

## Agored Cymru's Access to Higher Education Diploma provides a 'gateway' to a new life for single mother of five



Laretta Hughes

Access to Higher Education

After leaving school at 15 with no qualifications and an ingrained belief that she was 'stupid and would never amount to anything', single-mother of five Laretta Hughes defied the odds to be named winner of the **Agored Cymru Access to Higher Education Learner of the Year Award 2016 for Outstanding Commitment to Study**.

Disillusioned with school and further education, Cardiff-born Laretta Hughes was relieved to finally have an excuse to drop out of college aged 17 after discovering she was expecting her first child.

Over the course of the next 15 years, despite suffering from a very turbulent home life and the day-to-day challenges of bringing up five small children and caring for her disabled mother, Laretta found employment in the hospitality industry working her way up the ranks from cleaner to supervisor to acting manager, managing a team of 15 staff.

“Becoming a single mother of five young children was the hardest, yet most exhilarating thing I've ever done. Working hard to support my children, I realised there was something missing in my life. I loved helping people; I was good at it and it gave me a sense of achievement.”

In 2009, Laretta found the strength to leave her partner and job, and went back to college. She enrolled on a full-time Adult Foundation course at Cardiff and Vale College.

In 2015, with new-found confidence and determination, Laretta applied and was accepted to study a full-time Agored Cymru Access to Higher Education Diploma in Health Care at Cardiff and Vale College. This Diploma supports progression into nursing, midwifery and a wide range of health care professions.

“During the first few weeks at college I was unsure whether I had made the right decision. I'd been out of education for 15 years and everyone around me was so clever. The tutors, however, saw something in me that nobody – myself included – had seen: I wasn't stupid! Throughout the course, I gained a plethora of knowledge. I never wanted it to end.”

Laretta's course tutor, Lisa Bowditch, said:

“Laretta's commitment to study has excelled all expectations. She managed to maintain 99% attendance and achieved Distinctions across all subject areas. What makes her commitment so impressive is that she's done this whilst taking care of five young children, one of whom has Autism spectrum disorder (ASD).”

Laretta achieved 36 distinctions and nine merits.

In September 2016, Laretta plans to take up her place at the University of South Wales to read Psychology.

“The Agored Cymru Access to Higher Education Diploma has been essential in helping me to access education. I'm eternally grateful to the tutors at Cardiff and Vale College for their help and feedback. Their passion for teaching has given me a passion for learning. It's something I will never forget.”