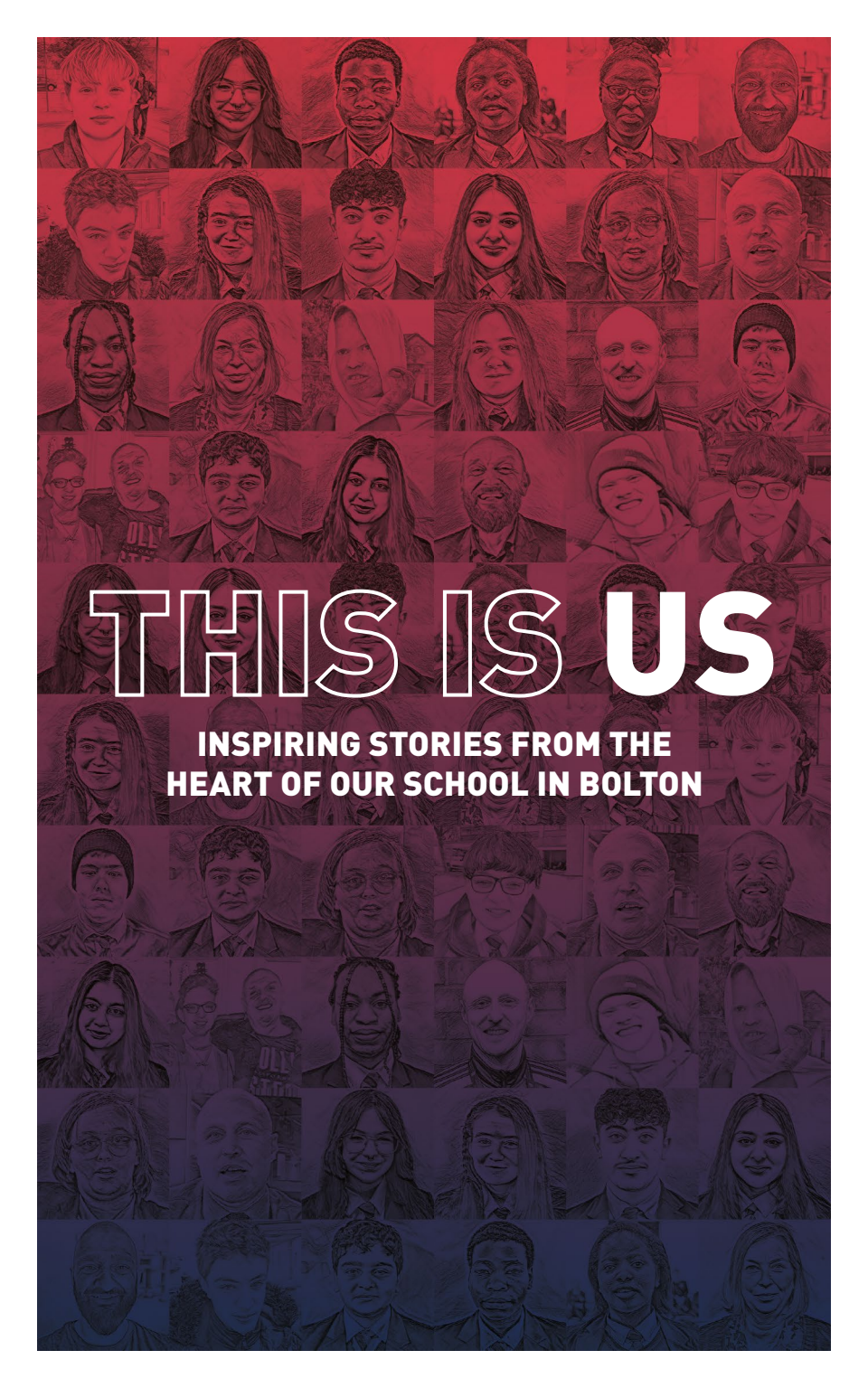




THIS IS US

**INSPIRING STORIES FROM THE
HEART OF OUR SCHOOL IN BOLTON**

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Ladybridge High School is a diverse and friendly school in the town of Bolton in the North West of England. This book, and accompanying film, is a collection of stories about how different members of our community came to study or work at the school. The school's mission centres on helping our learners thrive both now and in their future lives. Curiosity, compassion and a desire to learn help us to thrive; the stories strongly reflect these qualities.

Ladybridge is a truly comprehensive school serving areas with high levels of deprivation and also areas of relative affluence. Over 50 nationalities are represented at Ladybridge. In my opinion, part of a great education is to meet people who are different from you. You don't need to go far at Ladybridge to find someone from a very different background and with a very different life experience. As the stories in this book highlight, this diversity enriches the lives of all of us each day.

The aims of this project are to celebrate our wonderful diversity and to promote curiosity about the lives of people who are different from us. These differences actually unite and unify us, rather than push us apart. The This Is Us project is a public celebration of the positive impact of our multiculturalism.

Paddy Russell
Headteacher



Learning to Enjoy the Best of Both England and Burundi

Amuri

'Life is about having a good life.'

My name is Amuri, and I'm a 13-year-old student at Ladybridge. Although I live in Bolton, I was born in Burundi, Africa.

In Burundi, there is a big class divide between the wealthy and the less well-off. Fortunately, my family worked hard to earn money; my mum worked in a restaurant, and my dad was a taxi driver. So we lived in quite a big house.

Burundi is home to people from all over Africa who practise different religions. Most people are either Muslim or Christian. My family and I are Muslim, and we used to attend the biggest Mosque in Burundi.

The landscape in Burundi is much different from here. The weather varies a lot, from windy to rainy and sunny. The bush has a great variety of creatures. In fact, one of my earliest memories is being chased by a massive snake while playing football. Another time, my uncle and I went hunting and saw a black panther begin to fight a lion. My uncle shot his gun into the sky to startle them, and they ran away.

An even scarier incident occurred when we took an American man to capture some photos of the animals. Then, on the way back, we got chased by a hippo. I wasn't too scared because we were shooting darts at the hippo, which we'd dipped into the venom of poisonous frogs.

I went to a big school in Burundi, which was much different to school here. The school had very strict punishments for misbehaving, including standing on one leg for almost an hour or putting a rock on your head and making you hold it there. If you failed to stand up for that long or dropped the rock, they'd take a big stick and hit you on your hands or bottom.

One of my least favourite things about school was that we only had PE about once a year. I've loved football since early childhood; my favourite team is Real Madrid. I've always dreamt of becoming a professional footballer one day so the lack of PE lessons disappointed me. I love playing football and the thrill of scoring goals.

When I was 8, there was a war between the people and the government in Burundi. As a result, my mother and I came to the UK as refugees. But my dad stayed behind in Burundi.

I wasn't told where we were going when we came here; I thought we were heading to America. When I found out it was England, I was very apprehensive because I'd watched a documentary about violent crime in London.

I started at primary school here and was utterly shocked that the students behaved so badly. If they'd been in Burundi, they would have been severely punished. I thought I had to behave well in an English school because, if I didn't, I'd be punished or sent back to Africa.

It was difficult starting school in England because I couldn't speak English. In Burundi, I spoke Swahili and a little bit of French. However, I managed to make friends through playing football and, about a year after I arrived, I began becoming more confident when speaking English. I was nervous coming to Ladyrbridge because I didn't know anyone. But it's been mostly good at school. I especially like PE and maths.

Sometimes I feel pretty isolated because there are only five black children in my year, which has been difficult. In the future, I hope more can be done to put an end to racism.

I miss Burundi for lots of reasons. I wouldn't say I like English food except for fish and chips, so I miss eating the delicious food I grew up with. We used to eat lots of different things like chapatis, rice, chicken and fish. At home, we still eat a lot of traditional African food.

I also miss when we used to play football in the grass in Burundi. We'd make our own footballs by sewing together old plastic bags and cloth. I became pretty skilled and could make one in just twenty minutes.

I still dream of one day becoming a footballer, and since moving to the UK, I've also started playing basketball.

Other than football, my main goals are passing my GCSEs and attending a good college. I hope to continue to university one day.

In the future, I would like to live in both England and Burundi, combining the best of both worlds. Even though I miss some things about Burundi, I'm pretty happy with my life here.



Pursuing My Passion in the Face of Adversity

Oliver

‘You’ve got a great life ahead of you.’

My name is Oliver, and I’m a 14-year-old student at Ladybridge. I’ve struggled with many health complications throughout my life but haven’t let them stand in the way of my hobbies and aspirations.

I’m from Bolton and have lived here my whole life but thoroughly enjoy my holidays abroad, exploring new places.

I have a good relationship with my family and I have an older brother and sister. We’ve started getting along much better as we’ve got older.

My health problems began when I was just a month old. It was discovered that I had a double hernia and would have to undergo an operation. As I was so young, I don’t remember any of this, but my parents told me the surgery was successful.

However, during the procedure, they discovered another problem. I had an enlarged kidney, resulting in one kidney filtering much faster than the other. As a consequence, I would possibly have to brave another operation. Fortunately, my kidney remained stable, and I now just have to avoid injuring it. But I wasn’t discharged from that hospital until I was four.

When I got a bit older, my sister was diagnosed with an extremely rare eye condition as her vision was significantly debilitated. Shortly following her diagnosis, it was discovered that I shared the condition as well.

It’s such a rare disease that my sister and I are the only two people in the UK who are currently diagnosed. The NHS originally held the misconception that the condition only affected people who also have another disability, such as down syndrome. So, the NHS had to rewrite pages of their book to change the incorrect information.

At just nine years old, I underwent horrible eye surgery to alleviate a lot of pressure which was built up in my eyes. I’ve also had to suffer through numerous trips to the hospital.

It’s been a real challenge as my eyesight is very poor. I’m considered disabled when I don’t have my glasses on and have to wear my exceptionally thick-lensed glasses constantly.

It’s tough because I love football and have recently started boxing. Since I was 13, I’ve played football every Monday with my dad and it’s very disheartening when I get hit in the face during a game, damaging my glasses. My dad’s had to repair them ten times in two weeks before, and I’ve also got a scar on my face where they’ve injured me.

Despite these health challenges, which significantly strain my mental health, I’ve remained resilient. I think this is partially due to the inspirational influence of my grandad.

My grandad is a great man. He was born into poverty and soon became very hopeless. One day, he set off to end his life because he was very low and thought the insurance money would greatly benefit his family. But in the last moments, before he intended to jump, he realised that his potential to love and do good for his family far outweighed anything else.

Instead, he stopped himself and became a priest. Travelling around Bolton and preaching, he's now helped countless people pull themselves up from rock bottom. He's even written a book about his life called 'The World's Most Successful Failure'.

We have such a special bond and he saved my life when I was five years old. On holiday in Spain, a storm had left a dip in the sand, so a large wave almost drowned me. But at 69 years old, grandad ran over and saved me. He's an incredible man.

In the future, I hope to be a gas engineer or an electrician and work alongside my dad. So I'm very hopeful for what's to come.

Overall, I'd say so far my life has been fun but challenging. I haven't let my condition stand in the way of pursuing football and my education. I hope that through my story, others who struggle with a disability can see that you can still do whatever you want.



Making An Impact Through Working Hard and Being a Good Role Model for the Next Generation

Arif

'Education is your passport to a brighter future.'

My name is Arif. I'm head of computing and Enterprise at Ladybridge. After observing the struggles of my parents, who immigrated from East Africa, I've learnt the importance of working hard to secure a bright future for the next generation.

I was born in Crewe and brought up in a town called Winsford in Cheshire. I now live locally in Bolton. My dad's from Uganda and my mum's from Kenya, but we originally come from an Indian background.

