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A woman from Ely opened up about how learning is adding up for her as maths and literacy qualifications means she can progress her career in childcare, despite suffering from dyslexia.

Sharon can look to a brighter future having gained her qualifications by attending courses run by the newly relaunched adult community learning service Cambridgeshire Skills.

For her it was a great achievement, she said: “I am dyslexic so my school time wasn’t great and I needed to get Maths Level 2 and English Level 2.” She explained that it helped her to find herself again, adding: “I have always struggled with dyslexia but never been formally diagnosed. I need to use a red overlay to stop the text ‘dancing’ on the screen or on paper.”

Sharon’s course involvement proved a true success, as she highlighted: “On my first sitting of my assessment on paper I just missed by a few marks but with encouragement and support I did resit my Level 2 Maths and passed online.”

As Sharon and many other students return to class for the autumn term, Cambridgeshire County Council has launched a rebranded adult community learning service focused on improving work and life prospects for those who most need it.

From September, Cambridgeshire Skills, formerly Cambridgeshire Adult Learning and Skills Service, will extend its existing offer of accredited and non-accredited Basic Skills courses such as English, Maths, IT and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL).

In addition, Cambridgeshire Skills will now provide a range of vocational courses designed to help people find work or change employment, including in customer service, retail, business administration, hospitality, warehousing, horticulture, child care and development, and becoming a teaching assistant.

It will also continue to provide its well established courses for local people with learning difficulties and disabilities to develop life and employment skills.

Another student, Alba who lives in Fenland, attended the ESOL – Speak to communicate course at March community Centre so she could build up her English to an employable level. She explained: “I am currently unemployed and looking for work. I have started learning English to be able to communicate and find a good job.”

After completing the course, she is now fully capable of making appointments and to describe issues she may have and her level of writing has improved as well.

Not only has this course equipped Alba with the knowledge to speak and write in English, Alba has cultivated great sense of confidence. She said “I am more confident in communicating and now I know that I will be able to learn more of the language to find a job.”

Operating from its new bases in March and Ely and across the county from community venues such as libraries, community centres and faith venues, the service will offer a wide range of classes throughout the day and evening to meet the local needs and demands.

Tanya Meadows, head of Cambridgeshire Skills said: “We have a long history in Cambridgeshire, having successfully delivered adult learning for well over 100 years!

“People recognise that learning is one of the greatest investments they can make for their future and that of their families and communities, as it opens up a wealth of opportunities.

“We support people who live and work in the county to improve their work and career prospects; get more out of their family lives and social relationships and generally improve their confidence and wellbeing through the range of courses we offer.”

Since August, the £2.25M funding of Cambridgeshire Skills is devolved to the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA), a move that has seen no reduction in the amount of money spent in the county – but a change to focus it more on those who need it most and those who are furthest away from learning and work.

Cllr Kevin Cuffley, vice-chair of Cambridgeshire County Council’s Communities and Partnership committee said: “By working with residents and helping their progression into training and work, our relaunched service will be supporting local employers with the skills they need to help them recruit locally.

“We recognise the importance of leisure and pleasure classes to those who enjoy them, helping to reduce social isolation and build friendships. We will continue to encourage current sub-contractors to maintain their existing leisure programmes by making them self-funded through the fees they already charge.”

Courses are free for adults aged 19+ who have lived in the EEA for at least three years and who are unemployed or low waged and in receipt of active benefits.

Details of the classes, term dates and how to enrol are available online at www.cambsals.co.uk
(<http://www.cambsals.co.uk/>)

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