learning basic skills, the women have gained confidence and made new friends. Shirley continued: "At first the women who came were so nervous. They would say things like "I'm stupid", "I don't think I'll cope" or "they said I'd never be good at anything". It's taken time and patience, but we've seen the women start to grow."

"Working on their reading, writing, number and computer skills has helped them become more confident and feel more connected to the world. Moving the classes online during the pandemic helped the women get to grips with using software like Zoom, which meant they were able to keep in touch with their support networks during lockdown.

"These women have achieved so much. From qualifications in essential skills, to employment, to university and simply being able to do those things we take for granted like helping children with their homework – breaking the cycle of abuse. Some have even volunteered to take part in our peer support programme to help other women start their learning journey. Amy, 32, is a member of the Next Steps Survivors Education Group. She said: "Coming to the class is the best decision I have ever made. It helped turn a bad situation into a very good one. I am more positive, confident and happier, my mental health has improved and for once I actually feel proud of myself and positive for the future."



*A message from  
our supporters!*



WALES CYMRU

## The Open University in Wales



On behalf of all my colleagues at The Open University, let me firstly say a big congratulations to everyone who was involved with this year's Inspire! Adult Learning Awards.

Whether you were nominated, shortlisted, or won, you should be immensely proud: of your achievements, your contribution to your communities, and your learning. The stories we hear from nominees of how learning has changed their lives, how it has changed communities, and changed families for the better remind us of the awesome, transformational power of education.

Your experiences of learning, perhaps particularly during the last 18 months, tell that story. During the pandemic, some remarkable adaptations have been made by learners and providers alike, which have created real moments of hope and lessons which I hope we can take forward and make learning a lifelong prospect for everyone in Wales.

The Inspire! Awards are a timely reminder for us all to recognise how important learning is and to celebrate its power in keeping us occupied, keeping our brains active, and often, keeping us entertained. The Awards showcase the empowering force of new knowledge and new skills; they demonstrate how learning raises our aspirations, expands our horizons, and gives us motivation and inspiration every day.

We are all reminded by the brilliant nominees to redouble our efforts to make learning throughout life a reality for every person in every community across our country, regardless of identity, background, or circumstances. And while each of this year's nominees has a different story to tell, like every year, each one is just as inspirational as the next. Each one reminds us why education is so important. Each one has the capacity to unleash someone else's ambition, raise someone else's aspirations, and give someone else the confidence they need to believe that, yes, learning is for them.

So, congratulations to you all once again, and please remember that with your experiences and your knowledge, you are now members of the ever-growing community of people in every part of our country who are ambassadors for learning. Please go and tell your stories to all who will listen and help others enjoy the power and hope that you have unleashed for yourselves.

Best wishes to you all for the future and thank you again to our colleagues at the Learning and Work Institute Cymru.

**Louise Casella**

Director of The Open University in Wales





*A message from  
our supporters!*



## **Addysg Oedolion Cymru | Adult Learning Wales**

As a long-standing supporter of Adult Learners' Week and the Inspire! Awards, we are delighted to celebrate the achievements of nominees and award winners.

Addysg Oedolion Cymru | Adult Learning Wales - the National Community College and Voluntary Movement - is the culmination of over 100 years of heritage, all of which shapes how we work today. We have a proud history of helping people from all walks of life, in communities across Wales - shaping lives and providing inspirational learning.

It is crucial that we nurture, recognise and celebrate the skill of learning over a lifetime to secure informed, flexible, intelligent and healthy workforces and communities.

Adult Community Learning (ACL) supports a wide range of formal, non-formal and informal learning provision and is essential for all - particularly those who are hardest to reach, and furthest away from education and employment. Our work and other research shows the value of accessible education and how enhancing skills makes a real difference to people's lives.

Learning is perhaps more than a matter of building skills and knowledge around a profession; it is increasingly important to be well-rounded, to have a sense of perspective, and to be able to transfer learning experiences into generating new ideas and ways of doing things. The continued challenges presented by the pandemic serve further to illustrate a need to revise previous thinking and respond to changed prospects.

