

Eager to continue sharing



Hava is a remarkable student. Originally a maths teacher in Istanbul, Turkey, Hava was eager to continue sharing her knowledge. When she attended her first class with the WEA, she had low levels of English language skills but did not let that be a barrier for her to succeed. Since 2016 Hava has completed the Level 2 support work in schools and colleges, progressed on to more specialist SEND courses with the WEA and this year has been accepted to study PGCE Maths at the University of Oxford.

Now a fluent English speaker, Hava has been working as a support worker in schools within Oxford. Her kind nature and passion for learning have seen her support not only children in schools but her peers in class too. She cares deeply for the wellbeing of others and has spoken at schools about her aspirations and achievements, as well as supporting at refugee events in Oxford.

She is an outstanding role model and an inspiration to her fellow students. Her incredible achievements have been shared locally so that her story continues to raise the aspirations of fellow ESOL students, refugees and other women, and to challenge the stereotypical attitudes towards these groups.

Hava
WEA student
Oxford



**The WEA course was
the first step on my
journey and helped me
get a place at Oxford
University.**

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47,910+
students in
England

8,527
courses in
England

2000+
Volunteers



WEA impact report 2019

Challenges such as unemployment, social exclusion, self-doubt and anxiety are combining to create gaps in our communities.

At the WEA, we help to bridge these gaps with adult education.

This impact report demonstrates the social value of the WEA over the last year and how the 'WEA effect' on people's lives creates real change...

What does the WEA effect sound like?



I hated school...

This is nothing like school!



I don't know where to start...

I now have my dream job



I'm so nervous...

We got there together!



I feel like I'm useless...

I can do this!



I feel like I don't fit in...

I feel like I really belong here

Executive summary

Adult education within reach

At the WEA, our purpose is to bring adult education *within reach* - because so often this life raft to a better future is made inaccessible due to cost, location or lack of information. We recognise the responsibility this brings to keep providing excellent teaching in local communities. Indeed, more than half (58%) of our students choose courses that are delivered locally to them.

Our amazing tutors and volunteers work right at the heart of neighbourhoods, where their dedication to high standards and inclusivity makes the biggest impact. They strive to widen participation in education by targeting those furthest from work. For tens of thousands of people across the UK, this impact is not only on employability but their health and wellbeing, family life and community engagement.

These unexpected consequences of education make a very intentional difference to the UK's bottom line – saving money for the NHS, reducing the strain on local services and contributing to more connected families and communities. These wider benefits for society have been central to the WEA mission for over a century.

Golden thread of progression

There's no such thing as a typical WEA student: we teach people from 19 to 100 years old, across a diverse range of ethnicity, disability and previous educational experience. Mike is a lifelong learner. Lisa thought she'd never set foot in a classroom again. Seinab was well-educated, but wasn't able to speak English. Margaret could tell amazing stories, but couldn't write a shopping list. All found a home at the WEA.

People choose to go back into education for a variety of reasons, and often when they are seeking a change in their lives. Regardless of the course – whether pottery or digital skills – the impact is the same. That intent for progression is a golden thread that connects all our students. Our students feel empowered to move on to another course, seek employment or start volunteering.



Talking of which, we are immensely proud of all 2,000+ volunteers, without whom the WEA simply wouldn't achieve the impact that we've shared in this report. They are at the heart of our mission and take on a staggering variety of roles from giving time at their local branch, community outreach, classroom assistance or more formal contributions to governance.

Force for good

It's interesting to note that half (49%) of all our students are drawn to an individual tutor when they choose their course. We're very fortunate to offer such a respected company of tutors who encourage students, helping them gain confidence, knowledge and skills. Again, there's no typical tutor – they are extraordinary in every sense! They do so much more than teach, putting themselves forward as a 'guide by your side' when students need support most.

Perhaps, most of all, we've been a force for good in people's lives. The percentages, photographs and quotes in this report help to shine a light on the work we do at the WEA. But they can't capture all the smiles and laughter, tears and, the high-fives, the *how-are-yous?* that make the WEA such a satisfying organisation to be a part of. Together, we support students to take their next steps, whether that's finding a job or simply the courage to face whatever tomorrow brings.

That's what we call impact. That's the WEA effect.

John Widdowson

WEA Chair

Why we exist - the need for the WEA

The UK is caught in a vicious cycle...

- ▶ **Over a quarter** of working-age adults in the UK have low or no qualifications
- ▶ **9 million** adults lack functional literacy, numeracy or both
- ▶ **11.5 million** adults lack basic digital skills¹
- ▶ Participation in adult education is at a **20-year low**
- ▶ Total spending on adult education (excluding apprenticeships) has fallen by **nearly two-thirds** since 2003–04

Unemployment figures have reduced in recent years, but this doesn't tell the full story...

4 million workers live in poverty – 500,000 more than five years ago. In-work poverty is rising faster than employment, primarily among working parents²

However, adult education is not just about employability and skills. It also has a significant impact on health and wellbeing in society. Adult education can help those who left school with few qualifications and few skills.

Around 1.2 million Brits suffer from chronic loneliness. This costs the state an estimated £6,000³ per person for every decade of old age. The financial impact of **disconnected communities is believed to cost the UK economy £32 billion every year**⁴.

1. According to Ipsos 2017

2. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2018>

3. According to researchers at the London School of Economics

4. According to research commissioned by Eden Project initiative The Big Lunch

...we exist to break it

At the WEA, we want the most disadvantaged adults in society to have access to learning opportunities. This mission continues to inform everything we do.

47,910+

students in England

8,527

courses in England

38%

of students live in a disadvantaged postcode

44%

of students on income-related benefits

41%

with no or very low level previous qualifications

2,000+

community-based venues

2,000+

volunteers

WEA's unique approach to adult education

Together, we believe in adult education for all. We believe in lifelong learning. And, we believe adult education counts towards a better society.

