



# Caprice's story

## Acknowledgements

The saying it takes a village to raise a child is very accurate so my acknowledgements may be long:

To my Mum, you're the reason I have my "ordinary life" and I would never have made it without you.

Lucy and Jayne at Changing Our Lives, for taking a chance on a shy 17 year old and helping me become the woman I am today and giving me the most amazing opportunities.

April, we don't do cringe, but from the bottom of my heart you're my best friend. You've been my rock and I'll always be thankful. Jess and Beth, thank you for your never ending support always.

Dan, for taking on all the craziness of my story and loving me no matter what.

Sophie Butler, for being my first positive representation in the media for disability. She really is the change I wanted to see in the world.

Georgia, for her help in making this book and our lovely FaceTime calls during lockdown.

Nat (my first "real" boss), for teaching me I can get through anything if I put my mind to it.

# Contents

**Foreword 4**

**Chapter 1 5**  
**My starting point**

**Chapter 2 7**  
**Working with Changing**  
**Our Lives**

**Chapter 3 10**  
**University and beyond**

**Chapter 4 21**  
**The future**

# Foreword

It's a privilege for me to write the foreword for Caprice's book. We have got to know each other very well over recent years and she is someone I greatly admire.

I first met Caprice in the front room of her family home in Wolverhampton and was greeted by a polite teenager, who was fairly quiet but strongly opinionated. As time passed and Caprice matured, it became apparent that these beliefs teamed with her growing confidence meant that she was well on the way to accomplishing whatever she desired in life.

I am incredibly proud of what Caprice has achieved to date, how she has overcome her struggles and developed the resilience over time to allow her to do this. It is these lows as well as the high points in her life that have shaped her into the young shrewd professional she is today. The opportunity to contribute to her journey has been a joy.

Caprice is a fun, smart, beautiful and audacious young woman with the know-how to affect change in her life and others. She understands the limitations that society imposes, but doesn't stop to ask or wait for permission, instead imposing her own rules on society. This is what sets her apart.

Caprice's honesty, passion for social justice and undisputable nerve to take life by the scruff of the neck is something we can all learn from and for this she will always hold a very special place in both my heart and the heart of the organisation.

**Lucy Dunstan**  
**Deputy Chief Executive Officer**  
**Changing Our Lives**



# Chapter 1

## My starting point

Growing up my mum always pushed me to do everything I wanted and never let me see my cerebral palsy as a barrier to me living an ordinary life.

However, as my cerebral palsy got worse, the local authority thought it was best that I took the big yellow bus into my school as my mum was working and I did not feel I could go by myself. I found this experience embarrassing and it knocked my confidence with my peers. I then completely lost confidence in myself and it effected my mental health.

After a series of operations to help me walk, I thought I would use the opportunity to take myself to school with my friends. This was a big step for me as it meant that I had gained the trust and independence to go for days out with my friends and do the normal things that a teenage girl does.

This level of independence meant that when the time came to decide what I wanted to do after secondary school, I could choose to study wherever I wanted.





After researching my options, I found a sixth form that offered Law as an A Level option which was something I always wanted to do. However, it was on the other side of town, so I had to make my own way there. Some parents might have seen this as daunting, but my mum pushed me to follow what I wanted.

“ When I first received Caprice’s diagnosis my aim was to ensure that she was given the tools to live a full and independent life. This meant not setting limits to what she could achieve, but rather making sure she could follow her dreams in the same way as everybody else. ”

- Ann, Caprice’s Mum

# Chapter 2

## Working with Changing Our Lives

In 2014, just after starting sixth form, I became a Young Leader for Changing Our Lives. It was one of the best experiences I have ever had! Growing up I have always been very opinionated, but I was quite shy to speak out. This changed for the better when I began 'Rights for All', a ground-breaking leadership development programme.

