

Admission

In terms of the admissions process, I was really keen to do my research and knew what I was getting into. So my top two universities, I made sure that I went and researched the environment and made sure that it was going to work for me and be accessible. I got in touch with the degree administrator to talk about the set up of the university. Then I applied through UCAS and got an interview and was offered a place. I was sort of excited and ready to go really.

Teaching and learning

In terms of my general experience at university with the teaching and learning, it was a very positive experience for me. I just made sure I was honest and told people what I needed because how are they going to know otherwise. So I just said when I was in plaster, I needed ground floor teaching rooms, I needed a bit of time to be able to go and do my catheter, you know I just found that the more honest you were the better. They also gave me extra time in exams to have rest breaks. They never got angry about that or frowned at it, it was just totally encouraged.

Placement

In terms of placement that was also an incredible experience. The university were really supportive in organising it. They would get in touch with the educators and would explain that I was disabled and that my needs were kind of mobility wise. Then I would get in touch with them before the placement started and explained what I needed and just have a discussion about whether it could work and how we could make it work. I think it is really important to know that sometimes the placement supervisors are as nervous as you are about taking a disabled student and that all you need to do is to be honest and discuss what you need and then everybody knows just where you are at. Just be honest; don't be afraid to speak up.

Qualifying and employment

In terms of qualifying and employment just go for it! You know, you are working in a hospital, you are working in the community, and there are people who are disabled as well. I found that it is just a totally positive experience. You can build up a rapport with patients because you understand a bit more of what they are going through and you tend to be able to give them your own experiences as well.

GO FOR IT!

In terms of people who are considering training as a speech and language therapist or as a physio or something like that with a disability, you know don't let anything put you off. You know, get in touch with people; discuss what you want to do. Discuss what adjustments you need to be made and just go for it. You know, nothing ventured, nothing gained.

Case study VI Practitioner with dyslexia: 27 years of successful practice

I am sharing my experience of having dyslexia and how that has affected my working life. I qualified as a Physio in 1987 and at present I am working as a community physiotherapist, part of an integrated therapy team. I have dyslexia and my eye sight is not fabulous either and the combination of those two means that I cannot actually drive.

I was not diagnosed as having dyslexia until just before taking my O levels. That was because I had a really astute English teacher for the time that expressed to my parents her concern that even though I was bright and able verbally, my written work was appalling and even though my mum went through my spellings on practically every subject of my work, I was obviously having great difficulty. At this time I don't think dyslexia (and certainly in the school and Local Education

Authority (LEA) I was in) was really talked about. So the school and LEA didn't have any procedures in place to look at why I might be having these difficulties, so they advised my parents to send me to a private educational psychologist who assessed me and sort of gave me a diagnosis of dyslexia based on my IQ, which was high. My written work was appalling and of course I had visual and perceptual type problems as well. As a result of that, I was given extra time for my O levels and A levels and I did my exams on a separate table with a lamp to help with my visual problems. So that was where I actually got with my school, I did really well with my O levels and A levels so that was great and I decided during that time to train as a Physio. At that time I did not realise that the educational psychologist had really advised my parents strongly not for me to do A levels or go on to further education because they thought I will find it too stressful. Luckily they didn't tell me, but kind of just supported me in my decisions.

One of the things people want to think about is the procedure for applying to become a health care professional, especially if you have dyslexia. Really at that time, because it was not recognised, it didn't even come up in the interview; I don't know if the school wrote anything in their reports about me so it wasn't a question of disclosure or non disclosure it was not really anything. It wasn't something anybody really talked about and to be honest even though I had been given a diagnosis I tended just to shrug it off and not take any notice about that.