The WEA is on the frontline of adult education in society, helping people to get a job – or improve their health and wellbeing.

The impact showcased in this report demonstrates how adult education can reduce pressure on the NHS, support the

skills agenda, support people into work and strengthen communities.

The evidence shows that year on year we make a consistent impact to our students' lives.

Whether it's finding the skills to take on tomorrow or learning for the joy of knowledge - we're here, together, to make good things happen in our communities and bring change to our society.

Key findings

This report presents the findings of research⁵ with more than 5,000 adult students who responded to questions on the wider impact of their learning with the WEA.

Here are the key findings over the last 12 months.



Helping unemployed students move into work

- 91%** felt ready for work
- 69%** had a clearer idea of how to get a job
- 33%** found work after their course



In work progression for employed students

- 31%** could do their job better
- 30%** were more confident for the future
- 7%** earned more; 8% got a new job

5. For details on the methodology used in this research, please contact research@wea.org.uk



Improving mental and physical health and wellbeing

- 81%** felt more confident
- 61%** improved their mental health condition
- 56%** felt less stressed



Skills for life and work

- 54%** are now independent learners
- 53%** improved their critical thinking
- 44%** are now better communicators
- 23%** became better problem solvers



Vibrant communities and active citizens

- 80%** found it easier to make new friends
- 70%** mixed with people of different backgrounds
- 39%** have gained the skills to volunteer
- 37%** are more accepting of other cultures
- 36%** now feel they belong more in their community



Positive impact on parenting and family life

- 66%** encouraged their children to learn more
- 64%** can now help their children with reading, writing or maths
- 60%** now feel closer to their children

Who is learning?

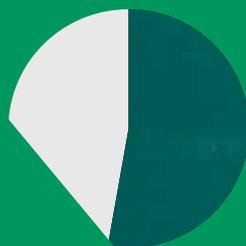
Our WEA learner numbers...



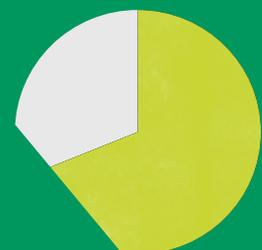
76% Women
24% Men

- ▶ Over a **third** of WEA students have a physical health condition or illness
- ▶ **One in ten** have a learning difficulty, disability or mental health condition
- ▶ **One in five** are carers
- ▶ **Half** do not have a degree level education
- ▶ **One in five** have no qualifications at all
- ▶ Over a **third** have Level 2 (GCSE) qualifications or below

Our wide range of courses attracts students from across the work spectrum:



53% Under 60
(of working age)
47% Over 60



69% White British
31% BAMER
(of whom 19% do not speak English as their first language)

Lifelong learners

Our broad reach in society is a fundamental strength of our organisation. 48% of our students are retired at enrolment and choose to study at the WEA for the love of learning, and for personal and social reasons, rather than improving their employability prospects. We have reflected these separate motivations where relevant in our impact report.

People come to WEA to:

- 81%** Improve knowledge or skills in the subject
- 50%** Have something fun do in their spare time
- 38%** Improve their mental wellbeing
- 15%** Further education, training or learning

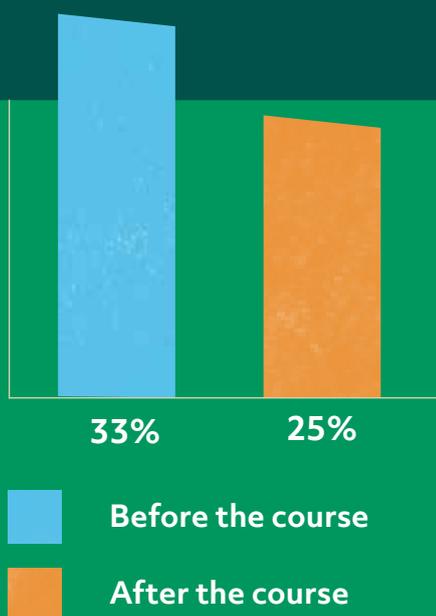
Learn more, better impact

Half of our students do two or more courses with the WEA. A quarter of them reported higher levels of impact across all outcomes including health and wellbeing, employability and self-confidence.

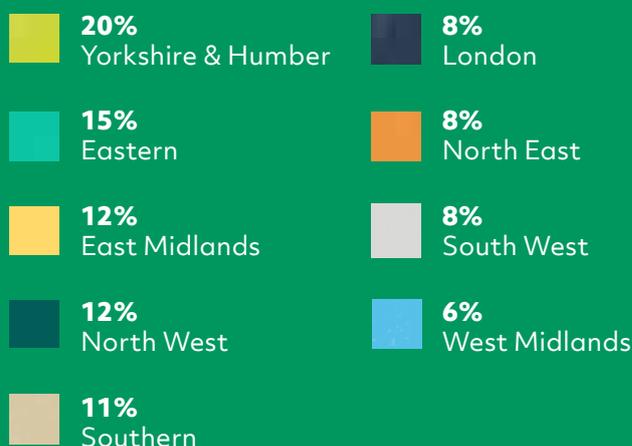
The benefits of learning?

BEFORE: A third of our students were claiming means-tested benefits when they began their WEA course.

AFTER: Within six months of completing their course, one in four of them had stopped claiming benefits.



Where are we teaching?



