

# Getting an education



**DEBRA Member Mohsin Ali, who's 17 years old and has Recessive Dystrophic EB, tells us how the EB Community Support Team helped him at college.**

I attend a college of further education. At first, I was worried about making the big move from school, as colleges are a lot bigger and filled with more people, but when mum and I contacted the DEBRA EB Community Support Team to find out about how they could help, I was relieved.

Sondra Butterworth, DEBRA's EB Community Support Manager in the North, helped me by speaking to my school Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator and finding out what type of support I was getting at school. Sondra then spoke to the Learning Support Team at the college to tell them what type of support I would need before starting college so that they could do their risk assessment to make sure that the college could provide a safe learning environment for me. The fact that she was there to do this really took a lot of my worries

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away – the risk assessment asked quite a lot of technical questions that I found very difficult to answer.

Now, I am enjoying going to college after receiving great help from Sondra and the DEBRA team. This has made a big difference to my life at college. I now feel a lot safer because of some of the provisions that have been put in place for me following the risk assessment. For example, I am allowed to leave classes slightly earlier to avoid being knocked and jostled by other students in the corridor. Sondra also helped me to appeal against the decision to reduce my DLA payments. She attended the tribunal with me and my family. We were successful and the DLA payments were increased. This has helped towards the cost of attending college, and will help to pay for my driving lessons.

If there are others reading this article who are also living with EB and are hoping to go to college in the future, I would advise them not to step back from their hopes: getting help from DEBRA would be the best idea.

Anyone with EB should not let themselves down. We can have days of agony and pain but we should never

## Free early years education

All 3 and 4-year-olds in England are entitled to 15 hours of free early education each week for 38 weeks of the year.

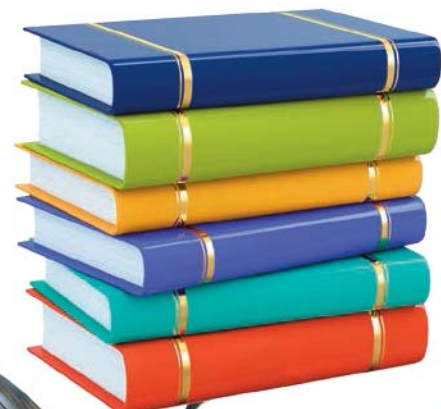
Once your child is 3 years old you can start claiming free early education. Some 2-year-olds are also eligible. From September 2014 more 2-year-olds in England will be eligible for free early education.

Find out more about the current rules and incoming legislation here: [www.gov.uk/free-early-education](http://www.gov.uk/free-early-education). Contact your local council to check if your child is eligible. This is something your EB community support manager can help you with if you would like.

let this put our hopes down! We should stand up and look out for what can be done to get the best from the day ahead and get the education we need.

**Mohsin Ali**

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# Education

**Many young people want to enter further education when they leave school, and that is no different for young people living with EB. The prospect of dealing with the physical challenges and extra responsibilities of college or university may be daunting, but there are plenty of resources to help you.**

## eLearning

eLearning has revolutionised education in further and higher education. Most college or university libraries have online resources such as eBooks and journals which are downloadable. So for those students who would find carrying heavy books to be difficult this may be invaluable.

Students can access their student account and the course materials remotely from home. So students who may be away from college for any reason should be able to still access their work.

## Assistive technology

Assistive technology is enabling all individuals, including those with disabilities, to be more independent, self-confident, productive and better included in everyday life, education, employment and everyday living. Assistive technology can include small items of equipment, such as pencil grips, which can make the task of writing easier. Many of our members request information about pencil grips for school.

Other technical items include:

- software packages which convert text to speech
- voice recognition software
- soft overlays for computer keyboards
- tracking balls mouse instead of using a standard mouse
- soft touchscreen tables or soft keyboard

This experience is part of a wealth of shared knowledge and information the EB Community Support Team can draw upon to help you when you need it. Visit [www.debra.org.uk/article-community-support.html](http://www.debra.org.uk/article-community-support.html), email [membership@debra.org.uk](mailto:membership@debra.org.uk) or call 01344 771961 to find out more.

## Financial support

Financial support may be available for young people who are planning to go into further or higher education, including bursaries and support for students with disabilities. The National Careers Service provides information and advice about how to pay for learning, what support is out there and where to find it.

## Legislation to support the young disabled person in education

The Equality Act became law in 2010. This Act is important when considering equality in education. For example, education providers should make 'reasonable adjustments' to the learning environment to make sure that the student living with a disability is not disadvantaged. This may mean the provision of assistive technology to support learning, or someone to support the student in the classroom.

## Support from college or university

Every college or university will have a department designed to support students with disabilities. This might be in the form of a learner support team, an inclusion team or an equality and diversity officer.

When completing an application form it is important to tell the college about your disability and how it affects you on a daily basis. The role

of the college or university is not only to make sure that your chosen course meets your needs, but that the learning support plan also ensures that the learning environment is safe and enables you to fulfil your potential.

## Support from the Community Support Team

If you're thinking of going to college, please contact your community support manager. With your permission, your community support manager can act as your advocate and speak to any other agencies who may be involved in your education.

### Useful resources

[www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

<https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/Pages/Home.aspx>

[www.education.gov.uk](http://www.education.gov.uk)

Kirsty Hard, EB Community Support Area Manager for Scotland, The Borders and Northern Ireland has now left the team. We are recruiting to the post. In the meantime, if you live in this area and require community support please contact Sondra Butterworth (call 07920 231271 or email [sondra.butterworth@debra.org.uk](mailto:sondra.butterworth@debra.org.uk)).