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## **Ellie May: Home Educated Youth Advocate for Home Education Futures case study**

### **This is my homeschooling journey**

I am now attending university in the hopes to gain a degree in Criminology and Law to join the Police force. I recently stepped down after volunteering for 20 months as a Youth Advisory Group Member for the Career's and Enterprise Company in partnership with the British Youth Council.

My home-schooling journey started in Year 10 of secondary school after becoming ill with a chronic illness. Both my mum and I tried to compromise with the school I was attending for them to tailor to my needs but this proved to be unsuccessful. It was extremely frustrating that the school wouldn't listen to what I needed and only focused on getting 100% attendance at the detriment of my quality of education. It was a hard decision to make but me and my mum decided to home-school me and remove me from the education system. I then began to be tutored at home to aim to sit exams for my GCSEs, however due to my physical health this wasn't possible. Instead, I focused on my health and studied whilst I could to feel physically and mentally well enough to attend college. It was a difficult time to be home-schooled as I was taken away from a pre-existing educational system, whereas when being home-schooled you have to create one. I was removed from easily accessible

opportunities, such as work experience and exams, and I was isolated from friends who I wouldn't get to see as much. Although I found it difficult, it was especially hard on my mum – she not only had to support me as a parent but now as a Science, Maths, English and History teacher.

Whilst I was being home-schooled and shortly before I started college I began volunteering at Yeovil District Hospital – my local hospital. I knew I wanted to study Health and Social Care at college and knew gaining some hands-on experience would be a good idea to prepare me, get me socialising again and maintaining a routine. It also gave me networks for work experience as I knew I would need to complete a certain amount of hours with an organisation as part of my course. I really enjoyed being a Youth Volunteer and helping in areas that needed it most.

When I applied for college I was told that it didn't matter that I didn't have any qualifications as I could take them at college and do a mainstream course. However, on my first day I was informed that this was incorrect and that due to being home-schooled with no qualifications I would have to go into a class with other individuals with no qualifications and complete a one year course before starting a mainstream one. I noticed the majority of the other individuals in my class were there because they didn't have the motivation to sit their exams, not because of a lack of accessibility or illness. This really disheartened me because although I did not have any qualifications it wasn't because of my own decision. After pushing the college by explaining I knew what course I wanted to do and after sitting several assessments a decision was made to move me to a Level 1 course. I was then asked to do another assessment to move me to a Level 2 course as they felt I was too advanced. I was asked to sit one more assessment which would allow me to go straight into a Level 3 course, however because I didn't have my GCSE English or Maths I wasn't permitted to. This was really upsetting as I felt as a result of me being home-schooled I was now being impacted regarding later decisions in my life. However, being held back that year meant that I got to be my college's Student Union Chair and Further Education Student Governor. I would not have been able to do these roles unless I had that year as elections were being held at the time (and then wouldn't have been held for another 2 years) and the winning candidate

must have been able to serve 2 years. I have one particular teacher to thank for pushing me to apply.

After being elected the FE Student Governor and the SU Chair I then was then informed of other volunteering opportunities and these roles gave me the confidence to believe that even without qualifications I can apply for these positions, including being a member of the Youth Forum for Somerset County Council, A Wellbeing Champion for Young Somerset, a member of the Youth Advisory Group for the CEC and a member of Somerset Big Tent which provides wellbeing support to young people in Somerset. Although some were college-based volunteering opportunities most of these were external to the college to find and apply for. I did this through researching opportunities in my own time or being referred to them by supporting family and friends.

During my journey at college I developed into a completely different person than who started. I completed a Level 2 and Level 3 Diploma in Health and Social Care with the best possible grade I could have asked for, I gained my English and Maths GCSE, I was voted Student Union Chair by the students of Yeovil College and elected the Further Education Student Governor by the Independent Governors. I paid privately to sit a GCSE Biology exam – although this wasn't required for my desired career choice I just wanted to have 5 qualifications in total all relevant to my career field. I had to save for this during college and had friends and family to support me to achieve this. I achieved all of this by being dedicated and disciplined. I would spend endless hours writing assignments and perfecting them to get the best grade and keep myself organised and manage my time well so I could complete college work, a job, volunteer, and spend time with friends and family. I am extremely proud of my college journey and feel I really made the most of my time there, grasping at every opportunity I was deprived of before. I left college a far more confident person knowing that my journey is different but that shouldn't and won't impact my life. I learned that qualifications aren't everything and should not be a judge of character. I am a hardworking and dedicated person, but you will never know that if you look at my qualifications list; you will know that by talking to me and listening to my story.

I left college after applying for different universities and being accepted to all of those I applied for. I did feel nervous I would be rejected for a lack of qualifications, but it never

came up once. I then started Open University to study a degree in Criminology and Law with a foundation year due to not having an A-Level qualification. Again, I did become disheartened however I knew that if this would be my journey then that was okay. I studied Health and Social Care and then began studying Criminology and Law. Although these are considered quite different topics they combine nicely together for the career I want in the Police force. During my university interviews I was asked more about real life examples relating to my course – this is where my volunteering came into use as I could use the times when I supported others at my local hospital and during college. They did not ask me anything about my grades. There is a minimum requirement for grades which is typically a college-level qualification relating to the university course subject. For example, achieving a diploma in Health and Social Care contributes towards being able to study a Degree in Nursing, as well as a GCSE or functional skills qualification in Maths or English and a certain amount of UCAS points.

Now that I have left college, I am working alongside my university studying as a Project Planner for Leonardo's Helicopters and aiming for my degree. I hope in the future to continue my volunteering especially in roles relating to the local council. After explaining my story, my hope is to share the message to others that it is okay to be different and that your journey is not the same as the person sitting next to you. We are all different people who have experienced different things. Although I was home-schooled that doesn't mean I am not still a valid member of society and that I don't have needs or aspirations. Being home-schooled for whatever reason doesn't mean that you should be treated differently; you should be treated and respected according to your needs. Home-schooling journeys can be hard and isolating but there are also so many amazing aspects to it and it is extremely rewarding, not just for the individual but for their parents, guardian or tutor. I was home-schooled because I became ill. It wouldn't have been something I or my family even considered before, however I wouldn't change it for the world.

I wanted to become a part of the home education futures project as this is really close to my heart. I knew the challenges that I went through and the successes and I wanted to be a young adviser. I am so pleased that young people across Swindon and Wiltshire will have access to resources to support them in their home education journey.

I got to spend more time with family, put my health and needs first, learn things at a pace that worked for me and not one designed for a blanket teaching technique. It made me the person I am today. I hope reading my story helps others and I wanted to say a big thank you to the friends and family who supported me in my journey, and I want to say the biggest thank you to my mum.

Many thanks

Ellimae