

JOURNEYS OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FROM AHEAD'S 25 YEAR HISTORY

25 | 25

Introduction

25 years ago the Association of Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD) was set up because students with disabilities were struggling with the basic academic activities of research and writing.

Established by Professor John Kelly, Registrar of University College Dublin together with disabled students; AHEAD had a mission to raise awareness about the ability of students with disabilities and to work with the colleges to build an infra-structure of understanding and support of their different learning needs. Colleges of higher education have stepped up to the challenge and have set about changing the culture enabling students with disability to succeed.

This book is a record of the journeys of 25 students with disabilities and of the many changes that facilitated them to reach their dreams.

Foreword



Dear Reader,

These stories tell an even bigger story, the story of the Association of Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD) and the story of students with disabilities who have succeeded in higher education over the 25 years of AHEAD. As I read through them I am struck by difference between the experience of the students in earlier years who were challenged when using a Dictaphone and the students in more recent years that had the benefit of disability support services and technology.

But it is still obvious that they have all had to be really resilient and creative in solving problems they meet every day. Like pioneers going where no man has gone before, or even expected to go, these students fought for their right to have the same opportunities as other students. We can hear their sense of achievement, whether it is living independently, studying in a foreign university, making lifelong friendships, achieving results, or just realising a dream by going to college in the first instance.

Today's students with disability are game changers in higher education. They are using their individual power to change the culture of learning and their leadership skills to ask for the right to be included in all aspects of college life, including clubs and societies and work placements. These stories show the type of coping and creative skills employers are desperate to get their hands on.

In essence, these students are class acts and it is time to listen to their voice. We cannot go forward without looking back. Happy 25 Years of AHEAD.

Ann Heelan

Executive Director, AHEAD

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Patrick Matthews

1988

“Anything is possible now for a Deaf person, once they believe in themselves and are strong enough to pursue their aspirations and dreams.”

In 1988, I was studying a Certificate in Tutor for Communications Skills with Deaf People in National University of Ireland Maynooth (NUIM), the first course in Ireland to teach Irish Sign Language.

The best experience I had, throughout all my years of study, was when I went to Bristol University to undertake a Certificate in Social Sciences in Deaf Studies course - all lectures were signed! I had never seen this before - the interpreters were in fact for the hearing students not the Deaf. It was so natural to be in an environment where everyone, both hearing and Deaf signed.

I’ve seen a huge difference since 1988. At that time there were no qualified interpreters, so you can only imagine what it was like to communicate and understand what was going on in the classroom. Today, there are a lot of supports provided by colleges, not just

interpreters but also note-takers, proofreading, etc.

I continue to have a passion to develop materials for Irish Sign Language. I want to make sure the language is not lost. I still observe, particularly with older Deaf people, signs that are beautiful but are not really used any more. I feel there is so much more needed when it comes to having ISL provided for our Deaf children and adults and this is something I want to change.



Gerry Ellis

1989

“When I was a child, we were seen as broken people who needed to be fixed or cared for.”

In 1989 I was studying Economics and Psychology as part of a Bachelor of Arts Degree by night in University College Dublin. I was working as a Software Engineer five days a week and attending college five nights a week.

I had poor sight, but was not totally blind, when I applied for the course in 1986. By the time that I started I had lost the remainder of my sight but decided to pursue it anyhow. There were no facilities for students with disabilities and I had no access to books in electronic format. I asked my lecturers if I could record their lectures although, to my surprise, some refused. I recorded them anyway. I had to arrange my own set of volunteers to record sections of books or to have them read out loud to me.

Supports that were not present in my time now exist. Technology has made a tremendous difference; students can access books

electronically, produce essays and take examinations. Now that I am blind I rely so much on technology that I would be effectively illiterate without it and it would be nigh-on impossible for me to undertake a third level course. With it, I continue in my employment and I have spoken at conferences on disability-related issues in over 25 countries.

Nobody should take my comments to mean that everything is perfect today. Many issues remain including timely access to books because of copyright problems and inadequate financial resources.