Essential skills for life and work

Through engaging in adult education, our students become healthier, more confident and more resilient. These last two qualities – confidence and resilience – may sound less important than hard skills such as carpentry, data science or nursing. **But when you look closer at the evidence, the skills crisis in the economy comes into sharp focus.**

Lack of soft workplace skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, communication and creativity are a common barrier to recruitment. Surveys of employers suggest that increasing numbers of school leavers are entering the job market without the confidence and resilience to cope with complexity and ambiguity. Unless these talents are learnt as adults, then the skills gap will continue to widen.

That's where the WEA can help. In fact, we already do. This report explains how.

The rate of soft skills development was higher for students from BAMER backgrounds, those of working age, those on low incomes and with low or no qualifications. This reflects the fact that these skills are typically high priority in their reasons for learning with the WEA.

The wider benefits of learning

64% of all students developed life skills: including critical thinking, decision making, problem-solving and parenting

55% of all students developed language and communication skills

28% of all students developed functional skills, including: literacy, numeracy, ICT and managing the family budget

Life skills: critical thinking, decision making, problem solving and parenting:

Under 60/working age	68%
On benefits	74%
BAMER	73%
No qualifications	61%
Entry - L5 qualifications	65%

Language and communication skills:

Under 60/working age	66%
On benefits	76%
BAMER	73%
No qualifications	63%
Entry - L5 qualifications	60%

Functional skills: literacy, numeracy, ICT, managing the family budget:

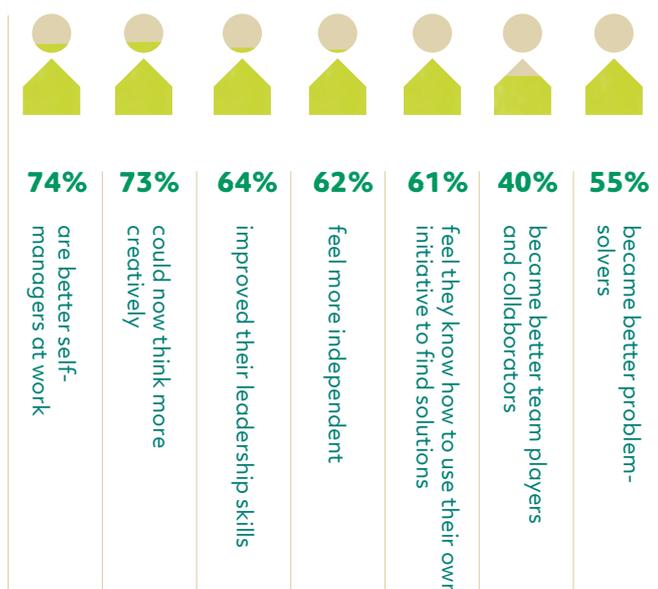
Under 60/working age	39%
On benefits	49%
BAMER	57%
No qualifications	43%
Entry - L5 qualifications	35%

Progressing unemployed adults into work

WEA courses have a notable impact on students who are unemployed and looking for work:



Helping unemployed students gain relevant soft skills for work:



Understanding the starting points for students

Students with no or lower level qualifications improved in core areas such as reading and writing (**71%** and **63%** respectively), managing the family budget (**34%** and **27%**), decision-making (**76%** and **72%**) and maths/numeracy (**54%** and **32%**).

Over a third (**36%**) of our students said that they would not have had the opportunity to improve their skills if it were not for the WEA, especially students under the age of 60 (**60%**), those on benefits (**49%**) and those with entry to Level 5 qualifications (**45%**).

Job-wise, 87% of unemployed students (who were seeking work) benefitted from the WEA courses overall.

Of these, 64% said they would not have secured these job-related benefits without the WEA.

Building confidence for life and work

Funders and policymakers often focus on the impact of adult education on the workplace – helping unemployed people find work, upskilling those already in work and also developing pathways for people at risk of redundancy.

Finding work from a position of being unemployed is notoriously difficult. Studies have shown how employers are more likely to recruit people who are already in a job rather than people outside the workforce.⁶

These issues are even greater for older job seekers for whom getting back into work becomes even harder. Currently, 38% of unemployed individuals in the UK aged 50 and over (116,000 people) have been unemployed for over 12 months, compared with 29% of 25-49 year olds and 19% of 18-24 year olds.⁷

Of the proportion of WEA students who are unemployed and seeking work:



Importantly, adult learning can help build confidence and prepare people of all ages for the workplace – and also for the difficult process of seeking work in a competitive environment.

We know that adult learning improves the skills and aptitudes in adults of working age, as well as the development of key competencies and qualities that employers want.

The experiences of our students bring this to life. Take Tom, for example; after two years' struggling with a back injury, he was unemployed and looking for a new career away from factories and warehouses. He was referred to join a WEA course by his DWP Work Coach. Soon after, Tom worked with two Lloyds Banking Group volunteers, who visited to give employment advice. They also helped with mock interviews - asking questions and giving feedback. The course not only helped Tom build his confidence, but he also ended up volunteering himself for the WEA. He is now an IT admin assistant, working full time for the WEA.

For many other willing-to-work people like Tom in society, adult education offers a life raft back into employment, and the sense of fulfilment and empowerment that a job brings.



Lloyds Banking Group and particularly Scottish Widows have worked with the WEA in a highly successful partnership since 2014, supporting students to improve their employability and digital skills with help from our volunteers. The WEA plays a vital role in communities that need the help the most, and we are proud to play a small part in helping them to achieve their goal of allowing everyone to become the best they can be.

⁶ Employers and the recruitment of unemployed people: An evidence review (Briefing Paper December 2011) <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/13251/1/evidence-review-employers-recruitment-unemployed.pdf>

⁷ Addressing worklessness and job insecurity amongst people aged 50 and over in Greater Manchester November 2017, Centre for Ageing Better, quoting ONS figures from 2017.

