

WHO CARES? SCOTLAND

Care Experienced Learners

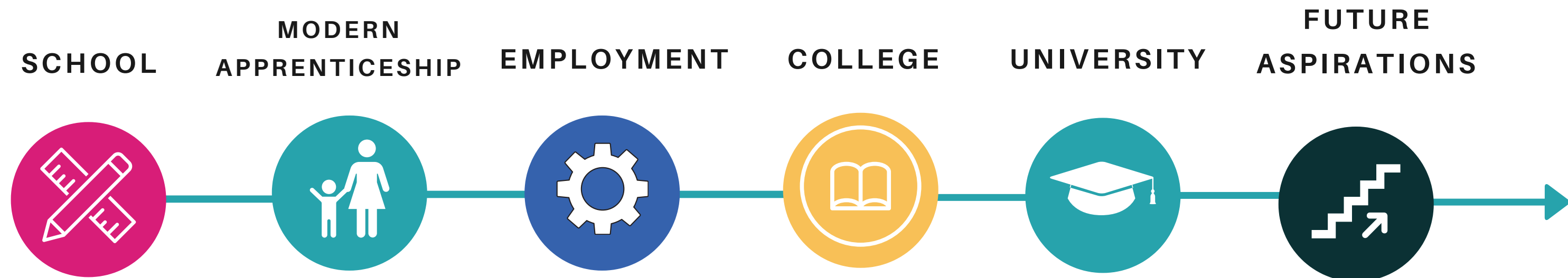
Leanne's Journey

A Case Study and Best Practice Guide



LEANNE

Leanne is a graduate, a mum and a Care Experienced person. Growing up, Leanne had mixed experiences of school. She has vivid memories and can attribute education to pivotal moments in her life. Leanne enjoyed learning. As her knowledge grew, she started to apply herself studiously, wanting to achieve. Leanne's aspirations to study took her to college then to university. During this time she claimed her Care Experienced identity, which inspired her in ways she couldn't imagine, as she continued along her cathartic educational path to a degree. She has generously decided to share her learning journey with us, to help us gain an understanding of education through the lens of a Care Experienced student.



SCHOOL



SCHOOL

PRIMARY SCHOOL

Leanne has many different experiences of school. **She attended five primary schools and two secondary schools.** Leanne recalls, *“I have vivid memories of primary one. I loved the teacher, she was a teacher who gave **lots of hugs**”*.

From primary two until primary six Leanne has lots of sad memories from continuously **changing school and making new friends.** When Leanne started primary six, things started to look up for her, *“that year and my final year of primary stay with me. The class was very small and **the teacher was amazing, she believed in me and went that extra mile for me.** She provided me with **so many opportunities** which took me away from the chaos at home”*.



SCHOOL



SCHOOL

SECONDARY SCHOOL

Unfortunately, the leap from a small intimate primary school to a large secondary school was too difficult for Leanne to manage. **She had moved into temporary foster care at the same time as starting secondary school.**

Leanne was quite overwhelmed with everything and her behaviour started to deteriorate in class whilst her peers also started to bully her. In first year, Leanne moved home to live with her mum. She didn't attend school for 5 months. Leanne and her mum then moved to a new home which meant **Leanne had to start a new secondary school.**



SCHOOL



SCHOOL

GUIDANCE TEACHER COMMENTS

Leanne struggled to settle in at school and **started displaying different behaviours** such as acting up in class, being the class clown and skipping classes. She often ended up in detention.

Leanne recalls a conversation she had with her guidance teacher, *“he said I was going to end up just like others and become a teenage mum”*. Leanne has reflected on this as an adult and wondered if he was being serious or using reverse psychology on her. Either way, **this conversation has stayed with Leanne throughout her life**. She says, *“although this stayed with me, I proved I was different and wanted more”*.

Leanne remembers being told, *“act like an adult and I will treat you like one but act like a child and I will also treat you as one”*. This was another comment which stayed with Leanne throughout her life. She contributes this comment to a turning point in her life.




SCHOOL



SCHOOL

FRIENDSHIP & PART-TIME WORK



In third year of school, Leanne started to concentrate on her schoolwork and study for her exams. **Leanne always enjoyed the social aspect of school.** She loved seeing her friends there, even though she would catch up with them in the evenings. **Leanne thinks she probably also liked the security school provided.** **At school, she could be a child, free of the responsibilities she had at home.** She also enjoyed having a certain amount of **control** at school, which she thinks is evident via the negative behaviours she displayed at school.

