



All of Us

The guide to graduation

By Jax, Kiah-Rose, Lewis, Lewis,
Peter, Sam and Tina

Introduction

In July 2024 All of Us, the community for estranged and care experienced students across the UK, held a graduation event. It was a joy-filled evening for people to virtually celebrate their achievements with fellow graduates; with special guest speakers and a panel of estranged and care experienced graduates open to questions about graduation and beyond.

They're the people that have created this guide.

If you want to hear what they have to say about entering the job market, work placements and internships, making friends, building a support network after graduation and what they're enjoying most now, read on...

A big thank you to Jax, Kiah-Rose, Lewis, Lewis, Peter, Sam and Tina for putting this together and also to the wonderful care experienced researcher Dr Zoe Baker who joined us at the event and shared her own guide [From Us to Us: A collection of advice from care-experienced graduates to care-experienced graduates](#)

Everyone had a great time and, if you're an estranged or care experienced student graduating next year or a recent graduate who would like to share your story so far, we'd love to see you at the next one!



Hello everyone, I'm Jax Sinclair (They/Them), Glasgow, Journalist, BBC Long Form Journalism and Investigations. You can follow me on X @jaxsinclairx or Instagram @scumdad.

Hello, I'm Peter and I'm a current International Journalism Masters student at the University of Stirling, I graduated from the University of Stirling in 2023 with a degree in Journalism Studies
You can follow me on X as Peter Humfrey (@phumfrey1)

Hello, I'm Kiah-rose (pronounced Kai-yah), Doctoral Researcher in Psychology, Birmingham. You can connect with me on LinkedIn: Kiah-rose Sargant

Hey! I'm Lewis A, I graduated in 2022 from Manchester Met with a Combined Honours in International Business & Marketing. Connect with me on LinkedIn (Lewis Adeniregun) or Instagram (@Adeniregun1)

Hey, I'm Lewis B (: I graduated with an integrated master's degree in maths from the University of Sheffield last year.

I'm Tina (she/her) and I live in my hometown Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire where I am a District & County Councillor and School Governor. You can follow me on X @tinabhartwas and LinkedIn.

My name is Sam Macrae (she/her) and I graduated from the University of Glasgow in 2021 with an MA (SocSci) in Social and Public Policy. You can connect with me on Twitter (@Sam__Gracee), or LinkedIn Sam Macrae.

Hi!

Jax

Journalism to me is about uncovering the truth that some people don't want you to find out. Last year I won the UK RTS On Demand Journalism award for a film I fronted, Should I Tell you I'm Trans? I graduated three years ago from university with a 1st Class Bachelor's degree in journalism, since then I have went on to gain twenty TV credits. My most recent work includes Disclosure: Surviving Domestic Abuse and Panorama: The Dark Side of Ballet Schools which are all available on BBC iPlayer.

Kiah-Rose

I graduated last summer from Aston University in BSc Psychology with a 1st. Throughout my undergraduate degree, I worked within CAMHS services and mental health hospitals throughout Birmingham. I also did a placement year working as an Assistant Psychologist. I am now a first year PhD student at Aston University. My project is developing a therapeutic intervention to support families and young people who struggle with self-harm and emotional dysregulation (mental health research). I recently won an award for "Best Presentation" for my talk at an academic conference!"

Lewis A

During my time as an undergrad I started a society for Care leaver and Estranged students which I managed to get fully funded by the union and also managed the socials for This Is US for a couple months.

I still live in Manchester and work full time at Barclays as a financial assistant whilst completing a MSc at University of Manchester in Real Estate Development. When I graduate my plan is to take a year out and travel South America then get a grad scheme with Barclays in corporate banking.

Tina

For the past year I've been working in digital and grassroots engagement following graduating from Queen Mary, University of London with a 2:1 in Politics and IR.

During my time as a first-generation estranged student, I faced many barriers and was keen to raise awareness of the challenges of being an estranged young person: raising the issue with universities, politicians and online such as to do with housing, finance and mental health. I am an avid reader, obsessed with Tudor history, love coffee, engage in a whole host of artsy, blast rock n roll music and always want cat cuddles.

