

BFAWU Learning Services

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Furloughed Benjamin uses his time to learn Mental Health First Aid.

Benjamin Coffie has been furloughed since mid-March – and has used his time to study as a Mental Health First Aider with the support of his union, the Baker, Food & Allied Workers Union (BFAWU).

Benjamin works for Greggs Distribution in Enfield as a picker, selecting products to be distributed to stores across the country. With the closure of most stores and the temporary halt in production Benjamin was placed on furlough. BFAWU Project Worker Carol Hillaby explained: "Benjamin was furloughed by the company and, along with everyone else, was sent a letter which explained it. They were to be temporarily out of work, but getting full pay: 80% from the government and 20% from the company. They were assured that this would run until 1st of July 2020. Following this Benjamin contacted me to do a Mental Health course that we have been running through the union."

The course on offer from the BFAWU to members is the full Level 2 Mental Health First Aid course. Carol had sent details of this course around to all the sites she covers and when Benjamin saw it he asked if he could be enrolled.

Carol explained that he'd worked hard to complete the course at home and, despite a busy household, found time to complete all the work that had been set and is currently waiting for it to be marked.

The BFAWU are seeing more people interested in these sorts of courses and qualifications.

Carol said:

"We have been working hard on the mental health issues with our Mental Health Awareness days. We started with five arranged but over 2019 it must have been around 50 nationally, all sites wanted it and many have either moved onto the Mental Health First Aid or were planning it before COVID 19 hit."

Carol has had requests from a number of employers for future courses to be set up when it's possible, and would normally visit workplaces to sign up new learners and work through the enrolment process with them, but the current situation has meant that is impossible.

Carol explained:

"When Benjamin expressed an interest in the Mental Health course I sent his information through to Julie in our Learning Team office to be enrolled. I was a little worried about distance

enrolment as I wasn't there to explain how this happens, so I emailed him the process of enrolling on line, what he would need and then put together a step by step guide for accessing the course just to make the process a little easier. I spoke to him later and he had completed the enrolment with the help of the guidance notes found it easy and thanked me for all my help."

"I've never met Benjamin; he is one of our shop stewards in Greggs and has been so helpful I am looking forward to meeting him eventually when things settle down."

Benjamin said it had been a busy time for him and his partner as they are looking after their children with schoolwork, and at one point they also came down with symptoms. But he has found the time to study.

"I signed up for the Mental Health course trying to up-skilling myself whilst on furlough. It has been good for me with the support from Greggs and the government but I'm worried that if the lockdown is not relaxed soon I'm not sure what myself and my family will do.

The reason I chose mental health course is to help people with mental health issues at my workplace and also to understand why some peoples mood changes.

This course has really helped me now I'm aware of what mental health is."



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Penny gets addicted to learning after union organizes courses



Penny Grimsditch is a machine operator and recently caught the learning bug after signing up to a functional skills English course organized by her union – she is now enrolled on a number of distance learning courses and building her skills.

Penny works at Fox's Biscuits in Batley and is a BFAWU Shop Steward and is soon planning to become a Union Learning Rep. She has been getting back into studying after signing up for, and passing, a City and Guilds functional skills English level 2, in January.

Penny said that she had really enjoyed the classes, saying;

"I have had the most positive experience. Firstly, I passed my City and Guilds functional skills English level 2, in January. These were lessons I attended at work, given by tutor Sally Lowndes and supported by Kamran Ali and the learning team."

The course is part of an ongoing series of learning activities that have been negotiated between the union and the employer through the BFAWU Branch Secretary and the union's Learning Services Project Worker, Kamran Ali. Kamran said:

"Following an agreement, we began promoting courses in the workplace. From all the courses promoted the City and Guilds English Level 2 was the most popular amongst the learners and we could easily fill a class with it."

The union organised the courses through Chesterfield College with two classes running every week on Tuesdays and Fridays.

However this wasn't the end of Penny's learning journey – in fact it was just the start, and she has gone online to continue building her skills as she explains:

This then spurred me on to do more learning so I did an

online course with Learning Curve,

I achieved a Level 2 certificate in Awareness of Mental Health Problems in March."

I followed this by doing a Level 2 certificate in Understanding Mental Health First Aid and Mental Health Advocacy-in the workplace, and once I get my results back I'm sure I will be doing another course, like chocolate learning is addictive and unlike chocolate none fattening." Penny feels that none of this would have been possible without the help of the BFAWU learning team and she has now decided that she would like to train as a Union Learning Rep so she can help others.

