# Ashleigh

I started community-based adult learning, because it was a good way to get into helping people. First of all, I went to college for three years and then I did three years at university, and then when I finished that, I was taking out other opportunities to help people. So, I signed up with LCIL and I did a lot of their workshops, which I would consider community-based adult learning, because you learn a lot about knowing your rights and how to speak up for yourself as well. And it was based in the community.

And also a big chunk of my community based adult learning, there were two main things I would say, was Partners in Policy Making, which I did in 2017 to 2018 and then I did an online course with Inclusion Scotland in June 2020 to 2021, and that was all about talking about disability rights and leadership. And it wasn’t until lately, that I realised it was community-based adult learning. But I think it’s really good, because it brings people together.

When I first started, I felt a bit nervous but I also felt excited because I was meeting new people and we were going to learn new skills and things. But the Partners, it was across Scotland, we got to meet lots of different people, from different places. But it’s always a bit daunting when you start something new, but once you get into it, it gets a lot better. And it’s really good just to have the opportunity to meet people.

When I got involved in Partners in Policy Making, I felt really good, because at the beginning, I kind of went in and thought that I didn’t really understand why I was there, so at the end, it was a real sense of accomplishment, and knowing that you learned a lot, you met a lot of people, and I really contributed.

Not so much with the Inclusion course, but I did feel at the end of it that again, I had learned a lot, because I had a placement at that course as well, I got some really good insights into it, like various areas of inclusion so I felt more equipped with how to approach things in a different way or know who to ask if you’re stuck with something. I found it difficult to work out what I was learning at the time, because you had lots of discussions, you might come up with these really good ideas, but I wasn’t sure how it would directly apply to my life. So, I would be like, oh this is really interesting, but I’m not sure how it fits into what I need to do next. That became clearer as time moved on, but at the time, you’re like, I’m not sure what I’m going to do with this information.

I was supported through the organisations that run it, supported by Partners in Policy Making, you know at the residentials, the company that run it, with the accommodation, brought out your meal and make it really really accessible. And also, you could email them to get them to check on your course work. And also the group of participants, they gave support as well, so that was really good.

At the Inclusion Scotland course, again I was supported by other participants, because the way I had fortnightly meetings and discussions on the learning, we were told we were doing an Open University course and we’d teamed up with a study group. So that in itself was really supportive, because sometimes when you’re doing something like that on your own, you’ve no motivation or you’ve not completed it and things. But that’s what’s really good to like almost be accountable to the group as well. So, it was something you would’ve been like, oh I’m meeting these people next week, I have to get this done, so that was really helpful for me and it was getting to know the participants in the group as well.

Getting back to CBAL learning is hard, again disability with Partners is a big key, is networking. I’ve met so many people and even though I did Partners a while ago we still get together and support each other and do different things. But it’s taking that nod elsewhere as well and I think with Inclusion Scotland it was a bit like looking at a different take on leadership, so it was another foot in the door to that kind of thing as well. So I’ve learned, I guess I’ve learned a lot about community and learning together and the value of that, rather than in the actual content. I’m not saying that because it wasn’t good, because the content was great! But there’s a different aspect to learning that as well.

My advice for starting community-based adult learning would be try and use it as much as possible, what it is you’re doing and why, what benefits there are and just stay connected to the people that you learn with as well because I think more ideas will be popping up all the time and I think it’s a really good way of continuing that learning as well.

What’s been really great about doing this project for me personally, is learning what community-based adult learning is. It’s not that I didn’t know what it was, but it kind of was loosely understood that it was this type of learning, but now I know that it was and it’s really good to identify what you’ve done. Whereas at the time you’re doing it, you may not always know that you’re doing it.