My grandparents were born in Africa, but my Great Grandparents originated from Gujarat, moving to East Africa for the better trade opportunities. When I completed a DNA test a few years ago, my results were 99.9% Indian.

My dad moved to the UK in 1972 after leaving Uganda because of Idi Amin (former President of Uganda). He met and married my mum in Preston. I was born a few years later, and my mother called me her miracle because they struggled to have a baby, believing it might never happen for them.

Consequently, I'm an only child. But my dad was one of nine. My mother one of four. He travelled to Pakistan in the mid-60s, attempting to set up a life there. It didn't work out and he returned to Uganda.

He finally, in 1972, ended up in the UK. Things happen for a reason because if he hadn't had to relocate, he never would have met my mum and had me.

I grew up in Winsford, and my particular area wasn't diverse. In primary school, I was the only Asian kid in the entire school, and then in high school, I was one of just two Asian learners.

Unfortunately, I was a victim of racism from primary school. I was called all sorts of unpleasant, racist names. I didn't understand the weight of their words at the time.

Looking back, my dad tried his best to shelter me from the abuse, but that was impossible.

For example, when I was young, my dad and I walked to the newsagent to get some milk. On our way back, we passed a double-decker bus. Someone on board shouted horrible racist slurs at us and spat at us from the top window. My dad, who wasn't a violent man by any means, threw the glass bottle of milk at the bus. You don't forget things like that.

Another terrible incident occurred when I was about 15 but my dad wasn't there to protect me. I've always enjoyed playing snooker and would go into town and play with my friends; my parents didn't mind me staying out late to play. One night, at around 11pm, a white friend and I were walking down the high street in Middlewich after a snooker game. That street was littered with pubs, and someone started shouting at my friend for hanging around with someone of my race. Then, one of the abusers came behind me and knocked me to the floor. They then continued to kick me whilst I was on the floor. Thankfully, they were using the lace part of their shoe rather than the toe, so I wasn't too badly injured, but

my friend left the ordeal with a broken jaw. That night has stuck with me my whole life.

College was slightly better. There was a larger catchment area, so it was a bit more diverse. That was probably the first time I'd ever had friends who looked like me in my life. Those two years were possibly my best yet.

I continued to university, where I studied business and law. University was difficult, financially. Some of my friends were extremely well-off whilst I struggled on my dad's allowance of £15 a week. So, affording essentials like books and clothes was difficult.

After completing my undergraduate degree, I began a PGCE in Business and Information Technology at Manchester Metropolitan University.

When I was a little kid, I wanted to be an astronaut; that was my dream. As I got older, that changed to fireman, doctor and finally, teacher.

My mum was a significant influence in choosing teaching as a career. She was a teaching assistant, and I valued the time she was able to spend with me during her holiday time.

Alongside the lifestyle appeal, I enjoy spending time with young people and sharing my wisdom. Young people are our future, and I feel I can effectively impact that future through teaching.

I began teaching in September 2001. It wasn't easy. The job was in Rochdale. I lived in Winsford so I found myself commuting 100 miles a day. I can't believe I continued that for 5 and a half years. Some 100,000 miles!

That school was pretty tough, but the staff were fabulously close-knit. The learners were great, too; every child is lovely underneath it all. It just takes a while to get there sometimes.

I moved to Bolton in 2007 and began teaching at Ladybridge in 2013. I'm currently head of Computing, Enterprise and IT.

Things have changed a lot since I first started, and it's been lovely to see the school evolve. I don't think any other job could make me smile more than teaching here.

I know a lot of learners at Ladybridge come from an African background and probably don't expect that I do too; I can even speak some Swahili. I hope to pass on my wisdom and become a role model.

My dad is undoubtedly my hero. He instilled in me the importance of thinking of the future and being grateful. When I was born, he saved £10 a month for 40 years and used it to buy me a present for my 40th birthday; that's how far ahead he was always thinking.

I'm closer with my dad now than when I was growing up. Of course, he wasn't as present back then, but I realise now that he must have been exhausted from the long hours he worked to provide for us.

I want to reinforce to learners how lucky they are and they should be grateful to their parents for paving the way before them.

My dad worked hard so that I could have a better quality of life than him, and I hope to continue that work ethic so my three sons can have an even better life than me.

Right now, I'm very content with my life. I've tried to reengineer how I think and stop over analysing so often, which isn't easy as a teacher. I've now reached a point where I'm truly happy.

Overall, I've got a great job and a fantastic team around me. My main goal for the future is to be a role model for my sons and those I teach, whilst emphasising the importance of gratitude.



Following My Dreams Regardless of What Other People Think

Keiso

'Life is about education, to help others.'

My name is Keiso, and I'm a Year 9 student at Ladybridge. In Kenya and the UK, I've faced judgement for my skin condition, but I've realised there's nothing I can do to stop people from staring. So I've decided just to keep on doing the things that make me happy no matter what others think.

I was born in Somalia but didn't live there for long. We moved to Nairobi, Kenya, when I was very young so I don't really remember Somalia at all.

I'm the oldest of four siblings, which is a big responsibility. My mum and I get along pretty well, but I've never met my dad because my parents divorced when I was little, and my younger siblings have a different father.

I didn't have a good time in Kenya. I have a visible skin condition, and people would frequently say nasty things to me. It was very isolating and left me feeling extremely depressed. It reached the point that I didn't even leave the house to go to school.

One day, I went to the Mosque, and the teacher there was very unkind to me. He wouldn't let me sit with the other children just because I looked different. When I told my mum what happened, she never let me go back there.

Even though people constantly made me feel upset, I didn't want to let my feelings show. I never cried in front of anyone because I didn't want to face the inevitable questions which would follow. So instead, I kept everything inside.

We lived in Kenya for six years, hoping the milder weather would help my skin condition. But then my mother, siblings, and I became refugees in Nairobi. My stepdad stayed behind while we were flown to Manchester.

When we arrived, I was shocked. Manchester wasn't like anywhere I'd seen before. Of course, nowadays I'm much more used to the terrible weather!

Shortly after we arrived, I began Year 6 at Brandwood Primary school. I spoke Somali and a bit of Kenyan Swahili but no English at all. There were a few Somali children at school, but they wouldn't talk to me, so I felt very alone again.

On top of that, my skin still presented me with challenges. People in the UK haven't said unpleasant things, but I still hate how they look at me. I wish people could see the person beyond the skin condition.

It wasn't just people at school who made me feel down about my skin, my younger brother used to bully me too. But, now, he lives in Africa with my uncle, so things are a bit better.

When Covid hit, it was hard. I didn't like not being able to go to school because although I wouldn't say I enjoy writing, I like reading and was eager to learn more. My favourite book is Harry Potter.

Nowadays, in my free time, I love listening to K-pop, watching K-dramas and eating sushi. My mum hates sushi, but she still comes with me to Manchester city centre where I try lots of different types.

I love anime, and another of my favourite hobbies is drawing. Drawing makes me happy, particularly drawing animated people. But I don't like showcasing my work and prefer keeping it to myself as a hobby.

In the future, I'd like to stay in England, even though my mum doesn't like it much here. I think my mum misses the places we used to go in Africa and the support from my stepdad, but I'm happy here.

Nevertheless, it would be fun to go to another country for university, and I've considered medicine and engineering as potential career paths.

Part of me would love to explore the world even further, and that's why I'm also drawn to the possibility of becoming a singer. I admire the freedom singers have to express their feelings and travel.

In the end, I've realised that people will always be rude and stare at my skin; there's nothing I can do about that. But as I get older, I'm getting better at dealing with judgement, so I can follow my dreams without caring what others think.



Understanding the Value of the Present and Using Every Moment To Do What I Love

Frankie

'It's made me a better person because I'm not glued to screens'

My name is Frankie, and I'm a Year 10 student at Ladybridge. In my spare time, I enjoy playing my favourite sports and getting creative in the kitchen.

I have a mum, dad, two brothers, a little sister and a dog. Coming from a big family is stressful. It means it's always noisy and chaotic at home. But it has its perks because there's always someone home to chat to if you're feeling down.

One of the hardest things I've had to go through was when my granny passed away four years ago. I have precious memories of her knitting, which I still can't do even though I've tried to learn.

My mum is a one-to-one teaching assistant, and my dad stays at home to look after us, which is nice.

My family prioritises spending time together and every weekend we do something different like watch a film or go to the park. I often choose baking when I get the chance.

One of my earliest memories is going on holiday with my grandma and grandad to a cottage and baking cookies. My family loves baking, so that's where I inherited my passion. My favourite cake to make is a confetti cake, the one with rainbow sprinkles.

Alongside my love of baking, I like to take part in sports. About three years ago I started running short-distance and track for a local team, which I enjoy, and sometimes I spend my weekends participating in events. I like cricket too, but that's more of a casual interest. I used to play in Primary School and I sometimes watch the big matches.

Growing up, I went to a small primary school; it had just a few classes because there weren't many students. So, the move to Ladybridge was a big shock.

I'd just begun to get used to the different environment when Covid happened, and everything changed all over again.

With such a large family, trying to do school from home was almost impossible. I'd have constant background noise to distract me from my work. On top of that, I didn't understand a lot of the content during online school, so things were extremely tough. But after a while, I adapted to doing my work online.

I actually think online school made me more confident. That's because, firstly, I got used to seeing people on a screen and then a small number of people in lessons which eased us back into the regular, chaotic school environment.

Although it was less daunting, being in smaller groups made things quite lonely. We couldn't socialise with anyone outside our class and even had separate break times. It was hard to adjust when things went back to normal, but now I'm used to it again.

I mainly struggle with how judgmental people can be in high school, and I sometimes try to force myself to fit in.

But overall, my childhood has been happy. My parents have instilled in me their values, teaching me to always show kindness to others, which I've implemented in my life.

My parents have also taught me the value of living in the present moment. I don't have a phone which my classmates may think is strange, but I think I'm a better person for it. We have a TV and laptop screens for homework, and that's all we need.

I'm pretty involved with environmental activism in school. We're currently working on a recycling campaign and will soon start another project involving bugs. It's fantastic to get stuck in and, on Tuesdays, we head down to forest school after school.

In the future, I'd like to go down the creative path and become either a chef or an actor. I want to be a chef because of my family's shared love of baking, which is amplified further at Ladybridge through studying food tech. The acting idea comes from my love of laughter. When I can make someone laugh, it makes me feel more confident.

Hopefully, no matter what I do, I still have the same good friends and spend lots of time with my family.



Transforming My Behaviour With The Hope of A Brighter Future

Alex

'I don't want to be a sheep following people'

My name is Alex, and I'm a Year 8 student at Ladybridge. I think others would describe me as a funny young lad who walks it off when I get hurt.

I have a fantastic, supportive family, which I'm grateful for. I wouldn't be the person I am today without them.

I live with my mum, brother and sister and, although my dad doesn't live with us, we still have a great relationship and a special bond.

My mum always tries her hardest to help me in any way she can, especially with my homework and I love my older brother, too. He always sticks up for me; he's done a lot for me over the years.

My sister's the opposite of my brother and tries to wind me up most of the time. I don't mind, though. I find it funny, so we have a good relationship overall.

Even though I don't live with my dad, I see him often. He's helped me deal with many tough situations, especially at school. It seems like he always knows exactly what to say and how to deal with me. For example, if I have a bad day, he reminds me to keep my chin up and keep smiling.

My dad takes me to the gym. When I find something difficult, he reminds me to persevere and shows me how to do the exercise correctly, encouraging me to try again.

