



Emma was a participant on the first Aspiring Leaders Programme. This is her story:

Emma grew up on a deprived estate in Workington, one of five children in a single parent family. School had been a difficult time for Emma, having been told she was stupid and that she would never learn anything. She subsequently left with few qualifications, a lot of bad memories and not much confidence.

When Emma was 20 she became a Mum, but found that she felt isolated, losing touch with friends and not wanting to leave the house. She only went out to see family and to attend a mother and toddler group at the local church hall. It was here that she was encouraged to attend the local children centre, where Action4Children provided family support services. Despite feeling isolated and lacking confidence, Emma knew she wanted a better future for herself and her child:

*"I wanted to be the best Mum I could be and not let my daughter become isolated because we never left the house. I also wanted to better myself and get a job."*

It didn't take long for Action4Children to see that Emma was an exceptional young woman. Passionate about her community and supporting families, she was driven by a will to give back to the organisation that had helped her at such a critical time:

*"I started to feel a little better about myself.....and mentioned to a support worker I would like to become more involved with the Childrens Centre, as I could see how much it had helped me and my family. So I started Volunteering"*

The team at Action4Children nominated Emma to apply for the Aspiring Leaders Programme. Emma was nervous about many elements of the programme, from travelling outside of her local area, to meeting new people.

*"I was told about ALP by Action4Children.....I did not think I would get a place..... I was nervous, excited and a little worried I would not be good enough and fail the degree"*

But Emma is also a determined and tenacious young woman. She wanted her children to grow up in a household with strong, capable role models, parents who accepted a challenge and worked hard for the things that matter.

Despite the challenges, Emma kept going. Little by little she began to feel comfortable within the group, whom she now considers friends and colleagues, and achieved good grades for her academic work, being awarded learner of the Year in the CN Education Awards.

For three years Emma juggled attending the programme, completing assignments, maintaining her voluntary work and raising her children.

In 2014 Emma graduated. The first person in her family to do so. Soon after, she applied for a paid job. She was successful and was appointed as a Parent Champion Support Worker in Workington. At the same time Emma applied for funding to set up an Autism Support Group, having discovered through one of her research projects the desperate need for such a group in her area. She also increased her voluntary commitments by standing as the Chair for the parent carer network, helped set up a volunteer group with the Worker Education Association (WEA) and has worked for Hospice at Home, West Cumbria.

Emma now feels confident and able to contribute to the development and quality of community provision in a way that she believed to be beyond her before she started the programme.

*“it (ALP) has helped me develop and look at ways in which I can support my local community and the support we have received has enabled us to overcome any problems”*

Not only has this been an empowering process for Emma, and enabled her to work at a greater extent of her capacity, but she is a positive role model both to her children and others in her community:

*“I know I would never have attended Uni if it wasn’t for ALP – having someone believe in me to put funding forward for me to attend has given me a bigger appreciation for my community and I want to give back, so others get the same opportunities I have been given. No matter where I end up working, I will always support my community”*

For more personal stories from the Aspiring Leaders Programme, go to the Brathay Trust You Tube page, or follow the link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o85H6LhUBrw&t=1s>

