Qualifications for homeless people, ex-offenders and refugees thanks to legacy from NEC tutor in college's 50th year

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Clients of charities working with homeless people, ex-offenders and refugees are learning new skills and working towards qualifications to help them into employment, thanks to a £19,000 legacy to distance and online college the National Extension College(NEC) http://www.nec.ac.uk/ from one of its longstanding tutors, Eileen Sellars. Eileen, who died in 2011 at the age of 88, wanted NEC to use the money to support students who have to overcome disadvantage in order to study.

The opportunity for a group of more than 25 people to change their lives through learning without having to pay their own course fees has come about as a result of a new {highlight}partnership between NEC and charities Crisis, St Giles Trust and the Refugee Council. The partnership is being funded by the bursary scheme set up as a result of Eileen's legacy.

In NEC's 50th year and just two years after Eileen's death, a group of people who would not otherwise have been able to afford to study are on the road to gaining qualifications as diverse as GCSEs and International GCSEs in English Language and sociology, 'A' level biology and a certificate in Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS).

Case studies

Refugee Council volunteer Emmanuel * is an asylum seeker from the Ivory Coast. A lawyer in his home country, Emmanuel spoke little English when he arrived in the UK. Now, he is studying for an IGCSE (International GCSE) in English and aims to continue his studies with a course in counselling. Emmanuel considers the UK his home, and hopes that one day he may be able to practice law again. 'When the opportunity to study with NEC came up I grabbed it with both hands and felt very relieved when I was given a place. I can fit my online studies around my two young children and my volunteering commitments,' says Emmanuel.

Dave * is a serving prisoner who volunteers on day release at St Giles Trust on a project helping young people break free from gang crime. He started a Level 3 Certificate in Advice and Guidance with St Giles Trust but was transferred from one prison to another before he had chance to finish the course. Dave has enrolled through the NEC bursary scheme on a Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLs) course and has this to say: 'I am due for release in June next year and hope to use my experience and the PTLLs qualification to help me to achieve my goal of gaining sustainable employment upon release.'

*Not their real names

NEC'S flexible model of learning means the students can start their course whenever it suits them, and fit their learning in around other commitments, rather than having to follow conventional term times and timetables. 27 people have already started studying, and more are due to start over the next few weeks.

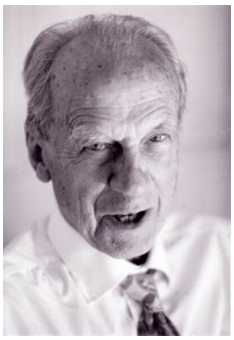
The most popular course choice amongst the new students who have been enrolled through the partnership so far is PTLLS, which leads to a qualification that will help the charities' clients become more economically independent by teaching new skills to others. It's a partnership which shows the value of voluntary organisations working together to enhance what they offer users.

The charities have approached potential students on the basis of them showing a genuine desire to learn, having the language and literacy skills they need to study at their chosen level and being willing to inspire others by talking about their aspirations and progress. Each charity has agreed to provide students with access to a computer and ongoing support throughout their course.

Ros Morpeth, NEC's Chief Executive, said: '50 years after Michael Young set out to offer an alternative way of learning for adults, there could be no better way of celebrating his legacy than the three partnerships we are announcing today. As we celebrate our 50th anniversary, I am sure Michael and Eileen would be delighted that NEC continues to change the lives of people whose needs today are no less distinctive than those of our first learners. We wish our newest students success with their courses and look forward to hearing about their achievements over the coming months.'

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