Lewis B

Since then, I've been working as a maths tutor in a local secondary school, alongside running my own maths tutoring business (which I started as during my degree around 3 years ago).

I'll be returning in a couple of months to start a PhD in an area of theoretical physics called quantum error correction, but I won't bore you with the details...

I love heavy music, going to gigs (and narrowly avoiding serious injury in the pit), running, playing guitar, snooker — and of course, maths!

Sam

During my time as a student, I was a keen activist for the rights and awareness of estranged students in Scotland which became the focus of my undergraduate dissertation. I played a role in some of the positive changes in the Scottish Government as a result of campaigning.

For the past 3 years, I have been working full time for Renfrewshire Council as the Promise Ambassador. The Promise is an ambitious programme of change, with lived experience at its core, to re-design the care system for children and young people in Scotland by 2030. My role is to lead on these changes and ensure that all services across the local authority understands how they can better support the Care Experienced community. In addition to my professional role, I am also a trustee of Project Change, and the Unite Foundation.

What advice would you give to care experienced or estranged people entering the job market?

Sam Macrae: The advice I would give is to have confidence and self-belief in your abilities. It can be really tough to find a job as a graduate, so it is so important not to let it get to you. Making sure you ask for feedback at the end of any interviews can also be really beneficial to improving your interview technique. I would also encourage graduates to be open to trying new things, be it roles you might not have considered initially or new locations. I was living in Glasgow during my studies but started working in Paisley for my graduate job, which has worked out really well in the long run. It is also about recognising the strengths within your living experience of care or estrangement and how this can give you unique skillsets and knowledge.

– Sam

My advice would be to celebrate your achievements, be confident in your abilities and to never limit your potential!

– Kiah-Rose

The main piece of advice I'd give is to not be too hard on yourself — it can be incredibly difficult to secure a graduate job in this economic climate, and all you can do is try your best. This is especially true for care leavers and estranged people as you may have gained less work experience at university due to personal circumstances, may have less financial support and thus more pressure to find a job, etc; all I'd say is to keep your head held high, keep applying, and something will come your way.

– Lewis B

Peter

“Being upfront, and building your own support.

I’ve always walked a bit of a tightrope, balancing openness about my adoption and neurodivergence, against not letting it define me. When it comes work its always been a tricky one, even before university, when it comes to things like ticking that box for disability, or mentioning additional support needs in the job.

I’ve arrived at a point now where I’m happy to talk openly and frankly with potential employers, about my disability (ADHD and depression) and background. I tick that box and then save any explanations and conversation until the interview stage, but I’ve found that broadly speaking, potential employers appreciate the openness and have an interest in your stories. It’s not a case of turning yourself into a sob story (and I know I’m a bit exhausted of the pitying looks I’ve received when mentioning my adoption), but owning who you are.

Most people don’t know much or anything about care-experience. You do. You’re the expert in the room and it can sometimes even be a great way of finding confidence in an interview, talking about something that you will almost certainly know more than the interviewer on. I’ve also found an astonishing prevalence in people who either are, or know someone who is care-experienced.

In a job interview last summer (and I got the job) I mentioned my adoption and discovered one of the two managers interviewing me was, herself, adopted. So I appreciate openness can be tricky and you shouldn’t feel the need to get it all out there if you don’t feel able to, but it’s nothing something to hide away. It’s always a great way of weeding out the bad employers who won’t try to support you. Better to know an employer is going to be a bad fit for you before getting the job, than weeks or months in.



The other piece of advice I'd say, extends on from all this. In university, the support you receive is often from people trained and knowledgeable on things like trauma, neurodivergence, care-experience, etc. In the workplace you can often find yourself being the most knowledgeable person in the building on these areas and having managers ask you "what do you need from us?". Building your own support is tricky and in my last position I didn't realise until many months in what sort of support I'd need.

So my advice is don't be afraid to say "I don't know". However what you do know is your own life-experience so share as much or as little as you feel comfortable sharing, with them. My manager in my last job admitted to me that I was the first person with the sort of issues I have, that she'd ever had to support. She was learning on the job as much as I was.