Students of the future, go for it! If they say you can't record your lectures, record them anyway. Break down the barriers; you are as good as everyone else!





Caroline Carswell

1990

“For most students with disabilities, friends, family and classmates make the difference. My fellow students got me through.”

I was studying History for a Single Honours Bachelor of Arts in Modern Irish History. I had accessed college on full CAO points, plus a Trinity College Dublin matriculation in Geology instead of Irish as a subject.

In 1990, I joined the Irish-Canadian Student Work Abroad Programme in Toronto, Canada, with two very different jobs. One was with the bilingual French-English Ontario Women’s Directorate, researching family violence. The other; as a gardener in a Jewish cemetery. This cemetery-gardener job got me into publishing as a career. An article about working in Canada resulted in an invitation to edit the Trinity News. Publishing suddenly opened up as a viable career and this has been my field – with marketing and different incarnations, ever since.

The internet has been a huge leveller in workplace and career options for me. A life-changing conversation when a visionary classmate said,

“This stuff [early internet] will level your workplace when you finish college”. Little did we know what was ahead. I now say to all students, technology is your best friend. Use it, advocate for it, and demonstrate how it benefits you. Show tutors how to make content accessible for you. Video is a fantastic way to ‘reach lecturers’ and grab their attention if you feel you’re not being ‘heard’ in your advocacy.

I had a happy ending after studying. One of the country’s leading Irish-American software firms hired me. The next and current move was to establish Irish Deaf Kids, a venture for inclusive education for deaf and hard-of-hearing students in Ireland.

Mary Duffy

1991

“I remember meeting the course director; to discuss my needs and to be honest I did not have a clue what she was talking about. No one had ever asked me before.”

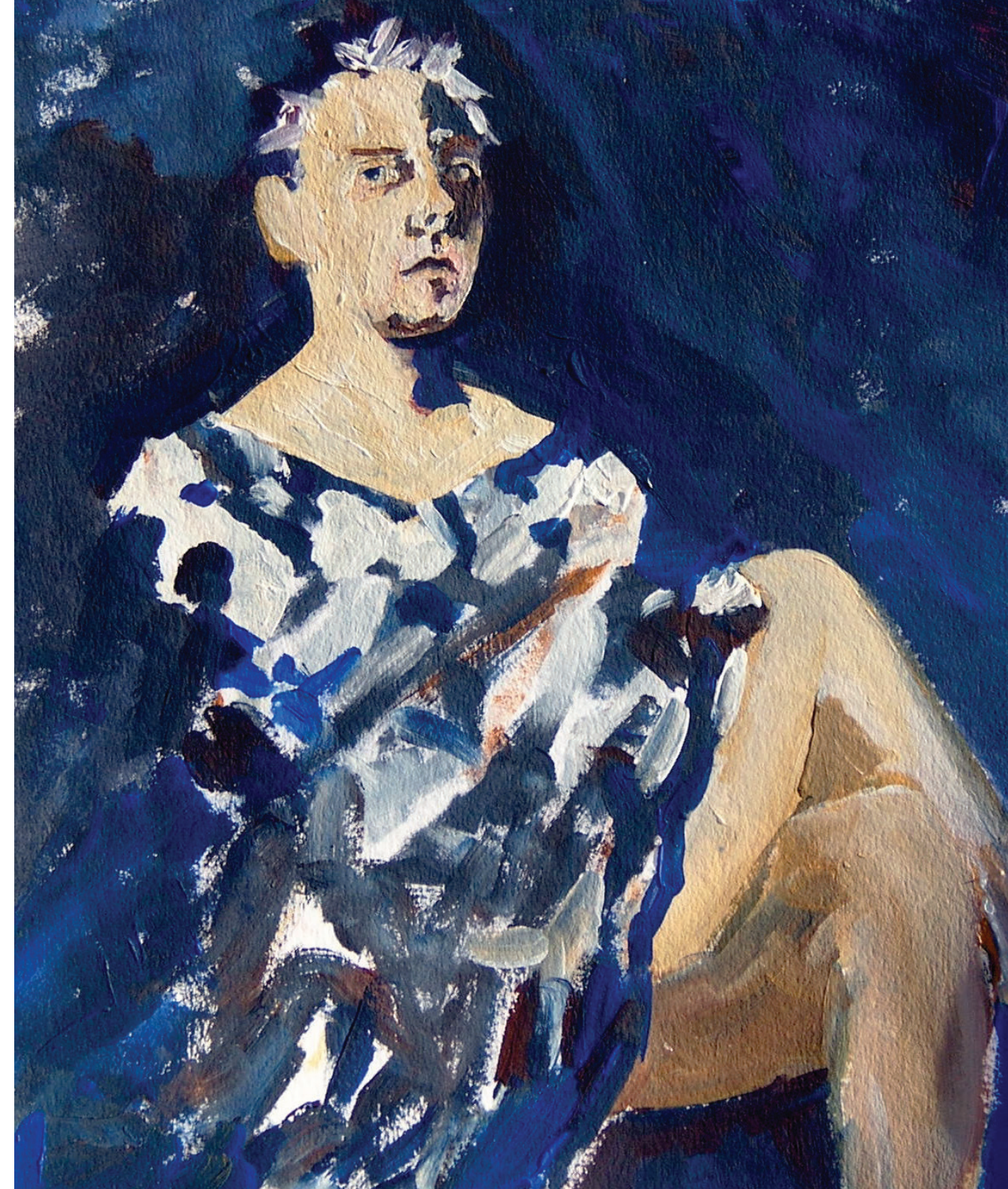
I was doing a Masters degree in Equality Studies University College Dublin in 1991. I had survived Art College in the 1980s which was a really difficult experience. The staff there expected me to be like everybody else. I got the message. In practical terms this meant I had to stand on a chair, on one leg, in the darkroom in order to access the darkroom facilities. It was very difficult and pure crazy. I had to engage in a battle for basic needs to be met and this left a scar that endures. And I graduated top of my class. In contrast, in 1991, everything was done to make my entry onto the course smooth. Carpenters made me a little desk. It reminded me of my first day of school when I was 4 years old.