Leanne had a great friend through her secondary school years. They would spend a lot of time together. Leanne remembers how supportive her friend and her family were, *"I was often at hers or we were out hanging around like most teenagers. Both my friend and her family were a huge support to me"*. At age 14

Leanne got a part time job in the local chip shop. She would work most weekends which gave her **money, a sense of independence and time away from everything at home.**

SCHOOL



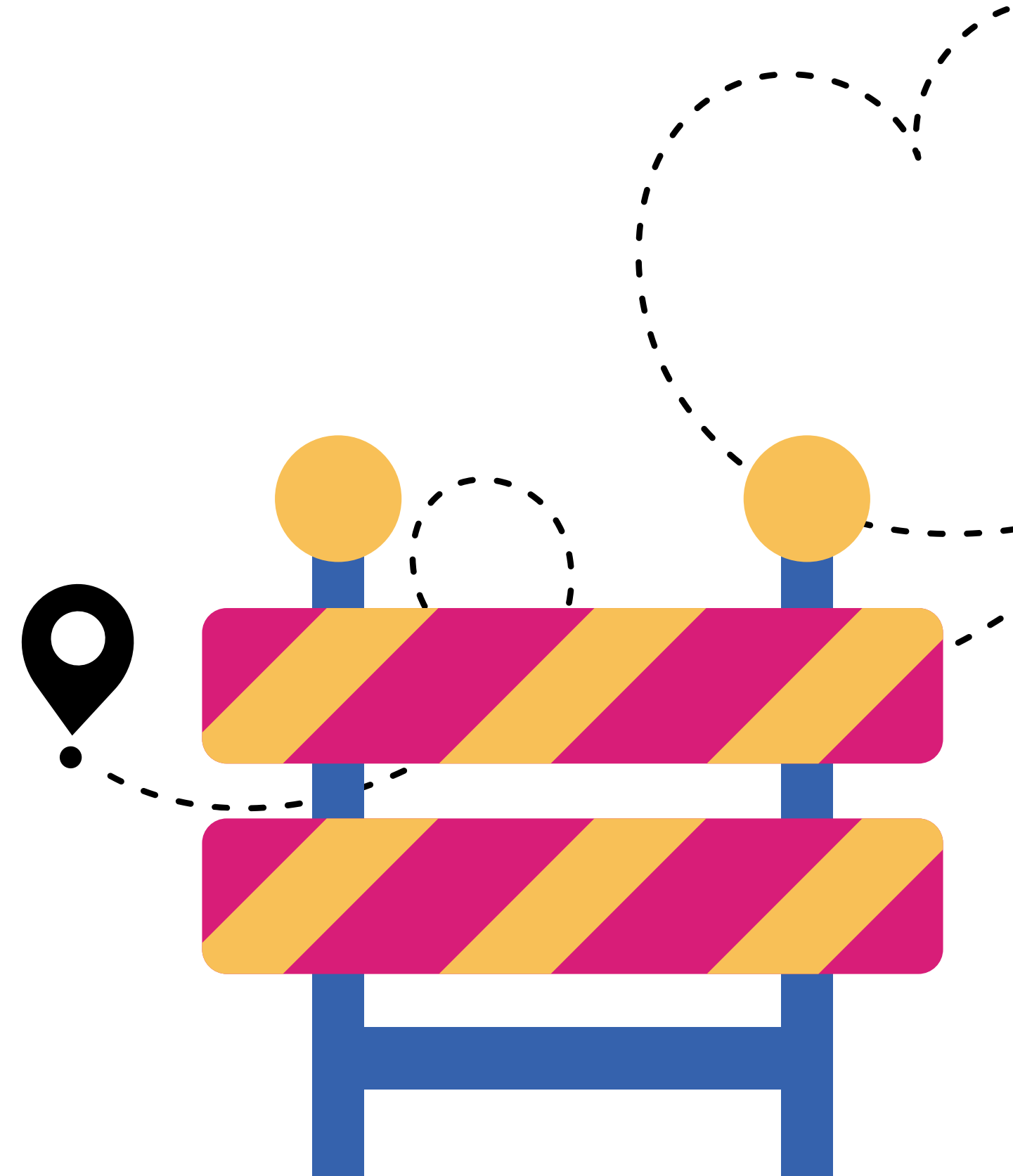
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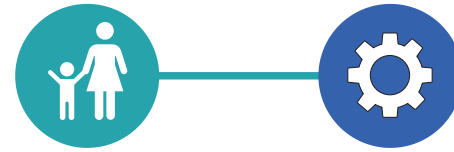
BARRIERS

Leanne remembers facing barriers throughout her education. Her main barrier was **a lack of understanding from people around her about what was going on at home**. No one asked why she behaved the way that she did. No one asked how she was.

