

The Value of Adult Education

Community Testimonies from Colchester People



From the year 2000 updated video:



“I was forced to retire at the age of 59, so I was looking around for something to do and my wife said to me, “Why don’t you try Grey Friars? They do all kinds of education courses there.” So I did, I wanted to try something I had never done before, and I am actually doing a painting course at the moment. It’s a course where you get 10 credits when you complete the course, which then enables you to get on an access course, and if you want to, to go and get a degree. There are so many courses available at Greyfriars, whether you are interested in computers, flower arranging, or you wish to become an artist”.



“I’ve always known that I’m not stupid but I didn’t get any qualifications at school, because it just was not relevant at the time, I suppose. So, a friend said to me “Why not come to Grey Friars?” And I must admit when I first came in I was very upset to be told that I was at a very basic level, ‘cause nobody like to think that their skills are basic, but I started in one of Grey Friars’ basic English classes, which I really enjoyed, then I went on and did my A levels, and got an A, which I was very pleased with.

I am also helping to teach the basic English classes, because I know what it’s like to need to start somewhere. I feel there is hope. This gives everybody a chance. It’s nice to be able to come back later on.

I think the advantage of a place like Grey Friars is that they give you credit for your maturity and for your life experience, and it’s nice to be appreciated and valued for who you are.

I think it expanded my social circle, I think I moved on and aspire to more. I’ve seen more ways of living a life and my absolute dream is to write. I write a lot and I’d love to get a play or something published. That’s dream material. But in reality I am doing this Assisting Teacher’s course which I enjoy, I’d perhaps like to go onto primary education, or nursing”.



“I retired from private practice as a solicitor about 18 months ago, I’d had enough, I needed to change. So I spent about a year wondering what I was going to do, and saw an advertisement for Grey Friars Adult Community College for fashion design and pattern cutting courses. Until then I hadn’t even considered adult community education. It’s something that when you’ve been educated, you’ve had your education throughout your life, you’ve been a professional you don’t automatically think of as a way of changing the direction of your life.

The standard of tuition here is really high, and it’s a nice informal atmosphere, you don’t feel inhibited or intimidated by it, because again, there is a sense of partnership and we are here to achieve a common goal, and having an access to education throughout your life I think is very important because you can always learn new skills, and you can always convey those new skills to other members of society.

These days, you don’t have a job for life, a lot of people are burnt out by the time they are 40 or 45 or even 50. Knowing that you can re-train in an environment such as this, is very important. Again, it’s having that goal, having that ambition, and it doesn’t stop just because you happen to have attained a certain age, you’ve still got more ambitions, you’ve still got other things you want to do”.



“I have been coming to Grey Friars for the last four years and at that point, I had been unemployed for eight or nine years, and I knew I had to start somewhere and I had no qualifications, and I had a huge gap with no experience. And if you don’t have any qualifications and you don’t have any experience, and you don’t know what you want to do, you can come here and they won’t turn you away at the door, whereas when you want to go to college and you read the prospectus it’s really intimidating: you need three A levels, 8 O Levels or whatever. Here, you don’t need any of that and you can sign on to most courses. Being here has enabled me to apply myself, I found I can actually apply myself to things and I can finish things and achieve things and discover loads of talents. I have applied to do a degree in Art and design at the Institute in Colchester and then go on and do my M.A. in Art Therapy”.

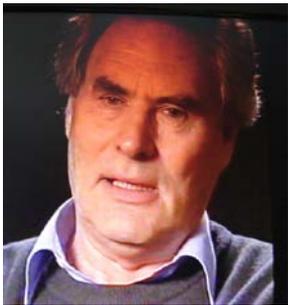


“When I started out in September I was just expecting it to be a course so I can fill my time and it turned out to be something I really enjoyed and I thought perhaps next year I start going into my GCSE Mathematics. But around November / December time I thought I was ready or I know I was ready to go and do my Maths GCSE. I thought this was going to be the first thing I successfully have got myself and even thinking about it cheered me up so much, I thought “one step forward”. It’s something I can write on my CV and it’s an extra line I can put down. There’s always

going to be that failure, those few people who didn't get what they expected at school. It does help when you can feel as comfortable as if you are sitting in a front room with your friends, 'cause it is what it is basically and I am looking forward to it and if I can get there early on I turn up earlier".



"You can call me a permanent student. I just enjoy classes because I enjoy the enthusiasm. It improves the quality of life of an enormous number of people. What's the alternative? People getting bored and getting ill. But if you want to avoid those two things, it's a very good idea to go on a class of this kind".



"I happened to go on a trip to Spain about three years ago on holiday with a group of friends, and a guy I went with was really enthusiastic about Spain so he excited me into going to learn more about the Spanish language. It's great, we have a lot of fun and we learn Spanish and it sort of combines a social activity and a learning activity".



"It took me a few years to find a course that would suit the school hours and the holidays. So I started with the interest course just to get a taste of it and see if I liked it, then there was the intermediate one, which by that time was something I felt I would like to pursue and in last September I enrolled for the practitioners course and I would like to do some other courses in Homeopathy or Kinesiology, but I'd like to do the actual practitioners rather than interest courses now".



