

	Bold: Interviewer	
	I: Hi Steve. Hello, alright? I: So, as you know, we're trying to collect learners' stories to understand more about what it's like for people to take steps back into education when they haven't previously obtained many qualifications, if any. Every person's story will be different, and I really appreciate you agreeing to share your story with me today. You're welcome I: So, you won an Adult Learners Award because of how well you did on your particular journey Right I: I'm very interested in just hearing you talk a little bit about, for example, what your background is, how you ended up doing your course Yeah, no problem, yeah. , so, I'll just start where I was then at the time? I: Yes please Yeah, um I: Wherever you're comfortable beginning	

	Yeah okay I'll start about three years ago then. I was er homeless. I was living rough on the streets I: Oh yes In London. I was er um had er alcohol issues. I was um so, sorry, I had alcohol issues I was living rough on the streets I: Uh-huh And then um I ended up going from hostel to hostel err and wound up in supported housing and then um when I was in supported housing I got some key workers, got er started linking in with some alcohol services and I went in to a detox, got detoxed I: How did you feel when you moved into supported housing? I felt... How did I feel... I felt as though somebody had seen me. Noticed me and thought I was worth helping. I was so used to moving around and being... tolerated for a night or two. And not having somewhere during the day, you know? I: Uh huh... Was that very different from before? Yeah, definitely. Hostels...it's a routine that is forced on you. I don't blame the people who try to help, they're fantastic. Without them, so many would be out in the elements, but their work routine can kind of... I felt like I was what had to be moved around during their workdays and nights. I know it wasn't personal, but it can make you feel like a ship floating past and being allowed to dock for a brief time.	
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	I: So, having people who could spend time with you personally, and who might have had ideas for moving forward... Oh God, yes. I wasn't floating any more. I was the solid base, and they came to me and I was so grateful. People don't usually think that you can do much if you're homeless. They think because you've reached that stage, they can give up on you. Of course, I was a big part of that because of my alcohol issues. I know that. So... and then um a key worker of mine worked for Mersey Reach, used to work for Mersey Reach, and told me about the apprenticeship scheme there and going to... maybe I could go for that, through my experience of being homeless, and go for an apprenticeship but it was... she was talking about... you need to go to college. I left school at fourteen I: How come? We were banded. Put in bands according to ability. So banded according to what future we were expected to have. I was in middle band, so not the dumbest, but not expected to go on to do much that needed further education. I just sort of drifted... from class to class, subject to subject and if I didn't cause trouble they left me alone. I started truanting and nobody seemed to miss me, so I eventually stopped going. There were some attempts, but I managed to float past the checks until I could legally leave. It's surprising how many kids get lost in the system. They can't keep up with them all. I: How did you feel when you needed to go back to education? Without any... without any qualifications. I went straight into work. But then, you know, I could... you could go straight into work in them days. It's not where you are today, and I had no qualifications, so I felt a bit, I'd never even turned a computer	
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	on, so I know you need a computer. I never knew a computer and , so I wasn't really up for, well I was, I wasn't really confident I'd be able to do this but Ann... the key worker, kept on to me. I done a bit of volunteering. I done a peer mentor course, volunteering, all this, did... I done quite a lot of volunteering all around the place just to keep myself busy while working on alcohol, you know, keeping trying to keep sober. I: Yeah, how did you find the volunteering helped? The volunteering was good because when I went to the peer mentor course, although it was, it was not relevant to computers, it was just a lot of good stuff, but we had access to computers so there was a few other students there who did a course with me who was a bit familiar with computers so they, you know, I was watching them. They gave me a few quick starter lessons, explained er the mouse to me, stuff like that, basic stuff. Nobody made me feel bad for not knowing. They asked me stuff too, not about computers, but about life, so that made me feel better. I: People were interested... Yeah. I had a place now, not just to stay, but a place where people... found me interesting. Not just someone to help. I could help. Ann kept saying 'Use your experience'. So then I done some volunteering with St Mungo's and had a computer class I went to once a week and also I learned... I learned maths. I did... I did... did some maths tests on the computer, stuff like that, basic tests. I was just getting back in. I wasn't... wasn't too bad at maths and I could read well. I've always read well but... um... my spelling weren't up to much but I've just you know, I was taking basic tests on the computers and speaking to the other students and the volunteering was good because I was learning quite a bit at volunteering and it gave me a lot of confidence and all because I passed the... ..	
