



# COLLEGES IN THE BLACK COUNTRY

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

## CASE STUDY

### Aiming higher

Jackie Simpson has been given a chance to pursue a career in art after having a family, thanks to opportunities at Stourbridge College.

Jackie, who is 51, studied part-time for a Fine Art HND at the college and was offered places at Birmingham University and the University of Wolverhampton for a Bachelor of Arts degree course in Art.

Although she has always been creative, in her youth Jackie was keen to start earning money so she left school and got a job. She worked in an office for 15 years before starting a family and then worked part-time. As the children grew up, she thought about revisiting her interest in art and design.

Jackie said: "I didn't know how I was ever going to manage, raising a family and doing a course at the

same time. But after my interview with Stourbridge College I realised it was easier than I thought to get back into education.

"It was a revelation for me. I work my study days around my part-time job and the course is part funded because I'm a single parent. My aim is now to get my degree and find a career where I can use my talent."

It was a desire to gain more qualifications while working as a PA which led Shirley Gooch to Walsall College and an HNC Business course.

Shirley, aged 45, was encouraged by her employer Walsall Housing Group. She loved the learning experience at the college and has not looked back. Shirley explained: "It's very rewarding to find out about something, read about it in more detail and



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then produce something at the end. The lecturers have been very supportive – if you've got any queries, they put you in the right direction and they treat you like the adult you are.

"I have now completed the HNC course and recently attended the awards ceremony, where I was presented with a special achievement award."

Shirley has gone on to take the HND course and may decide to top up to degree level at university after that.

"I feel the experience has made me a more rounded person – I have gained in confidence and am able to relate more on a professional level," she said. "I am now a Development Officer at WHG and aim to become a Senior Development Officer. In the long run, I would like to enhance my skills further and become a Development Manager."

Medical Science student Sam Bedford is among the many to be set on the path to a rewarding career at Halesowen College.

He won a two week scientific expedition to Borneo as the Royal Society International Expedition Prize at the BA CREST award ceremony in London. Sam, who is studying the National Diploma in Medical

Science, won the award for a project on stem cell research in muscle atrophy.

CREST (CREativity in Science and Technology) is a UK award scheme managed by the British Association for the Advancement of Science that aims to encourage young people to explore creative problem solving through mini projects.

Sam undertook his project in collaboration with lecturers at Birmingham University and has been promised a university place on the grounds of his research work. In the future, he hopes to progress to a PhD, researching diseases that affect old age. Science Lecturer, Linda Neal, said: "Sam deserves his success - his work and commitment have been outstanding. His phenomenal success story shows that vocational courses provide a serious alternative to A Levels as an excellent progression to academic eminence."



Shirley Gooch