Getting job ready

Dan came to the WEA through a Building Better Opportunities arts and crafts engagement project supporting adults with mental health issues.

He really engaged with the art group, enjoying the activities and made a lot of progress during his time on the course.

But then, he stopped attending as sadly, Dan's depression had returned, and he found coming along to the project too much.

The team kept in touch with him, just to let him know that there was support if he needed it and he reconnected with us in November 2017. He was feeling, better and as he was about to be moved on from Employment Seeker's Allowance, to Job Seeker's Allowance he was sure we would be able to help him get ready to apply for jobs.

Dan had his heart set on an apprenticeship. Securing this role would enable him to help young people struggling with mental health issues in his community, in the same way, that he had been

supported. Over a series of one to one meetings funded by the BBO project, we helped Dan to apply for his dream job and prepare for the interview.

Finally Dan got his dream apprenticeship. Dan is just one of the thousands of students we have helped to gain employment and a shining example of the importance of employability skills and coaching.

Dan
WEA student
Eastern



In-work progression for employed students

For those in the workplace, learning remains important. Building confidence and gaining new skills and knowledge enables low-paid workers to progress and adapt to the pace of change in the modern workplace, with changing patterns of work as well as increasing automation.

Many employees do not feel that their skill-set matches the role they are in. In a CIPD survey of 3,700 UK employees, more than a third (37%) of workers were found to have the skills to cope with

more demanding duties than they currently have. At the opposite end of the scale, one in ten (12%) employees said they lacked all the skills needed to carry out their job effectively. This means that as many as half (49%) of UK workers could be in the wrong job, based on their skill level.⁸

Adult education courses help working students upskill to match the requirements of their current job. It also helps students to gain the confidence to apply their existing skills in more senior roles or in a new role.

81% of employed students received at least one employability-related benefit. Of them, **31%** believed they would not have had the opportunity to get these job-related benefits without the WEA course.

53% of employed students reported gaining new skills or knowledge they might use in a job as a result of WEA courses.

37% have gone on to do another taught course, of whom **58%** will be gaining qualifications.

26% started earning more as a result of the WEA course.



The WEA is not a crutch. It's a launchpad. There are definitely opportunities for adults to learn - if you're not afraid to take them.

Debbie
WEA student
Falkirk

Improving mental and physical health and wellbeing

The NHS' latest 'Five Year Forward View' points out that one in four of all people in the UK will experience mental health problems. Indeed, mental illness is now recognised as the single largest cause of disability. Fortunately, there is good evidence that tackling some major mental health problems early reduces subsequent problems, improves people's life chances, and also saves money for the wider economy.

The NHS plan places considerable emphasis on tackling the high prevalence of mental ill-health. We know that non-clinical interventions have an effect, which is why social prescribing⁹ is being explored.

Our own students tell us that taking part in learning is good for their mental (and physical) health. What's more, it seems to lead to fewer GP visits.

Adult learners visit their GP less frequently than the national average (currently six times a year and double the rate from a decade ago¹⁰). Just 13% of WEA students visit six or more times. 42% said that they had visited only once or twice in the last year. The average cost of a GP visit to the NHS is £42.80¹¹, and 87% of WEA students made at least one fewer visit to their GP compared with the national average. This could equate to a saving of as much as £6 million a year for the NHS from adults who are attending WEA courses.

Taking friendship to heart

This year's report highlights the vast impact that WEA adult education courses make on students' mental and physical health, which put a strain on public bodies like the NHS. In total, a third of our students became more motivated to improve their health and said their courses helped them to keep physically active.

Many studies in recent decades have shown that friendships will encourage heart-healthy lifestyles that reduce the likelihood of diabetes and strokes, especially in older age. Likewise, self-confidence is known to help avoid isolation and shyness, which can lead to depression and stress, with increasing evidence around dementia and Alzheimer's too. These illnesses are some of the biggest contributors to the mounting pressure on national and local services.

Yvette is typical of the 80% of WEA students who said their course helped them to make new friendships – and also 61% of students who reported an increase in self-confidence. After her husband died and her son left home, Yvette suddenly found herself alone. Her WEA art class for students with disabilities stopped her from becoming a recluse in her own home. Now, she has a part-time job and has "reawakened her lust for life".

Caring about carers

There are around seven million **carers in the UK** – that is one in ten people. This number is rising too.

According to the most recent State of Caring report¹²:



81%

said they couldn't exercise as much as they'd like



81%

said they'd felt lonely or isolated
72% said they'd suffered mental ill health as a result of caring;
61% reported physical ill health

WEA courses had a significant impact on improving the health and wellbeing of carers:



85%

made new friends on the course



70%

said their self-confidence increased



68%

were encouraged to take up new hobbies or interests



Over 40%

were helped to keep physically active and motivated to improve their health

⁹ <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/social-prescribing>

¹⁰ Health and Social Care Information Centre, Trends in consultation rates in general practice.

¹¹ Unit Costs of Health & Social Care 2018, Curtis & Burns

¹² State of Caring Report (2019), Carers UK, Accessed via <https://www.carersuk.org/news-and-campaigns/news/state-of-caring-report-2019>

In England alone, the costs of caring for adults with learning disabilities could increase by almost £2bn by 2025¹³. This year, our courses had a significant impact on improving students' physical and mental health, especially for those with long term conditions.

Adult education at the WEA is contributing to minimising the costs to the economy.

Overcoming barriers to wellbeing

	All	Mental health condition	Learning disability
The course helped to reduce stress	56%	71%	59%
The course helped to manage stress better	48%	68%	57%
The course helped with mental health issues	48%	81%	60%
The course helped with physical health issues	22%	28%	33%
To feel more resilient	44%	26%	20%

15% of WEA students became involved in voluntary activities as a result of WEA courses, often for personal fulfilment and to give back to the community. Many were also interested in volunteering as a way of gaining experience and skills to improve their employment prospects. This accounted for the higher rate of volunteering among those under 60 (24%), BAMER students (36%), ESOL students (40%) and students on benefits (30%).