Another barrier was the lack of encouragement she got from her family to achieve and attain at school and in education. **Her immediate family didn't see education as being important**. As the oldest of 5 children, Leanne's mind would often be occupied at school thinking about what she would need to do for her mum and younger siblings when she got home.

Leanne also struggled to find a quiet place at home to study, with a busy house and younger siblings. **Leanne would have benefitted from help with her homework as well as access to a quiet place at school to study**.





MODERN APPRENTICESHIP & EMPLOYMENT

SVQ AND EMPLOYMENT

Leanne left school at the end of her fourth year. She was still working at the chip shop and carried this on until the following summer. That summer, Leanne was **supported by the careers service** to apply for a **Modern Apprenticeship in Childcare (SVQ 2 & 3)**.

After 3 years Leanne was qualified as an Early Year's Practitioner (nursery nurse). **A major barrier here was money**, she earned £160 per month. Leanne took on a weekend job to support her, which meant **she was working a 53-hour working week**.

By this point Leanne had moved out of her mum's house and **was living on her own**. She recalls, "*I have to say at this point I was really driven to achieve and get what I needed to get a good well-paid job*". Leanne was 19 when she qualified and **got a really good job which she stayed in for 15 years**.



COLLEGE



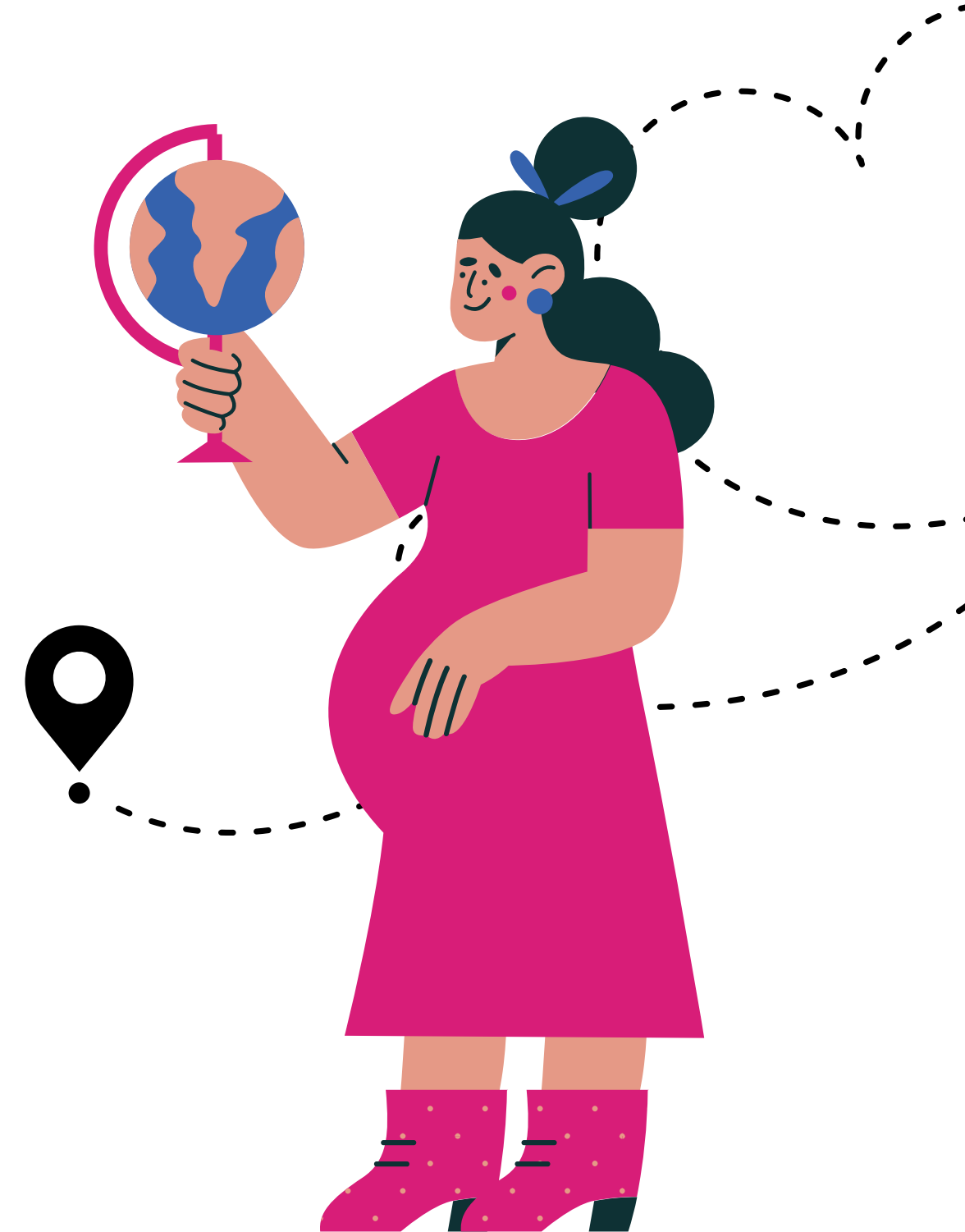
COLLEGE

GOING TO

When Leanne was 28 and pregnant with her second child, she suffered a significant bereavement. As a distraction from all that life was throwing at her, Leanne went back to college part-time to study **HNC Social Care and work full time.**

Studying was a **good distraction** for Leanne. She enjoyed studying the subjects. It was at this point that **Leanne started to make links between the theories she was studying and her own childhood.**

Leanne recalls, *"Social policy took me on a journey and supported an aspect of my personal life which was a bonus at that time. I was proud to have completed the course and graduated with an A"*.



UNIVERSITY



UNIVERSITY

ARTICULATION INTO UNIVERSITY

Once Leanne completed her HNC she couldn't help but think, "what next"? She attended university open days but **felt all of her options were closed**. Leanne found a degree that she could articulate on to with her HNC, **the BA Childhood Practice**.

Leanne was 34 when she applied to the course and was accepted. **By articulating into second year of university with her previously gained credits, she would achieve her degree after 3 (rather than 4) years of study**. Leanne was so proud and excited to start studying at university. ***"I was so proud to walk through the doors that first time."***



UNIVERSITY



UNIVERSITY

SUPPORT FROM A PERSONAL TUTOR