Penny said

"I owe Kamran a box of teabags for his help when I have messaged him with queries."

"My advice for anybody wanting to learn something new or even refresh an old qualification is Do It, you will not go wrong, the learning services are there to help and support you."



Mental Health First Aid distance learning course

Enrolment criteria:

- Aged 19+ at the beginning of the academic year
- Lived in the EU for 3 years

Available fully funded

Around 450 million people currently experience mental health problems, with recent reports suggesting that over 12 million working days were lost due to work-related stress, depression or anxiety in just one year. It's important that employers are transparent and open about mental health issues, and this qualification builds an understanding of mental health problems and the support available to colleagues. Increasing the understanding of mental health of staff at all levels builds a culture of care and support.

Benef its

What you will learn

Achieve a nationally recognised Level 2 qualification

Evidence your competency to employers

Further your personal and professional development

Learn at a time that suits you without the need to attend college

Increase your understanding of mental health and how to support people in the workplace

Exploring mental health

Understand how to support individuals with mental ill health

Understand a mentally healthy environment





Level 1 & Level 2 Available!

About the Course

These qualifications explore the basic principles of sustainability and environmental impacts.

They will introduce you to the key issues in sustainability, raising awareness of the topic and encouraging you to consider your role in helping to make sustainable choices.

You will receive a **Level 1 or Level 2 Award in Environmental Sustainability** to add to your CV.

Course Modules



Understand basic concepts in sustainability.



Discover the environmental impacts of the creation of goods and services.



Explore what makes up a sustainable community.

Start your learning today!



Sign up online

Contact us or fill in the online form to sign up!



Home Learning

Complete your learning in the comfort of your own home via a link, with remote tutor support and 24/7 access to learning materials.



Assessment

Assessments are completed via our online learning platform.

To enrol today contact your Project Worker or email: bfawuls@bfawu.org

Unionlearn launch “Growing Skills, Cutting Carbon—green skills for a just transition”

Unionlearn is today launching a new publication that explores the need for green skills in the future and the ways that unions can support environmental awareness at work. “Growing Skills, Cutting Carbon – green skills for a just transition” (<https://www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/cutting-carbon-growing-skills-green-skills-just-transition>) explains the background to the climate crisis, why just transition is a trade union issue and the role of green reps in bring about workplace change. The document also explores the skills that workers will need as we head towards a net-zero carbon economy and how existing skills can be transferred. It is also packed full of resources and case studies that will give reps ideas of how to get involved and develop their own workplace initiatives to green their workplaces and which learning opportunities are best for their members.

unionlearn Director Kevin Rowan said: “Growing Skills, Cutting Carbon is a fantastic new resource for reps that explains why climate change and just transition are trade union issues and looks at the skills workers will need for the future.”

“Developing green skills at work has the potential to offer a wide range of exciting opportunities to workers across the UK, and the trade union movement will be leading the way in supporting the fight against climate change and helping workers build the skills to be part of the solution.”

unionlearn
from the TUC

How the BFAWU Learning Services have adapted to life during the pandemic

As lockdown was announced, the factories that we visit, assigned a non-essential person on sites policy, making our work practices change overnight. Learning on most of the sites came to a halt, so we had to embrace these changes straight away. The factories and the people who work there, became essential workers, keeping the country going with food for our tables. With some negotiations from the reps they provided extra food for the food banks and charities. The factories looked at different ways of working with the social distancing laws. As we answer to unionlearn and the Government, our practices had to change as we are paid through results. We phoned the Branch Secretaries in our areas, making sure that they had everything that they needed, letting them know that we are only a phone call or email away. Social media became a lifeline with Whatsapp or Facebook groups for the different branches, enabling us to give course information as some learners wanted to carry on their learning journey, even in these strange times. Distance Learning has become a lifeline in the

communities as people have been furloughed and wanted to use the time up as best as they can.

This brings me onto the providers that we use. These groups of providers are struggling to cope with the demand at this time, and are running out of the funding to provide these free courses and it is made more difficult with the devolution in certain areas, like Liverpool and Greater Manchester and other regions as well.

This makes our job a little more difficult to hit our targets, but I think we are all up to the challenges ahead and we won't let this beat us.



The new and improved BFAWU Learning Services website!! COMING SOON

Dealing with redundancies – A different way

Redundancy support is always hard when a site closes, supporting those losing their jobs, listening to hopes and fears, helping with CV's and showing them the Find-a-Job government website; doing this when we can't visit the sites is daunting.