The other piece of advice from all this would be to maybe look up organisations that have information on care-experience, support for employers/employees with neurodivergence, and check if anyone in the organisation/business is trained in "trauma-informed practice". Also ask if they have a mental health first aider. It's surprising how many do these days.

At the end of the day, if you settle into the job, and feel able to, you can be part of that change, building up systems of support and the right culture in your workplace. Having someone with lived-experience to lead and build that support is something many employers would love to have."



Did you do a placement,
work experience or an
internship during your
degree – and did this help
you gain a graduate
job/further academic
study?

Throughout my degree I have worked in various roles to financially support myself and to get experience relevant to my degree. I studied Psychology, so I worked in a mental health hospital in various roles (both NHS and private healthcare) and also did a placement year as an Honorary Assistant Psychologist. This clinical experience, my First-Class BSc, and my own lived experience of mental health difficulties helped me to secure my fully funded PhD studentship in Psychology once I had graduated!

– Kiah-Rose

I did a few things! I completed a data analyst internship between my second and third years of university, which certainly helped me gain a graduate data scientist internship post-graduation. The following year, I completed an internship in my university's maths department, where I helped write a first-year undergraduate module; I then marked and moderated students' work as a lead teaching support assistant in my final year, and created an analogous second-year module in the summer after graduation. Ultimately though, I started my maths tutoring business during third year, which is what I'm doing now!

– Lewis B

Sam

“I worked throughout my degree, most notably within a widening access organisation called FOCUS West, working with target schools in the West of Scotland to improve access to further and higher education. The skills I learned during this role were invaluable, such as the basics of administration, working in an office environment and navigating working relationships. I also had a really supportive line manager during this role who had a significant influence on me as well.

I also completed a three-month Fair Access internship in partnership with the Robertson Trust and the University of Strathclyde, the University of St Andrews and the University of Stirling to complete a range of tasks in relation to widening access resources and research. I was also a research assistant during this role, supporting a paper into the links between rurality and widening access.

Overall, I would highly recommend completing an internship if you are able to do so, as the skills and experiences that you gain make the job search so much easier after graduating.”



Peter

“In 2022, at the end of my first attempt of my 4th (final) year, I was put informed of a paid internship opportunity over the summer with my university’s careers and employability service. They were looking for two care-experienced students to investigate the support needs of care-experienced students from a care-experienced background, and co-author a report with recommendations for the university to action. It was my first-time diving into the world of research on care-experience and organisations such as Who Cares? Scotland, NNECL, The Unite Foundation, etc. It gave me a direction and the following spring my final journalism project was around care-experienced students in higher education, working through many of the contacts I’d made that previous summer. It has gone on to inform my postgraduate work, particularly my final journalism project this summer, exploring the transition from adolescence to emerging adulthood (12-25) for adult adoptees.

I’m now in the midst of applying for a practitioner role within a mentoring network that works with care-experienced young people in schools, and am looking to return in the next year or two, for my PhD in which I hope to conduct a study on the experiences and outcomes of adult adoptees later in life. I’m also now well and truly bunkered into care-experience as my specialism within journalism and may explore writing a book in the near future. That internship came out of nowhere and focused me into a clear future that I know I can reach and not tire of.”



How did you make your
friends or build a support
network after graduation?

Peter

"I've always been a friendly and outgoing person but living in student accommodation for my postgraduate course has definitely helped me broaden my network of friends. What many might already be aware of is that your network of close friends from university will focus down into a handful that you see regularly. Those are the friends you'll probably have for the rest of your life. It's still worth keeping in loose contact with other friends you've made at university though and throughout your life.

Going all the way back to 2010 here, for my current project I've ended up interviewing a person from my year group at school who is now an adoptive parent. That interview was our first conversation in 14 years, and we now talk semi-regularly. So yeah, contact doesn't have to be constant but you never know when someone you've crossed paths with may be relevant personally, professionally, or otherwise.

My student mentor from my time as an undergraduate, Ben, kept seeing me through the summer despite the funding stopping for a while. He's continued to be my mentor through my postgraduate life and we're going to be keeping in contact long after I graduate. My personal tutor Adrian, since the first year of my undergraduate degree, has continued to be supportive throughout and even requested to be my project supervisor for what I'm working on now.