In my school before that, I had quite a tricky time. The typical problems of been told off for failing a spelling test, getting nought out of twenty or one out of twenty even though I tried to learn them and really struggling with copying things off the board. So, I was perceived as sort of being slow, and so it was the whole thing of when you are looking at the board and you are trying to write it down you just can't do it and the more stressed you get, the harder it will get and I will often have to stay behind and do that. I was told off for being lazy and being careless. I remember having to go to the head teacher's once because I had been a bit naughty but she also had my rough book. There was a group of us that had been naughty but I was made to stay behind afterwards and really blasted for having such appalling writing and told it was disgusting and she went on and on about it. That was often the implications of having dyslexia.

When I got to college in some ways things became harder, though school didn't give me much in the way of strategies to learn, I just kind of worked those out for myself; at college I found things harder because it was people talking and trying to write it down, which I found incredibly hard and trying to look at the board and write it down. When I was at school, especially in sixth form I had one or two friends whom I knew incredibly well, they would always give me their notes after every lesson and I would have to spend the extra time with their notes and putting them in a way I could learn. I couldn't really use anything I had written down in the class as it never made sense; I could not even read my own writing basically. At college, it was new people who were actually quite competitive and there was not really a sense of being aware of those issues. Even the girls that I lived with were not prepared to let me use their notes because they thought I was just copying and using them, so that was really quite hard. It didn't occur to me to go and talk it over with anybody. I also find it hard just rote learning muscles, which is what the anatomy was like in the first year because the way I like to learn is really understanding. So, if I can understand a concept and see it through that is fine; if I am actually trying to look at a word and memorise it, that is hopeless. I have issues with remembering names and visual perception is really hard so. I might be told someone's

name and try to remember it even though I have been told several times or write it down really clearly. That kind of learning for me was really hard. In exams at the end of the year, what we called Part 1s there was no indication that I would be given extra time, so I kind of just went along with it.

In the second year, in the clinical field, things could have gone to a bit of a head. I obviously got quite stressed, but was OK until I had a problem with one of my placements which was kind of linked to the difficulties I had with dyslexia. On the next placement it was outpatients and I found that really, really hard and so I decided that perhaps this wasn't the job for me, but there were other reasons as well. At that point there was a bit of help, I think people realised I must be struggling, but whereas they let me have like a week to think (and at the end of the week I thought "no I really wanted to do physio"). Nothing was put in place to help or support me and I think that was just because that wasn't just what happened in those days and there wasn't the technology. So I just plodded on and I got through my training and then for my finals there was no assistance for my exams, no extra time as I had in O levels and A levels; that wasn't seen to be appropriate. I think I may have discussed it with my tutor and they just said you have to cope in the real world basically. I passed and had my first job.

Moving into work was very easy in those days, I had several job offers and because I was getting married I moved to the job that was most convenient to where we planned to live. To be honest having managed to get to O Levels, A Levels and all my training, which as a physio was very hard, because you had to do all the academic work as well as working and lots of travelling, I think if you can get through that amount and then going into the working world you are kind of there-really. In those days there wasn't the technology or anything so you are just expected to work and so you just take it in yourself. You know you are going to take longer doing everything, you know there are certain things that are going to stress you so you try and work out certain strategies that will help.

I will always stay late, writing things up, you know; so, writing in rough and then writing [notes] up later, especially in outpatients. I think that is probably the main strategy. I also probably took stuff home quite a lot. So I just sort of muddled through and put the whole dyslexia thing behind me and did my rotations in those days and then got my job in paediatrics. That was actually a real relief because you are not working in the acute systems and you are spending much more time with parents and families; there is much more of an emphasis on having empathy and those kinds of skills can come through then. In those days you were not expected to be rushed, you were expected to give people time and if they needed a cup of tea you took the time, and that was acceptable in those days, but not now. So rather than having to see several people in outpatients, say, every ten minutes and having people go, and rushing from one cubicle to another you just had to pace yourself to relate to children and family. So that was better.