Proportion of students developing greater political engagement as a result of WEA courses:	All
Took more interest in local or national affairs or national affairs	22%
Took part in a campaigning activity (e.g. signed a petition, attended a demonstration)	14%
Contacted local or national authorities (e.g. city council, Parliament)	7%

Overall, **43%** of students claimed to lead a healthier lifestyle than was the case before the course. In addition, courses improved wellbeing 'a lot' for **13%** of students, 'a little' for **28%** and 'somewhat' for **32%**.

Taking all the health and wellbeing benefits mentioned in the table, **81%** of the WEA students experienced at least one of them. Among those who reported experiencing health benefits, **27%**¹⁴ claimed they would not have been able to gain these health and wellbeing benefits elsewhere.

27% of students took part in activities to improve their local community¹⁵ as a result of their course. This was higher among BAMER students (**38%**), students on benefits (**32%**) and students over 60 (**27%**).

Over one-third (39%) claimed that their course gave them skills or knowledge that could help in voluntary work¹⁶. This number was higher among ESOL students (79%), students on benefits (70%), BAMER students (56%) and students under 60 (48%).

Among ESOL students, the engagement level was higher, with 40% taking an interest in local or national affairs, and 14% of students contacting an MP or local councillor.

32% of students who felt they had gained community benefits said that they would not have had an opportunity to achieve them without the WEA. This proportion was 34% among BAMER, 35% among those aged under 60 years old, and 50% for those on benefits.

¹³ According to research commissioned by the County Council Network
¹⁴ This excludes those who said they 'did not get any health benefits'

¹⁵ Excluding twenty eight % of students who claimed there were no activities for them to join
¹⁶ Excluding 12 % who were not interested in getting involved in voluntary work

Giving you the freedom

I love it all. I write at least one poem every day. I love trying to find the right words so I can help others to learn and laugh at the same time. The words just keep coming. I get so much information from my friends. The WEA gives you the freedom to show what you're good at. My art, writing and motor skills have improved, and it's all thanks to the encouragement of my amazing friends.

I feel very safe here. We're all created the same in life, but you don't always get that feeling in the real world, do you?

Lynne attends art, drama, fitness and poetry classes at her local WEA branch. A wheelchair user with Cerebral Palsy, Lynne has found an outlet for her creativity, where she feels both inspired and included.

Lynne

WEA student
Worcester



I first started coming to the WEA around ten years ago. I was referred by social services, and I remember being very nervous, but everybody made me feel so welcome. I thought: "I'll give this a go, and here I am 10 years later".



Increasing participation in culture and the arts

Government figures in 2018 showed that three-quarters of adults had engaged with the arts at least once a year. Just under two-thirds engage three or more times,¹⁷ building social cohesion that encourages mutual understanding across communities, while creating economic opportunities for individuals in culture and the arts.

The arts also help to meet challenges in health and social care associated with ageing, loneliness, long-term conditions and mental health. Crucially they can also help save the care sector valuable funds that can be spent elsewhere¹⁸.

Many students join WEA classes for the love of learning, or to develop culturally and personally.

The results varied, depending on student groups. For example, half of all students on benefits said they were involved in research, a third gain more enjoyment from arts and crafts, while a quarter finds more time for creative writing. Meanwhile, among BAMER students, 42% read more often, and 27% do more creative writing, as a result of their course.

Proportion of students enjoying cultural activities more often as a result of WEA courses	All
Research	43%
Read	30%
Visit museums / galleries / historic sites	28%
Arts or crafts	22%
Go to the cinema / the theatre / music concerts	13%
Creative writing	12%
Listen to music or play a musical instrument	10%

Of those 88% of students who experienced at least one positive change in their cultural awareness, 39% said that they would not have had the opportunity to achieve this without the WEA.

A recent study by Arts Council England showed that young people are held back from engaging in the arts and culture due to cost and a sense of anxiety, caused by lack of self-confidence¹⁹.

A separate survey²⁰ by the Council found that most over-65s believed the arts contributed to their health and happiness in life, but only a half go as often as they used to when younger, with the figure dropping further for those who live alone.

- ▶ **88%** of all students claimed that WEA courses encouraged them to do at least one cultural activity more than before.
- ▶ A significant number of students on benefits said they were likely to read (**36%**), listen to music or play a musical instrument (**19%**), pursue arts and crafts (**32%**) and to write creatively (**25%**) as a result of their course.
- ▶ Almost a quarter of students (**23%**) took part in cultural activities with their friends or family more often than before the course²¹. This number was greater among students who were carers (**30%**).
- ▶ **55%** of all students believed that learning with the WEA helped them reflect on wider world issues.

17 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/807859/Taking_Part_Survey_October_2017_to_September_2018_Provisional_.pdf?_ga=2.11733108.1187947057.1566313620-2129003014.1565343201

18 http://www.artshealthandwellbeing.org.uk/appg-inquiry/Publications/Creative_Health_The_Short_Report.pdf

19 https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/ART31%20-%20Young%20People%20and%20Arts%20Engagement_0.pdf

20 <https://www.comresglobal.com/polls/arts-council-england-older-people-poll/>

21 Excluding 9% who said this was not applicable as they have no immediate friends or family

Learning is the spark

WEA courses also influenced students' further learning:

- ▶ **72%** of students claimed they would know where to go if they needed to improve English, Maths, ICT or vocational skills²². This proportion was greater among students who were carers (**79%**), BAMER students (**75%**), students on benefits (**78%**) and students who took employability courses (**83%**).
- ▶ A quarter of students (**25%**) enrolled on another course. This proportion was higher for those with mental health issues (**32%**) and those on employability courses (**38%**).
- ▶ Of the students undertaking further taught courses and of working age, **43%** said their courses would lead to a qualification²³. The proportion of students doing courses leading to qualification was much higher in BAMER students (**55%**) and for students who were under the age of 60 (**39%**). Levels were also higher for students in this group with a learning disability (**31%**) and students with entry to Level 5 qualifications (**47%**).
- ▶ Furthermore, **54%** of students tried to improve their knowledge or skills independently as a result of the course. This impact was greater among students who were carers, of whom **64%** participated in independent learning.



