



Helen Colson



“...Someone suggested I could be a special needs teacher so I’m aiming towards that now! I just really want to help others to achieve like I did and to give something back for every support I had!”

Hearing Loss/ Deafness and School

Can you tell me about your type of hearing loss, how long have you had it and you're main mode of communication?

I have moderate hearing loss in both ears which I have had since birth and my main mode of communication is speaking with the help of lip reading.

What was it like for you at school with your deafness, did you have challenges?

I was lucky that in the three schools I went to all had a Hearing Impaired Centre attached to the school so all students with a hearing impairment were very well supported in their studies. I had challenges for example group work was always difficult because of the noise levels.

University Life

What interests did you have while growing up and what led you to study for your chosen career?

Whilst I was growing up I was very interested in using computers and originally wanted to work in IT when I finished studying. However since attending the first university, things have changed a lot.

After leaving my first university after a year, I took a year out to decide what I really wanted and in September 2010 started a Childcare course. I then

wanted to be a nursery nurse to begin with but since then I changed my mind to become a special needs assistant whilst I was doing my HND. However when visiting a university (for my third year to gain a BA) someone suggested I could be a special needs teacher so aiming towards that now! I just really want to help others to achieve like I did and to give something back for every support I had.

“Particularly with the first placement, the one class I worked with were so incredibly supportive about making sure I could hear both the staff and children”

What were your feelings, thoughts before starting university, did you move away from home?

Before starting at my first university, I was really excited but scared at the same time. I didn't move away from home but had I stayed at that university, I was planning to move into halls for the second year.

Before I started my HND at a college, I was really excited but had many anxious moments that history would repeat itself and I wouldn't do so well.

When I move to a local university for my third year in September 2014 again I will be staying at home but I'm very excited yet again

and looking forward to the new challenge.

What is your course title and have you graduated?

For the first university it was BSc CH Applied & Social Psychology with IT. I didn't finish the course.

For my HND it was 'Advanced Practice of Work with Children and Families HND' I have finished and awaiting graduation.

For my top up degree it'll be 'BA Childhood Studies (with Practitioner Status)'

Were the disability supports services approachable and helpful to you?

At the first university, the disability support services were very approachable and helpful to me. I spent a lot of time with the disability support and inclusion officer.

At the second place, they were completely unhelpful in supporting my needs. Each time I filled out a form on my personal details, it never seemed to accept my tick for disability despite the fact I have been with the college itself since 2010 anyway.

With the university I'm going to in September, I have been in contact with the Specific Learning Needs Co-ordinator via email and we had a meeting face to face to discuss the support I will need in place and he also gave me the paper copy of DSA application.

Tell me about the supports you used for your course and how was these set up?

For the first university I had note takers right from the beginning and eventually when my DSA application was finally sorted after so many delays I got a new computer with specialist software to help with writing assignments. I was also given an allowance for internet and photocopying but never claimed these back. Didn't know how to and didn't actually know I could as nobody really explained that part. I was also given extra time in my exams which meant I was in a separate room to the rest of my classes. I was also given a radio aid which I didn't use as I didn't want to stand out and was having a hard time with myself without attracting more attention.

For the second place (a college) I've not had any support whatsoever unfortunately.

For the university I'm going to I already know I will have note takers in place and I can't remember what else was actually agreed.

Placement/Work Experience

Did you have work placements/work experience as part of your course, if so what was that experience like for you, did you have supports? (if relevant)

For my HND I had to complete four placements

over the two years. They were mostly positive experiences for me. Particularly with the first placement, the one class I worked with were so incredibly supportive about making sure I could hear both the staff and children. They told me if I didn't hear them, to ask again and anything I needed really. When I lost one of my hearing aids during the second month, they were again so supportive as they knew I was really struggling to hear everybody and made sure all the children remembered to speak facing towards me and when working with children one-to-one I had them sit on my left side so I had a better chance of hearing them.



Did your work experience/placement help you gain confidence for future work after your course?

It did and it gave me hope that more child care/educational settings would be that supportive and it gave me more experience which obviously always helps.

Advice for New d/Deaf Students

What is/was the best thing about going to university?

Meeting new people from all walks of life.

Did you find it easy/hard of make friends because of your deafness and what was the social life like for you?

I've always found it hard to make new friends but I have managed to make friendships and they are thankfully understanding of my needs. At the first university, the social life was difficult as I didn't live on campus but I did make a lot of friendships over Facebook which probably helped a lot. At the second setting it's been a college but I have spent a lot of time with my friends both at the college and outside of it which is a new experience for me to an extent. Again social media and phones have helped...a lot!

Did you get involved in clubs and societies at university?

At the first university I was involved with the Christian Union, MadSoc (Music and Drama Society) and the Choir.

Any useful tips you would like to pass onto new d/Deaf university students regarding supports and approaching their new disability adviser?

Get in contact with them as soon as you get your offer, although most universities are very quick to get in touch with you via letters/emails. So my advice is to respond to these as quickly as possible and as detailed as possible so all arrangements can be in place for when you start.

Also fill out your DSA application and get it sent off asap. I applied for it for my first university and due to delays it was finally all sorted in the January/February which was also six months into the course. Luckily my university still allowed the note-takers to provide support and claimed the costs back.

Oh and ask as many questions as you need to!!!

Make sure you understand everything and have it written down/emailed so you don't forget anything.

