

A National Lottery funded project for young people gave Jessica the skills and confidence she needed to overcome setbacks and break into her chosen career.

After leaving full-time education, Jessica Starns wanted to work in museums. But, despite building up an impressive portfolio of project work and volunteering for museums and charities, two years later, she was still struggling to find employment in her chosen field. Then a National Lottery funded project for young people called The Only Way is Ethics (TOWIE), which gave her the skills and confidence she needed to finally bag her dream job.

Leaving education

Leaving full-time education is a big adjustment for anyone, but this change brought extra challenges for Jessica, as she has dyslexia, dyscalculia and dyspraxia. These learning difficulties, she explains, affect memory, writing and spelling, understanding of maths and abstract concepts, social skills and speech.

“It’s hard to say how it affects my life really, because I’ve never not had them,” she reflects. “I still have difficulty in cooking and I’ve also had difficulty with sports. But I’m a very organised person. People with learning difficulties sometimes struggle with organisation, so it’s something I’ve worked so hard on. It gives you a lot of determination,” she concludes, with a wry smile.

"Having learning difficulties gives you a lot of determination."

- Jessica

Despite her grit and hard work, Jessica still faced an uphill battle finding employment. “I had learning support at school and at university. But when it’s the last day of your time at that education establishment, that’s it - there’s no support afterwards, it’s completely gone. But they don’t really prepare people for that. It’s a bit weird to suddenly not have that support in place anymore.”

Picking up skills

Not one to just accept things the way they are, Jess put her time post-education to good use. “I set up a support group for young adults with dypraxia, just to help with that transition from having some support to nothing at all.” This group meets once a month, and has been doing so for four years now.

On top of running this group, she took on a number of volunteering roles to bolster her CV. Scrolling social media one day, she came across a post that caught her attention: a youth focused project called TOWIE was holding a taster evening.

Joining the project

“The project, run by Emergency Exit Arts, was for young people aged 18-25 and the aim was to give young people the skills to deliver heritage projects,” Jess explains. “The Bishopsgate Institute was given an archive on the Mondcivitan Republic [a nation without territory, whose citizens across the world worked to promote peace and unity in the aftermath of World War II], and we received training to interpret the archive, and share our discoveries with others.”

As part of TOWIE, Jess helped produce a toolkit about best practices for working with young people on heritage projects: “I really enjoyed the project, especially being involved with people who are a similar age to me – just being creative and making something that we could talk about in finding employment.”

Career take-off

Jessica completed the project with more than just a toolkit. After 12 months of working with others, developing skills in archives and exploring ways of sharing her learning with other young people, Jessica had everything she needed to break into the museum workplace.

Now, she designs volunteering placements for other young people at an internationally famous heritage landmark: the British Museum. “I really enjoy my new job,” she says.

Creating more opportunities for others

“Through volunteering" Jessica says, "you can gain transferrable skills and then use those skills to find employment in something that you’re passionate about.”

Is this what TOWIE did for her? “Yes,” she says. “I’m passionate about giving more young people like me the opportunity to find out what they can do.

“I’m not 100% sure if all National Lottery players know where their money is going when they buy a ticket, but they should know it goes to really good causes like TOWIE.”





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