"At Grey Friars, they help you choose what you want to do and say: "You could apply here, you could apply there, you could do this next" and they are very good at putting you forward. I got a lot of help from my tutors and they are very nice, they all congratulated me when I said I got my place at the Institute. If there hadn't been childcare here, I just wouldn't have been able to do it and it's very cheap for the all

day. It's same as the crèche for the day, roughly, as a childminder for an hour. A lot of people who take some time at home with their child, lose their confidence they had at work and the habit of interacting with other adults, and I think that going into education in-between gives you that edge back. And initially you are scared you think "Oh, I am going back into the classroom, I can't do it I've got to study". But you can, everybody else is in the same boat as you so you're no different to everybody else.

You are all adults and having another go, tutors are really friendly and helpful, all the other people become good friends. There are still people from other courses that I've done before this Art and Design course that I am still good friends with, we still keep in contact".



"I am just doing the Information Technology courses because they are particularly useful at the moment for me. Before Christmas this year I did the Global Communications course, which involved designing websites. That was really interesting I really enjoyed that, and I have done a Database course, and a presentation and word processing course, and a spreadsheet course. Two other courses that I've actually done based at Grey Friars have been the Preliminary Disabled Teachers for Swimming course and the Parent and Child course, and I still work as a swimming teacher on a part-time basis. I can't think of anywhere else that has a variety of courses that are available daytime and evenings".



"At the school where my son goes to, they advertised Grey Friars courses starting actually at the school. It was a Word Power course, which involves Basic English, with your children coming to the class with you, and I thought maybe I could start refreshing my memory on things and get more qualifications behind me in order actually to get back to the world and work. Doing the first two courses at the school gave me the confidence to go on and do a creative writing course. I am also doing a parenting course, which is run by the social services and helps you deal with teenagers.

I have got so much more confidence I am also now a parent governor at my son's school, and I stick up for myself more now. Most of all, the education was fun. It wasn't hard, it wasn't impossible and the tutors made it so easy for us to learn that we were like little sponges sucking out all the knowledge that we could, and there are a lot of like-minded people out there.

There are a few of us who now have gone out and started a parents' group for the estate, where we are getting them to come in and help with the children, so in a way they are self-educating as well. It's getting better; we have an association now, for which I am the secretary, and we are getting together as a community. It is exactly what it needs: it needs input of money from the Council and it needs education".

Participants' summing-up:

"I would just like to pay respect to the teachers 'cause I think they play a big part in why this place works so well".

"And they are all very patient, and they give time to each individual".

"Tutors in Grey Friars are people who are very, very creative, who give you ideas, and give you inspiration".

"It is mind-blowing to start off with, but it is amazing what you turn out in the end".

"You do something positive and hopefully it will lead you somewhere".

"Now I know there is something out there, there is more that I can do; there is more life that I can live".

From 1988's video:

"I took a course in typing and can now touch-type. I did an introduction to computers and word-processing and generally learned things like English and Maths back from scratch, things that I'd forgotten. I've been married for 28 years, I've got two children, 22 and 17, I haven't worked for the last 5 years, and I wanted to get back into employment. I think it's very good for women who have been at home for some time and have lost their confidence, and want to get out, maybe go back to work part-time or during holidays. It's the next step: rather than trying to do it yourself you get help and it boosts your confidence."

"It's just a nice way, a gradual way, of getting back into the idea of going out to work full-time or part-time, whatever you prefer. It's not as easy as people sometimes think to have stopped work and had a gap for four or five years, and go straight back into it because a lot of things have changed, especially technologies. This has been very good, the facilities here are very good, the word-processing, electric type-writers, and good tutors."

"I enjoyed the word-processing on computers; before, computers were a bit of a baffle, but once they taught us the basics, I seemed to get on very well especially the word-processing, which was good fun. I would definitely recommend the course to other people. It's just about coming out, meeting other people, and the basics they give you if you want to get a job or if you want to carry on with your education in a day school or night school."

"We've been developing our communication skills, building up our confidence, and reassessing our education standing at the moment with a view to go on to further education later on. I think it's a good course, it's a good confidence builder, and it gets you back into the classroom environment."

"I would like to become a qualified probation officer, that's the CQSW qualification, and I've been put off by the amount of book-work that would be involved in the two-year course. Now I've been here for four days, I feel a lot more confident that I could tackle the books. I enjoyed the course, it was excellent. I've been on many courses in my life and this is one of the more enjoyable ones. It's often that when you go to a course like this you don't know what standard you're actually at. And I tend to bring myself down so I had my ego boosted coming here. I was at work last night and I actually did recommend the course to colleagues."

Grey Friars - Colchester's specialist adult college



Began in 1965 as the Borough Council's 'Colchester Senior Evening Institute'
Ended in 2005 as the Adult Community College Colchester, when its locally-managed college status was removed and all Essex adult education was directly managed from County Hall, Chelmsford.

Grey Friars was vacated, emptied, offered for sale by Essex County Council in 2007 and is now a luxury hotel.

This video was found when the building's contents were being disposed of in skips.

It can now be viewed on You Tube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1qo1cg8211l>

The history of the site and its occupants can be followed on the community 'sharing heritage' website:

www.greyfriarscolchester.org.uk

Community interest and interaction on the social history of the site can be found on Facebook www.facebook.com/greyfriarscolchester