In 1991, I had a separate room for exams but found it really difficult to write for hours with my head between my knees. The invigilator offered to be my amanuensis. I remember being very moved when

a fellow student gave a note to my amanuensis inviting me to join them in the pub after.

I currently work as an artist having travelled full circle. I have worked as a researcher for the Arts Council, a freelance journalist, a researcher and as a producer with RTE Radio 1. I have had the wondrous benefit of having had many dream jobs in the last 30 years.

The idea of any assistance when I was a student in the late 1970s and 1980s was unheard of. Now it is the norm. And I think that is wonderful. Students of the future - don't take it for granted.



Steve Daunt

1992

“It was a hell of a ride and I wouldn’t have missed a minute.”

In 1992, I graduated from Trinity College Dublin with a degree in English. It was a fantastic year to graduate as it coincided with Trinity’s 400th anniversary. I decided to stay on and complete a Master in Letters.

After graduating, I would be lying if I said finding employment was an easy task. It was not.

I found myself doing freelance research for a number of voluntary organizations. This changed in 2006 when I took part in the first AHEAD/WAM internship. I was placed in the Equality Section of the Department of Justice. I even got to write a first draft of a speech given by a Government Minister, but I like to keep that quiet!

Through a series of lucky breaks, my WAM placement ended and I walked into a researcher’s position in Newstalk 106-108 FM.

There is no doubt that I enjoyed the non-academic side of student life. I was active in Dublin University Players where I gained some great friends and a life-long love of drama.





Rosie McAdam

1993

“My family was very proud of my achievements in College.”

I was studying Social Science in University College Dublin in 1993. I had a great time in College; they were the best years of my life. My classmates and friends just viewed me as one of the gang and didn't seem to think it was anything special that I was in college, which is the way it should be. I made great lifelong friends. I had an opportunity to spend a summer in America which I wouldn't have if not for my friends.

