

News

University helps homeless with degree course pledge

Nicola Woolcock Education Editor

Homeless people who dropped out of school are now taking degrees thanks to a pioneering scheme that is being shared with other universities.

Chichester University set up Adversity to University, a 12-week course for students living in a local homelessness shelter, Stonepillow.

Those who complete the course, which reintroduces them to education, can begin a degree at the university. Five students have since embarked on degrees in subjects including sociology and fine art. A further six have taken a qualification in maths or English to set them back on the path to employment.

Now Chichester has produced a toolkit as a guide for other universities looking to establish similar projects. The new guidance provides information on how universities can establish similar initiatives. It shows how to set up the bridging course, its content and structure, common challenges and how to access funding.

The government is putting pressure on universities to provide lifelong learning and become civic hubs that help local economies, rather than just focusing on three-year undergraduate degrees for 18-year-olds.

Professor Jane Longmore, vice-

Case study

Philip Day, 45, is studying sociology at Chichester having completed the 12-week bridging course.

Diagnosed with dyslexia while in school, he was put in a special needs class but quickly "disengaged from school" and eventually became homeless.

"When I began the bridging course I didn't think I would last one lesson, let alone a day, but I loved it from the start."

Day, who is living in halls with other first years, says: "I have sanctuary in the library, it's my home from home."



chancellor of Chichester, said the course dismantled hurdles and was a "simple and elegant solution to some of our most deeply-rooted societal challenges". She added: "I hope universities use the toolkit and be as inspired as I have been by the transformational impact of this wonderful initiative."

Richard Brabner, director of UPP Foundation, which published the toolkit, the project proved what a difference can be made with a relatively

small amount of funding, if it is the right idea and the right partnership. "With the government's plans for a lifetime loan entitlement and the revitalisation of the civic role of universities in recent years, there's no better time for higher education institutions to set up similar schemes in their local communities."

Lucy Davies, 30, who had struggled with homelessness since she was 16, completed the bridging module in 2019 and is now in the third year of her fine art degree. She said: "The bridging course gave me something to focus on, it gave structure and meaning in my life that I had lost altogether."

"I discovered the joys of research, essay writing and academia. The course gave companionship of like-minded individuals, the drive and belief that I could do anything I put my mind to and hope for the future. It, quite literally, transformed my life."

Despite action to prevent homelessness during the pandemic, more than 68,000 households became homeless or were threatened with homelessness in the first quarter of 2021.

Becky Edwards, the senior lecturer at the University of Chichester who leads the project, said: "Some of the most able people in the UK have not been privileged, lucky or supported enough to access a good education. This project gives them a second chance and proves the power of education to transform lives and reshape futures."



Dragon slayer A stained glass window by William De Morgan, one of the greatest ceramicists and designers of the Arts and Crafts Movement, is expected to fetch between £80,000 and £120,000 when it is auctioned at Sworders next year



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