There is a wealth of scientific and anecdotal evidence that learning benefits memory, understanding language, solving problems, and making decisions. Learning helps to keep our brains working well, and as we continue to live longer and longer, we become increasingly more aware of this benefit. Learning doesn't stop at the school gate. In fact, for many, learning only starts once those gates are far behind them and society is all the better for it.

Huge congratulations to all Inspire! award winners and nominees - enjoy your success and enjoy this point in your continued journey - as we applaud your achievements and celebrate the rich tapestry of adult learning and all its rich variety.



**Agored Cymru**

The team at Agored Cymru are proud to continue our longstanding association with the Inspire! Awards.

These awards are happening during the most abnormal and challenging time in our history. We have seen the awards of GCSE and A-levels severely impacted by the Coronavirus crisis, and we have heard distressing stories of learners facing real adversity. However, at Agored Cymru we are pleased that we have continued to award learners of all ages, and in a variety of settings qualifications that are enabling them to progress and move forwards.

Progression and lifechanging learning underpins everything that Agored Cymru stands for. This is the reason that as a Welsh Awarding Body we continue to work with the Learning and Work Institute to celebrate success stories. The Inspire! Awards are about learners of all ages achieving great things, often against the odds. We are proud that our qualifications can play an important part in recognising their achievements.

Lifelong learning has never been more important as we continue to negotiate the uncertainties of 2020 and beyond. The education and training network in Wales is strong and made up of providers whose only aim is to help learners achieve their goals. Learning for fun, learning as a hobby, learning for work, or learning to create opportunities in higher levels of education - whatever the purpose Agored Cymru stands up for the right to high quality lifelong education and training. These activities are vital for the economy, for health and wellbeing, and for communities.

Agored Cymru continues to award thousands of qualifications to learners every year. We understand that a qualification is only one aspect of the overall benefits felt by learners, but it is vital that learners receive recognition of their achievements. The Inspire! Awards offer a further valuable opportunity to recognise these achievements through celebrating some of the most powerful learner stories in Wales.

Congratulations to every winner of an award and the very best of luck with your future!





*A message from  
our supporters!*



Y Ganolfan  
Dysgu Cymraeg  
Genedlaethol —  
National Centre  
for Learning Welsh

## National Centre for Learning Welsh

Celebrating the achievements of adult learners helps inspire others to take up the baton and the National Centre for Learning Welsh is delighted to support this year's Inspire! Awards.

Learning a new skill gives people confidence and can open new doors in terms of career and interests. Joining a class can also help people connect with each other.

We know that people want to learn Welsh for many reasons, whether to support children in Welsh medium education, reconnect with their roots or widen their job opportunities.

Giving learners choice and flexibility when it comes to learning is all-important. Most Welsh courses are currently being held in virtual classrooms, while new 'blended' courses, which combine tutor-led lessons in a virtual or 'real' classroom with online self-study modules, have also been introduced.

The 'Starting out – Welsh Beginner' category in the Inspire! Awards is a great way to celebrate the achievements of those starting on their language journey. It can take confidence to take those first few steps into the classroom, but once there, the buzz of learning will soon take hold!

The past year has shown how we can all adapt to new ways of learning in order to enrich our lives, strengthen our skills and support our wellbeing.

Our message to learners, and to Welsh learners in particular, is to take advantage of all opportunities to learn and practise your new skills, including online and virtual activities,



Nominations for the 2022 Inspire! Adult Learning Awards are open.

Learning and Work Institute welcome nominations for people, community projects and organisations in Wales.

Closing date for entries is 1 March 2022.

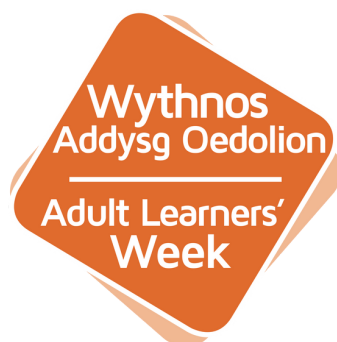
Visit [www.learningandwork.wales](http://www.learningandwork.wales) for more information about the awards.







*change your story...*



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