*"Although, it was a rollercoaster of emotions throughout my student time". Whilst at university, Leanne had barriers to overcome. **She was a mum, working full time and legal guardian to her teenage siblings.** Leanne's long term partner gave her lots of support. She recalls, *"I was not prepared for how much the course would bring back many of my childhood memories - the degree was studying childhood, families and social justice. Looking back, I should have asked for support in the early stages."**

During her final year Leanne had so much going on at work and at home that she nearly quit. **Her tutor at university was a huge support,** *"I spoke with my personal tutor who got me through it, she was **fantastic, approachable and very understanding,** she listened and supported me right through until the end".*



UNIVERSITY



UNIVERSITY

TAILORED SUPPORT

Leanne was doing well and achieving good grades but she always got the same feedback about her essays, commenting on her poor grammar and spelling. Due to this Leanne decided to get a test for dyslexia. She was diagnosed with dyslexia and dyspraxia. **The pieces of Leanne's learning puzzle started to fit together.** She had always struggled with her reading and writing. **She was able to apply for funding to get a proof-reader. This was a huge benefit for Leanne, when she graduated, she did so with distinction.**

Leanne didn't identify as Care Experienced until halfway through university, as it wasn't until then that she realised she was Care Experienced. **Leanne thinks if she had identified as Care Experienced earlier it would have led to her receiving more support.** *"Had I acknowledged I was Care Experienced and informed the university I definitely think I would have received more support. But sadly, I was ashamed of my past experiences. It did not resonate well with me to tell people I was Care Experienced".*





CARE EXPERIENCED IDENTITY

As Leanne lived in temporary foster care and with extended family members (kinship care) **she didn't realise that she was Care Experienced.** Learning about and acknowledging her Care Experience inspired Leanne to research this community in more detail for her dissertation.

This study coincided with **the Independent Care Review** that was taking place here in Scotland. *"I used **The Promise** in my dissertation to explore attainment, attitudes and stereotypes towards Care Experienced children and young people. This was my highest mark, an A2, my passion and drive for the lived experience I had supported me to achieve this".*





FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

TAILORED SUPPORT

Leanne wants to complete a **master's degree**, but she is unsure in what area. She had goals to be a teacher and a social worker but she is taking time out just now. *"I'm taking time out and enjoying spending time with my family and friends. I plan to continue to support social justice for Care Experienced children and young people and kinship carers, and will investigate the what next over the coming year"*.

