

## **Your first... day as a mature AHP student**

Rose speaks to Natasha, 2<sup>nd</sup> year masters occupational therapy student about her first day on placement as a mature student.

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**Rose** [01:00:55]

Welcome back to another episode of your First of Everything. Today I am joined by Natasha, who is a second year master's occupational therapy student. She is going to be talking to me about her first day on placement as a mature student. Hello, Natasha, How are you?

**Natasha** [01:01:12]

Hi, Rose. I'm very well, thank you. How are you?

**Rose** [01:01:14]

I'm good, thank you. What I'm really interested in is your first day as a mature student. What was that like?

**Natasha** [01:01:21]

Oh, you're taking me back now. But yeah, I think that my first day was interesting as well because I didn't have a lot of experience with in hospitals in general. So I remember, you know, walking in on the first day and everybody's in the uniforms and you're wearing your your uniform. So there's, there's kind of a fitting in bit, but you don't belong. You've never been there before. People have jobs and things they do and you don't have that. So you're following along. There's that sense, there's a sense of purpose, but along with it is a sense of, Can I do this? Yeah, can I do this? What really struck me was the mature student part of it was, it's not my first time going around with these things, so I'm expected. Or there's always a sense of expectations. You're expected to know a lot more than what you actually do. I'm supposed to have been there before, but I haven't been there before. So it's everyone's like, Oh, you know, can't believe you're still a student, you know? What did you do before? When there's those experiences, I've got to somehow add up to this experience. So it felt like a big weight. You walked in excited, but with a massive weight on your shoulders. People were lovely. I remember, you know, the people were lovely, but not in the sense as a mature student, you can't be your students. There's a big pull between looking stereotypically like a student and having had work and other experiences and previous studies and stuff before. So you're learning, but

you're not allowed to learn because you were expected to have done it before. Yeah. I think that's something that I've heard before is this expectation. Well, if you're a mature student and you should have life figured out and you should know everything, and actually that's not the case. You're still a student just like everybody else. And that age aspect doesn't matter, but you. Do carry it along. So and until you luckily for me, somehow I managed to figure that out, you know, through that placement. But I can imagine if I didn't, I would have still had that weight that. Expectations are really high and you probably put them on yourself than one of the people put it on you. But unless you say I'm still a student at this level, even though I have been there before, I have got previous experience, I have done other things. Unless you say I'm still a level four or level five or whatever level you need to be at. You carry that weight along with you. Yeah.

**Rose** [01:03:33]

How did you overcome that?

**Natasha** [01:03:37]

I had a I had a very helpful conversation with one of my educators about this this weight that I carried along, because it did it really infiltrated into everything. And the conversation was more along the lines of it's not really other people they're putting on, it's yourself. You're going into this whole experience feeling like you have to have been something, but you haven't. So it's as soon as I let go of that, as soon as I let myself be a band four or a band, I don't know what you're starting out at. As soon as I let myself do that, I could just learn and I could grow. Yeah, it sounds corny, but it was. It was really a lift, a weight lifted off my shoulders as soon as I did that.

**Rose** [01:04:15]

That's really good. And I think anybody that's in that situation will really resonate, you know, that really resonate with them, that you've managed to come out the other side of that. So along the way, did you face any challenges at all?

**Natasha** [01:04:28]

That was and it links very nicely to this that you were saying, you know, that others can resonate with us. One of the biggest things that I could just kick myself now was I felt really isolated and alone with this weight. And I don't know if it was because I was considered a mature student or a master student, which is different to the normal, you know, course that they run. Or maybe it's just being on placement by yourself without any of your peers there. But I generally felt for the first six weeks that this was just my struggles and I was doing this alone and it took until the second placement. But if I could just have done it sooner to realise that absolutely everybody else felt the same. Yeah, everybody else on placement felt the same. They struggled with the same thing, with the same weight that they were carrying, with the same expectations, but the same having to have known more than what they actually did or feeling like they were expected to have been higher than what they actually were, or struggling with communication, which is a big one or, you know. It's difficult to maybe to look back at this, but when you're a student, you're watched all the time, you're graded and watched all the time. And I wouldn't wish that feeling on anyone. So that was if I could really go back to anything, I would have just said, Oh, you're not alone. You're genuinely not alone, you're not isolated, you're not alone. You're not doing this by yourself. Everybody else is doing it. And on the second placement, I

made a point to make contact with some of my peers, you know, whether they were in the same area or in different placements or wherever they were. Again, it was just as soon as you get somebody else going. I've had that as well. Yes, I feel the same. Oh, but you know, I did this or I did that. As soon as you have that feeling, it was just such an enjoyable experience.