²² Applies to 69% of students who claimed improving these skills was relevant to them. Of those to whom these skills were irrelevant, 80% were over 60 years of age and 77% already held degrees

²³ 2% did not know if it will or not

Supporting parents to develop and grow as a family

We've seen so far in this report how adult learning can make a difference for individuals. The benefits also extend further into families and communities. Parents are empowered to take charge of their own lives, widen their horizons and make decisions about their futures.

Regardless of family income or background, it's known that children whose parents are involved in their schooling are more likely to have higher grades and test scores, attend school regularly, have better social skills, show improved behaviour and adapt well to school²⁴. When parents are engaged in their children's school lives, students have the home support and knowledge they need to not only finish their assignments, but also develop a lifelong love of learning.

Taking this a step further, studies also show that parents who themselves study – and demonstrate the enjoyment and benefits to their children – are setting a positive example and raising aspirations.²⁵

Research from the annual Varkey Foundation Global Parents' Survey (2018)²⁶ revealed that almost a quarter (23%) of British parents did not spend any time helping their children academically with their education.

Headline findings:

- ▶ **64%** of parents improved their confidence in helping their children with reading, writing or maths as a result of the course.
- ▶ **62%** of parents were more confident in engaging with their children's school activities as a result of the course.
- ▶ **60%** believed that their relationship with their children improved.
- ▶ Over a third (**38%**) helped their children with schoolwork more often as a result of WEA courses.
- ▶ BAMER parents were more likely to develop these benefits, along with parents without degrees.

Proportion of students with underage children who improved their confidence in helping their children with school subjects as a result of WEA courses

	All ²⁷	BAMER	No quals	Entry to Level 5 quals
Reading, writing or maths	64%	78%	92%	66%

Proportion of students with underage children reporting parenting benefits as a result of WEA courses

	All
Encouraged children to learn more	66%
Improved relationships with children	60%
More confident in engaging with children's school activities	62%
Helping their children with schoolwork more ²⁸	38%
Encouraged children to live a healthier lifestyle more ²⁹	36%
Noticed an improvement in child's educational achievement ³⁰	33%

Our research has identified a positive link between adults who are learning with the WEA and improved family relationships and greater parental involvement in children's learning.

Different groups reported greater parenting benefits after learning with the WEA. For example, 85% BAMER and 92% of those with no qualifications encouraged their children to learn more. In addition, over half of BAMER parents said they helped their children with school work more often and 84% of parents with no qualifications improved their relationships with their children.

Out of 87% of all parents who gained some sort of parenting-related benefit, 51% believed that they would not have been able to get these benefits without their WEA course.

²⁴ Henderson, A.T., and K.L. Mapp. 2002. A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement. National Centre for Family and Community Connections with Schools, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.
²⁵ Coles, J and Fraser, L (2002) Looking over the wall: the role of adult education in changing children's aspirations.
²⁶ Global Parents' Survey (2018), Varkey Foundation

²⁷ Excluding 3% of students per each row whose children were too young for school
²⁸ Excluding 2% of parents whose children were too young for school
²⁹ Excluding 2% of parents who felt their children were too young to encourage to lead a healthier lifestyle
³⁰ Excluding 2% of parents who felt their children were too young to gauge educational achievement

When you're determined, you can achieve anything

Sarah wanted to work in a school but wasn't sure how to start. Her mum saw a WEA helping in schools course at the local library, and it all began.

The course enabled Sarah to open many doors for her professional development. The course allowed her to volunteer at a school, which she did for three years before getting a full-time job as a teaching assistant. Since then she has gone from strength to strength – presenting at an awards evening at the school and getting involved in schools programmes on health and fitness and becoming the after-school club manager.

The course has helped her overcome low confidence and a lack of self-belief. She overcame her fears and is now more resilient and determined to achieve more. None of this would have been possible without the WEA. Sarah is a great inspiration – showcasing the importance of people believing in your potential. Her learning journey started at the WEA and has turned into a career.

From September 2019, Sarah is starting a new chapter in her learning journey. She will be studying a BA in Education Culture and Childhood with a Foundation year at Sheffield University.

Sarah credits the course for so much more than her career. She says that "the course has given me confidence and self-belief. In my life outside of work, I have recently passed my driving test and overcame my fears. It made me more resilient in pursuing my goals by not giving up and continuing through difficulties. I have taken part in many long-distance running events, and these experiences have taught me that when you're determined enough, you can achieve anything."

Sarah
WEA student
Sheffield



Education will transform your life, just like it has done mine. It will boost your confidence and working in a relaxed, friendly environment will enable you to thrive, as you move through your professional journey.



Looking forward to next year - and beyond...