Recently, he's hurt his bicep, so can't train with me, but I still go to the local gym by myself.

My most precious childhood memories are probably of family days out to Blackpool. We'd go to the beach, on the rides, to the arcades. It was fantastic.

The newest addition to my family came last Christmas; we got a dog. It was my idea because I thought going on runs with a dog might help me expel some energy and calm me down; he's a very hyperactive dog, so that's certainly been true.

I'd say the hardest thing I've ever gone through was dealing with my nan passing away. As such a tight-knit family, her passing was very difficult. She passed away on my 9th birthday, and with every birthday that goes by, I'm reminded of that difficult time.

Primary school was challenging for me, and I was diagnosed with ADHD in Year 5 or 6. When I started school, I was known as a troublemaker. I would never focus, run away from teachers, and start fights with my mates. I regret that now because I lost a lot of friends.

I was excluded multiple times until I was finally permanently expelled and put into Youth Challenge. Fortunately, I continued studying English, Maths and Science in the programme.

Youth Challenge, alongside CAMHS, really helped me. They just knew how to deal with children who faced the same behavioural difficulties as me and gave me useful strategies.

My mum and I decided I should go on medication, which was undoubtedly the right move for me. The medication calmed me down immensely, and I won't even need to be on it for the rest of my life. Once I've matured and learnt to manage my behaviour, I won't need it anymore.

When it came time to move to high school, I was warned that this was my final chance. In Year 7, I messed around a bit, but I changed my behaviour about halfway through the year.

The support from Ladybridge and the Rise programme has been extremely beneficial in managing my behaviour. I'm even at the point where I don't feel like I need as much support.

When I was misbehaving, my dad's advice particularly stood out to me. He warned me that he made all my mistakes but ten times worse and didn't want me to repeat the cycle. I think his advice was instrumental in me changing my behaviour.

Nowadays, alongside the gym, I enjoy playing golf, running and swimming. I'm also very dedicated to keeping my room tidy; I like being organised and knowing where everything is.

In the future, I'd like to keep my head down at school as I hope to become an archaeologist. I was inspired by a show I watched when I was young about a kid who went back in time and saw lots of dinosaurs. The career seems so fun, and you get to explore the past and travel the world at the same time.

Sometimes, I think back and wish I could tell my younger self not to make all those mistakes. But there's no point dwelling on the past when the important thing is I've turned everything around for the future.

I couldn't have done that without my family. They taught me that when something goes wrong, it doesn't mean I've failed and to keep going until I get it right.



Rediscovering the Music In My Life

Katrina

‘Music should be part of your life.’

My name is Katrina. I’ve been a teaching assistant at Ladybridge since 2004. I’ve discovered the importance of doing what makes you happy and, for me, that’s music.

I was born in Fife, Scotland, and we moved to London when I was three. My younger brother was born in London, but we relocated to Gloucestershire shortly after.

We had an idyllic childhood in the countryside. My dad worked for an ice cream company, so we had plenty of ice cream growing up, which was ideal for a child.

I loved swimming, and my primary school had a pool which was just fantastic. However, my true passion was music; I was absolutely music mad.

I passed the 11+ and headed to grammar school. I regret that now because I wouldn’t consider myself an academic and struggled the whole time, emerging with very poor O-Level results. I’d say I was more of a practical person instead.

When I was young, I didn’t want to enter education as a career, especially because my mum was a primary school teacher. I initially wanted to become a nurse in the armed forces, but my grades held me back.

Instead, I headed to the RAF recruitment office, but the only options available were medic or air traffic control officer. So I decided to hold off for a few months.

Despite not being naturally attracted to teaching, part of me still wanted to work with children. So, I began nannying in London. I love children, and they come out with such funny things.

While there, I reapplied for the RAF and received an offer to train as a policewoman. I stayed there for five years, working in counterterrorism and security. When I met my first husband and married, I decided to leave the RAF, putting my family first.

This worked out well because, at the time, the RAF offered no maternity leave, and I found out I was expecting. So we relocated to Bolton, where I gave birth to my twin girls.

I had so much fun raising them, but we had to move around a lot for my husband’s job, which was a challenge.

After ending up in Cumbria, I had my son and my girls started playgroup. When my son was old enough to go to playgroup, I started helping out there.

Whilst volunteering there, I did my qualifications, and that’s where my journey to becoming a teaching assistant began.

We ended up moving back to Bolton. Finding a school that could take twins was difficult, but we found one eventually. Then, after my son went to nursery, I applied for a job running a nearby playgroup.

I worked my way up and became the boss there. It was the perfect job because I love reading stories to children.

But then chaos hit because my husband decided he wanted to relocate again, this time to Germany. So we concluded that we would go as a family, and I gave up my position at the playgroup, but at the last minute, plans changed, and we didn't go.

Fortunately, I met someone from a local primary school and got a job supporting a young man with special educational needs. Simultaneously, I worked at my children's primary school, providing literacy support.

When my children went to high school, I applied for jobs at a few secondary schools, including Ladybridge.

I started at Ladybridge in 2004 and have been here ever since. I came as a Level 2 teaching assistant, and Ladybridge supported me in achieving my higher level teaching assistant qualification.

Even though it wasn't the route I initially chose, I love my job. Seeing a child's lightbulb moment when they finally grasp a difficult concept is unbelievably rewarding.

During this time, my husband had been to Germany and returned but was still working away. It wasn't working between us; I felt like a single parent. So my husband and I agreed to separate.

I would have done it earlier, but I was worried about upsetting my children. As they were a bit older then, my son was 16, and my daughters were 18, they'd seen for themselves that the relationship wasn't the best for me.

I was playing in a brass band every Saturday morning; it was my me time. While there, someone at practice asked me if I'd help in a Christmas concert, where I met my second husband.

He was playing too. He and I have a lot in common, and we have great fun together. We've now been together for ten years and have a blended family; he has two daughters as well.

Although I love my life with him, I wouldn't say I'd change any of my choices. His and my past lives wouldn't have been compatible, and I wouldn't have my beautiful children.

Overall, I believe life is about family and that everyone should have music in their life. I hope to spend even more time with my family in the future.



Adjusting to a New Country, Language and School

Angelique

'Life is about working hard.'

My name is Angelique. I'm a 16 year old student at Ladybridge. After moving to the UK as a refugee, I found adjusting difficult, but things have been better recently.

I'm Congolese, but I was born in Burundi. I moved back and forth between Congo and Burundi for most of my early life.

I have a mum, dad, four sisters and a newborn little brother. I'm the oldest, so it's my responsibility to set a good example for my siblings; I'm like another mum to them when my mother isn't around.

I often cook for my siblings (I'm a pretty good cook) and enjoy cleaning my house. I know my mum appreciates the help, especially considering my dad still lives in Congo.

We came to the UK in 2018, but before that, we lived in a refugee camp for 3 years.

My childhood was good. I was neither poor nor wealthy, but we were comfortable. But, of course, people are wrong about Africa and think people there don't have any food. We used to eat a lot of fish, rice and delicious chapatis and we had a river nearby where we would bathe and get drinking water.

People also think we see crazy animals in Congo, like lions, tigers and snakes. But, truthfully, I'd never even seen a snake until I visited a zoo!

When I was young, I had dreams of being a nurse. I went to school in Burundi and spoke Swahili and some French.

In 2015, there was war in Burundi and my grandma said we should leave. That's when we headed to the refugee camp. Life was hard, and we had to eat a lot of simple food like beans. We were there for 3 years.

In 2018, we arrived in the UK. I didn't know where we were going and didn't expect to be living in Bolton. My mum warned me not to change when we moved to the UK, especially not to start drinking and smoking.

My grandma and auntie also came with my mum and siblings to the UK; they live together. But my dad still lives in Congo. I've not seen him in person for a long time, but I talk with him on the phone every day.

Before we came to the UK, people at home said that people lived like angels here. I don't think that's true. I believe that Burundi is very lovely; it's just the government that ruins things.

It was scary coming to Ladybridge; it's hard being new. People have been mean to me and judged my appearance. It's mostly stopped now, but in Year 7, I used to cry every day.

A few other children in the school speak Swahili, and I have a couple of

friends now. I've realised I don't want to give others the power to bring me down.

My best friend is my cousin and we have fun together. I hope to go back to Congo one day to visit the rest of my family, but I don't think I'd like the hot weather anymore.

My mum is doing well too. Before having the baby, she was going to school to hopefully get a job one day.

In the future, I want to persevere, go to college and finish university. My goal is to speak perfect English in three years.

Although it's been hard, I've shown resilience and I hope that, by working hard, my future will be bright.



Understanding the Value of Family, No Matter How Big or Small

Gabor

'Family is the first thing in your heart.'

My name is Gabor. I'm a 13-year-old student at Ladybridge. I'm originally from Hungary but moved to the UK with the hope of living a better life.

I was born in Hungary and have travelled a lot, living in the UK and France. I have no siblings, and my mum and dad divorced nine years ago.

My mum told me they had to separate because my dad was abusive. He was diagnosed with a mental health condition, causing him to suffer delusions and hallucinations. One of his delusions left him wanting to hurt me, so we had to get away from him.

It's been difficult getting used to not having a father around. However, despite the complicated relationship with my dad, I still understand the importance of family, and I'm even closer to my mum because of it.

I currently live with my mum and grandpa; I try to help them out however I can. For example, when my mum had surgery on her stomach, I helped her out by doing lots of cooking.

We first moved to the UK when I was about 3 or 4, but we returned to Hungary and then went on to live in France for a year. So I can now speak Hungarian, French and English!

I think we moved around a lot because Hungary had significant poverty, and my mother wanted a better life for us. But we had to leave France and return to the UK because it was too expensive.

My English was a little rusty when I moved back to the UK in 2018. But after just two or three weeks I was fluent.

We chose Bolton because we have some family here. I didn't realise how bad the weather would be. It's so different to Hungary, which can sometimes reach temperatures of 40 degrees.

I love Ladybridge; my friends and teachers are fantastic. In my old primary school, the teachers were alright, but I didn't feel like they understood me. I do here.

I enjoy playing football and cycling to school with my friends. I also like playing video games, and I go swimming in Bolton.

I remember, when I was young, not only was I food-obsessed, but I also had the drive to start my own business. That's been a great motivator during my studies, and I still have that dream. I've also considered becoming a lawyer.

If I were to have my own business, I'd like it to be something to do with making cars. I want to build them or buy old ones and rebuild them. I'm super interested in cars; my favourite would probably be a matt black BMW.

In the future, I'd like to travel. It'd be great to head back to France one day. I'm also intrigued by Miami's amazing weather and Mexico's delicious cuisine, so I would possibly like to explore them as well.

The hardest thing I've had to overcome was the situation with my dad. But my mum and grandpa make my house a home through the love they show me. Coming back from a tiring day at school, I know I can feel cosy in my house with them and play.

Finally, I believe that the world should give back to people just as I try to give back to my mum. Things need to change because too many people keep money for themselves without trying to help those who are less fortunate.



Maintaining A Positive Outlook While Having to Adapt to a Whole New Way of Life

Alisha

‘Don’t believe what other people tell you about people’s disabilities because they’re not always true.’

My name is Alisha, and I’m a Year 9 student at Ladybridge. After moving to England, I underwent a series of challenges, including an unexpected diagnosis, but I’ve been able to adjust to my situation and still do the things I love.

I was born in Dundonald, Northern Ireland and lived there until I was about five. It was just me, my mum and dad; I didn’t have much family, and I’m an only child.

I do remember a little of my life in Northern Ireland. I remember having a crush on a classmate in nursery and dreaming of being a dancer in dance class.

