LSF Academy
Further Education Institution
Licence Number 2025-003

WHAT CERTIFICATES CANNOT CAPTURE

What if the biggest barrier in adult education is what society assumes adults should already know?

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THE EXPECTATIONS HIDDEN BEHIND THE WORD "ADULT"

Society expects adults to be independent, managing money, communicate professionally, make decisions, understand workplace responsibilities and navigate everyday life. But what happens when someone reaches adulthood without having been given an equal opportunity to develop these skills?

At the Lino Spiteri Foundation, particularly within the LSF Academy, there have been assumptions that society attaches to adulthood. The adults LSF supports are persons with disabilities, each bringing different abilities, experiences, ambitions, and support needs.

Yet one question remains: Does society takes this knowledge for granted just because they are adults?





THE INVISIBLE CURRICULUM OF ADULTHOOD

Adults are often expected to navigate adulthood without ever being taught how. There are no textbooks, no specific lessons, nor a final exam, yet society expects adults to know what to do. They are expected to speak to an employer, protect their personal information, understand how to handle conflict, ask for help when needed, or to make daily decisions.

Many learn these skills through family, school, work and everyday experience. However, unfortunately, not everyone gets the same opportunities to learn, and when this is overlooked, a lack of experience can easily be mistaken for a lack of ability.

Perhaps the real question is not what someone struggles to do, but whether they were ever given a fair chance to learn.

MAYBE WE ARE ASSESSING THE WRONG THING

Success in adult learning is often measured by qualifications, completed courses, and employment opportunities. Although these milestones matter, they do not always show every way an adult has grown. However, working with people with disabilities brings a different question into focus:

"What became possible for this person that was not available before?"

Progress might mean following a routine, following instructions independently, feeling more confident in daily choices, speaking up, or completing a task without first asking for reassurance. Unfortunately, these achievements are never listed on a certificate, but they are essential in an adult's everyday life.

These achievements matter as much as academic success and need to be part of what education aims to achieve.



DISABILITY SHOULD NEVER LIMIT POTENTIAL

Support can sometimes hinder learning when educators complete tasks for learners instead of providing the necessary guidance to do them independently. Providing support is important, but so is allowing learners the space to explore, make mistakes, and develop their skills. Every educator should ask:

"Am I giving the learner the tools to succeed, or am I doing the learning for them?"

Accessibility does not mean removing every challenge. It means giving learners the support they need to work through it. Learning is not a one-size-fits-all process. Each learner may require different strategies, resources, and levels of guidance to succeed. The key is to recognize these differences without allowing them to define what a learner can achieve.

Different support should never mean smaller ambition.

THINK BEYOND TRADITIONAL TEACHING

At the LSF Academy, we believe that every learner deserves an opportunity to demonstrate what they can achieve. When someone finds a task challenging, our starting point should be to explore alternative ways of teaching rather than assume that the task is beyond their abilities. Inclusive learning requires educators to be adaptable, reflective, and willing to challenge their own expectations. It is about finding approaches that work for the individual, whether through different explanations, additional time, adjusted activities, or opportunities to develop independence.

The aim is not to make learning easier by removing every challenge, but to make it accessible while allowing learners to grow.

THE DIGNITY OF BEING ALLOWED TO GET IT WRONG



PROGRESS NOT PERFECTION

Independence cannot develop if every decision is made, every difficulty is avoided and every mistake is prevented. People learn by doing, reflecting on their experiences and discovering how to approach situations differently. An error can be corrected, a misunderstanding can be resolved, and a poor decision can become a valuable learning experience. For adults with disabilities, the intention to protect can sometimes lead to doing too much on their behalf. While genuine risks must always be managed, it is important to distinguish between preventing harm and preventing opportunities to learn. When individuals are never given the chance to make safe mistakes, they may also miss opportunities to build confidence, take responsibility, and develop their own judgment.

Sometimes, allowing someone to make a mistake is part of helping them succeed.



SUPPORT WITHOUT TAKING OVER

Sometimes, the most valuable contribution an educator can make is knowing when not to intervene. Instead of immediately offering solutions, they allow learners the time and space to think, experiment, ask questions, and reach their own conclusions. Not every attempt will lead to success, and not every decision will be the right one. However, each experience provides an opportunity to develop confidence, responsibility, and problem-solving skills.

Because learning becomes more meaningful when the learner takes ownership of it.

An educator's role is not simply to provide answers, but to create opportunities for individuals to discover their own abilities and become more independent.

True independence is not about managing everything alone. It is about having the confidence, support and freedom to make choices and take an active role in everyday decisions.

SUPPORT SHOULD NEVER DIMINISH DIGNITY

One of the most important principles in supporting adults with disabilities is recognizing that they are not individuals waiting to become adults.

They already are adults, with their own identities, preferences, aspirations, and rights.

Having a disability does not reduce a person's dignity, maturity or right to make informed choices. Adult education should not attempt to fit everyone into one definition of independence.

Instead, it should create opportunities for individuals to recognise their strengths, develop practical skills, access employment, participate in their communities and have greater control over their own lives.

The role of educators is not to make individuals dependent on continuous professional assistance, but to provide the guidance and opportunities they need to develop their own independence.

ACHIEVEMENT GOES BEYOND CERTIFICATES.

Qualifications and employment are important outcomes of education, but they do not tell the whole story.

Behind every completed program is a journey that cannot always be captured in a certificate. It is a journey of discovering abilities, overcoming challenges, building confidence, and learning to do things that may once have seemed out of reach.

It is also a journey for educators, who must continuously adapt their approaches, question their assumptions, and recognize that every learner has something different to offer. Progress does not always happen in a straight line. Sometimes it involves trying again, making mistakes, discovering alternative ways of learning and gradually developing independence.

Most importantly, adult education challenges the assumptions society holds about disability. Instead of focusing on what an individual is expected to know or achieve, it encourages a different question: have they ever been given a genuine opportunity to learn, practice, and develop that ability?

At the LSF Academy, education is about recognizing potential that may have previously gone unnoticed and creating the conditions for it to flourish.

Sometimes, the greatest achievement is the confidence to say: "I can do this myself."

