

Lee [01:00:02]

So hello and welcome to your first of everything. My name is Lee and I'm very fortunate today to have Fiona with me. Fiona is a student occupational therapist. Hi Fiona, how are you?

Fiona [01:00:15]

Hi, Lee. Good. Thank you. Thanks for having me.

Lee [01:00:18]

Oh, no. Thank you for coming to speak to us. So you're going to be sharing some of your experiences around sort of returning to education, if you like. Is that right?

Fiona [01:00:28]

Yep. That's correct.

Lee [01:00:29]

Oh, brilliant. Do you want to share some of those experiences?

Fiona [01:00:33]

Yeah. So I think really the first thing is that I have returned to university after about 19 years. So I first came over from Ireland to university and did the did my work and then got a job and stayed. And now I really wanted to create change. But I've gone back to university now with a husband and three kids and a long term a long term illness slash disability. So I'm juggling quite a few plates at the one time. But yeah, I'm really enjoying it. I think it's, it's it is a difficult transition, but I find it really rewarding.

Lee [01:01:12]

Now that that does sound like you're juggling a lot of plates. To be fair, three children in the new, a new career as well. What sort of led to the career change or the changing career aspiration, if you like?

Fiona [01:01:27]

Yeah, I think I was diagnosed ten years ago, nearly 11 years ago with the long term health condition. And I think that changed my view on things. I wanted to I wanted to be able to help people. And I had some personal experience with an occupational therapist who came out to the house to see me. And he was really encouraging and really kind of motivated me to think that I maybe, I maybe could do that job. So sort of lockdown, I decided that I was going to leave the job that I was in. Well, I'd already left, to be honest. And, just start again. So I started to do an access course, to get me ready. And then I've just jumped into the degree. I think I'm really surprised that I'm still here after three years. That's really surprising. And I'm just about to graduate. So, it's been a long journey, I would say. And I think there have been ups and downs. I think going back to university after 19 years was very, very different. And it was very different to having kids. You really have to manage, your time, manage your workload and understand that I it won't be the same experience for me as it is for other people. And I think I learned that through Covid as well. It's just by staying in my own lane and trying to keep what I'm trying to achieve, just as what I want to achieve, rather than sort of envy and other people's kind of journeys. This is my journey. So, I think just being I think one of the key things to going back to university was being organised and knowing when things are normal. Assignments were due, and normally they were due when the kids were off school, which made it even more impossible. But, Christmas, Easter kids are off school and have three kids running around and a semester in. And I just it was difficult. And it's difficult to juggle that role of being a mother. And having the time for university. And I've done it. I've done it now. So I think I'm proud that I've been able to achieve that. So yeah.

Lee [01:03:29]

I mean, I'll say quite honestly, if, you know, I don't have any children in the thought of trying to navigate university placements and life as well, as well as, children I like, I think I've said before, Wonder Woman, like absolute Wonder Woman.

Fiona [01:03:50]

Definitely not. Definitely not Wonder Woman. I think it's just you have to get on with it, don't you? I think, there's there's been a there's just definitely a change now where I think that, oh, I can do it and it's fine, but it is difficult. I won't, I won't lie, it is a little bit difficult, to fit it all in really.

Lee [01:04:08]

I. Yeah, I can imagine. Especially when you've got. You must have to be so organised and know every date of everything that's happening. You know, like you

say, assignment submissions, deadlines for your practice, assessment, documentation, all those sorts of things.

Fiona [01:04:25]

Yeah, completely. And I think like having all of the kids activities, I think they do more than me. They have a better social life than me. So I think having those activities in the diary and realising that I don't want to miss out on their school days or anything, but also making sure I'm, organised. I think part of my condition I will be, I suffer from fatigue. So I think managing fatigue, is really important. So I don't get run down. I don't get overly tired. I'm able to kind of do everything that I want to do. And I think that's probably one of the other sort of things I need to manage is fatigue. And I think that's. That's quite important because if I'm tired, I'm not really fit for the other jobs that I need to be doing. So yeah.

Lee [01:05:08]

No, that's a that's a really valid point. How do you even start, you know, in terms of managing fatigue, what sort of things have you put in place?

Fiona [01:05:17]

You have to set out your day from the very minute you open your eyes to the minute you go to sleep. What have I got to do today? What is most important and doing the the best way possible. So I will use, because I have some mobility issues. I will use a walker or the real term is a rule later or waiver later, but I call it my walker, so I use that to kind of help with fatigue because it's balance and walking. And I'll use things like that. I use assistive technology on my laptop. So I got that through the university, which was really helpful. So I'll use techniques, I'll use little apps to kind of help me out. I think being aware of what's available and what supports available is really. It's really important, isn't it? Because if I didn't know about, the, the apps that you can have on your laptop to record or to play back some of my, lectures and things, that's been quite helpful. And when I started the journey, I proactively went out and find what I would need, and I really wanted to. I think that's part of just being prepared. So I wanted to see what what can I do to make life a little bit easier for me? So that's come in handy.