But before Year 1, my parents told me we were moving to England. I was utterly distraught and hid in my wardrobe for two hours. I didn’t want to leave everything behind.

My parents thought coming to England would be better for me. They aren’t religious, so they resented the issues caused by the divide between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland also significantly lacks diversity, so my parents thought coming here would allow me to engage with, and learn from, people from all cultures.

When we moved to England initially, things weren’t as bad as I expected, and I made some lovely friends. We used to play together in the park.

When I was around ten or eleven, I started going to Bolton Lads and Girls Club and was assigned a mentor. Her name was Gita. Even though I was her first-ever child to mentor, she did a fantastic job. We’d play games and go on days out together.

I was used to the feeling of moving, so the transition to high school wasn’t as daunting as it could have been. But it was definitely hard at first, and I moved friend groups quite a bit. Thankfully, now I have a great group of friends.

The school work itself is ok too. I have a natural ability in maths, but I struggle with English, especially spelling. But my teacher’s amazing and does her best to find resources to help me.

My mum now works in a local restaurant and my dad is still in Northern Ireland, but he and my mum get along, and I talk to him all the time as well. I often visit him in the summer or at Christmas.

Last year, when we were in one of the lockdowns, I went to stay with my dad. Out of nowhere, I started becoming extremely unwell, and it got to the point where I couldn’t get up in the mornings. I was experiencing intense fatigue, vomiting and dizziness, which lasted around two to four weeks.

My grandma urged my dad to take me to the hospital because I'd become worryingly thin. Once at the hospital, it took less than 30 minutes for them to diagnose me with diabetes.

At that point, my blood sugar was so high that I was on the cusp of a coma. The doctors kept me in hospital for a week, teaching me how to eat with my new condition.

On my first day in the hospital, I didn't realise that I couldn't eat normally anymore, so when the food cart came round, I got myself a curry. The nurses came rushing over, panicking and shouted that I couldn't eat it because of my blood sugar.

I've adjusted to my new life now. I can eat whatever I want as long as I weigh it before and make sure I give myself an insulin injection. At school, I take my own packed lunches and go to the nurse's office at the beginning of lunch to take my insulin.

I'm a big fan of Ru Paul's Drag race, and my mum and I went to see one of my favourite Drag Queens to mark one year since my diagnosis. It was such an unforgettable night!

I have a few favourite hobbies, including rounders and listening to music. My music taste is a bit all over the place, but I have a favourite band, Lovejoy, who I'd like to see live in concert one day.

Alongside my other hobbies, I love all things creative, and one of my major interests is art. Currently, I'm working on a papier-mache mannequin which I intend to paint in the style of Picasso.

I want creativity to be a big part of my future career. That's why I want to continue to college after high school, studying maths at A-level, alongside cosmetology. I've always been fascinated by makeup and have been experimenting with it since I was six.

If I could go back and talk to my younger self, I'd tell her that things will get better and emphasise the importance of talking to others about your feelings.

I'm amazed at how far I've come and adapted to my new situations, particularly my diagnosis. It's important not to let what anyone says about your condition hold you back; if you believe in yourself, you can do anything.



Coping with Life's Ups and Downs

Lacey

'The world is a difficult place.'

My name is Lacey and I'm a 13-year-old student at Ladybridge. Moving to Year 7 was a difficult transition, but recently I've accepted that life has its ups and downs, and I'm much better at dealing with my emotions.

I was born in Bolton in 2009. I currently live with my mum and my 19-year-old brother. My dad no longer lives with us because he and mum split up when I was very young. I didn't see him much before that anyway because he was in the army.

In fact, one of my first memories is of my 3rd birthday, and I remember crying because my dad wasn't there. So I asked my mum where he was and learned he was on his honeymoon with his new wife.

Before they finally split, my parents were on and off for a while, and I watched them argue day and night.

After the army, my dad suffered from many mental health conditions, including PTSD, anxiety and depression, so he was going through a lot.

My brother tried to protect me from their arguments. I remember one holiday when I was around seven or eight to Lanzarote, where my brother put headphones on me so I couldn't hear all the shouting.

However, I still enjoyed primary school because I had lots of friends. At school, I got stuck in with anything creative, especially arts and crafts.

I think primary school might be where my dreams of becoming an actress began. I have a fond memory from reception of playing an angel in the school play. Before that, I wanted to be a shopkeeper. I'm not sure where that came from, but maybe I'd read about one in a book or something.

I was a super clumsy kid. When someone called my name on my first day of reception, I turned around and fell on my head. Thankfully, my clumsiness never landed me in the hospital.

After primary school, I knew a few people before moving to Ladybridge in Year 7, but I was still apprehensive. It was during Covid times, so things were already quite strange.

There have been tough times since moving here because sometimes I feel like I don't fit in. I've also struggled with anger management. For a while, it was difficult for me to cool down when people upset me. I never physically fought but, at times, I've screamed at people for things others may view as minor. I'm just a sensitive person.

I attended some helpful counselling sessions, and my therapist taught me how to manage those feelings. For example, if I walk out of a situation and go up to my room, I can think of my safe place, which makes me feel better. My safe place is a waterfall, surrounded by all my friends.

There have been many good times at Ladybridge, too, I've had some lovely teachers, and I've even received a head teacher's award.

I keep myself busy with lots of hobbies as well. I was on the school football team and still play with friends on my street. I also listen to pop music. I find it's a great way to relax.

In the future, if I get good GCSEs, I hope to continue to college and study drama. I'd love to become an actress. My mum says it's the perfect job for me because I'm such a drama queen!

Ideally, I'd do some script writing alongside acting. But I don't mind which area of drama I go into, whether that be working in film, TV or anything.

Throughout my life, I've learnt that the world can be a difficult place and that no one's perfect. So I understand that I might struggle sometimes, but now I'm better equipped to deal with my feelings.



Breaking The Silence on Mental Health Through Sharing My Own Experience

Tom

'I want to make sure others are better equipped if they have to face that battle.'

My name is Tom. I've only been teaching for about a year and I'm so glad my first teaching job is at Ladybridge. After going through a low period during my teacher training, I've benefited from the supportive environment here at Ladybridge and embraced the opportunity to teach my students about the importance of mental health awareness.

I'm a local lad, born in Bury. I had a great childhood with a set of brilliant parents.

For as long as I can remember, I wanted to be a footballer. When I was younger, I played for Manchester City (a smaller team back then) and, after that, Bury football club.

Following high school, I headed to sixth form with little direction for my future; I was still sort of clinging to the professional football dream, but at that point, it was looking increasingly unrealistic. I had to make peace with the fact I wasn't going to take that path.

So, upon leaving school, I didn't have a 'proper' career plan to fall back on.

I knew I didn't want to head to university and was instead intending to relocate to the US on a football scholarship. However, I ultimately declined that offer due to anxiety surrounding possible homesickness.

But I wanted to explore the world, so my next intention was to join the navy. Unfortunately, that plan was scuppered before it could begin: I failed the mandatory eye test. Undergoing laser eye surgery, I hoped to reapply in 12 months' time. But during that year, on a regular night in the pub, I met the woman who's now my wife and my plans changed.

Although not in the way I originally envisioned, I still managed to fulfil my dream of travelling the world. I've mostly covered Asia and Australia and even ended up getting married in Bali.

My time in Australia lasted around six months. My wife and I were well educated; I had completed my sixth-form education, and she had a degree, but we were just working odd jobs. We decided it was about time to head home and begin our careers.

I don't want to play too much into cliché and say I found myself travelling, but I believe during that period, I finally found the direction I wanted to take. I applied for a degree in sports science the following September.

I wasn't heading to university for the typical lifestyle. As a mature student, I was different to others on my course. But I ended up really enjoying the content and engaging with my lecturers. I particularly liked applying what I'd learnt to my role coaching a local kids' football team. I think that was where my road to teaching began.

Following that, my wife got a teaching job in Dubai, so we relocated. Scarily, I went there without a job but found a role coaching kids quickly. Eventually, I was transferred to the sports science department. I was then offered a really good job with the military.

We had a great four years in Dubai; both my children were born there. But our longing to be back with family and the greenery of home became overwhelming, and we decided to return to the UK.

When we came home, we were both looking for work. The pandemic hit, so there weren't many jobs going. We had our hearts set on Bolton because we wanted to be close to my wife's mum. But, if I stayed in sports science, I would face a hefty commute.

I put a post on LinkedIn saying I was looking for work and to my surprise, someone messaged telling me the school they worked in was looking for teachers. Fortunately, bursaries were available, so it wouldn't have to be a year of unpaid work.

It was a tough year, and I began struggling with depression. I reached the point where I wanted to take my own life.

Depression is something I've dealt with my whole life. I'd experienced similar periods of extreme lows in the past, and I knew that my father also struggled with depression, even though my parents tried their hardest to hide it from me.

I felt guilty and ashamed because I loved my family, yet I felt so low. But things got better once I opened up to my wife; talking about things made them much more bearable.

However, I was further disheartened when I learnt there weren't any jobs going at the school where I was training and was instead encouraged to apply to Ladybridge. After just pulling myself up from rock bottom, I was intimidated by the prospect of starting from scratch.

Nonetheless, I'm so glad I decided to apply, and I'm now a science teacher at Ladybridge. The school has been massively influential in helping me, providing a supportive environment. I currently work to raise mental health awareness within the school.

I want others, particularly young men, to know it's okay to talk about your feelings. The atmosphere of silence surrounding mental health certainly impacted me during my depression, and more work needs to be done to help people open up about their mental health.

I'm aware that there might be periods in the future where I relapse mentally, but I know now that talking about my feelings helps ease the burden. Through my work on mental health at Ladybridge, I want to ensure that others are also better equipped to face their own mental health battles. No one should have to suffer in silence.



Leading A Fulfilled Life By Focussing On My Goals

Hakar

'Family can motivate and love you.'

My name is Hakar. I'm a Year 10 student at Ladybridge. My family is originally from Kurdistan, and I've had the fantastic opportunity to grow up experiencing Kurdish culture.

I have a good relationship with my family; I tell my parents everything. I'm particularly close to my older brother, and we often hang out together, going into town when I'm not at school or studying.

One of the most challenging moments in my life was when my mum's uncle passed away earlier this year. Although I didn't know him well, I found it distressing to see my family upset.

I'm originally Kurdish. My parents were born there, but I was born in the UK. I've not been back in recent years, but I've had the best time on my past visits.

My grandma and auntie still live there, and we typically stay with them. I especially like the food. When my grandma knows I'm coming, she fills her freezer to the brim with traditional Kurdish food. My favourite is dolma - vegetables stuffed with delicious rice and meat.

Kurdish towns are remarkably vibrant. There's always so much going on, so many sounds and sights. They're very chaotic. Some people there cross the road as if they have an extra life.

I think my parents chose to move because they wanted a better life for us all. There was a lot of conflict in Kurdistan. My dad served in the army and constantly reminds us we need to be grateful for what we have, emphasising how hard things were in the past.

I enjoyed primary school; it was a simpler time. People looked up to me in primary school because I was outgoing and loved trying new things. I wish I'd realised then how important it is to embrace that free time before you have to get more serious in high school.

I've just finished my mocks, which is a huge relief. But the pressure of my actual exams next year definitely looms. My main goal is to do well in my exams and get good grades.

Due to heavily focussing on my studies, I don't go out with my friends much outside school. But I'm not anti-social. On the contrary, I enjoy spending time with my friends during the school days and relaxing with my family at weekends.

My family and I are Muslim, so I'm passionate about my faith. My parents encourage me to keep up with my prayers, but they don't need to as I enjoy exploring religion, morality and becoming closer to God. I pray five times every day.

