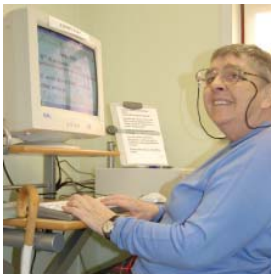
# NIACE Research and Development

# Key Findings



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## The Impact of Learning on Health


## Abstract

This research focuses on those people we know to be active learners and who could comment on what impact, if any, there has been on personal health as a result of learning.

The responses are both a powerful argument for closer study and a strong justification for the belief that learning can make a difference to individuals, their health and the well being of their families and friends.

**Research methodology:**

- Postal questionnaire to 2,000 individuals and 750 groups nominated for Adult Learners' Week Awards during 1998 and 1999. Telephone interviews were offered for those who would have difficulty making a written response.


## Key Findings

**The main conclusions of the project are:**

- The greatest general benefits experienced from learning are: confidence; new friends and contact with other people; direct health benefits; and new employment or voluntary work.

- Unexpected benefits included (in size order): self-confidence (25%); personal discoveries about themselves and their relationships with other people; improvements at work, new employment or voluntary work; new achievements and skills; intergenerational benefits to children and family members; a sense of achievement and satisfaction; and health benefits including reduced stress and anxiety levels.

- Most learners reported experiencing 'disbenefits' at some time from their learning. The most significant 'disbenefits' were: stress, anxiety and mental ill health (39%); separation and stress (16%); and broken relationships (9%). Other disbenefits included dissatisfaction with their former way of life; family difficulties including child-care problems, lack of time and tiredness; and insufficient money.

- 87% of respondents reported benefits to their physical health. These included learners who felt less ill, managed pain more effectively and felt less tired. A third of the replies reported actual physical health benefits from their learning. Other strong themes included managing better in spite of physical ill health, improvements to family health, better health behaviours and psychological well-being.

- 89% of respondents felt they had experienced positive emotional or mental health benefits from their period of learning. Benefits included "feeling mentally better"; changing health behaviours; distraction from dwelling on ill health or poor circumstances; and psychological displacement activity helping them to deal with pain such as bereavement. Many respondents attributed their improved sense of mental well-being to the new-found confidence and enjoyment of learning.

- 20% of learners were encouraged to attend adult education opportunities by education staff. This is a key method of encouraging people to become learners, at least at beginner stages.

## Recommendations

NIACE intends to develop the programme in three ways:

- A further study of primary health care professionals
- Monitoring and encouraging existing projects
- Through direct pilot work.

## Output

- Aldridge, F. and Lavender, P. (2000) *The Impact of Learning on Health*. NIACE: Leicester.

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**Project Managers: Peter Lavender & Fiona Aldridge**

**Email: fiona.aldridge@niace.org.uk**

Requests for 'Key Findings' in other formats, such as large print, are welcome. We would be pleased to consider your request.

niace
promoting adult learning

21 De Montfort Street
Leicester LE1 7GE

Tel: +44 (0)116 204 4200/1
Fax: +44 (0)116 285 4514
Website: www.niace.org.uk

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