

**An autistic College Librarian describes securing her first role in the sector NLISN serves, and how the role itself and the reasonable adjustments offered made a huge difference to her life.**



My name is Aibhlinn, I am 21 years old and I received my autism spectrum disorder diagnosis at 20.

Speech difficulties and no sense of identity pretty much sums up my childhood and adolescence. It wasn't that I couldn't understand how other people felt, or that I had trouble 'reading the room', I was all too capable of doing that and it was painful. How other people feel and react to things overwhelms me. The

part I struggled with was reading how I felt.

Due to a late diagnosis (although not as late as some), I developed one mental illness after the other, and they were so prominent that I was considered clinically depressed and have been on anti-depressants since I was 18. Although what I was going through at the time was traumatic, some of it wasn't explained and justified. And so, it led my mother to question whether something else was working in the background.

I quickly realised that my professional life had been affected and I was not coping at work, even though I had previously thought I was. I'd come to understand that getting so emotional at work wasn't something that everyone did, and having panic attacks (later discovered to be meltdowns) before going in for a shift weren't normal. Luckily, a job opportunity appeared where my mother worked at a college. I got it and haven't looked back.

Growing up, I adored books. My mother read to me often when I was young, and I still read regularly. The library at school was where I spent most of my time if I couldn't bring myself to go to lesson. It is a comfort space for many people like me, who struggle daily.

Working in a library, and within such a supportive team, has allowed me to figure out what it is I need from those around me. Naturally, being in a quieter environment with routine, regular meetings and mutual understanding has benefitted me in ways I didn't know I needed. I learned that your company must make reasonable adjustments where needed, for example, I can wear headphones while I work or use noise cancelling earplugs when needed. If I need a change, I can enjoy a sensory room on my lunch break.

Not only are libraries great therapy for neurodivergent individuals, but they're great places to just simply sit and exist. To take a breather when everything gets too much.

These changes saved my life; libraries saved my life. *And they can save yours too.*