I listen to the Quran when I need to relax from my studies. I haven't quite got to grips with Arabic yet, but I'm learning.

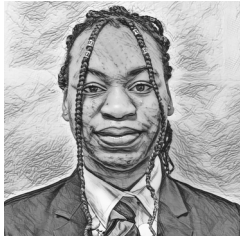
One of the main things I want in life is to change people's views on Islam, as I think many people hold unfair misconceptions about the religion.

Since I was young, I've expressed that I'd like to enter the medical field. My favourite subject is also science, which makes a lot of sense. I want to work hard and fulfil my potential. My parents are very supportive and always encourage me to pursue whatever makes me happy.

After high school, I think I'll attend college in Bolton. But following that, I hope to move away.

As well as visiting Kurdistan, I've also been to Istanbul and travelled around most of Europe. I'm intrigued by different cultures.

Overall, I enjoy focusing on my grades, family and religion. I believe life is about achieving your goals, and I work hard at school, so hopefully, I can reach them.



Discovering That Good Friendships Are Universal

Kamsy

'Life is about spending time with people you like.'

My name is Kamsy. I'm an 11-year-old Year 7 student at Ladybridge. I've lived all over Europe: in Spain, Germany and England. Living in different places and meeting such a variety of people has taught me the value of making good friends.

I was born in Spain in 2010, but my parents are originally from Nigeria. My parents were given lots of gifts when I was born because I'm the third child, and that's the tradition. I have two older brothers and now also have one younger brother. We fight a bit sometimes, but mostly, we all get along pretty well.

One of my favourite family memories is my fifth birthday party. I was surrounded by my cousins and I had a delicious birthday cake.

When I was young, we moved to Germany. My parents taught me English and Igbo, and I learnt Spanish living in Spain. When I moved to Germany, I learnt German too, meaning I can now speak four languages.

Going to primary school in Germany was alright. I liked the teachers, but I wouldn't say I liked the food. I remember one particularly horrible batch of mashed potato!

My parents decided to move to the UK when I was ten because they wanted the best possible life for us. However, moving was complicated because we didn't have passports at the time.

Amongst the practical difficulties of moving, I was also upset about leaving my friends behind, and I hadn't even told them I was going. But I was still excited about the chance to make new friends in England.

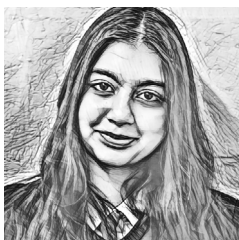
So far, I've enjoyed living in the UK and attending Ladybridge. I've made a few loyal friends. I believe it's much better to have a few true friends than many fake friends.

The content of some subjects at school can be tricky, but I find other topics easier, so overall, it's manageable.

I enjoy drawing in my free time. I hope to pursue other hobbies in the future, such as piano or guitar, because I think they're cool.

Since coming to the UK, both my parents have begun studying to become nurses. The medical route also intrigues me, and I've considered the possibility of being a doctor one day. I like the idea of helping others. However, I'm also interested in becoming a lawyer because I find the concept of citizenship interesting.

Looking to the future, my main goals are getting good grades and making meaningful friendships. I also hope that one day there can finally be a complete stop to racism.



Learning to Lead a Balanced Life

Samiah

'Life is about enjoying yourself.'

My name is Samiah. I'm a Year 9 student at Ladybridge. I'm passionate about creativity, studying, and my family. Throughout my school career, I've learned the importance of maintaining balance in my life.

I have a very close family, and I'm an only child, so my relationship with my parents is very strong. My friends have often commented that my mum and dad are more like my friends than my parents.

I'm British-Indian and also have family connections to Pakistan. Although I was born in Bolton, I've visited Pakistan many times. But unfortunately, I haven't been able to visit India yet.

Even though there is a conflict between India and Pakistan, that doesn't cause problems in my family! We're a big family, and people come from different backgrounds, but we all respect and support one another. The only time we ever split is during cricket, but that's all good fun.

My family is predominantly Muslim, so we celebrate Eid, but one of my aunties is Catholic. We all support her religious beliefs - my family is very respectful of one another.

In 2015, my grandmother was diagnosed with pneumonia, and my mother and I stayed in Pakistan for three months. We thought these might be our last moments with her. To our surprise, she seemed to make a slight recovery and even left the ICU, but sadly, after returning to the UK, my mother received a phone call saying she'd passed away. It was tough that it happened just after we left, but I'm glad we spent that time with her.

Then, in 2020 my grandad passed away just a day after my 13th birthday. I was in Covid isolation, so we had to say goodbye on Facetime, which was quite distressing.

Both passings were a shock as they were only 65 and 67, and I was very troubled to see my family so upset. Sometimes it hits me that they are gone, and even though time has passed, I'm still not used to them not being around.

I also have the added stress of GCSEs, and it's been challenging to keep up with my Mosque exams alongside them. Nevertheless, I'm very academically driven and one day hope to pursue a career in medicine or business.

It's easy to become overwhelmed when studying, and that's why it's essential to maintain balance, which I think many people struggle with.

My family is invaluable to keeping me balanced because I always have someone I can turn to for support. In my culture, I feel that people often find it difficult to share their feelings, but in my family we do.

My hobbies also help when I'm feeling overwhelmed and need a break from studying. I love getting creative, and baking and doodling are my favourite ways.

I started baking with my mum when I was young. I remember when I was about seven, and as a family, we baked a cake together for the first time. Of course, it turned out terrible, but it's still one of my most cherished memories.

I've been doing well in my studies this year and enjoying Year 9. My number one aim is to get all my GCSEs done, but at the same time, I want to make sure I enjoy myself because that's what life is all about.



Embracing My Family Heritage and Encouraging Others to Share Theirs

John

'Community can be supportive, sharing, diverse.'

My name is John Knowles. Through listening to my family's stories, I have developed great empathy for those who come to the UK as refugees and the challenges they face throughout their life.

I have always lived here in Bolton, but my family's Polish heritage has formed a core aspect of my identity and has significantly impacted my outlook on the world.

Growing up, my dad was in the Merchant Navy, so I didn't see him much in my early years. As a result, I spent a lot of time at my grandparents as my Mum also worked. Spending a lot of time on my mum's side of the family, I found my grandparent's life stories unbelievably engaging.

My mum's parents were both born in Poland. My Nan was born in 1925 just outside Warsaw and she lost both her parents at a young age and unfortunately found herself in an orphanage, whilst her sisters were taken in by other family members.

When the second world war hit, my nan, at just 14 years old, was sent to a forced labour camp in Germany. Ironically, despite less-than-ideal conditions at the farm, she seemed fond of her time there; she preferred it to the orphanage.

Upon liberation in 1945, the family owning the farm fled. My nan's retelling of the years 1945-47 is littered with gaps, but from what I can gather, she remained on that farm.

But after a while, the UN gave her the choice of relocating to Canada, the USA, or the UK. A few people she knew at the farm chose the UK, so she also picked it on a whim; if she hadn't, I would never have been born.

She arrived in the UK and was sent to Bolton where she lived in a hostel in Bromley Cross. Promptly, she got a job in a cotton mill, where she worked for the remainder of her working life.

My Grandad was born in 1922, in Zielonka just north of Warsaw. Unlike my nan, he came from quite an affluent background. He joined the Polish army just before the outbreak of war and was a tank driver and engineer. He didn't like speaking about what happened during the war as it was a traumatic time. But from what he's told me and family members I know he spent most of it in mainland Europe.

Much of the Polish forces managed to get out and support the allies. But unfortunately, my grandad wasn't so lucky, and the German army captured him. He was presented with difficult life choices throughout the war, and I believe during the period from 1939 to 1945, his skills of tank manoeuvres and engineering were utilised although towards the end he was forced to fight on the Eastern Front.

The Soviet Union army arrived at my great-grandfather's farmhouse as people in the village had told them his son was in the army and demanded to know where he was. He ultimately refused to cooperate and was killed.

After the war, my grandad was a prisoner of war with the Americans, and the allies used him to mop up the aftermath.

In 1948, the Polish Resettlement Corps relocated him to the UK. He arrived with thousands of others in Surrey, moved around a bit and then ended up in Bolton due to the demand for practical skilled workers.

My grandparents met shortly after and were married in 1949. They had my mum and her siblings in the following few years.

They moved around Bolton together, living in houses in the Chorley Old Road area and finally the Haulgh. At the time, there was a strong Polish community in the Bolton area. My grandad was very involved, becoming one of the leaders of the Polish Church on High Street, Daubhill which was a converted Methodist Church.

My grandparents faced significant discrimination in Bolton, and that has a great deal of influence on how I perceive refugees and immigration issues now.

There was very little contact with their families in Poland post war as Europe was in disarray but in time they managed to do so through the relevant agencies and revisited Poland several times, but it was a different place following the war and the Soviet Union takeover.

One of Nana's older sisters had survived a concentration camp, where she found herself by virtue of passing on food to a family in the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw and was subsequently rounded up by the German troops and police for her good deeds. On my grandad's side of the family there was initial animosity on contact due to the circumstances surrounding my great-grandfather's death, but through the passage of time differences were resolved and unity ensued. In the proceeding years I recall helping Grandad's organisation of donated used clothes and other items to be parcelled up to be sent over to family in Poland, which was under Communist rule.

I have very fond memories of my grandparents. I was particularly close to my grandad; he was a remarkable man. He could speak fluent English, German, Russian and Polish. He had a beautiful garden and home-grew fruit and vegetables. I remember family times harvesting the food and the Polish cuisine such as pierogi, golabki and kielbasa which we would enjoy at weekends.

I learned a lot from his wisdom. Sadly, he passed away relatively young in 1991, and a huge hole formed in my family.

My nan lived until 2016, but she spoke little English, which was a significant barrier to our relationship, although we always found a way to happily engage. In honesty, not learning Polish is one of my biggest regrets.

Alongside my Polish heritage on my mum's side, my dad comes from a mixed-race background. His parents were in an interracial marriage, so they also experienced racism and discrimination at times in their lives.

Through hearing about my family's struggles, I have developed a lot more empathy for others who've arrived in the UK from different parts of the world and how multicultural heritage has influenced not just Bolton but the whole of the UK. We have a great deal to learn from each other.

I've been a teacher at Ladybridge for over 20 years and am currently head of humanities. I love teaching and I don't plan to retire soon because I want to contribute for as long as possible to share Ladybridge's vision for our community.

Family will always be at the core of my values. Now I have 3 children of my own, and although we have become geographically distant from the wider family, my immediate family is the most important thing in my life.

I believe that community support is invaluable. The strong community certainly helped my grandparents deal with discrimination. However, I still think there are too many arbitrary barriers to migrants and refugees in this country, which need to be addressed on a more personal level.

Through listening to my grandparents' stories, I have learnt that people who come to the UK from abroad are eager to contribute to society and embrace British values, therefore, systems should be more accessible to them.

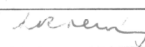
Furthermore, I would like to emphasise that different heritage is something to be embraced. Hopefully, through sharing my story, others will be encouraged to share their own.