I subsequently completed a Higher Diploma in Social, Vocational and Rehabilitation Management. I then worked in the Brailing Office on campus for a year before joining BT Ireland in Customer Service.

I would definitely recommend higher education; it is great for developing life skills and will definitely benefit you in the world of work and finding a job. It can be hard, but worth it in the end.

I still don't know what my dream job would be, but I'm happy where I am working with the Sales Teams in BT Ireland.

I learnt a lot through my degree, but mostly remember the good nights out!

John Cradden

1994

“I really, really wanted to go to third-level.”

In 1994, I was studying a Bachelor of Arts in Communications Studies in Dublin City University. I felt extremely lucky to get into DCU in the first place and, although it was a much smaller institution at that time than it is now, it turned out to have a great atmosphere with a strong entrepreneurial ‘can-do’ spirit that made me determined to get stuck in and make the most of my three years there. I got involved in all sorts of things, including the students union and the college magazine. I was elected as a Student Union Officer in my second year - much to my shock.

I also set up a society to run sign language classes.

After graduating, I worked in a few different areas, including video production and public/press relations in Dublin and Belfast, before returning to DCU to do a Masters in Journalism. When I returned there in 1999 there was a

dedicated Disability Support Officer, if I recall rightly, which it didn’t have in 1994.

Since my Masters course, I have worked both as a freelance and staff journalist and sub-editor for a wide variety of publications including The Irish Times, Irish Independent, the Sunday Business Post, The Sunday Times (Ireland), Computerscope and Consumer Choice Magazine. I’ve been freelancing since about 2008.

College in 1994 was probably the single most enjoyable period of my life to date, for all kinds of reasons.



Louise Milicevic

1995

“English was always my passion and I was blown away by feminism...”

I was attending University College Dublin in 1995 studying a Bachelor of Arts in English, Greek and Roman Civilization. It was undoubtedly my most enjoyable year. Coming from a small rural community where disability is perceived as abnormal it was empowering to be in an environment which accepted me for me. Arts courses attract a hodgepodge of people and for the first time, I met people who weren't uncomfortable around disability and could see past it.

Living on campus gave me the opportunity to become involved in the social aspects of college and I did my fair share of partying. I had great flat mates, a very good friend of mine was living next door and a group of fun loving first year engineering students was upstairs.

Obviously, there were challenges. Some of the lecturers objected to me using a Dictaphone to record

lecturers. On one occasion a lecturer insisted I turn it off and give him the tapes. Unfortunately, there was no legislation at that time to safeguard against unequal treatment. However most of the lecturers, once I explained my reasons for needing the Dictaphone, allowed me to use it.

Since then the Disability Support Service has increased and changed beyond recognition with a range of supports and a dedicated support staff.

I was lucky enough to meet some great people in the early weeks of college, who have remained friends to this day.





Senator Martin Conway

1996

“Education is and was a battle worth engaging in...”

In 1998 I graduated with a Degree in Economics and Politics from University College Dublin.

my commitment for campaigning and advocacy, for people with disabilities

I have just 16% sight, but rather than go to a school especially for blind and visually impaired, I attended my local schools with my brother, just as my father who has the same condition wanted. I believe this was very important in terms of developing my self-esteem and survival instincts from an early age. I hit the ground running when I started my college career, engaging in many of the clubs and societies and making great friendships – many of which have remained as lifelong friends. In fact I met my wife in college; we had a shared interest and not just in politics but more so in the same politics!

While in college I was allowed to electronically record lectures, access books on tape and additional time at examinations. However, recent access to Apple iPad technology has revolutionised the way I work now, allowing me to magnify the print to a very large font in order to read material with comfort. If this had been available back then – I wonder what my experience would have been like.

One of my proudest moments was to receive the prestigious University College Dublin’s Presidents’ award for Excellence in recognition of

Dr. John Bosco Conama

1997

“Friends thought I was very brave to enter the university, a place always deemed as hostile or intimidating to many of them.”