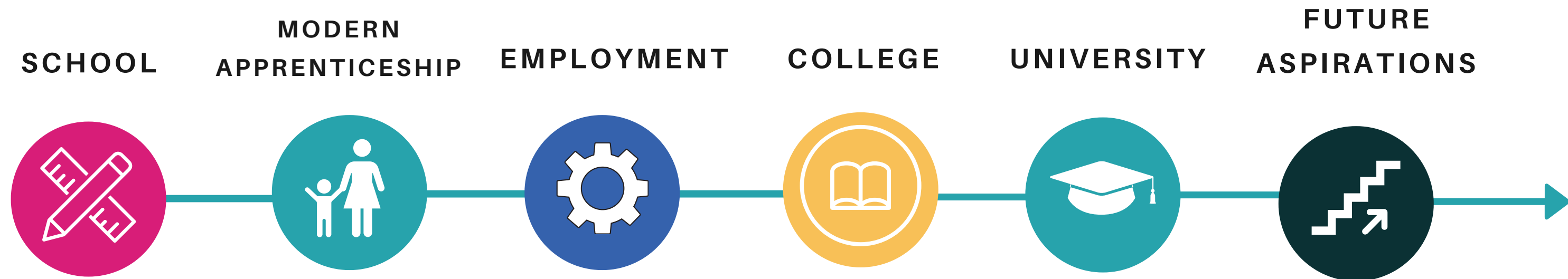
When considering her next steps Leanne has reflected on what support could help. She suggests, **"Opportunities and contacts to help mature students"**.

Education has been very important to Leanne throughout her life. She reflects, *"Education has been a get away from life for me, however it has also supported me to understand, and continues to drive my passion for social justice. Education has opened up many opportunities and **helped me live the life I want to**. It has given me a wealth of employment opportunities while supporting my knowledge and understanding in other areas such as children's rights and social justice- my passion"*.



LEANNE

Leanne feels being Care Experienced has made her able to reflect, empathise and relate to others both personally and professionally. Leanne says, *"I have the ability now to challenge things as I have the theory and personal experience behind me to make a relevant point. I have the confidence to be proud to say I'm Care Experienced, sharing how far I have come and that you are never too old to achieve, and that your Care Experience can hinder you, however, it can also get you the determination to say I CAN do this."*



LEANNE

KEY LEARNINGS



BELIEVE IN AND ENCOURAGE CARE EXPERIENCED PEOPLE

Leanne has vivid memories of her teachers in primary school, who made her feel cared for and "went the extra mile" to create opportunities which were a welcome distraction from life outside of school. Be proactive in ensuring that Care Experienced people have what they need to thrive, and that they feel supported and nurtured.



UNDERSTANDING THE WIDER WORLD

For Leanne, life at home caused her to change her behaviour at school as a way of feeling more in control. She spent time in detention, but no one asked how she was or how life at home was. Make efforts to understand a Care Experienced person and their world.



HOMEWORK AND STUDY HELP

For Leanne, it was difficult to focus on school work when she had responsibilities at home and her family did not think education was important. Proactively offer support with homework and exam preparation, as not every Care Experienced person will get this sort of help outside of school hours. Also offer access to a quiet place to study.

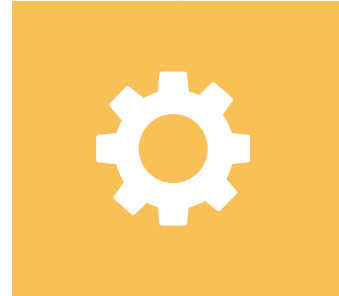
LEANNE

KEY LEARNINGS



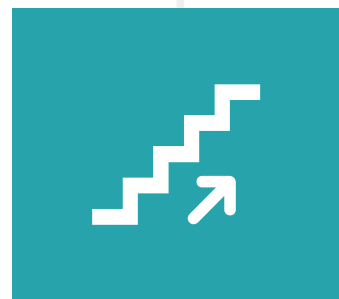
RAISE AWARENESS AROUND CARE EXPERIENCE AND RELEVANT SUPPORT

Leanne did not realise she was Care Experienced until she went to university. She felt ashamed of her past and so did not self-declare, missing out on support she was entitled to. Create a positive culture around self-declaration as a means of accessing support without stigma.



LEARNING AND LIVED EXPERIENCE

Leanne did not expect her course to bring back childhood memories. She now wishes she had asked for support in the early stages, though her lived experience also gave her the passion to achieve and succeed in her chosen field. Be mindful of how a Care Experienced person may find it challenging to study topics which evoke their lived experience, and be prepared to offer tailored support in helping them to process and engage.



SUPPORT NEXT STEPS

Leanne would like to complete a master's in future, and has suggested that a useful support around this would be opportunities and contacts for mature students. Consider how you might be able to support mature students to thrive and continue on their academic journeys.