

## Tracey Woods, Autism (Children) 2011



After passing the University Certificate and the Higher Certificate in Autism I realised I was capable of achieving more. As well as my knowledge of autism increasing with the course, so did my confidence. The realisation that I might even be able to obtain a degree at the end of my studies was something I never thought I would achieve, especially at my age. Admittedly one of the main reasons I wanted to carry on studying was that I did not want to leave my tutor group. The friends I had made were very encouraging and our tutorials were such fun. Two in particular have become such good friends that we are going to call ourselves 'The Three Degrees' when we all pass! There was a mix up with tutors during the Advanced Certificate Course but the three of us met up regularly to help each other and we were able to direct any difficulties we were having to the University, who always provided us with the answers. After passing the Advanced Certificate I knew I was so close to getting a degree that I had to commit to another year of studying. At the time I was working four days in a mainstream secondary school as a Teaching Assistant as well as stacking shelves in a supermarket on a ten hour night shift and being a mother and wife. Studying was often done VERY late at night but mainly at weekends and always in school holidays. My dissertation was a critical analysis of the support I had given to a student with Asperger Syndrome (AS). It made me review strategies we used within the school and gave me the opportunity to learn new methods that could be introduced. I also did a training session to teachers at my school on how best to teach students with AS. To help with my dissertation I had 1-1 sessions with my tutor at her house. Her constant reminder that she had a 100% pass rate with students ensured that I did not dare let her down and fail!

My graduation was amazing and a day I will never forget. The sun shone and I went to Birmingham University on the train with my mother and husband. As the first person in my family to get a degree it was a very special day. We had a graduation meal at the University which was a buffet and wine. The ceremony in the Great Hall was fantastic with all students in the various coloured gowns. Everyone was made to feel special. On arriving home my children had brought me cards saying how proud they are of me and gave me flowers!

Since passing my degree I have given up my night shift job and work 5 days a week at school as an Autism Advisor. I advise teachers how best to work with children on the autistic spectrum and liaise with parents to ensure a continuity between home and school life. I also have 1-1 lessons with all students on the autistic spectrum to help improve their self esteem.

Enrolling at Birmingham as a distance learner was one of the best things I have ever done. I have made two brilliant friends who I regularly meet up with and have a degree. My next step is to use my new qualification to apply for jobs where I can use my knowledge to the best ability. Meanwhile the students I work with in Hemel Hempstead have gained so much from my studying.