

## CASE STUDY:

### *Supported learning students engaging together online and enjoying learning!*

Our Skills and Learning Programme lecturer explains how an initiative to engage with students online has had far reaching, yet unexpected positive impact brought about by COVID due to changing the way she teaches. Our supported learning students (ASN) are attending online-classrooms and engaging well with technology, so much more than we could ever have anticipated.

“When the reality that we would not see each other or students face to face for a long time, we knew we had to do something. This was out of concern for the immediate and long-term wellbeing of our students,



many of whom are in the most “at risk” category for COVID and are already amongst the most vulnerable and isolated groups in society. The college not only provides education, but a much-needed link to their peer group and community.

Early trials did not go well using core learning technologies with students, resulting in confusion and disengagement. A social media closed group sharing posts with key partners was more successful. It was about keeping in touch (60-70% of students) rather than interactive learning. When the college gave us the opportunity to trial MS Teams with our learners, we jumped. Although our team are non-tech savvy, in two short training sessions we were cautiously optimistic.

Our students’ enthusiasm and their willingness to keep engaging with us from very early on was a positive and yet unexpected consequence. There was a genuine ‘buzz’. Students used to attend college in five different rural communities across an area half the size of Wales. These students were now linked into one online community.

Online-classes are very beneficial for student and carer wellbeing. Online-classes provide social connection with each other, reducing loneliness and associated anxieties at a time when students hadn’t seen anyone outside their own family since lockdown. This had a positive impact on carers.

Online-classrooms are much more accessible and inclusive for some students eg no lengthy travel, reduction in anxiety levels (entering a building and crowded physical space). Some students voluntarily attend more classes and join students from a different community, widening participation and opening up new friendships.

Another insightful and surprising outcome is about how well the online-classroom fosters student independence and engagement. Students have a shortened, more focused online tutored session and will then complete tasks and worksheets offline. All students are punctual, some are 15 minutes early. Most students have thrived, taking on more responsibility for their own learning than ever before. Students apply theory from the John Muir Award inspired class when they go into our great outdoors and notice their surroundings also increasing physical wellbeing. All students gain far improved digital skills that we never imagined possible because they are regularly using technologies for communication, collaboration and social interaction.