I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1997. It was the successful end of my stay in University College Dublin – I had attended four nights a week while working full-time in Revenue. My objective was to achieve a degree and better prospects for job promotion but over time, this objective slowly faded away and became replaced with a love of learning.

After graduating, I applied for Masters in Letter (research) course in Trinity College Dublin. The subject was the analysis of social policies affecting the Irish Deaf community. Upon the completion of this Masters, I continued to Doctorate level; this time with the Equality Studies Centre in University College Dublin.

When I arrived at university in 1993, there was an odd official responsible for disability support. I had to rely on note-taking or friends’ support. Classmates (as

I imagined) found the situation strange and interesting to see people like me watching lecturers - with or without interpreters. When I left the university, there was an embryonic disability office in place but it came too late for me. AHEAD was pivotal in increasing awareness and I remember seeing it in its infancy when I was in UCD.

I often wonder if I would have done a lot better if I had direct access to what lecturers were saying instead of notes.



Mark Pollock

1998

“Sometimes we choose our challenges, and sometimes our challenges choose us. What we decide to do about them is the only thing we can control.”

In 1998, I went blind in April just before my final exams of a Bachelor of Arts in Business Studies and Economics at Trinity College Dublin. The disability services were very helpful and provided invaluable support. They provided facilities for scanning books, adaptive technology support, and sourced reader grants.

That year, I remember competing in rowing, captaining the Trinity College Boat Club and representing Ireland in rowing. I also built up a great network of friends and have fond memories of the social side of college life.

Since graduation I have worked in a couple of jobs before going on to set up my own motivational speaking business, raced in adventure races in deserts, mountains and to the South Pole and wrote a book called ‘Making it Happen’. Today I am in my dream job, working as a motivational speaker, author and

adventure athlete and co-founder of Run in the Dark. Multiple projects all at once!

While I haven’t been in higher education since 2005, I am aware of an increasing focus on people’s abilities rather than disabilities and more positive role models emerging over the last decade.





Patricia McCarthy

1999

“My family and friends were delighted if a little surprised when I went to university.”

In 1999 I was a student in University College Dublin where I was studying for a Bachelor of Social Science in Sociology and Social Policy. I have very happy memories of my time as all my education up to that point had taken place within the special education system. That was the norm for blind and vision impaired people in the 1970s and 1980s when I was in school. While getting used to the enormity of the campus was difficult and getting to grips with the amount of reading required was challenging, I found academia stimulating and exciting and over time I really began to feel that I had found an environment within which I could excel.

My greatest achievement to date came in 2000 when in my finals I got a first class honours in Sociology, considering I had failed it in first year and thought about dropping out. As a consequence I was invited back to do a Masters in Sociology which I really enjoyed, particularly

as it gave me the opportunity to do some tutoring. The supports that were available to me during my time enabled me to participate to my optimum.

If I could offer advice to students of the future I would say follow your dreams, believe in your abilities, obtain the supports and resources that are available and get involved in societies and extracurricular activities. But most importantly enjoy your time in University and be able to look back on it with fond memories.

My dream is to remain within academia both as a researcher and lecturer/tutor and to mentor students.

Tina Lowe

2000

“I have been blessed with extraordinary people...”

In 2000 I began my Masters in Equality Studies in University College Dublin. My experiences in college as a person with a disability were on the whole very positive.

I lost my sight at the age of 27 and had to undergo a huge change in my life, I had to retrain and re-educate myself. This involved a long road of trauma, positive experiences and a huge amount of learning about my new life as a person on the margins of society. I had to get a guide dog which considering I had a huge fear of dogs is momentous. But I would say that on the whole the biggest support to date since I have lost my sight is having people who understand and have empathy with you.

Today there is a new, more confident breed of student with a disability, including students with mental health disabilities; they are much more open and confident about discussing their disabilities.