I worked for a while at the Children's Hospital in Birmingham which was very research oriented and very much a calm atmosphere and taking time and so there weren't any issues there and then I had like several types of little jobs due to personal circumstances. The next long job I had was working in a residential school and really dyslexia was not really an issue there because you could pace yourself. But it was there that I began to actually face up to the fact that I might have a problem, because I think you don't want to be different to everybody else and you don't want to

make a song and dance for everything, you just think this is me, this is who I am. One of two things came to a head that weren't anything to do with dyslexia and the Head of that School was an English teacher and I had gone to see her and chat things over and she said "you know you do remarkably well for someone that has dyslexia". I almost burst into tears then because (a) I thought how did you know? and (b) if I had not actually told somebody then I must really have a problem. That was one of those moments that you remember and I thought "that is really useful to know". Whereas before that even though I have had help in O levels and A levels, nobody apart from the educational psychologist had ever really acknowledged that I had a problem. That was useful; it didn't mean that my working practice changed. This was before the days of PCs so you would write your reports in hand and then the secretary will write them up. They were lovely, they got to know my handwriting and all my little abbreviations and things and that was fine.

I just trundled along with things and I got a similar job when we moved in a residential school when we moved and things just ticked along OK. I was very much aware that I would take longer than other people. I got to grips a lot more with IT in that job; the previous school hadn't had computers. This school did. I found that once I was shown what to do I picked things up quite easily but I think the thing I find hard and still find incredibly hard is speed of typing. I find it difficult having thoughts and then having to type. It was fine. I was able to pace myself. Unfortunately, that school was closed and I have just been recently redeployed into the community, which is lovely in many ways; but I think I have felt the most dyslexic in my life with the pace and pressure of working in a different environment. This made things come to a head a wee bit or more than a week back and I had to go and see Occupational Health and they advised that I need to talk to Access to Work about it. That is where I am now.

I would say if it is something you want to do, just go for it and there is so much more support now, so I advise that if I can manage it then you can manage it. When I came to the established trainers' day for the students, there was a workshop on dyslexia and I think the lady that was leading said can you get into small groups and discuss the positive things about having a student that has dyslexia with you and everybody's reaction in my group was just really negative. They just said they can't think of anything positive and that really upset me and so I just thought of all the things that are positive that people with dyslexia have. When you have had something like that and have had to work through it you know:

- People with dyslexia will have great perseverance
- They will have much more empathy because they have had to cope with something that is hard. They will be absolutely good at problem solving and they would really be good at thinking outside the box
- They would be much better at seeing the whole picture of things
- They would be used to developing other ways of doing things because a person who hasn't got that problem may not have had to do this.

I would say that if you have dyslexia you have the potential of developing all those gifts and in spite of, well not in spite of but because of, your difficulties, you have got lots of other positive things to offer, so I would encourage you to go for it.

Case study VII Student Journey: physiotherapy student with rheumatoid arthritis

Hi, my name is Emma; I'm a third year physiotherapy student from Coventry University. I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis as a child, predominately affecting both knees. As I was diagnosed as a child I have had the opportunity to develop effective coping strategies to manage my condition and now I'm 28 years old I don't feel my arthritis really affects my daily life. As you can tell by my age and that I'm only a third year student, I didn't jump straight from school to college to university. I worked for several years in IT before deciding to go to college and eventually university to study sports therapy. It was during this degree I realised physiotherapy was the profession for me. I had guidance from my tutor at university about the physiotherapy course, however, I didn't feel the need to seek guidance about how I'd cope with having RA and becoming a physiotherapist. I didn't feel my condition would be an issue – possibly due to the fact I hadn't had any severe flare ups for a couple of years – like I say I was able to self-manage quite effectively.

The admissions process was simple enough, through UCAS like all other prospective students. I was worried about declaring I had a disability on my application form as I didn't feel my RA was disabling to me. I was also worried I wouldn't be offered a place on the course, so I pondered as to whether to declare it or not. I decided to be honest and tell the university about my condition. I was offered a place despite being considered disabled so in the end I was glad I was honest as I could really be myself.

