

John W's story

Sources of support . . .

Well, it was good and I found the teachers really helpful and good. And I did make a few friends who . . .well, quite a few friends who I still have today.

There was also a careers advisor that could give me . . . that gave me some sort of . . . that also let me know about the, kind of, benefits I could receive at the time.

Making school/college better . . .

I guess if they kind of . . . if they kind of see where my strengths were and my weaknesses are and what sort of skills are going to be really useful to me later on in life – I think that would have been really useful, whether that had been to learn domestic skills that are useful or it's going to be learning skills that'll help me later on in work, skills of how to sell myself. I think those sort of things could have been really useful.

If I was doing it again, I guess I might . . . I guess I'd have got a bit more clear in my mind about myself, a bit more confidence, so I'd kind of be able to approach it a bit more clearly with making decisions about 'This is what I want to do – or do I?', like, 'Is this helpful to me?' and I'd be able to ask the key questions as I'm doing it to learn things and also interact and make strong friends with people at the time and be able to use . . . be able to learn off friends, you know.

I think something else I'd do if I had the opportunity to do the, kind of, college side again, is probably challenge myself a bit more, to stretch myself more. Challenge myself a bit further.

I think I liked the college experience – (but I'm) thinking that if we'd interacted with the other people at the different courses a little bit here and there, that might have been a good experience – just to get a feel of 'This is the other things that are going on in college meanwhile', kind of thing. It might have been interesting, because what I've found with college is the courses were very much kept in their own bubble – doing their own sort of thing, but . . . and there are only little bits of overlaps between them. I was just wondering what that would have felt like, if the overlaps was a bit bigger, you know.

The move to college . . .

Well, when I say 'variety' it's, at the college, on the Context course, it's, kind of, learning a bit of everything. I think the good thing . . . I think it was good to have learnt some different skills, like there's a bit of . . . a little bit of woodwork we learnt, cooking. There was also trying out some different work experience. There was also a bit of IT – you know, IT skills were coming in strong at the time, but there was a bit

of that I done – there was some English, which was good. Yeah – so a mixture of different things really.

Adult life . . .

I think after that when I done a bit of volunteering, and got involved with Speaking Up and things, and my confidence has grown by doing things. And learning through the life experience sort of things, I think, beyond college – there's lots of life experience things. Even with the, kind of, learning to drive bit, there was the lesson and things where I might have learned a little bit here and there, but the actual experience of doing it, after getting the certificate, saying you've passed, that's . . .

Yeah, the work experience bit was in school and college and then there's a year after college where I done volunteering. For that year I was learning . . . I was still learning to drive, which I'd started learning at college, kind of, every fortnight, on and off, kind of thing. And I was also doing some volunteering, at Blue Cross, which is . . . where I was also already doing a bit at school, work experience and that bit, and in my spare time, you know? I guess that's a good point. I guess if people had've been saying to me: 'You can challenge yourself more than that – you can . . . you can do better than that.' And asked me to come up with something even more . . . something that would have challenged me even more, that might have been good. And there was Darwin Nurseries which I volunteered for, and Speaking Up. And also there was . . . there was also doing some IT skills.

Kind of different . . . kind of a week – every day there was something different – different days. And then after about a year . . . a year or so . . . I think after about a year of that I got a job. A really positive difference. I remember at the time, I was, like, thinking at the interview: 'I'm nervous, I'm nervous and I'm terrified'. And when I was told that I'd got the job, it kind of felt like it wasn't real at first, but then after a while I got into it – enjoyed it. So, yeah, a positive difference.

Advice for others . . .

Kind of the whole thing about believing in yourself, kind of thing. And, yeah, and feeling strong enough in yourself. If I could kind of see directly that, yes, it's exactly what I've been through, yeah, I'd guess it'd be, like: 'Don't be afraid to talk – talk to your other classmates – they're going through some things too.'