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	I: Uh huh Steve: I got through the test at the peer mentor course. I achieved that and it gave me a lot of confidence. I was doing it. The tutors spent time with me and gave me good feedback. That was new to me in education. ‘Course, I was an adult, so they spoke to me different now. But I was doing okay... same as other people who weren’t... hadn’t been homeless. People were surprised if I told them where I came from, said they’d never have known. That was huge for me. I’d landed in a place where I fit in. When I went for the apprenticeship and I was surprised I got... er... shortlisted and then I got the interview and then I got the apprenticeship and I still wasn’t really confident I could do it. Then I went to college once a week. I went to City college and... which was brilliant, really enjoyed, I was really... well... er... I don’t know what the word is. When I went there, I would’ve thought I was gonna be be really out of my depth. Other than the basic computer and maths stuff, before proper college, I hadn’t been in the classroom as I said since fourteen. It was going back in the classroom. I was probably the oldest one there and I thought, I’m not going to be able to keep up here and I struggled at first. Well, actually, I thought I struggled, but the tutor there Leanne, really patient with me. They give me some extra maths. I went in extra studying there behind. Every weekend did some extra maths, which helped me catch up on some of the non-basic stuff I’d missed before. I still felt like I was struggling a bit. There was a lot of written work there, and keeping up, and I was doing a placement as well with Mersey Reach at the time, two placements towards my apprenticeship I: Yeah, you were busy I was! ‘Cause I was working in a hostel and doing this but Leanne was encouraging me. She had ever such a lot of patience I stayed behind a few times. I just really got into it. I met with a few of the other students who were apprentices at Mersey Reach, obviously, as well. We was all Mersey Reach apprentices and we met up,	
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	who live locally. We met up on a weekend and went to the library somewhere else and started doing the work together. So, we was putting our heads together and it was good and . I mean, I just grew in a bit of confidence I think and I was I was getting interested as well. Getting interested with it 'cause it was a good pace and Leanne was... was just showing me and I wasn't falling that much behind. I wasn't as behind as I thought I was. I was one of the normal apprentices, coping with college and getting it done. Going home after it all like the others. Normal life. I: How did these changes make you feel overall? It was all happening. A home, volunteering, classroom, the apprenticeship. Not just the learning, but everything else. It was a new world, and it was full of people who accepted me. All those wasted years though... A lot of regret too. I never even thought about education... I: How it could change things Exactly, that was a thing that came and went by the time I was fourteen. Never considered it. I: Okay So when I just , I dunno, I er I er, it wasn't easy. It didn't come easy later. It wasn't just that. It wasn't easy. It was , but I got confident, more confidence, I grew, but... er... I: What were the biggest challenges that you that you found when you were doing it? How did you...?	
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	Well, , I dunno, , getting in the classroom setting, I think, keeping up the classroom setting, the computers, you know. Er I was still not great on computers and we needed it to work the placement so that was the biggest challenge, getting computers, and completing. The thing is, like I say, I'd never been near a computer in my life. I've heard about emails. I've heard about this, but that's all. I had heard. I didn't even know exactly what an email was. I had an idea. I'd never had an email address. It literally wasn't in my world. I belonged... I didn't belong there. No way, I thought. I: yeah Steve: er, anything like that. , and the maths, the maths had changed since I was at school, which worried me... moved on. What I remember of maths... 'mean numbers' and stuff like that. I hadn't heard anything like that before, but when I got some extra maths in and another tutor again was really good and he explained it and I found the maths quite... quite easy. I surprised myself. I did find it quite easy but it's just er just er averages and percentages and stuff like that, but they're just named differently. I: So it clicked Yes, I could do it all along, but the names kind of... shut me out... made me feel like it was something else I didn't know. I'd been shut out for so long... I: It must have been a big confidence boost when you realised. Steve: Yeah, it was it was, a big confidence boost and I thought, you know, what, half way through, I did feel like a couple of times... I'll be honest, I just thought, I'm not er, I'm wasting my time, wasting everyone's time. I'm not going to pass this. It, er, was a confidence thing with me, I think. I thought I weren't going to pass. The	
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	others seemed to be like, cracking on, although it's... it's hard to tell, concentrate on yourself and not look at other people, but you know, you waltz into the classroom, you look around and people seem to be finishing and, you know, moving on to the next thing and... people just passing me by again... making progressing, while I'm floating behind. It's em, I was going to, I did a few times, feel... er... I was getting a bit frustrated. I thought I, you know, I'm wasting time here for everyone and myself and I'm not up for this and I'm not going to be able to do it and I was going to er just leave, to tell the truth, like give up, sort of thing but I didn't I know, I think I was speaking with Leanne and was telling her and she says no keep going and I did... I just kept going and then I thought it would be silly to give up, you know, it'd be really silly to give up was worse, whether, if, I finish the course, if I don't pass I don't pass, what I've gone through it, but if I don't do it, I'll never know. I've given up too easily before. This felt like I have to keep moving forward or I'd only drift back, and I... I really didn't want to do that... .. I: yeah And I did it. And I've moved into work with Mersey Reach. Yeah, I finished my two placements and then I had a six month placement in a hostel and a six month placement in floating support which was good I really enjoyed it I felt I done well at it, and then after when we came to the middle of the placement I went for a job with Mersey Reach and I got a three month contract at Hackney floating support which was extended to... to ten months and then I went for another job what came up... a vacancy with Mersey Reach at Lewisham Mersey Reach... Lewisham supported housing and I went for the interview and I got that job I was surprised I: Oh, well done	
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	Steve: I got that job cos I've never been to to interviews before and apparently I've got a strong interview and I've got that interview and I've been here now for nearly two years. I: Oh, wow that's quite a long time. It it seems like it seems like there's a lot of change and instability but you've really been with Mersey Reach for quite a long time now. Steve: Yeah, I'm the one helping people with housing problems. I'm the one... I make sure they all are seen and listened to. I know how an attitude, or a word or... How people can be lifted up or ground down... I couldn't have done it without the apprenticeship with the learning the amount of college I got I wouldn't have been able to do this job without it I learned er er... I like... I really I don't... I can't quite tell you how I've missed the college and I I was dreading going to the college to tell the truth, but I really do miss it I was dreading it if I had time I would to another I'd do another course if I could find the time now but I don't know what course I would do. I: It seems like you have so many options and opportunities now. I do. I know I wasted years myself, but then I was a lucky one that got picked up. What if I'd missed that chance? I: Would you like to say any more about your experiences coming back into education? I could talk for ages, but I think I've said all I want to say. I: Thanks, Steve. I've really enjoyed listening and you've contributed a lot for me.	
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