



Student turned teacher tells how free adult course turned saved her from mental health struggles

WHEN single mum Hannah Draper started studying at Gosport's Adult Community College she could never have imagined that ten years later she would be a teacher there.

Hannah, now 40, was on benefits and struggling with mental health issues at 22 when she decided she wanted to make a career for herself. She took a two-year Access to Higher Education course in psychology to enable her to go on and study for a degree in the subject at Portsmouth University.

"I had been at a very prestigious boarding school until I was 16 and had got good GCSEs but I thought I knew best and went off the rails a bit. I ended up pregnant at 18 and on my own and although I had a good support network from my family my mental health really suffered and I was drinking as well," she said.

"I loved the course, being back in the classroom and I really loved learning. I already had purpose as a mum to my daughter Faith but it gave me some self-identity."

She went on to the University of Portsmouth in 2005 but after completing her degree she never had a chance to use it. "I was swept off my feet, fell in love and got married," she said.

The marriage turned sour and Hannah, by now with a second daughter, was still struggling again with her mental health and her self-esteem. In 2010, feeling vulnerable and lacking in confidence, she saw free community learning courses at the Nimrod Centre in Rowner. "I was as much attracted by the free childcare as the learning if I'm honest," she said. "But I did an introduction to customer service course and really enjoyed it.

"At the end of the course I had the best careers advice I'd ever had when the college suggested I did the Level 3 NVQ course in preparing to teach so I did it, even though I had never thought about teaching. After that I wanted to do the level 4 at St Vincent but to do the course I needed a teaching placement place. I approached the community college and asked them if I could teach there."

The college agreed but when staff asked what Hannah wanted to teach, she had no idea. "I was so surprised they agreed, I hadn't thought what I would actually teach," she said. "I did some market research among my mum friends and came up with child psychology."

The first course in 2011 was so successful the college booked seven more and had a waiting list of parents wanting to join. After completing her NVQ in 2015 she applied to teach the Access to HE course in psychology at the college – the very same course she had studied herself 12 years earlier.

Now she is also running a number of social sciences courses for adults including criminal investigation, criminal justice, criminology, forensics and forensic psychology at the community college.

"Someone once told me that if you find a job you love you'll never work a day in your life again," said Hannah.

“It can be hard work but I just enjoy it so much. In my forensics course we are profiling serial killers while eating a freshly-baked lemon drizzle cake one of the students has bought in – that’s community learning and there is such a mix of people, different characters from all walks of life.”

In 2016 she went back to the University of Portsmouth, and did the CertEd qualification to become a fully-fledged teacher.

Her story has inspired many of her access course students to follow her pathway to university.

It has also brought her family into the college. Her dad John, the retired canon and rector of St Mary the Virgin in Rowner, completed an online introduction to Spanish course during lockdown while her mum Hazel, a retired teacher geography at Brune Park Community School, has signed up for a carpentry course.

Her eldest daughter Faith, now 22, studied A-level psychology at St Vincent and went on to complete a degree in architecture and design at Portsmouth. She now designs kitchens for Homebase in Fareham. Hannah’s youngest daughter Holly, a 12-year-old pupil at Brune Park, wants to study at St Vincent when she is old enough.

The Adult Community College is run at a separate part of the St Vincent College site and offers dozens of courses ranging from NVQs in care, IT or business admin to lifestyle interest such as guitar, carpentry, photography. It also offers English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses for refugees to help support them into education and employment.

Community college manager Tracey Strong said: “Hannah is an inspiration to her students and her colleagues because she loves learning and is living proof of the doors it can open for people.

“We are really proud of the variety of our courses and for anyone who wants to get back into work, pursue a hobby or who just enjoys learning there is something there for them. We have a drop-in every Tuesday from 10am to noon for anyone who wants to pop in and talk about a course.”

Find out more about the courses on offer in its new adult education brochure at stvincent.ac.uk/adult-education/adultcommunitycollege, email acc@stvincent.ac.uk or call 02392 603 606.

ENDS

Pictured: Hannah Draper with some of her students as Gosport’s Adult Community College

NOTE TO EDITOR

For further details or interviews contact Bev Flanagan at Meadow Communications on 07725 881342 or bev@meadowcomms.co.uk or Gary Lawrence at Meadow Communications on 07866 422308 or gary@meadowcomms.co.uk

St Vincent Sixth Form College offers full-time A-level and vocational courses for 16-19 year olds, coupled with a number of part-time adult education courses. The mission of the college is to raise the aspirations and achievements of students of all abilities, by providing a high-quality learning experience through strong teaching, outstanding student support and a wealth of extra-curricular activities. The college also embraces and supports the local community of Gosport by opening its doors for evening and weekend lettings.

Website: stvincent.ac.uk – Twitter: [@StVincent6FC](https://twitter.com/StVincent6FC) – Instagram: – [@stvincentcollege](https://www.instagram.com/stvincentcollege)