



Graduate's volunteer work tackles mental health stigma

A determined graduate is hoping her varied volunteering experience will help her land her dream job as a Clinical Psychologist.

Natalie Quinlan completed a [BSc \(Hons\) Psychology](#) degree at Staffordshire University last year, and has since volunteered in a range of positions including working with mental health patients in developing country Sri Lanka.

The 36-year-old, from Abbey Hulton, moved to London to become a singer when she left school and ended up working in IT. She said: "I wasn't enjoying my job. I wanted to do something I felt passionate about and so decided to go back into education."

Natalie secured a place at the University after completing an access course at college and now hopes to become a Clinical Psychologist, specialising in neuro-psychology and dementia.

"It's a tough area to get into. There's a lot of competition so you've got to prove yourself before you have a chance of getting a place," explained Natalie who believes her voluntary work experience will help her get onto a post-graduate course.

Last autumn Natalie travelled to Sri Lanka to help to tackle the stigma surrounding mental health issues on the island, which she says was a life-changing experience.

"Traditionally there is a sense of shame surrounding mental health problems in Sri Lanka. Most people believe in karma and that if someone has a mental illness they are being punished for some wrongdoing in a past life."

By participating in a scheme with SL Volunteers Natalie was trained and supported by Sri Lankan Mental Health professionals to help equip her with the skills to work sensitively within the Sri Lankan culture, and in thoroughly under-resourced facilities and challenging environments.

For three months Natalie worked at Psychiatric Hospitals and ran therapeutic activity sessions at centres for individuals with various specific needs.

"It was difficult but I saw the positive effect I was having on patients and it was such a good feeling. That sort of satisfaction stays with you."

Back home Natalie has also volunteered as a Healthcare Support Worker in Stoke-on-Trent and now volunteers as an Assistant Honorary Psychologist at The Bennett Centre.

"Volunteering in Sri Lanka meant I could see a beautiful country whilst getting some great practical skills for my CV and my work back home has given me an insight into clinical practices."

"Life's too short to do something you don't enjoy. I'm so glad I studied at Staffs and I'm that much closer to my dream career."

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