

After a difficult childhood, a National Lottery-funded project helped Jade find the confidence to enrol at college. Here's her story.

In her 22 years, Jade has experienced more hardship than most people encounter in a lifetime. Born to a heroin addict mother, Jade spent most of her childhood in the care system.

Asked about the happy times in her childhood, Jade is unequivocal: the years living with her grandma in Trimdon village. “I had a really good life and then, when I was seven, me grandma become ill and I moved down to Dover with me mother.” Jade describes her years on the South coast as "horrendous". Eventually she was taken away from her mother because of neglect, physical and emotional abuse and went into the care system.

A childhood in care

Things were looking up for Jade when she started an assessment to see if she could live with her dad, who was turning his life around after a spell in prison. But in the cruellest blow, Jade’s dad was tragically murdered in a violent altercation in Durham city centre.

> “Even still now… I can’t have relationships with people, I can’t let people in because I’m scared that they’re going to hurt me again, or they’re going to leave me, or they’re going to die, because everyone else always

has.”

Jade realised she would spend the rest of her childhood in care. She spent her teenage years moving around between "every children’s home in the county" even including a spell living on the streets.

Meeting Jade now, it’s clear that life can still seem precarious as she continues to overcome such a difficult childhood. But what’s also clear is that Jade has grown into a determined, articulate and inspirational young woman.

Taking part in a heritage project

Much of this change has come about thanks to her involvement in Durham’s Investing in Children (IiC). IiC is a children’s human rights organisation that works in partnership with children and young people to help shape local services and participate in decisions that affect them.

Through IiC, Jade took part in a National Lottery-funded project to research the history of young women’s rights in the North East. She presented her findings at a women’s gala in Wharton Park, Durham.

“I was so nervous,” says Jade. “I’ve never, ever done anything like this before in me life. I felt like I was going to have a heart attack. But I didn’t – and I managed to do it.”

> Jade always wanted to go to college, but it wasn’t until she overcame her fear to address hundreds of people in Wharton Park that she finally had the confidence to start an access course – the first step towards a university degree.

“It was the start of me becoming the person that I would like to be,” she says.

“Without people buying Lottery tickets, I wouldn’t have had the amazing opportunities I’ve had over the last six months of me life, so I would just like to say thank you to everyone that does, because yous really have changed my life for the better.”