In the first week of starting the course I had to have an Occupational Health review to highlight areas I may struggle with. I also visit the tutor for disabled students a couple of times per year to check everything's ok and that I'm still managing without any issues. The university have been incredibly supportive at offering advice and they have a wide range of services for disabled students. The lecturers on my course have also been very supportive at providing alternate physiotherapy treatment techniques to avoid placing my joints in painful positions. On my clinical placements my educators are aware of my RA, as I agreed for a letter to be sent from university prior to me starting the placement. All placements have made it clear that my RA isn't a problem and have allowed me to work comfortably throughout. I've not experienced any major issues, although having a physical disability makes you much more aware of your posture when treating patients!

I don't have any concerns about finding employment as a disabled person as throughout clinical placements I have found alternate ways of coping which I will emphasise when applying for jobs and at interviews. I've come to understand, however, that some areas of physiotherapy may be physically too much for me to cope with when I'm qualified; however, other doors remain fully open to me like all other physiotherapists without a disability. I would encourage people with disabilities to apply for courses in health and social care – I'm beginning to realise how much of a rewarding career I will be getting by working as a healthcare professional. I don't think having a disability and working with people with similar problems is a bad thing – quite the opposite in fact. You're able to empathise with patients and treat them holistically as you can draw on your own personal experiences.

I hope I've been able to reassure those of you who are worried their disability will be an issue when applying for and training in their chosen profession. My experience is only a positive one – so I would encourage you to go for it!
Thank-you for listening.

Case Study VIII Student Journey: social work student with trigeminal neuralgia and atypical facial pain

Introduction

My name is Mr. C and I am a full time student at Coventry University in my final year. I am studying BA Social Work and I am on my final placement this year and will graduate in 2014.

Condition/Disability and University Experience

I was diagnosed with Trigeminal Neuralgia and Atypical Facial Pain at the end of November 2013 after suffering with the symptoms of this from the beginning of October 2013. I wasn't sure whether I would continue on the final year, as my disability is very bad and I was not sure whether I would be able to continue. I spoke to my Course Director to discuss what my options would be. My Course Director really helped me and we went to see the placement coordinator as I was going to be going on a 100 day placement starting September 2013. After talking to both I felt that I had some options and things that I could put into place [to help].

I was able to speak to the Disabilities Support Team at the university who showed me how much support and help I could get from the University and also from the DSA (Disabled Students Allowance). I was also able to access counselling from the university to help me to deal with what will possibly be a lifelong disability as there is no easy cure for this. My experience with the university since I have had this disability has been very, very good. I have been extremely impressed with the way that the Course Director and Placement Coordinator have handled my disability and how they ask me each time they see me. They like to find out how things are going with me and the placement and what is happening with my disability and how I am managing it with doing the placement.

Being on placement has been hard at times as I don't want my disability to stop me from being there and accomplishing what I need to as I know that I'm capable of finishing this degree and doing really well on placement. At the placement, I have found them all to be supportive and very understanding and if I need to go home and work from home then they have been happy for me to do that. I think that sometimes though, they all forget that I have a disability or an illness as 80% of the time, it is controlled. I don't see this as a problem as I don't want people to focus on me being in pain all the time, but instead, look at what I can do and focus on that all the time. However, my placement has been fantastic as well and they have figured out some of the signs for when I am in pain.

I am looking forward to qualifying but am very nervous about being employed, as I would have to tell the employer eventually about my disability and that scares me as hardly anyone knows about it and if they do know anything, then they are usually only slightly informed and I'm not sure what

the reaction would be. However, when I qualify with this degree then that makes me a fully qualified social worker who is competent to practice as such, here should not be any judgements based on my competence and whether I can function as a social worker with a disability. I will be someone who has a disability who is able to work. I think that anyone who has a disability should definitely consider a career in health/social care. I think that as a career the jobs that you might go into within those fields, mean that you are there to help people and any type of disability that you might have should not be seen as a hindrance and/or a bad thing, but that actually your experience is valuable and might help with different situations.