Army Form X204 (Polish)

ALIEN IDENTITY CERTIFICATE
DOWÓD OSOBISTY OBOKRAJOWCA

POLISH RESETTLEMENT CORPS AND A.T.S. POLISH RESETTLEMENT SECTION. RELEGATION TO THE UNEMPLOYED LIST OR TO THE RESERVE FOR EMPLOYMENT APPROVED BY THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND NATIONAL SERVICE

POLSKI KORPUS PRZYSPOSOBIONIA I ROZMIESZCZENIA ORAZ POLSKA SEKCJA PRZYSPOSOBIONIA I ROZMIESZCZENIA (A.T.S.). PRZENIESIENIE NA LISTĘ, NIEZATRUDNIONYCH LUB DO REZERWY CELEM PODJĘCIA ZATRUDNIENIA ZATWIERDZONEGO PRZEZ MINISTERSTWO PRACY I SPRAW NARODOWYCH I NARODOWEJ SŁUŻBY

Number/ Numer dowodowy 30013996	Rank/Stopień L/opl.	Name (Block Capitals)/Nazwisko (litery drukowane) K R Z Y Z B L E W S K I B.	
Date of Birth Data urodzenia 8.10.1922.	Height/Wzrost 5 ft. 2 ins. stop cali	Colour of hair/Kolor włosów fair	Colour of eyes/Kolor oczu blue
Complexion/Cera fresh		Marks or scars/Znaki szczególne	
Address to which proceeding/Adres miejsca przeznaczenia Hostel o/The London Brick Co., Peterborough.			
Occupation/Zawód Labourer		Employer (name and address)/Pracodawca (nazwisko i adres) The London Brick Co., Peterborough.	
Ministry of Labour occupational Classification No. (if known) Numer zawodowej klasyfikacji Ministry of Labour (jeśli znany) L.220.29		Date of relegation for an indefinite period Data przeniesienia - 2 FEB 1948	
Local Office of the Ministry of Labour and National Service at which he/she will report Miejscowy Urząd Ministry of Labour and National Service do którego winien/jasie zgłaszać Empl.Ex.West Gate, Peterborough. Northants.			
A. I CERTIFY that the above named alien has been relegated from military service to the Unemployed List/Class "W" Royal Army Reserve. He/she has been instructed to report to the Police on his/her arrival in Peterborough and thereafter to the local office of the Ministry of Labour and National Service. STWIERDZAM, że wyżej wymieniony obokrajowiec został przeniesiony ze służby wojskowej na Listę Unemployment/Rezerwy "W" i został pouczony, że z chwilą przybycia do Peterborough ma się zgłosić do Urzędu Policji, a następnie do miejscowego Urzędu Ministry of Labour and National Service.			
Date/Data 30.1.1948.	Signature of Officer Commanding Podpis Dowódcy Oddziału 		
B. I understand that, with my consent, I have been relegated to the Unemployed List/Reserve* from the Polish Resettlement Corps/A.T.S.-Polish Resettlement Section* in order that I may take up work with the employer specified above or such further work as may be approved by the Ministry of Labour and National Service. I understand that if I fail to take up such work or if I change this work without the permission of the Ministry of Labour and National Service, I shall be liable to be recalled, and, if recalled, any pay or allowances in lieu of leave which I may be given when I am again relegated to the Unemployed List/Reserve* will be deducted from the amount of any financial benefit due to me on final relinquishment of my commission/discharge*. I also understand that I shall not be entitled to another civilian outfit or cash grant in lieu, or a further issue of supplementary clothing coupons. Jest mi wiadome, że za moją zgodą zostałem przeniesiony z Polskiego Korpusu Przyposobienia i Rozmieszczenia/ Polskiej Sekcji Rozmieszczenia i Rozmieszczenia (A.T.S.)-Polskiej Sekcji Przeniesienia do Rezerwy* celem rozpoczęcia pracy u wyżej wskazanego pracodawcy lub też takiego dalszego zatrudnienia, które zatwierdzi Ministerstwo Pracy i Spraw Narodowych. Jest mi również wiadome, że, w wypadku niepodjęcia przesłannego takiej pracy lub zmiany zatrudnienia bez zgody Ministerstwa Pracy i Spraw Narodowych, mogę zostać odwołany i że w razie odwołania żółd i należności pobrane zamiast urlopu, które mogą mi być następnie wypłacone w związku z ponownym przeniesieniem na Listę Niezatrudnionych do Rezerwy*, zostaną potrącone z sumy należności, przysługujących mi w związku z odejściem z armii i demobilizacją. Wiadomo mi również, że nie będę uprawniony do dalszego wyposażenia w odzież cywilną lub otrzymania równowartości w gotówce, ani do dalszego otrzymania dodatkowych kuponów odzieżowych.			
Date 0.1.1948	Signature Podpis  Counter signature of an officer Kontrasygatura oficera 		

* whichever is not applicable/* niepotrzebnie skreślić

P.T.O./ODWRÓCIĆ

The official Polish Resettlement Corps document recognising my Grandad's relegation from military service and transition into civilian life in Britain. The PRC was formed by the British Government in 1946 as a holding unit for members of the Polish Armed Forces who did not wish to return to a Communist Poland after the end of the Second World War.



Family photograph of Nana and Grandad with my Mum and both Uncles celebrating Christmas at their home in Hampden Street, Bolton during the 1950s.

Registration Certificate No. A. 500723.
 Issued at Bolton Borough
 on 20th August, 1955.
 Name (Surname first in Roman Capitals)
K R Z Y Z E L E W S K A Janina
 Alias
 Left Thumb Print
 (If unable to sign name
 in English Characters).
 Address of
 Residence 14 Hampden Street, Bolton, Lancs.
 Arrival in United Kingdom on 13. 11. 1947.
 Address of last Residence outside U.K. No. 263 U.N.R.R.A
 Team, Papenburg, Germany.
 Government Service
 Passport or other papers as to Nationality and Identity.
PWX/DP/186316. NRI.No.T.B.H.2813116

Nana's official work card issued by Bolton Borough Council in recognition of her Cardroom Work at Egyptian Mill in Halliwell.

— 2 —
 OBYWATEL POLSKI
 ПОЛЬСКИЙ ГРАЖДАНИН
 POLISH CITIZEN
 KRZYŻELEWSKI
 nazwisko фамилия nom Surname
 Bronisław
 imię имя prénom First Name
 data urodzenia 08.10.1922
 дата рождения date of birth
 miejsce urodzenia Zielonka
 место рождения lieu de naissance place of birth
 miejsce zamieszkania H. Braganza
 место жительства lieu de domicile residence
 stan cywilny — wolny(a), холостой (незамужная),
 семейное положение célibataire, single
 état civil — żonaty (zamężna), женатый (замуж-
 ная), married, married

— 3 —
 POLSKA
 RZECZPOSPOLITA
 POLSKA
 B. Krzyżelewski
 podpis posiadacza
 подпись владельца
 signature du titulaire
 signature of bearer
 PASZPORT
 KONSULARNY

Grandad's Polish passport issued in the 1970s. He made several visits to Poland during this decade when he was reconnected with his own family and in-laws.



Turning My Life Around and Discovering The Importance of Education

Avesta

‘Education should always be the number one thing in your life.’

My name is Avesta. I’m a 14-year-old student at Ladybridge. When I was younger, I misbehaved a lot, but I’ve recently transformed my attitude, realising the true value of education.

I was born in Bolton in 2007. I have a mum, dad, a brother and two sisters. I don’t see my family much, probably around once a month, as I currently live with my foster carer, Amanda.

I’m of Jamaican and Iranian heritage. I find my background very intriguing, and I would like to learn more about it in the future.

My mum tells me I was a mischievous kid and a fussy eater. But the first thing I can personally remember is probably primary school.

I went to a few different schools; the first one wasn’t great. I was bullied a bit, and when I told my mum, she decided to move me elsewhere.

I preferred the second school I attended because the teachers were more supportive and took a hands-on approach to bullying. But I left that school in Year 5. Thankfully, the next school was even better than the one before.

When I was around 11, I began behaving very badly. I’d go out on my bike with my mates and not come home until way past my bedtime. I was naughty with my Xbox, too. I loved gaming so much that I played all night long instead of sleeping.

At 11, something bad happened, which I don’t want to share because it’s personal, but the police had to come. That’s when I was put into foster care.

Now, I live with Amanda. Of course, we have our ups and downs, but mostly we get along well. Amanda also has her own children, and in 2018, we went on a lovely family holiday to Egypt. I have one particularly funny memory from that trip. I got stuck in a banana boat and accidentally tipped into the sea.

Although I was badly behaved in Year 7, receiving countless detentions and being excluded numerous times, in Year 8 and 9 I feel I have turned things around.

I think I found the transition from primary school difficult, which was reflected in my poor behaviour. However, now I’m much more settled and have enjoyed participating in PE and other sports, especially rounders and running.

Another one of my favourite hobbies is biking. I bike locally and mostly with my mates; I enjoy getting out and about.

I have a few friends, but I like keeping myself to myself these days. I don’t want to get distracted from my studies.

I was obsessed with buses as a kid, memorising all the local bus routes. Now that I'm older, I still share a similar interest in transportation, but that's shifted towards trains. In my spare time, I do a lot of trainspotting and my dream is to become a train driver one day.

I've done so much research on trains that I could tell you all about the model from a picture. I find their designs absolutely fascinating.

Now I'm in Year 10, I want to get serious with my education and put all possible effort into improving my life. But, truthfully, I get nervous that I'll fail and won't get into college or get a good job.

There are some colleges I've been interested in, and I would possibly like to study transport and logistics. In the future, I'd also like to travel around the UK on trains.

I'm proud of myself for turning my life around. Recently, I came in the top three in my physics mock, which is a drastic change from the boy in Year 7 who never did his homework.

I've not seen my family for a while, but my mum and sister are coming to see me soon, which is exciting.

Overall, I would like to emphasise the importance of education. I haven't always realised how valuable it is, but I'm making sure that it's my top priority moving forward.



Overcoming The Challenge of Moving Somewhere Brand New

Vina

'School should be the best thing for your future.'

My name is Vina, and I'm 11 years old. I've recently moved to the UK, which has presented many challenges for me, and I've struggled with homesickness.

I was born in Slemani, Iraq and lived there until I was ten. I have a mum, a dad and one younger brother. My brother is like my best friend - we usually get on really well.

I loved my life in Iraq. I had lots of friends, and we enjoyed playing hide and seek together all the time. School in Iraq was enjoyable too. My teachers inspired me in lessons and taught me so well that, for a while, I wanted to become a teacher too.

Another of my favourite things about Iraq is the food. My absolute favourite food is rice and, in Iraq, we enjoyed lots of delicious rice, chicken and fish.

I don't know why we left Iraq and came here. I didn't know anything about England before we left. So, I assumed we would be going to London, but we arrived in Manchester.

My native language is Kurdish. When we came here, I only spoke very little English, so moving was the hardest thing I've ever done. I find the English language very difficult.

School in England has been a bit of a struggle. I felt very lonely when we first arrived because of the language barrier.

The tests at school have been the biggest challenge for me. I can't understand the questions a lot of the time, so it makes answering even more difficult.

If I could make one law, I'd say there were to be no exams in school because they're so hard.

Our house in Iraq was big, with many lovely, spacious rooms. But here, our house is much smaller, which is certainly an adjustment.

I've made some friends here now, but I miss Iraq a lot. I especially miss my friends there because we don't talk much anymore.

My dad works for Tyrepress, and my mum takes care of us, but I think they miss Iraq too. We still have family there who we talk to daily, and I'm hopeful that we can all go back one day.

The only thing I don't miss about Iraq is probably the weather. It gets so hot sometimes, and I prefer winter.

I hope to become a doctor someday because it's a really valuable career. I also like helping people and think sharing my skills with others is important.

In my spare time, I enjoy sleeping and reading stories.

In the future, I'd like to return to Iraq and maybe explore some other countries. I find Paris intriguing, and the weather is nice and cool, which is perfect for me!



