

***Worship: Leading & Preaching* | Overcoming challenges on the journey**

Angela's Story

My name is Angela and I have been studying *Worship: Leading & Preaching* for twelve months. My specific learning needs and impairment is Dyscalculia. This is known as a type of dyslexia, but it's quite complicated. It is difficulty with processing, difficulty with tracking from different devices to other devices; you have poor short term working memory and just a hard time generally. Finding things and spending lots of time reading is incredibly difficult. Also I have Irlen's Syndrome, which is quite a rare condition which affects the visual cortex of the brain and basically creates, as your eye filters light, it creates a hyperactivity in the visual cortex of the brain and that leads to a great deal of discomfort trying to read, trying to read for long periods of time, and it can be quite unpleasant at times.

The extra support I have had on this course is because I find it very difficult to track information online. And to do that with each module and each theme, even when preparing for course tutorial time, I find it very hard to find what on earth it is I am supposed to be looking at, when I am supposed to be looking at it. I may look for hours and not find what I should be looking for and looking at. So, basically I need to ask for help really, maybe from my peers or my learning mentor or my course tutor, so that can be quite an issue particularly when you are trying to prepare for tutorial sessions. So I have had lots of help from my mentor. But I took quite a while actually to ask for that help and it was quite an emotional journey. Really it can be quite hard to approach that issue at times, because as someone with specific learning issues there can be quite a lot of

stigma that is involved with that and a misconception that you lack intelligence in some way shape or form because you have these difficulties. Sometimes people have difficulties with speech as well and I can do at times as well, with the processing, it sometimes affects my speech as well. As anxiety rises it becomes a real issue and starts to affect my speech as well. So it's really important, if anyone has any issues like that, to kind of not put them on the back-burner just really reach out and try and find somebody that you can talk to easily and explain your needs and get that help as early as possible. Because now that I have got it at a later stage I wish I'd asked and been more transparent with the issues that I have.

The extra facilities that I found the most useful on the website, the *Worship: Leading and Preaching* website, really are the videos. Because it's very hard for someone like myself to do lots of reading and there is lots of information that you need to take in and if you find it hard to take that in and you've got a poor short term working memory it becomes very difficult to have, not only have you got a situation where you need to read, you are going to have tiredness and it is going to become very difficult. You have to remember this information as well.

Personally I find it a lot more accessible and inclusive if you can have something visual and audible, because the brain can actually remember things a lot quicker when there is visual and auditory learning going on. Without those things it takes a lot longer to take things on board. So I found that really useful on the website, and the way that they bring everything together, in different ways, creative ways, looking at different learners, music and kind of art, and that basically for me has meant that I can be a bit more myself on the course as well.

The key tips I would give to anyone with additional needs starting the course is don't panic, first of all: just take your time, take a deep breath. It seems incredibly overwhelming and at times you are going to feel really overwhelmed. You know really honestly it's easy to get anxious about things when you have most of your life struggled through academic learning, but it's really important to take things a little bit at a time, get used to the website, have a good look at everything and try and work out where things are. If you can't work it out don't worry. You need to ask for help. It's something that took me a long time to do, too long, and I ended up getting quite anxious and panicked when I hit the sort of coming up to a year. And in the end it turned out that at the Local Preachers' Meeting I explained that I was finding it hard, couldn't catch up with the work and was feeling like I was lagging behind. So if you just ask for help from your mentor or your tutor. Any prayer support you can get from anyone as well is a really brilliant idea. Also, make sure you save everything and all the articles, because it does at times take you a long time to read things perhaps. It is really important that you don't put yourself under a lot of pressure to read things quickly and get through it, because you won't take it in. So, save the articles, put them into a folder on one of your devices that you know exactly where it is, clearly name it so that you can go back to it again time and time again as much as you need to. Here and there when you get a spare five minutes, just have a quick look at it, read a paragraph. Also there are an awful lot of articles, but just look at the key articles that are highlighted within the themes, within the modules, and concentrate on those first. If you get any additional time then move into a, maybe, a suggested article, but I think it is a lot of pressure and there are a lot of readings, so stick with the key readings.

What I've most enjoyed about the course so far is the level of fellowship, that we have grown together in the course as we have gone on. Our tutorial sessions have become very supportive and very inclusive, particularly for myself, now that we are getting to know each other we are not so scared to share our thoughts and ideas with each other, I feel. It has just been very liberating, a very uplifting time to actually reflect on all these different themes together, and to feel that you are in a safe place with people that you can trust to actually share what you really think about things. Quite often in our tutorials we have had 'oh not sure what you'll think about that', but you know its OK, it has really been such a wonderful time together. It's very much about support and that's something that's really important for me personally and I would say for anyone with additional learning needs it's very, very important to know that you have a supportive team of peers with you together on this journey of *Worship: Leading and Preaching*. I think it's been a real amazing experience, having been given the opportunity to pour in creative and artistic elements into the course, because I personally am a very creative artistic person and to be able to express that in *Worship: Leading and Preaching* has been really uplifting for me. Quite often these courses are very linear and you have to do lots of writing, maybe just 'one size fits all', but it's been I feel amazing how it's catered for so many different learning styles and gifts and talents. The other thing really is how amazing and how much of a great privilege it is to actually be given the opportunity to lead worship and to speak for God and it's something that I never take lightly. I know that is him helping me do this and he is giving me the strength to do it, but it just so wonderful to bring everything that I am and everything that he is and somehow put it all together in a creative

way and convey that in love is really one of the most greatest privileges that we have as Worship Leaders and Local Preachers.