Speedibake, Wakefield, suffered a catastrophic fire on the second of February 2020. Every effort was made to save jobs but on the 28th February the decision was made to close the site as it would have been too costly to rebuild. The company then went to consultation. In March COVID 19 hit and the country went into lockdown which meant we couldn't visit the site to give redundancy support., however, on April 2nd 2020 each project worker was given a number of telephone appointments for people who needed support with CVs.

One of my contacts was a lady called Paula Johnston who had worked at Speedibake for 5 years. I phoned Paula but she didn't pick up so I left a message leaving my details. A couple of days later Paula returned my call, afraid she had missed her slot for CV help. She was really pleased when I said it's ok we can still do it.

I completed the CV, emailed it to Paula wishing her all the very best for the future and included the link for the government web site. Paula phoned me back on receipt of her CV thanking me for my help. A little later she called again explaining she'd got a text about job vacancies but she couldn't upload her CV. I asked her to give me the website and job details and I would have a look. With a

little bit of back and forth on the phone we got there and the job was applied for.

Over the next week I helped Paula apply for other jobs and I want to say thank you to Paula as well; "Thank you for being a member of the union and thank you for entrusting me with your personal details so we could do this together." Ordinarily we would have been on site with our laptops to help those with limited computer skills and encourage people to participate with us but it goes to show there is a way round, a different way of working, so we can help.

Paula messaged, 'Thank you for helping me with my CV and applying for jobs, I would have been lost if it wasn't for you. I appreciate everything you have done for me and to the BFAWU Learning Services for supporting us'



Furloughed Kevin uses the time to study online

BFAWU member Kevin Bird was recently furloughed and decided he would use the situation to improve his skills, so contacted his unions Learning Services team to see what was on offer.

Kevin first contacted the BFAWU Learning Services Facebook page on the 2nd April requesting the means to access the Learning Curve courses on offer.

BFAWU Learning Project Worker Karen Plasom takes up the story:

"I asked him to send me his details so I could get him set up. I spoke to Kevin and sent him an email with the link to sign up for the courses."

Working at Samworth Brothers, Manton Wood, Kevin was furloughed, along with others from the company. Having time on his hands he decided to keep his body fit by running three times a week and occupying his mind by immersing himself in course work and so enhancing his CV as a result."

The Learning Curve Group offer a wide range of online courses which lead to qualifications, and Kevin thought he would try a couple of them, starting with Mental Health Awareness.

Kevin explained:

"We have been furloughed because of the COVID 19 pandemic a having our wages paid by the government and topped up by the employer. I decided not to sit back but to increase my own knowledge and understanding of issues that can affect us all"

He went on to say:

I have an interest in mental health issues so decided to start with the Mental Health First Aid course which I found

really interesting. I then contacted Julie Oakley at BFAWU Learning Services and signed up for the Equality and Diversity course. Each course took me around 10 days each to complete and I am waiting for feedback from the tutor"

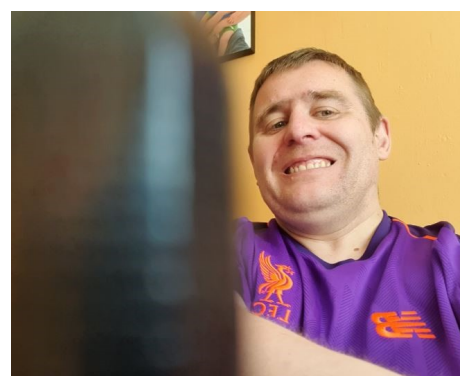
Kevin's work is waiting to be marked, but it has not stopped him ploughing on with another, he is now tackling the Prevent and Safeguarding course.

BFAWU Learning Services Manager Lisa

Greenfield congratulated him saying:

Well done Kevin, keep up the good work."

Being furloughed can be frustrating, but it also offers a good opportunity to build up your CV and learn some new skills, and we would love to hear from any members interested in exploring our learning offer."



FREE online bitesized computer courses



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Available learning:



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Access the Union Learns skillcheck to complete initial assessments in Maths, English & ITC by following the link below; <https://skillcheck.unionlearn.org.uk>



Interested in FREE bitesize learning? This includes courses on Mental Health. Speak to your Project Worker or ULR for more info. <https://www.unionlearn.org.uk/wranx>



Fully funded (FREE) distance learning courses available: <https://lcgonline.formstack.com/forms/level2courseenrolment?referral=BFAWUJulieCoates>

Check out our Facebook page: BFAWU Learning Services for more information on available courses.

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