Facing the Challenges of Striving for Improvement Whilst Maintaining a Work-Life Balance

Martin

My name is Martin. I'm an Assistant Headteacher at Ladybridge and leader of behaviour, attitudes and safeguarding.

I had a great family structure growing up. My dad worked away a lot as a steel fixer, but my mum stayed at home for my brother and I. So although we weren't well off, I never felt we were struggling and always had a strong family unit.

I was a sporty kid from the start. My younger brother was also pretty active, so we had a lot of fun together. Once I got to high school, I immersed myself in sports.

Teaching certainly wasn't the first thing on my mind when I was a kid. Instead, I considered the possibility of joining the RAF.

I did pretty well in my GCSEs, went on to college, and then to University, where I studied sports and business.

Whilst at uni, there was a taster session for the RAF. In truth, at the time, I wasn't as fit as I could have been, and when I went down there on a scorching summer's day, I quickly realised that both the physical and aptitude elements were not for me. Some other guys looked superhuman and were made for that role, but I wasn't.

But I maintained my love of sports throughout University and, towards the end of my time there, I got a job doing a bit of coaching. I'd always had the PGCE route in the back of my mind and was starting to consider it more.

Once returning home after uni, I started working with a kid's breakfast and after-school club. It worked well for me at first; I had the middle of the day free to head to the gym. But eventually, that got tiresome.

I then started working as a TA in my old high school and enjoyed that. One of the lads I worked with had muscular dystrophy, but he didn't let that hold him back. He was a fantastic character and loved football. His dad got wind of wheelchair football and established the Bolton Bullets.

That was an immensely rewarding project, and I was involved with that for about five or six years. During my time with them, one of the lads had trials for England.

I decided to begin my PGCE at Liverpool John Moores. It was a good course and a decent commute. There were some challenging kids at my first placement, but it was amazing to see their improvement over my time there.

After completing my course, I interviewed at a school in Bury and got to the final application stage, but I didn't get it. However, after that rejection, I wasn't too crushed, and the second school I applied to was here at Ladybridge.

I'm now coming up to 14 years at Ladybridge. I initially joined the school as a PE teacher and still teach PE; I wear my notorious shorts 365 days a year. But around four years ago, I was looking for an opportunity to advance my career.

All jobs available were KS5 head of departments and wanted experience working within that field. But, I also didn't want to leave and just wanted to push myself. So, I spoke to the head at Ladybridge, and he let me know an internal position was available for an Assistant Head.

At the time, I was a main-scale teacher and was up against 5 heads of department, so I really appreciated the opportunity. I'm thrilled to have got this position and it's my absolute dream job. I've always felt drawn to the pastoral side of teaching, so this role is perfect for me.

The jump has been difficult, and I think I initially struggled with maintaining a work-life balance. In addition, taking on the role coincided with the birth of my eldest, which complicated things further.

As a PE teacher, I've always expected to work longer hours; taking charge of breakfast clubs and after-school activities is just part of the role. But when I became Assistant Head, I found it difficult to switch off from work and enjoy my family time.

Now, I'm much better at prioritising time with my family and knowing when to turn off my emails. I want to lead by example at school and at home, being present, visible and approachable. To do that, downtime is crucial.

In the future, I intend to keep striving for improvement in everything I do. But I also want to ensure I'm present for valuable family time.



Dealing with Homesickness and Adjusting to Life Far Away From Home

Haleema

'Don't ever lose your dreams.'

My name is Haleema. I'm a 12-year-old student at Ladybridge. I moved to the UK when I was young but have struggled with missing Pakistan and dream of one day returning.

I was born in Gujrat, Pakistan and have great memories from growing up there. I have one brother and two older sisters. Even though my dad loves Pakistan, he lived in Spain for a while and can speak Spanish. He's also lived in Italy and Norway.

I didn't meet my father properly until I was 3 years old, so I didn't know who he was at first. But after just a few weeks, we developed an unbreakable bond, and I became very comfortable around him.

I have a good relationship with my mum too, she and I are friends.

My grandmother passed away in 2019, which was difficult for me. It was the same day as my cousin's wedding, and we couldn't go because my family and I cried so much.

When we lived in Pakistan, we had a very comfortable lifestyle. My dad didn't have a job, so he was very happy and free.

I liked my school too because although the teachers in Pakistan are much stricter than here, it's helpful that they understand my language.

When I was nine, we moved to the UK because my parents wanted us to receive the best possible education. At first, I was overwhelmed with excitement at the prospect of living in the UK. However, my parents warned me not to get my hopes up.

Upon arriving, I was a bit disappointed. My house in Pakistan was much nicer, and I preferred our old lifestyle. The only thing I didn't miss was the scorching heat!

After around six months, we went back to visit Pakistan but, as Covid hit, unexpectedly stayed there for nine months before returning to the UK.

Before moving to the UK, I could speak a fair amount of English, even a bit of Norwegian, too, thanks to one of my uncles. My school in Pakistan spoke English, so I could mostly understand what others were saying but understanding different accents was challenging.

I want to move back to Pakistan permanently one day. I still miss it all the time and would live there forever if it was my choice.

Overall, school here isn't too bad for me. I have many friends, so for me, school is one of those situations where, when you think about it, you don't want to go, but once you get there, you don't want to leave.

Now, my dad has his own takeaway, but I'm still undecided about what I want to do in the future. I've considered many different options. I wanted to be a doctor first. Then I wanted to be in the army, to fix the problems my mum always complains about on the news.

My most recent idea was to become a teacher, but I'm also unsure of that, so I remain wholly undecided. Whatever I do in the future, I hope to follow my dreams.



Undertaking A Difficult Journey to Open Up Possibilities for Another One

Rasti

'I've made a lot of friends at the school.'

My name is Rasti, and I'm 12 years old. In 2018, my family and I undertook a gruelling journey to the UK, but I'm thankful we came here because my education will pave the way for a brighter future.

I'm from Kurdistan, a northern region of Iraq. It's not a country yet, but hopefully, it will be one day.

My earliest memories are from my village, going out with my family to buy tea, food, and other things.

When I was eight, we left my country and came to the UK. That journey was the hardest thing I've ever gone through.

My parents didn't have passports, but they wanted a better life for us, so we had to take a complicated route.

Firstly, we crossed into Iran, and there was loads of snow. So I decided to walk instead of riding the horses because that would have been too scary.

Once we were through Iran, we tried to get into Turkey, and we asked a man who had a very beaten-up van covered in bullet holes if he would take us. He was too afraid, but somehow we managed to get in through a different way.

From Turkey, we travelled to Greece in an inflatable boat. Scarily, the boat popped because the waves were too powerful, and the Greek police surrounded us and took us to shore.

At that point, we were on a Greek island where we stayed for a month or two. We then travelled to mainland Greece where we stayed for two and a half years.

The police seriously mistreated people who had come across to Greece alone, and I saw people come away with bruises. Luckily, we went as a family, so we were treated slightly better.

Next, we travelled from Greece to Italy and then had to get a train from Italy to France. We got a ticket for the first part of our journey, but couldn't afford one for the second, so we were kicked off the train.

That night, we slept on a bridge. I don't know if we were in Italy or France, but I knew we were close to the beach.

We didn't have enough sleeping bags, so my parents gave them to my siblings and me. But my parents slept with only jackets over them.

The next day, my dad got us soap, and we took a shower by the beach. They had cubicles, so they weren't too public, but it still felt bizarre, and the water was so cold too!

Eventually, we made it to France. My dad called one of his friends who lived there, thinking he might let us stay with him for a while. But he said no because he was too scared.

So instead, we went to the port. We stayed there for ten days until the French police came and pepper-sprayed us in the middle of the night, asking us to move along.

My dad had had enough, and there were people with masks asking us if we wanted to go to the UK. Those people broke the back of a lorry whilst the driver was asleep, and we all jumped in the back.

It was like a freezer in that lorry, but thankfully an American charity was handing out blankets and sleeping bags, so we didn't freeze.

The lorry made it onto the ferry, and eventually, we heard the engine stop, meaning we were in Dover. We started banging on the back of the van, and the lorry driver was very confused. So, he called the police, and they came and took us away.

We stayed in a hotel in London for a while until we moved to a house in Luton. But Luton wasn't a great place for us, so we relocated to Liverpool and were eventually given this place in Bolton.

Soon after, I started Year 4 at Ladybridge Primary. But my sister was in a different school, and picking us up at the same time was impossible, so we both had to change schools.

It was a bit isolating at first because my parents couldn't afford to buy a different jumper for the new school. So they saved for a while and eventually bought me one so I could finally be the same as my classmates.

In Year 5, lockdown began. However, it wasn't too bad because my dad managed to buy my siblings and me a phone, so we had some fun times watching YouTube together.

It was strange when we returned to school in Year 6 and had to wear masks. Nevertheless, I had fun that year, with great teachers and many friends.

Then, when I came to Ladybridge in Year 7, I made even more friends. Overall, I'd say my experience here has been really positive.

I enjoy spending time with my family when I'm not at school. I have four sisters, and my mum's expecting another baby. So I try my best to help out with my siblings and keep them occupied by playing games.

My parents still don't have passports, making it difficult to find a job. But now they're both at college, which should make things a bit easier in the future.

I'm thankful to my parents for everything they've done for us. Not only have they taught me to respect others, but through bringing us to the UK, they've given us the invaluable opportunity for a much better education.

Hopefully, my education will unlock many doors so I can have a successful career in the future. I'd like to be a lawyer, but I've also considered becoming a doctor or starting my own business.

Although our journey to the UK was difficult, it was worth it, and I completely understand why my parents did it. Now, I enjoy education and look forward to what the future holds.



Believing In Myself Despite What Others Say

Max

'I don't want anyone else to go through that.'

My name is Max, and I'm a 13-year-old student at Ladybridge. I've experienced terrible bullying throughout my life, but I've pursued my love of football regardless of what others say.

I was born in Bolton, and I'm really close to my family. I have great parents, two older sisters and a little nephew. Spending time with my family and babysitting my nephew makes me the happiest.

I have one especially fond family memory from when I was young. My parents bought me a bouncy castle, and it was raining outside, so they blew it up inside instead. I bounced on it all day long, it was just fantastic.

Even though my family was great, my experience at primary school wasn't. There were a lot of kids, and the teachers couldn't pay much attention to individual students. The lack of concern was particularly bad for me as I was bullied relentlessly about my weight in primary school. Countless times, I was pinned against the wall and kicked. It became almost a daily occurrence.

As a result, at just five or six, I was depressed and had suicidal thoughts. My depression affected not only me but my family as well. They were devastated that I felt that way as such a young child.

Upon telling my teachers what was happening, they did nothing. Maybe it would be generally mentioned in assembly for a minute, but then they'd move on quickly.

I longed to be a footballer; I love football. But my bullies told me I never would because of my weight. So I wanted to get healthier to prove them wrong.

The bullying stopped because I hit them back. It's not what I wanted to happen, but when I showed I could stand up for myself, the bullies were shocked and backed away.

I think the bullies were angry with their own lives and took it all out on me. But that still doesn't make what they did alright.

After moving to Ladybridge in Year 7, I lost a lot of weight by improving my lifestyle. I hit the gym regularly and focussed on eating balanced meals.

Things have been much better at Ladybridge. I've still faced some bullying, but the teachers and staff here are more attentive, and I feel they actually listen.

I think that although the bullying was horrendous, I'm now much tougher for having gone through it.

Even though I dedicated a lot of time to losing weight, it wasn't because I was worried about what the bullies thought. Instead, I wanted to prove to myself that I could do it and prove everyone else wrong.