Helping to support students

Our funders have shown real confidence in our ability to meet local needs and to deliver for our students and their communities in our unique WEA way. We are excited to develop new relationships with Mayoral Combined Authorities following the devolution of the adult education budget, as well as over 100 funded education projects and contracts. To ensure we are clear about our intentions for our students, we are working towards a balanced curriculum which meets broad outcomes for students in the following six areas:



Confidence for life and work



Mental/physical health and wellbeing



In work progression



Social inclusion and loneliness



Adults into work



Active citizens in vibrant communities

Helping our mission

The impact showcased in this report has demonstrated how adult education can reduce pressure on the NHS, support the skills agenda, support people into work and strengthen communities. This report shows that we are already having a significant impact and meeting the needs of a diverse group of adult learners, including some of the most vulnerable in our society. We will keep the impetus going as we build on the WEA's Strategy 2025 and shape our work in the year ahead.

We recognise our role as a leading voice in adult education. But how can we spread our influence even further and see the impact grow wider?

Our ask...

Firstly

We would like to see more collaboration across the education sector (higher education and further education included) to look at the impact of lifelong learning in all contexts. Additional support and incentive for this from government and other funders would be welcome.

Secondly

One of the stand-out findings from this report is the positive impact learning has on health. We would like to see the Department for Education working more closely with the Department of Health on areas such as social prescribing and other ways to encourage learning for better wellbeing.

Finally

This report shares its title with a wider campaign calling for greater investment in adult learning. We are operating in difficult times, socially and politically. The numbers of adults learners and the funding they receive are at an all-time low, despite the enormous good that adult education brings to our society.

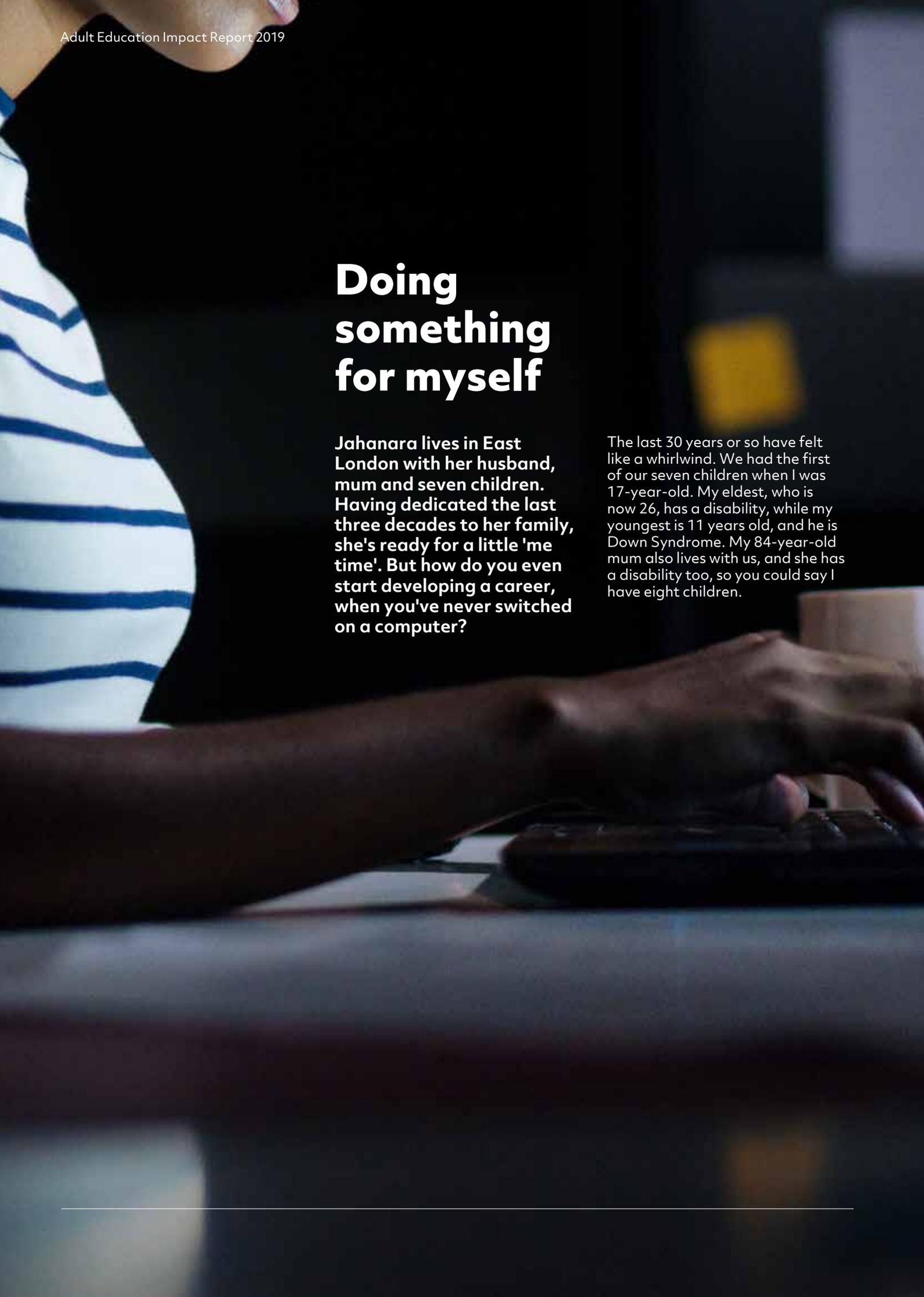
Let's be in no doubt. Adult education works. It always will. We are extremely grateful to everyone who shares in our mission to bring adult education within reach.

