

Olinda's story

Hi my name is Olinda and I am 31 years young. I spent all of my teenage years either being supported at home by social services or living in hospital. When I was 16 I moved into MACS supported accommodation and was let loose on the world of independent living.

I left school just before my 14th birthday so I didn't sit any exams. I guess education wasn't really a priority to me or the people around me at the time; life was just about getting by. At 17 I decided to go back to tech and do my GCSEs, not liking to stress myself too much I did 2 in my first year and 4 the next. I decided to keep on going after this and studied for my A levels and then went to Queen's University to study Psychology. While I was studying, I gained a lot of work experience in VOYPIC. I shadowed the staff and learnt how to deliver focus groups and individual work with young people. I then got a job as a VOYPIC Advocacy Support worker which I loved!

I decided to go back to uni and did a PhD. I now work in Queen's University as a lecturer in cancer survivorship; I teach psychology to nurses and try to come up with the best ways to support people after cancer. My job is cracker, I get to travel, meet loads of people and have fun teaching students.

Positive experience

Getting the work experience I did at VOYPIC was amazing. From being unemployable and behind my peers, I was able to overtake them and had experience to apply for jobs when many in my uni class couldn't.

Short message for children living in care

Grab all the opportunities and supports that are available. Just because you might feel behind right now doesn't mean you can't be ahead in the future. Work hard...it pays off.

My hopes and dreams for children in care in the next 21 years

That young people in care will have the same opportunities as all other young people. That they have strong stable placements and don't spend their lives changing placements and social workers. That they are listened to and their viewpoint is respected. That the gap in educational attainments between care experienced young people and their peers disappears.