

## **Your First...experience of being a mature student**

Rose speaks to Jennifer, an occupational therapist, about her first day as a mature student.

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

Welcome back to another episode of your First of Everything. Today I've got Jennifer with me, who's a second year occupational therapist student. Jennifer is going to talk to me about her first experience of being a mature student. Hi, Jennifer. How are you? Hello.

**Jennifer** [01:00:16]

I'm good, thank you.

**Rose** [01:00:17]

Good. So tell me about your first day being a mature student. What was it like?

**Jennifer** [01:00:24]

I remember it clearly. It was beginning of February, so it was really cold. I remember I went into uni on the train and I've never felt so scared and nervous in my life. I really wasn't expecting it, but I felt sick. I was really nervous about going in, being a lot older than the cohort, and I have to be honest with you, that feeling didn't go away as the day went on, and I was very aware that I was probably 10 to 20 years older than most of the people on the course. I felt that people weren't talking to me because they thought that I was a lecturer rather than a student. And it took time. It took time to sort of integrate and get to know people and realise that actually the problem was with me being worried about what they thought of me rather than what they actually thought.

**Rose** [01:01:20]

Yeah. So when you were there on that day and you know, you said you had that train journey to go in, and then being in that environment on your very first day, how did that change over time? Did it improve massively? Yeah.

**Jennifer** [01:01:35]

What helped was we were in university probably for about six weeks at the start before we went out on placement. So it was maybe three days of every week that we

were together. And you get to know people and you get to realise that other people feel the same as you. There were a lot of people in my situation which I hadn't realised. You just think of it's all you and your own issues. So it did get a lot better and I started talking to people, finding out about them, finding out about their past. And yeah, it went, I'm glad to say. Good.

**Rose** [01:02:11]

That's really positive. And now obviously you're in your second year. What was that like learning again? What was that like stepping back in to learn? How was that?

**Jennifer** [01:02:22]

I hadn't thought about it enough before I started that. That was probably one of my downfalls because when we got our first assignment, I hadn't considered the fact that I needed to reference properly. I was looking at sources, just general sources on the internet, not looking at academic sources. So the feedback that I got on my first piece was not great, but it was a learning curve. And I think if I were to do it again, knowing what I know now is I would have looked into it before I'd started because I wasted a lot of time doing things wrong. And had I done a little bit of research as to what they were actually looking for, I could have saved myself a lot of time. And I also found that things took a lot longer than they should in the early days, lack of confidence. And as the years have gone on, I'm now near the end, three months left to go. It's so much easier because you know what they're looking for and you don't waste time putting things in that aren't going to get you any marks.

**Rose** [01:03:22]

Yeah, exactly. And I think sometimes I know from my point of view, the first assignment that I put in that was horrendous. It was the feedback that I got back. It was like, Well, you need to do this, this and this, And actually that helped me. Then going forward, you have to mess up sometimes to learn and to know what to do. So I think from your point of view, you know, that's definitely a positive learning curve as well. And from your perspective, you've also got that life experience that you've bought in. Do you feel like that's helped you?

**Jennifer** [01:03:53]

That helped massively. When we started placement, I know a lot of my peers struggled on placement, but it's the part that I've enjoyed the most. I think it's just you. You become used to going to work every day and it was actually great to go back to work even though it wasn't officially work. So yeah, that's helped massively. I think because I'm a bit older, I sort of saw what it was like being on the other side. Yeah. And being the educator, knowing the sort of workload that they had. So I try to just be mindful of that and, you know, sort of try and do as much as I could for myself. Yeah. Which seemed to they seemed to recognise that and it helped. So yeah, that's, that's helped a lot.

**Rose** [01:04:43]

So explain to me then, tell me what your first day on placement was like as a mature student.

**Jennifer** [01:04:50]

It was really good that what, what I liked is the fact that you have that contact before. So I emailed them, introduced myself and had a few emails back. And also I went in on an initial visit. They asked me to come in just to meet everyone, which was great because I knew what to expect on my first day. So I suppose the visit was my first day because that's when I got introduced to all of the team. I got a timetable. I got shown around the place, told what I was going to be doing. So when I actually had my proper first day, it was very relaxed. Good.

**Rose** [01:05:26]

That's really good. What were your friends and family like? How did they react when you said, I'm going to go to university and I'm going to do this course? What was their reaction?

**Jennifer** [01:05:36]

To be honest with you, the wind, other than my husband there, weren't very supportive. My parents thought that I was crazy and that I should be, you know, sort of focusing on my career. And as the months and weeks went on, there was this sort of assumption when I very first started that I had all this time and, oh, Jennifer can do that. She can help out with that. Oh, I'll just phone Jennifer. So it took me quite a while to try and train them that actually this is a job to me. It's really important. And you know, I can't drop everything. I've got deadlines, I've got commitments. But my husband has been right behind me the whole way. And he but I suppose he can see how hard I work. I work every day. So that's helped.