This is a great advancement. But even though there have been positive strides, there are still very few blind and deaf people in college and students with disabilities are not as vocal or as informed on their rights as they should be. We still need to empower students with disabilities.

After all, I have had a huge amount of wonderful opportunities since I became blind.



Roisin Dermody

2001

“When I was 15, I decided that the two organisations I would most like to work for were Amnesty International and the United Nations: I achieved both within 5 years of graduation.”

In 2001, I graduated from University College Dublin with a Bachelor of Arts in Music & Classics. Following graduation, I studied by night for three years for Diplomas in Public Relations and Journalism while working with Amnesty International as a Policy and Research Assistant and as a Disability Equality Trainer. In 2004, I returned to full-time study to complete a Masters in Equality Studies. In 2011, I completed a Masters by research in Social Justice.

I still remember quite vividly my first class of 2001. My class was given out to by our Department Head because we hadn't submitted forms by a particular deadline, notification of which was on the noticeboard at the top of the stairs. I went to the Head after class to explain that I didn't know about the deadline as I couldn't see the notice. To which he replied “Oh yes, you can't see”.

In September 2001, I started a programme in a private college where the concept of disability support services hadn't yet reached. I just had the same battles I'd been having for the previous 4 years - the only difference was I knew the battlefield very well by then.

My advice to students and graduates at all stages of the journey, is dream big dreams, make big plans. Never let anyone else's negativity derail your dreams and plans.





Seónaid Ó Murchadha

2002

“The best, best, best thing ever was to graduate - in spite of everything.”

In 2002, I was completing my Bachelor of Arts in International Business and Languages (French & Spanish) in Dublin City University. I had just returned from my Erasmus year studying at the University of Alcála de Henares. My year in Madrid, Spain was an integral part of my international degree. I can still remember writing my dissertation (all in Spanish!) with an archaic computer in 40 degree stifling heat - sweat dripping off my fingers and making the keyboard sticky! I also recall laughing so much when I discovered that my wheelchair accessible parking spot beside Faculty was in the middle of the pedestrian area!

I thoroughly enjoyed every minute of my college experience. It was where I regained my independence after my accident in 1997 and where I learned how to be comfortable in my own skin again. With the help of fantastic friends and colleagues, I got through it, but it was difficult.

After graduation, I applied for graduate programme places but got a terrible response compared to my peers' experiences. It began to dawn on me that my 'significant' physical disability was going to be a huge barrier to my employment prospects. I finally got a job in financial services through a family friend. Today I am in my dream job - working for AHEAD!

Students with disabilities - I am telling you, don't be afraid to ask for support! In the beginning, I wasn't keen to request help as I wanted to be as independent as possible. But I would have made my college experience easier on myself if I had got more support.

Yvonne Lynch

2003

“Higher education is a wonderful experience and no-one should be dissuaded from pursuing it.”

I graduated from Trinity College Dublin in 2003. I had submitted my Masters of Philosophy thesis on disabled characters in the Irish theatrical cannon.

I went straight on to start work on a PhD, asking why all the disabled roles in Irish theatre are played by non-disabled actors. I abandoned it in 2005 this due to the absence of trained disabled actors in Ireland as you cannot write a thesis on an absence.

One thing I remember about my time in college was when the head of the drama department, Professor Denis Kennedy, launched his two-volume tome ‘Theatre and Performance’. It was held in the evening in the Long Room in the library, with lots of candles and free-flowing wine. Surrounded by all these ancient books I thought if one of the candles got knocked and fell over it would be like the fire in the film ‘The Name of the Rose’!

Students of the future - just ask the appropriate person for what assistance you need - it’s not an imposition or charity, it is a right to inclusion.



Lorraine Gallagher

2004

“How they must have loved us!”

In 2004, I was just completing my Masters in the National College of Art & Design having completed a Degree in Fine Art Print.

There were many funny moments in college. We nearly always ate lunch in the studio. We had a kettle and a sandwich maker which could apparently be smelt doing its thing throughout the print department; I've only recently gone back to eating cheese. I remember a tutor came in just as we were finishing our lunch and shouted 'this isn't a café you know, back to work!'

