

Amy's story

The move from primary to secondary school . . .

A few things but not much. I remember going round looking at the schools – some of the schools – and I remember that I went to a different school from most of my friends. The school that quite a lot of my friends went to didn't have a special needs department and I kind of needed a school that had a department like that. I was on a Statement.

Life at secondary school . . .

They had a place called The Pavilion where I could go when I wasn't in lessons. I had a few friends there and the LSAs, learning support assistants, were based there and I had a key worker – I had two key workers actually, since I was in my second year at school. I suppose they were kind of particularly there to support me with my school work and I could talk to them about any problems that I had.

Things about school I liked . . .

I always liked dance and drama, music and, well, that was . . . I suppose that was . . . and English. Those would have to be my favourite subjects, I think, although I did sort of have . . . don't know – I liked . . . quite a . . . well, I liked most things. Well, I passed nine GCSEs – most of them between . . . most of them between grades A and D. I liked school generally and I worked hard.

Things about school that I didn't like . . .

I'm not sure. I didn't really have any lessons that I really hated. I mean, I didn't . . . I found maths very difficult. I think I didn't really like . . . I wasn't that keen on maths lessons because I found it difficult.

Relationships at school . . .

I had one or two friends, but not . . . not very many.

Problems at school . . .

And I . . . I got bullied. Well, practically for every year that I was at school, in one way or another. There was, like, different forms of bullying throughout the years. Well, I would say definitely . . . definitely tell someone, someone you trust. I know it's hard because I've been there myself, but it does . . . it can help.

I suppose probably one of the hardest things at that school was that I was basically sort of excluded from . . . from . . . The other students there didn't really want me in their groups. I've had various times where they were doing group work and I'd go and join one group and then the people . . . the girls there would say, 'Oh that group there really wants you to go and join them', and so I'd go over there and then they'd say, 'Oh actually, no, go and join that group'.

Sources of support . . .

Well I talked to . . . I had my key workers who I could talk to about it. They tried to help me. I became . . . I preferred working with my LSA or with one particular person, well, sort of like, friend.

When I was in my first year at college I used the student services counselling service.

The move to college . . .

I went to college after school and, well, got on well there. I mean, I did get bullied in my first year at college for being short. There was a girl there who kept calling me 'midget', and putting my things out of my reach and stuff like that. So that was a hard year. But I enjoyed doing the course and I did an NVQ in admin the next year, which I really enjoyed.

I found it hard to imagine life after school – in fact I didn't really think there was a life at all outside of school. But then one of the good things was I became more independent with getting around by myself and learnt how to use, like, buses and taxis and things.

The course that I did, which was City and Guilds Skillpower, sort of helped me to sort of find my feet at college. I did various different things like leisure and tourism, sport and leisure, basic life skills, horticulture, hospitality and catering, lots of different things.

We were given a tour of the college when I first started so we sort of learnt where everything was through that.

Well I suppose the worst would be when I was being bullied in my first year at college. I suppose the best thing about that year would probably be my friends. I had a friend who I could sort of, like, talk to . . . one particular friend.

I learnt a lot about using computers, using the phone and filing and faxing, lots of different things. And I did work experience at the Faculty of Modern and Mediaeval languages.

Adult life . . .

On my days off from college I went and did voluntary work at . . . with an organisation called Youth Action on a magazine project called 'Respect' – one of those magazine projects? And that kind of, sort of, I did various . . . well, that was . . . I suppose that was my sort of main sort of . . . I did a bit of voluntary work during that time and I volunteered for Speaking Up! as well. And I just kind of progressed, from being more of an observer, observing things, and taking part in things, to being more of a lead – over time. And I started working with Speaking Up! back at the beginning of March 2002. That's when they offered it to me . . . it took quite some time but they did offer me paid work.

Yeah, I'd say the best place to start is by talking to someone you trust and ask them then to help you find out about things that are out there. Yeah, well, just take that from someone who's been there.

Advice for others

There's lots of opportunities to do things out there, but if you're not sure what you might like to do, there's . . . well, you can talk to someone you trust, like, whether that's a relative or support worker, or whatever.