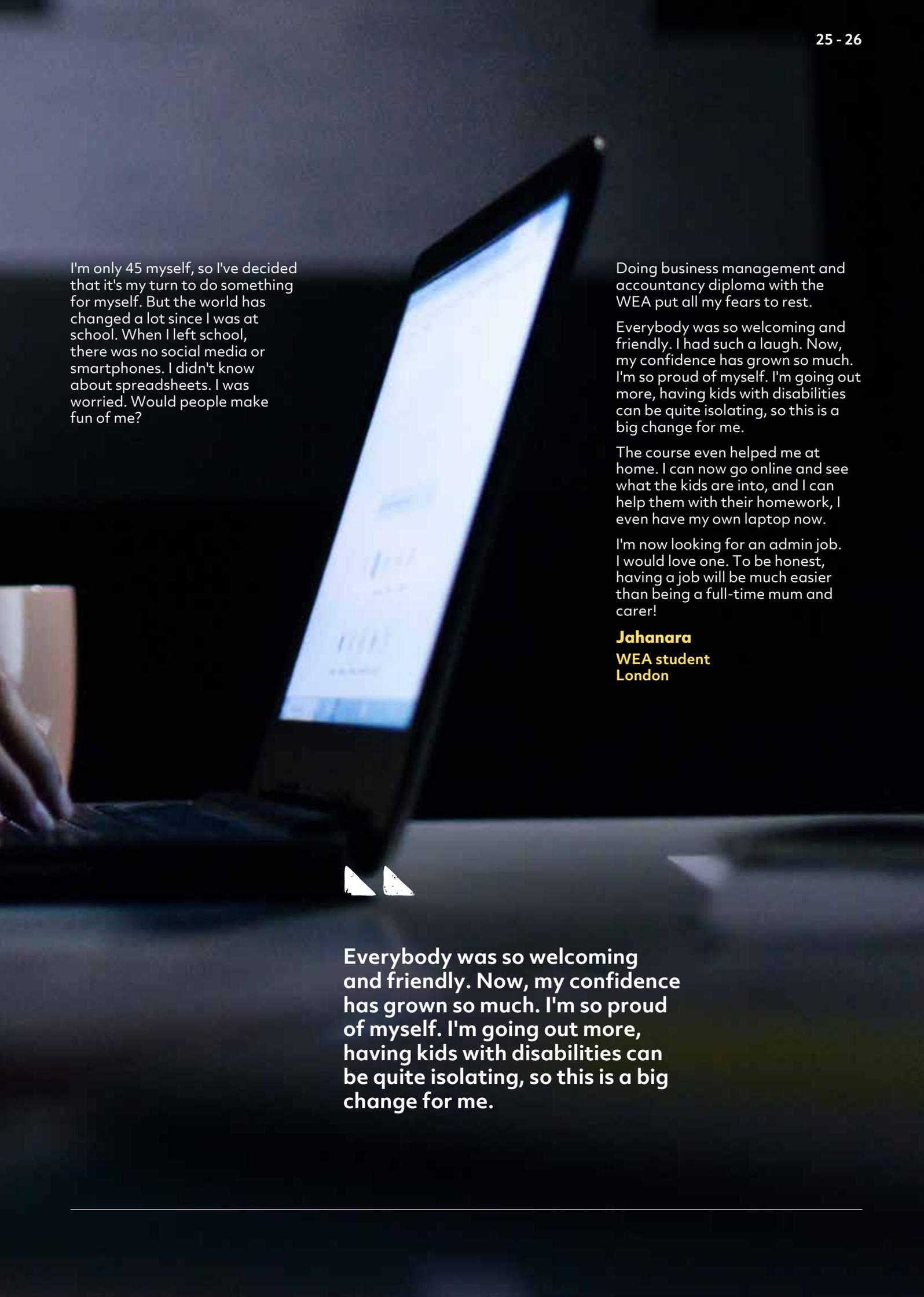
We couldn't be the WEA without you!

Doing something for myself

Jahanara lives in East London with her husband, mum and seven children. Having dedicated the last three decades to her family, she's ready for a little 'me time'. But how do you even start developing a career, when you've never switched on a computer?

The last 30 years or so have felt like a whirlwind. We had the first of our seven children when I was 17-year-old. My eldest, who is now 26, has a disability, while my youngest is 11 years old, and he is Down Syndrome. My 84-year-old mum also lives with us, and she has a disability too, so you could say I have eight children.





I'm only 45 myself, so I've decided that it's my turn to do something for myself. But the world has changed a lot since I was at school. When I left school, there was no social media or smartphones. I didn't know about spreadsheets. I was worried. Would people make fun of me?

Doing business management and accountancy diploma with the WEA put all my fears to rest.

Everybody was so welcoming and friendly. I had such a laugh. Now, my confidence has grown so much. I'm so proud of myself. I'm going out more, having kids with disabilities can be quite isolating, so this is a big change for me.

The course even helped me at home. I can now go online and see what the kids are into, and I can help them with their homework, I even have my own laptop now.

I'm now looking for an admin job. I would love one. To be honest, having a job will be much easier than being a full-time mum and carer!

Jahanara
WEA student
London

Everybody was so welcoming and friendly. Now, my confidence has grown so much. I'm so proud of myself. I'm going out more, having kids with disabilities can be quite isolating, so this is a big change for me.

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Any questions?

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This research examined the impact of mostly short (between 15 – 30 hours) WEA courses that were predominately completed in the autumn term of 2018. The sample included students who completed single and multiple courses in various subject areas.

The data was gathered using a quantitative online survey sent out to all WEA students with email addresses. The survey received 5,361 responses about four to six months after most of the courses finished. The data was weighted to account for unequal probabilities of selection into the sample and non-response. Thus the sample was representative of the entire WEA student population within a margin of error of 1.2 percent. Impact on different student groups was analysed by taking key demographic and course characteristics* into account and have been reported where statistically significant.

* For example, ethnicity, age, gender, claiming of means-tested benefits, qualifications, disabilities and course theme were accounted for with logistic or multinomial regressions

For further information
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