One of the most memorable times though was the trip to New York when around 30 of us took over a rundown hostel in the Chelsea area; the interior of which reminded me to all intents and purposes of the hotel in the film Psycho with a few cockroaches thrown in for good measure. Our room was situated in the basement and every time we opened the bedroom door this little

old man who lived upstairs would appear on the landing and watch, but being art students we took it in our stride.

I loved my time in college and I'd advise any student with a disability to enjoy the experience, to learn, build self-confidence and perfect what works for you. I can attribute many of my successes today to these experiences in college; I have artwork in the Irish state collection, the United Kingdom & the United States. I am also a former Paralympic & World Champion.





Sean Herhily

2005

“I have three sisters and two are deaf. They are my role models and always tell me ‘yes, you can do it.’”

In 2005 I was undertaking a Higher Diploma in Education at Trinity College Dublin. After college, I got a job teaching Leaving Certificate Mathematics in St. Josephs School for Deaf Boys in Cabra. I myself had attended there as a pupil.

2013 is my 8th year teaching and I have completed further studies with University of Birmingham (Teacher of the Deaf). Even though my parents had no third level education - my father left primary education for farming - they continually encourage me.

2005 was my best year as I know this was just the beginning of my future career. I am still grateful I got the job in St. Josephs after I completed my course.

Garry Toner

2006

“My family is proud that I went on to achieve my academic goals.”

In 2006, I was completing my Masters in Equality Studies. I then started to do a PhD in Sexuality and Disability from a male perspective but found it too difficult to continue because of work commitments. I had secured my current role as a Disability Officer in September 2006 at the Institute of Technology Tallaght, Dublin. I was also a guest lecturer for the Disability Module in Equality Studies, in University College Dublin, which I have continued since.

One of my main memories was coming to live on campus. This was the first time I had lived independently and I felt it was a great personal achievement, owing to my disability. I also made good friends with some of my peers while at college.

I now believe that no matter what the obstacle, there is always some way to overcome difficulties you may face or encounter.



James Northridge

2007

“I always thought that only intelligent people went to university!”

In 2007, I was partway through a degree in Business Information Systems (BIS) in University College Cork - I have Dyslexia.

I was diagnosed just after my Leaving Certificate. I had initially started a Civil Engineering course thinking I would make my millions in construction... this was not the case! I did dreadfully; not having the correct mix of subjects and without the safety net of my secondary school teachers, I finally ended up dropping out. This was certainly a difficult time. But I was lucky that I got a job in car sales which I really enjoyed and learned a lot from.

The next time I considered college I approached the Disability Support Service in the university to clarify what I needed to do to get a place the following year. From the very first time I walked through the DSS doors, I haven't looked back. The essential thing about any support

service is the people who you deal with on an ongoing basis; the equipment, the resources and the IT setup are important, however the support and efficiency of staff is second to none. Having failed first time round, I was determined to succeed. I didn't want special treatment, just recognition that I do certain things a little differently.

Today, I work as an IT Consultant for University College Dublin. I am currently studying part-time for a Masters of Science in Rehabilitation & Disability Studies. I have also set up a website to help people with disabilities to overcome their challenges and succeed in life.





Caitriona Kenny

2008

“I always knew I could do it!”

In 2008, I was in University College Dublin studying a Bachelor of Social Science degree.

going on to do my Masters and achieving what I set out to achieve.

I was living on campus with the support of personal assistance. The thing I remember most is being able to get involved with all aspects of student life. The student union and my accessible on-campus apartment were my favourite places on campus. I really enjoyed my studies and loved being in the thick of it all the time.

Now I have graduated I would love to be a Youth Worker and work in the community. I’m working towards that goal today.

My family saw how much college life benefited me and what a positive experience it was for me. I would have to say to anyone with a disability considering going to college - don’t be afraid to get involved in education. If the supports are there, you can do anything you want to do. Don’t be scared!