Lee [01:06:32]

I think that's a really good point, because I don't think we always know actually what systems are available or support mechanisms out there that can sort of signpost us

to different things or, apps. The use of digital technology is really sort of enhance that support, hasn't it? For a number of people. It was really nice hearing you speak just just before about how you were inspired by another OT or another OT student. Are you happy to share a little bit about that? Because I just think it's it's such a powerful message around how we can inspire other people.

Fiona [01:07:17]

Yeah, I think at the time when that person came out to visit, I was in a very sort of difficult position. I felt like, I think you go through a little bit of grief when you're when you are diagnosed, anything, you grieve what you wanted to do, but you can't. And this person came out of the house and was very, very kind of like, I think. He was just very helpful in I would give him I would give him options. Oh well, I can't do this anymore and I can't do this and I can't do that. And he'd be like, but you can with this help or this assistance or adoption. So and I think sometimes I did that at the time. Really appreciate that advice. I kind of said yeah, yeah, yeah, okay. But it's stuck in my head and it's set that little seed of maybe you are capable, maybe you can do it. Maybe you just need to manage yourself a little bit better, because I would kind of go, boom and bust, just like do everything that I wanted to do because I wanted to do it and not get anything done. So and it was a really and he had explained to me that he was, I, he was a mature student and he had just gone back and retrained, and he said, you can do it. And I think his confidence in me, really pushed me along. And I think it inspired me to think, oh, well, you can do it. So I should be able to do it. And I think there are some barriers to education with the mobility issue. So there are some there are some challenges. I won't get past that. But I feel if you've got a good communication and you're a little bit stubborn like me, you you just challenge that. You challenge that there kind of like. Those those challenges put in your way. Basically, you are able to overcome them. And I think that ot give me that. And I think that's what OTS do don't we. We kind of we look at you as a whole. And he could see that I really wanted to change and I really wanted to have a career, and I wanted to change roles in the job that I was doing. And he gave me that confidence. So yeah, it was, it was I actually don't I would love to go back now and speak to him and just say, look where I am. I've done it, you know, but I don't I don't know his name or anything, so that's a shame.

Lee [01:09:34]

Isn't it? Isn't it funny, though, how we can we don't necessarily always remember people's names or what we we can definitely remember how that person made us feel. And did you feel.

Fiona [01:09:46]

Yeah. And the impact that he's had that he probably has no idea. And I think that is an OT is is is is amazing. You can just plant that seed in someone that you are capable. You can come, you can come across challenges. But there are ways to. To. To achieve. Yeah. He was he was quite. He's been really helpful even though he doesn't know.

Lee [01:10:10]

I think as well. It's it it really solidifies for me actually just hearing you speak around that around actually the impact we can have as healthcare professionals in, in like you say, probably doesn't know. No. But what that's meant for you has been really impactful because it's, you know, it's spurred you on to where you are today, which is.

Fiona [01:10:34]

And I would say, obviously, as well as that experience, I've got some really, really supportive friends and I and family, my husband's been really supportive. Obviously he started working from home during Covid, which changed it for us completely because he was able to manage help me manage the kids. And it was just although both of us worked him being at home made it possible for me to go back to university. And so he's been really supportive. My friends are really supportive at times where I've said, I can't do this. They've said, you can, you do it already. You do it in your everyday life. You just need to focus. And so, as you said, manage fatigue better rather than trying to do everything all at once, just space out what you what you have to do and pick the most important things. So, yeah, I think my friends have been really supportive as well, because a few times I've said, oh, I can't, I can't continue, it's too much. And they've been like, just take it every day, take each day as it comes. And I think that's really empowering. So I've done today being really proud of myself. I just need to get through tomorrow night. And you know, you do get through.

Lee [01:11:35]

So yeah, I think again, such a powerful message, isn't it? That thing of let's, let's make today manageable and break it down and we'll move forward. I love that, I love that, I suppose for me, what would be the one key piece of advice for someone else who's maybe returning to education as a mature student, managing or managing a family, and this sort of new career shift, what would be your top tip? What would be your key piece of advice for that person?

Fiona [01:12:13]

Reach out and ask for support of anyone. Everyone ask for support and it doesn't have to be, physical support. I think just that emotional support. And I think that really that's really important. The course is, is quite stressful. But ask for the support and the support not only sort of like the emotional support, the support that's available to you, like the it support the, some of the I think just some of. All of that will make life a lot easier for you and be organised. That was a I'll give you a few little tips there. But anyway, be. Be organised. Set a good routine and that's it. Really. And enjoy it because it goes past so quickly. I yeah, it's gone past really, really quickly. So, I'm looking forward to the next chapter, which is hopefully work.

Lee [01:13:05]

It does go really, really quickly. I can speak from experiences. It's it's forever burnt in my memory is an experience that I've had and loved. But it was a blinking time. It doesn't feel like it always when you're going through it, but when you reflect back, it is like a little blip in time. But I just want to say, Fiona, thank you so much for coming, to speak with me, being so, candid about your experiences. And, it's been I've actually found it very inspiring to listen to you and all that you've achieved. So just thank you so much for coming and sharing that with us today.

Fiona [01:13:42]

And I thank you for having me. It's been fun.

Lee [01:13:45]

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