

Shropshire's century old legacy of inclusion sparks new national business movement

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Updated:

A pioneering business movement celebrating disabled, chronically ill, and neurodivergent entrepreneurs is launching across the UK this autumn, with its roots firmly planted in Shropshire's history.



Helen Pugh

The inaugural National Ablepreneurs Day, taking place on 16 September 2026, is inspired by a remarkable local story that dates back nearly a century to the earliest days of Derwen Training College.

The movement was founded by award-winning Shropshire entrepreneur Helen Pugh. After a successful 30-year career in the property and professional services sectors, Helen was forced out of traditional employment due to her own worsening disabilities and chronic

illnesses. Rather than stepping away from the workforce, she founded Ablepreneurs®, a national community that empowers individuals to build businesses tailored to their unique health and accessibility needs.

The inspiration behind the venture, however, belongs to Helen's grandmother, Emily Kathleen Renshaw. After losing her leg as a child in the early 20th century, Emily became one of the first three students welcomed to Derwen Training College by founder Dame Agnes Hunt.

"At a time when disabled people were so often defined purely by what they couldn't do, Derwen gave my grandmother skills, confidence, and a profound sense of purpose," says Helen Pugh, Founder of Ablepreneurs. "She and my grandfather, who she met at the college, built a life that proved disability never dictates ambition. That quiet strength became the blueprint for my own journey."

With Derwen approaching its centenary next year, National Ablepreneurs Day marks a full-circle moment for the county's history of inclusive innovation. The movement aims to challenge outdated corporate perceptions and shine a spotlight on the estimated 25% of UK entrepreneurs who navigate long-term health conditions, barriers, and neurodivergence.

To mark the launch, a live celebration and networking event will be held locally at The Wroxeter in Shrewsbury on Wednesday 16 September, from 10 am to 2 pm. The event will bring together founders, regional business leaders, and national supporters to share lived experiences and discuss how the UK can build a more adaptable, accessible economy.

"Talent doesn't fade with disability or illness; it just needs the right environment to shine," Helen adds. "Shropshire has a beautiful legacy of believing in human potential, and it feels incredibly meaningful that a movement now impacting lives across the UK started right here."

Local business owners, organisations, and residents are invited to support the campaign online using the hashtag #AblepreneursDay or by attending the Shropshire launch event. Tickets and further details can be found at nationalablepreneursday.carrd.co.

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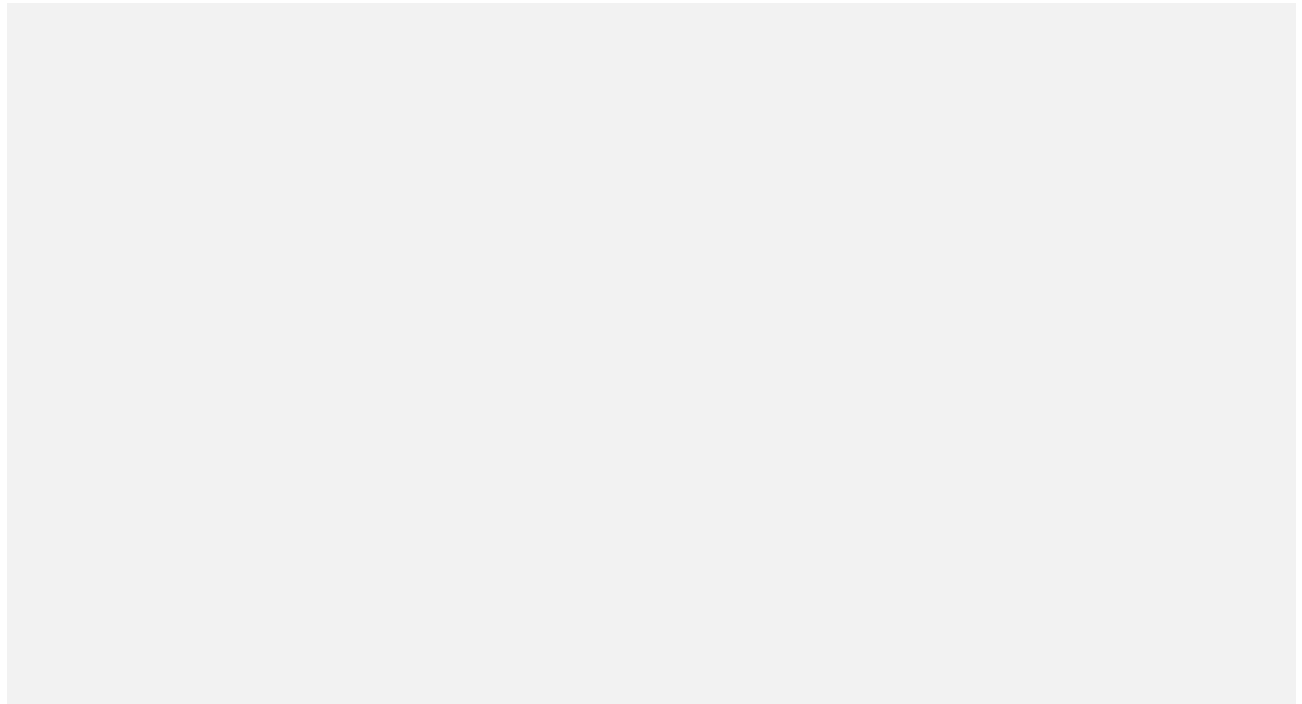
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