**Rose** [01:06:24]

Yeah, I think there is definitely this stigma around students. You know, if you're a student, well, you have loads of time, but actually the health care sector as a whole and anybody who's stepping into that, who has to go to university, the health and social care medicine side, it's not like every other course. This is, I believe and maybe I'm a little bit biased the hardest courses to do you have to do placement that includes night shifts, weekends, bank holidays, Christmases, Easter in everything as well as doing assignments, as well as trying to balance social life. A lot of people work at the same time. You don't have time. And, you know, I think that there is that stigma that actually, well, now you're a student. It's okay. You can sit off and do what you want and that's not the case. So I think that must have been really, really challenging for you and for you to have persevered and be where you're at now. You know, your second year and how many months off did you say you are?

**Jennifer** [01:07:22]

Just over three.

**Rose** [01:07:23]

It's just three months away. That's fantastic. You know, that really shows your resilience and where you're at now. And I think a lot of other people, if they're questioning mature students, if they're thinking about being a mature student, then hopefully if they listen to this podcast, they can actually resonate with that and think, Yeah, I can do it too. You know, that's what I'd recommend. Is there any kind of advice that you'd give to somebody that is thinking about being a mature student?

**Jennifer** [01:07:52]

Lots, actually. Do your research, think about you know, it's I think the reason I say that is it's a lot of effort. And if you're not 100% committed and if you don't actually know what you're stepping into, which I think a lot of students don't, they don't know the reality. So do your research. Go and do some shadowing. I went to three different places before I started the course, and actually it was really helpful because two sectors I knew that there weren't for me. So and there was one that I really enjoyed. So I suppose it could have meant that I didn't do the course altogether. It had a not liked that third placement. So yeah, do some shadowing and I think really the treating it like a job. Yeah it's like you say it is not like any other university course, especially with it being a master's course. It's condensed and therefore it's like being in a full time job. So be prepared to the fact that you're going to be doing assignments whilst you're on placement. Generally your deadlines will be after your placement, so you've got to balance both of them. So be prepared.

**Rose** [01:09:03]

Good. Would you recommend to people as well to think about the impact that it's going to have on their lives, do you think?

**Jennifer** [01:09:12]

Yes, I think choose your timing. I know you can't plan for everything, but you need to be in quite a stable position and you need to be able to commit 100%. That's my advice.

**Rose** [01:09:26]

Good. Fantastic. So, Jennifer, tell me, what made you decide this is what you wanted to do, this degree?

**Jennifer** [01:09:36]

It was a very lengthy process. So before I started the course, I was a teacher for nearly 20 years, and then I worked for the police for a short period after that. So if I go back to when I was teaching, I started teaching health and social care A-level. I was a biology teacher. So it's fitted with that. And one of the modules the students had to research different health and social care professions. And one of my students chose an occupational therapist for their research, and I'd never heard of them before. And I found it really interesting. And I knew at that time, because of circumstances, I couldn't pursue it. But it sort of stayed in the back of my mind for the next ten years, and I finally was in a position to do something about it. So that's when I organised the shadowing and I went out on different placements and realised I was going to apply. So I applied for university and got a place which was brilliant. I resigned from his job and then family circumstances meant that I couldn't pursue it and I had to find a job in the interim until I could. So that's when I joined the police for a couple of years, but it was still in the back of my mind. I knew I wanted to do it, but I knew that the time wasn't right and as soon as it was and I think it was fate, Liverpool decided that they were going to do a master's degree. So I applied for the intake in 2022 and I got a place and that's how I ended up there. So it took probably 10 or 15 years for me to get to this point, but it was clearly worth doing.

**Rose** [01:11:17]

Well, that's really positive in the sense that you recognise what you wanted to do and you've still pursued that career and that dream really to get to where you are now

also as well. So from that perspective, what when was that moment that you went, This is it, This is where I want to be and I'm going to do this now for the rest of my life. This is my job. I'm really happy I'm here.

**Jennifer** [01:11:43]

It was the shadowing experience, so I went out with a community occupational therapist who worked with people with neurological conditions, and I found it fascinating, absolutely fascinating, the variety, the different range of people that you met. And just it was the innovation. It was the thinking on your feet, the fact that you could really make a difference to that person's life. And that's when I thought, yeah, I'm doing this.

**Speaker 3** [01:12:12]

Yeah, that's.

**Rose** [01:12:13]

I think that's one of the main aspects, isn't it? Particularly with occupational therapy, you can have such a positive impact on somebody's life and you do have to use that innovation in that side of, well, how can this work for this person but might not work for this individual? And you have that free rein. So yeah, no, I think I think occupational therapy is absolutely fantastic and well done to you for getting where you are now and I wish you all the best in the future. So good luck.

**Jennifer** [01:12:41]

Thank you very much.

**Rose** [01:12:43]

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