My greatest personal achievement has been completing my degree,

Rosaleen McDonagh

2009

“They tell me my graduation made history. One of these days I will do a PhD.”

I was in university in 2009 when the cuts and the bite of the recession were starting to hit. Signs were afoot that Traveller children would be targeted by cuts; eventually those services such as the Visiting Teacher would be withdrawn. Four years on, the community, my community, young men and women, mothers and fathers, who never had the opportunity to go to secondary or post-primary, are again seeing their children having dreams and expectations taken from them.

I had decided to give up work after ten years and go back to college to do a second Masters in Creative Writing.

My family was thrilled and excited. My community, the Traveller community, made me feel very proud to be a Traveller woman the day I graduated. It went somewhat towards the building of expectations around Traveller

education within our community and within Irish society at large.

With a degree and two masters, I am now doing my dream job; writing for theatre, television and newspapers. It's how I imagined it would be.



Louis Watters

2010

“It’s not easy, if it was, everyone would be doing it, but it’s certainly worth it in the end.”

In 2010, I was in the University College Dublin Michael Smurfit Graduate Business School studying a Masters in Management

Following my graduation, I travelled extensively in both China and the United States before returning home to take up a position with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. I am now about to complete my studies at the Dublin Business School for a Bachelor of Laws in Irish Law.

In the beginning, I guess my classmates would have found studying with a blind person unusual, however, those that got to know me pretty soon accepted it as the norm. Sharing a lecture hall with a guide dog was a little more difficult for some of my classmates to comprehend.

My best and worst memories are, strangely enough, influenced by the weather! I recall hot summer

lunch breaks sitting on the steps of the restaurant while chatting with friends, or trips to the local corner shop for ice-cream. I also recall arriving in a wet and miserable Blackrock Dart station only to be refused transportation by a taxi driver because I had a guide dog. I trudged through the rain, getting wetter and wetter by the moment, until I felt so miserable and despondent that I turned on my heel and went home.

I still think that no matter what we attempt in life, it will always have its ups and downs. But all things considered, my year in Smurfit was a great experience.





Maeve Dermody

2011

“I would not have achieved so much without the support of my family, most especially my parents”

I attended Dublin City University and graduated in 2011 with a Bachelors of Arts in Accounting and Finance. I still remember my first week in DCU, when a group of international students asked if I was Irish as they couldn't understand my accent! But the highlights of college were most definitely receiving my repeat examination results on my 21st birthday and later graduating with an honours degree.

Since then I have returned to DCU to study a Professional Diploma in Education on a part-time basis. I have also worked in two schools as a substitute teacher. I am currently working in the business environment, while studying.

I know my parents are very proud of my achievements despite the many barriers I had to break down to succeed. I like to believe that because students like me speak out and demand our entitlements,

better services such as more sign language interpreters are the result. Also, my classmates now know more about deafness and have a better understanding of this disability.

In the future I would like to teach in a secondary school and I would also like to complete my chartered accountant qualifications.

Ger Gallagher

2012

“College is a fantastic opportunity to meet new people; I have thrived as a result.”

In 2012 I started my Masters in Equality Studies in University College Dublin.

I had developed a keen interest in advocacy and disability when I was an undergraduate student in Social Science in University College Dublin.

I took every opportunity I could to acquire new skills, securing experiences as auditor of the Inclusion Participation Awareness Society (IPA) and becoming very involved with the Student Support Services and the Access Committee in the university. I also assisted the Irish Council for Civil Liberties with a campaign which they launched in advance of Ireland’s Human Rights Review before the UN, which I attended in Geneva in October 2011.

Between my undergraduate studies and Masters degree I worked as Equality Officer with the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) which

I believe was a direct result of my involvement in the students’ union.

Having said all that, getting involved in clubs and societies and meeting new people was my favourite part.



We would like to thank these students/graduates for sharing their stories with us. We would also like to thank the Shelbourne Hotel & staff for providing the location for photography.

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