I'm happier now. I enjoy hanging out with my mates and playing football; I still want to be a footballer one day and hope to make the team soon.

My favourite subjects in school are PE, History and ICT. Although my dream is to be a footballer, I'm also interested in going into property development. I love the potential old houses have and would enjoy transforming them.

I've also considered the possibility of becoming a social worker. It would be nice to help others face their own bullies and the other challenges of life's ups and downs.

Overall, I think more needs to be done to combat bullying. At Ladybridge, I'm lucky because the teachers intervene but elsewhere, that doesn't happen. Even though my experience made me stronger, I wouldn't wish that on anyone. School should be a safe environment for everybody.



Placing Happiness at the Centre of My Career

Simon

'Life is about being happy.'

My name is Simon, and I teach Year 7 to Year 11 maths at Ladybridge. I've been a teacher for coming up to 20 years and, during my career, I've learned the importance of pursuing what you enjoy.

I was born in Greenmount near Bury. I have a mum, dad and younger brother.

My mum was a primary school teacher and mainly worked full-time but sometimes went part-time.

My dad had his own textile business, which he established from nothing. But as a child, I watched how ill my dad's career made him, and so I strove for something less stressful. My dad always took his work home and could never switch off. I didn't want to be like that.

In primary school, becoming a teacher wasn't the first thing on my mind. In high school, I fancied a career in law, but after completing a week-long work experience placement in a solicitor's office, I realised the mundane side of things wasn't for me.

Next, I briefly considered a career in the RAF but ultimately changed my mind again.

After high school, I did my A-Levels and chose to study mechanical engineering at Leeds University. So by default, I became an engineer and worked in that sector for about eight years.

Looking back, I wish I'd chosen to study a subject I was passionate about. But instead, I picked the course partly because my cousin was an engineer, and I admired his lifestyle because he got to travel the world.

My career as an engineer wasn't quite so glamorous. Instead, my company informed me that I had the choice of relocating to the Midlands or taking redundancy.

I'd met my wife at work, so she had the same decision to make as me. We decided to move to the Midlands, as they offered us a relocation package, saving us money on rent and bills.

For my whole career as an engineer, I struggled with terrible imposter syndrome and never liked the work.

I didn't like that I had to choose where I lived around where I worked and felt there was a high chance they'd move us again.

My wife had always fancied becoming a teacher, and I was in desperate need of a career change, so we both used the money we'd saved to take a year out and complete our teacher training.

I worked in my first school for a year, then moved to another school on the outskirts of Oldham, and was there for 14 years.

I was worried I was too stagnant in that role. I feel like, as a teacher, you risk becoming part of the furniture. So with that in mind, I left that school as well.

I got a job at another school down the road. On applying, I hadn't considered if the school was right for me. I didn't think that was important. But I began struggling in that school.

Finally, I reached the point where I didn't want to go to work. I didn't feel like I was doing a good job at all. I developed mental health issues, and my wife encouraged me to leave that position.

So about a week before the Christmas holidays, I asked if I could leave. At that point, I was technically unemployed, so I expected to start doing some supply work in the coming January.

Then I found a vacancy at Ladybridge for maternity cover. So I applied, turned up on the Tuesday and got the job. Fortunately, another permanent position opened during my time here, which I got, and that's how I'm here today.

I'm much happier now. The environment is more relaxed and has a culture of positivity. The school suits me, and I suit the school, which is important and something I hadn't considered in my previous roles.

I'm satisfied with my teaching abilities nowadays. Before coming here, I'd never felt like I'd done a good job. I wasn't suited to being an engineer and didn't feel comfortable in my old schools. But now I feel like a good teacher, which is a really lovely feeling.

There's never a day when I don't want to come in anymore. I don't even mind coming to work on Monday morning now!

When Covid happened and we moved online, things were bizarre. There was a focus on independent learning in the first lockdown, but as we realised the pandemic wasn't going away anytime soon, we moved full lessons to Teams.

The teachers were fantastic! We all shared resources and helped each other get to grips with online learning.

But teaching to my screen felt very odd. It was as though I was talking to myself. I think even the most conscientious students struggled with concentration so it was a relief to be back in the classroom.

I have three kids of my own, aged 22, 20 and 14. Being a parent's been great, and my children are polite and respectful. I think we've done the best we could in raising them.

Music's a big part of my life, so I enjoy going to gigs and discovering new bands in my spare time. It's a passion that my son shares as well, so we often go to concerts together.

I'm also into cycling because I believe fitness is important. When my mental health took a hit in my previous job, exercise was recommended to manage it.

When I'm not cycling for my mental health, I take the dog on a walk.

During my career, I've tried for leadership positions, but I always felt I would get too caught up in admin and lose focus on what's important: my teaching.

Others may disagree, but I think enjoying your current position without constantly seeking leadership roles is okay. I'm happy being a classroom teacher and have a good work-life balance.

Sometimes, I wish I'd explored a path I truly enjoyed instead of heading down the engineering route. But I believe that, right now, I'm pursuing what makes me happy without the influence of other people.



Combating Adversity By Being Myself

Anna

'Life is about believing and achieving.'

My name is Anna, and I'm a 13-year-old student at Ladybridge. When I first came to high school, I found it challenging but, by taking my family's advice and being myself, I've pursued hobbies which make me happy.

I live in Bolton, but I was born in London. I have a mum, dad and eight siblings. I'm the youngest, so, unfortunately, I've never had the chance to live with my siblings as they've all moved out.

My mum works as a caterer, mostly from home, which is nice, and my dad's done lots of different jobs.

Although I was born in London, we moved to Bolton when I was young, spending all my primary school years here.

My first primary school was All Saints and my time there coincided with the beginning of my great love of Harry Potter. That was fantastic because the school had houses just like in the books and I was put into the green house, reminding me of my favourite Harry Potter house, Slytherin. Following that, I went to two other primary schools because my parents moved around a lot.

My dream, when I was little, was to become a lawyer. A strange choice for a little kid, but I was really good at arguing.

Before coming to high school, my parents and cousins warned me that I might struggle and encouraged me just to be myself at school. Some parts have been tricky, just as they suggested; the concept of popularity is ridiculous, and there are lots of fights, dramas and intense gossiping.

I found it difficult at times adjusting to the change, and for a while, I would hide my real feelings from others to avoid them asking what was wrong, but in many ways I was ready for the challenge.

In high school, people have said some hurtful things to me. I've been called overweight, useless and told I'll never achieve anything.

But things haven't been all bad. High school has been an excellent place to make new friends. I love building new relationships, getting to know people better and establishing trust.

I've not let people's words hold me back, and I've pursued all my favourite hobbies, including netball and online gaming. My favourite games are Roblox and Call of Duty.

At the moment, I'm working hard to improve my art skills. My abilities include drawing eyes and painting sunsets, but I'd like to advance my skills and get even more creative with my work.

Food is another of my favourite things. Alongside enjoying foods like noodles, I enjoy exploring traditional African foods, especially as I'm of West African heritage.

I definitely enjoy my home comforts, but I would like to explore the possibility of studying abroad in the future. Ideally, I'd live in America and study law at Stanford or potentially UCLA.

If I could do anything to improve the world, I would eliminate hate, racism and discrimination. Unfortunately, I've seen racism go on, and it needs to end.

Overall, I'd like to encourage others to find something comforting or to go to someone you trust when things get difficult. It's important to share your feelings with others rather than bottling them up and to always believe in yourself.



Calming My Anxiety by Doing What I Love

Jasmine

'Life is about the stuff you do on the way.'

My name is Jasmine. I'm a 15-year-old student at Ladybridge. I've had a tough time whilst caring for my chronically ill dad, but pursuing my favourite hobbies helps.

I was born and raised in Bolton and have a large family: three brothers and one sister. Naturally, with a big family, getting on each other's nerves is easy.

My mum works long shifts at an end-of-life care home for the elderly. But unfortunately, my dad suffers from many illnesses and conditions which render him too unwell to work, so he has to rely on benefits.

He's been unwell for 20 years, so it's all I've known and I try to do my best to care for him.

His conditions include PTSD, arthritis and spine and kidney problems. For my dad, just going to the shop is a challenge.

His situation does cause me a lot of upset, but I'm very used to it because he's been ill my whole life. So when my friends mention doing things with their dads, I find the possibility unfathomable.

I attended a primary school nearby and did very well; I was one of the top students in my class. Admittedly, I struggled with maths, but I did well in everything else. I found high school more challenging.

On high school induction day, I was shocked at the noise and the number of students. I didn't realise how loud school could be, and I find I can be pretty sensitive to noise.

On top of that, I've also struggled a bit with making friends as I'm pretty introverted. I feel like an outsider sometimes, and I get anxious because I can't tell what others are thinking. But I have a few good friends, especially online.

I think I've learnt that doing what I love is a good way to cope with being introverted. For example, when I feel overwhelmed by sounds, I listen to music or go and sit with my head of year to chill. Ironically, my favourite music to calm me down is pretty loud dance music.

I also enjoy getting creative. I bake, play computer games and draw. So I'd definitely say art is my favourite subject. I've been drawing since I was little; I'd doodle on anything I could, the back of envelopes and, to my mum's horror, even the walls.

My brother is now my dad's registered carer, but he isn't in the house at the moment, so I try to help as much as possible. However, caring for my dad has been difficult. My mum tells me I shouldn't have to care for him, it should be the other way round, but that's just the way it is.

I dreamt of having magical powers when I was young. Now my dreams are more realistic. I love cake decorating shows, and I'd love to combine my passion for drawing with baking to open a cake decorating shop.

So after I finish high school, I hope to continue my education and maybe study something to do with food, theatre and art.

I believe life is about the journey, and it's essential to keep going. So following my dreams is important to me.





Acknowledgements

Thanks to our wonderful staff and learners who took part in this project - It has been an honour to hear their stories and to discover so much about their lives. They have shown a real bravery in their willingness to share their personal stories so candidly.

In curating this book we worked closely with 'Tales To Inspire' a fantastic local organisation focused on harnessing the power of stories to make connections with others. Thanks to Krish Patel, the organisation's founder and his associate Madiha Sosan for the amazing workshops with our learners and the confidence that you were able to inspire within them. Further information about the organisation can be found on their website: www.talestoinspire.com.

The publication of this book has been generously supported by the North West Comino Consortium - An organisation that supports important work in schools across the North West in creating cultural, creative and real-world experiences for young people. Thanks to Pat Walters (Director of Strategy) and Deborah Davidson (Consultant Programme Director) for your support with this project and many others! As a result of this funding, we are able to donate all proceeds from the sale of this book to BRASS - A Bolton based charity led by Malcolm Ngouala which supports refugees and asylum seekers with a range of services to help overcome barriers and integrate into the local community. I highly recommend a visit to their centre, which is filled with warmth, hope and a genuine belief in the power of community. More information can be found on their website www.brassbolton.org.

Finally, thanks to Ann Zammit for proof-reading and her keen eye for detail and to Michael Connor for designing this wonderful book!

Martin Ainscough
Assistant Headteacher



**"Tales
to
Inspire."**



Published by Ladybridge High School, 2023
Contents © Ladybridge High School, 2023

First published in the United Kingdom in 2023
by **Ladybridge High School**
www.ladybridgehigh.co.uk

Designer: Michael Connor, MA Creative Ltd
www.ma-creative.co.uk

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Printed and bound in the UK.



Ladybridge

High School

ISBN 978-1-3999-5282-8



9 781399 952828 >

First published in the United Kingdom in 2023 by

Ladybridge High School

www.ladybridgehigh.co.uk

£6.00