The support network isn't vast, but I have key people around me, who have known me for years, and want to be there working with me. One thing that is interesting is, at least from perspective, those relationships with my support network have developed into loose friendships as well despite the professional boundaries. I expect I'll be in contact with Ben and Adrian for many years to come."



My university offers a lot of training sessions, coffee mornings, and other social events that create opportunities to get to know other PhD's/Post-Grads. We also have our shared office spaces at the University, which are a great way to get to know other people. As well as continuing the friendships I have made throughout my undergraduate degree and beyond, I have been able to make lots of new friends!

– Kiah-Rose

I think the main thing is to keep in contact with the friends you've made at university — I chose to stay in the same city that I studied in, so lots of people are still around, but I appreciate this may be much more difficult if you moved away after graduation. I'm quite lucky as I have a supportive partner who is quite extroverted, so I've made a lot of friends through her — although quite sociable, I'm fairly introverted so admittedly I'm probably not the best person to advise on this matter!

– Lewis B

I found this to be quite challenging post-graduation. It is hard to maintain existing friendships as many people move across the country, and free time is more limited when you work a 9-5. In terms of the office environment I work in currently, I am very young compared to the rest of my colleagues. However, I have learned the importance of building work relationships and friendships despite this, and I have a really good network within my role.

– Sam

What's your favourite part
about your job /
volunteering / masters /
post-grad education now?

My favourite part about doing my PhD is that I get to research a topic that I am very passionate about (whilst being paid for it!). I have an amazing supervisory team and support network which makes it even more enjoyable. I also really like being able to manage my own time and having the freedom to explore my interests whilst continuing to push myself out of my comfort zone!

– Kiah-Rose

I really enjoy running my own maths tutoring business, teaching students the wonderful intricacies of mathematics and helping them improve their mathematical ability and thus grades, allowing students to go on to achieve great things. I'm looking forward to starting my PhD in quantum physics soon, so we'll see where that takes me!

– Lewis B

My favourite part is being able to use my lived experience for good and being a part of the positive change happening across Scotland with the Care Experienced community.

– Sam

Peter

“The best part of life after graduation, and my move into postgraduate study, has been the change in how people engage with me. Until the final months of my undergraduate degree, I always felt like a student, being taught, and being asked about my life–experience from a position of trying to empower me or make me feel involved. That feeling, however internal, has now changed. I feel like almost like a colleague, a peer of the professionals and researchers I speak to. This year I was invited to a conference on adoption and trauma, to speak with delegates on my life experience and the work I’ve carried out. Apart from the lovely little detail of it being the first time I’d had my travel and accommodation all paid for (it really made me feel like I was wanted/needed there), it was a pivotal experience for me. I spent two days listening to speakers, surrounded by social workers and other practitioners, speaking with them about my own experiences and their work. Many asked to keep in contact after and I’ve already fed back advice and such into at least one body, on building up support for adopted adults. I’ve even had me quoted back to me, by one of the service managers. I’ve gone from being taught, to being part of the teaching.

Something I’ve always felt, as a chip on my shoulder, is that the moment I say “I’m adopted”, the listener immediately lurches towards sympathy and compassion. Whilst it’s appreciated, I always felt like I was almost being listened down to. In the conversations I’ve had over the last year now not even one of the practitioners or researchers I’ve spoken with has asked me questions like “How are you feeling?” or “Are you okay?”. They’ve stuck to questions on what I have learnt and how can they improve/build support for care–experienced people. I’ve even found myself introducing professional contacts to each other, to be part of that conversation on improving care–experience support.”

My lived experience is now a teaching experience. I’m now part of that change, no matter how little or great my contribution is. I’m no longer just a child of the care–system.”



For further support and advice, check out [From Us to Us: A collection of advice from care-experienced graduates to care-experienced graduates \(2024\)](#).

Thank you to Dr Zoe Baker for sharing this with us at the All of Us Graduate Event.

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The Unite Foundation supports our community with funding and dedicated team members who work hand in hand with estranged and care experienced students across the UK, to help us all become better connected on and offline. Find out more [here](#).