**Rose** [01:06:11]

Yeah, it's that networking, isn't it? And being able to say, Actually, yeah, I'm not alone. I do feel like this. And that ties in lovely with this podcast. That's what we want to create. You know, we want everybody to talk to each other and be like, Hey, you're not alone. It's all right to feel that way. Yeah. How did your family react then, to you becoming an occupational therapy student? You know?

**Natasha** [01:06:35]

Yeah, well, I'm a part of being a mature student. I have two little boys at home. I have a five year old and a three year old. That was one and a half and, you know, three and a half when we started this course. So very young and maybe a little bit too ambitious of me. But it doesn't matter. We did it. We're here now. And I think. Again, it ties with what I've only realised now is probably the most important thing that you have to have when you do a course like this or any course is support. It's not necessarily you know, when we talk about support, we talk about your educator support from your educator or support from your academic advisor or somebody from the university or support from your peers. It's not just that. It's that backup from family. And that's that's definitely pushed me through. I couldn't go home. And having struggled or having not accomplished this, there's like a role model aspect to it that was quite interesting. But also just what do you mean you can't do it? You're doing it. You can do it. So I think they're very proud of me and that helps. That really helps with that.

**Rose** [01:07:34]

Yeah, that's good that you've got that support network around you as well, you know, to to go forward. Is there any kind of advice you'd give to any mature student stepping into the placement or even just as a student for the first day?

**Natasha** [01:07:50]

Yeah. I'm. You can do it if you're thinking of doing it, but you're worried that it's too hard. Don't get me wrong, it is hard. It's not easy. And I think maybe the hardest part about it is trying to explain to somebody who's not in the same situation. It's difficult to explain how you pulled into different directions when you've got children or when you've got a family and you know another life, or you're worried about finances, all of those things, and you're also doing academic work. So when I say you can do it, I don't mean that lightly. I don't mean just push everything aside. You can do it. I just I mean, you can it's possible when advice wise, if you have the right support, which I would, I would say is absolutely critical, not just from the people around you, but there's also support. Again, it sounds ridiculous, but from yourself, take yourself back to the basics. Why are you doing this? Why? Why do you want to do this? And if you can if that can be a positive answer, if that can be because I need the sense of accomplishment or because I want to become an occupational therapist. And I've been given this opportunity, then nothing else matters. It doesn't matter. You can do it and you're not. You're not alone. You're not alone. There's other students. You

have kids who have other responsibilities, who can't do assignments at time because they have kids with a motor virus at home. Or it's just ridiculous. That was this week. Oh, gosh. Or who has to cut things short because there's a football game over the weekend or it happens, but it's still possible. It is.

**Rose** [01:09:21]

What are your future aspirations then?

**Natasha** [01:09:24]

Oh. You've come at the right time now. Oh, this is the only conversation that's going around at university, so it's tricky. I obviously want to be an occupational therapist. I have a background in psychology and neuroscience, so I always kind of figured I was going to be that kind of line. But I've developed a strong interest in children in in seeing if we can help along those lines, you know, with children and. Occupational therapy is. How should you say this? The world. We've been promised that the world is always there at the moment so we can, you know, choose where you want to go. We just also put a lot of pressure on you because you have to choose a direction. The wise choice would be rotations would start there. As much as we've built now academically, I definitely think along with those placements, there's a lot more experience that we need for these things. So the rotations would definitely be the best place to start. But ideally I'd. Gosh, I don't know. One half of me wants to take my children back to South Africa. So I know occupational therapy is quite strong on that side. So that doesn't I don't know. There's just so many options. I don't. Know. That's good. It's exciting. I don't know.

**Rose** [01:10:37]

That's it. And I can see even in your face as well that you're just so enthusiastic about it. It's like, well, I might try loads of different things. And that is what is so special about, you know, work within the health care sector. Yes, the world really is your oyster, so you can pick and choose what you want. Yeah, well, thank you, Natasha, for sharing your experience with us. Thank you for being here today.

**Natasha** [01:10:59]

You're only very welcome. Thank you for allowing me to share my little bit of wisdom. Thanks.