Being paired with a mentor from the professional world boosted my confidence and empowered me to voice, not only my own opinions, but the opinions of other young people. It also helped me to build a network of friends across the West Midlands. It was brilliant to be around other inspirational young people with similar experiences to me. It made me feel comfortable to share my personal story. I even got to go to the Houses of Parliament and I met a few MPs who told us their stories!





As a group of young leaders I felt we really made a difference through the work we did. We were involved in the development of the Local Offer, which gives young people and families information about local services. We made this more accessible by filming short video clips to explain what services provide. We also delivered a practice development session with Wolverhampton Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) Governing Body about how to work in coproduction with young people and embed this approach into everything they do!

From this amazing opportunity I began paid work with Changing Our Lives. This included a range of areas, for example, Quality of Life reviews and workshops on what living an ordinary life means to me. I also got to work for the Care Quality Commission through Changing Our Lives.

All of these different opportunities helped me to become the woman I am today. They also made me feel like I could make a difference to young people's lives, because I know how strange it can be navigating teenage life with a disability, whether that is at home, school or in the medical system.







# Chapter 3

## University and beyond

I struggled to accept myself growing up and I always doubted myself. Slowly, step by step, through working with Changing Our Lives that changed. I started to believe I could get accepted into the university that I always wanted to go to, which was Manchester Metropolitan.

Setting my sights high and hoping my grades would be good enough to get in, I applied and three short weeks later I had my offer. I sat my exams and to my surprise I got in! Months of revision had paid off.

I remember my first time in the massive lecture hall. I fell and stumbled and I was a little late as usual. I also remember the first night out I had in Manchester. All these big 'firsts' in a new city seemed scary, but along the way I made some of the best friends I could wish for.



My friends have never seen my disability as something that defines me as a person, it is part of me but not all of me. I have had some bad experiences on nights out with my crutch. Some people have been rude about it and I cannot fathom that level of ignorance. My friends are always there to pick me up when I fall or get upset, and they make sure they let those ignorant people know that their behaviour is not okay.

I feel my most confident when I am with my friends and that is how I feel it should be. I think they are a major part of why I feel so happy and confident, even in the face of utter idiots. They are probably the reason I survived my 4 years at university.

As time went on, I managed to get through numerous pieces of coursework and gruelling exam seasons. I even stood up and presented legal arguments in a room full of people and achieved my first ever first class mark, something I never thought I could do (had to squeeze something academic into this, it wasn't all fun!). I achieved this with the help of my friend Jess who sat in the library for hours on end with me.

I continued to grow as a person. I learned to be independent by paying my own bills, learning to budget and navigating a completely new city without my family support.





However, I did have my absolute rock of a best friend and flat mate April, who has seen me through every possible bump in the road and for that I will be forever grateful.

Along the way I got myself a part time job to push myself even more and be truly independent in Manchester. This meant I could spend my summers here making more memories with the girls, going for brunch, parties and concerts.

Working in retail was one of the strangest experiences. It teaches you a whole new level of patience and skill. It also gave me a greater understanding of responsibility and time management skills, something I have not always been good at.

I worked in a popular children's shop that I loved growing up. I remember on one of my first shifts a little girl came in who also had cerebral palsy. She wanted to buy a toy ready for her operation a few days later. It turned out that she was having the same surgeries I had, with the same surgeon I had.

Firstly, it amazed me and I thought "what a small world this is". However, it also made me think how important it is for disabled children to have visibility in everyday life because seeing 21-year-old me would have meant the world to 8-year-old me.

Sure, the start was scary in Manchester but I built a life I loved at university and met people who truly helped make me to become so much stronger as a person.



James

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# Progress isn't linear and its okay to take some time.

You have to take the good with the bad and I want to be completely honest about my journey in this book.

In 2018 my mental health took a dip and I had to take a break from university for a few months. This was a decision I did not take lightly. I took a breather, collected myself and worked on me for those few months while continuing my part time job.

I graduated a year later than expected but I did what was best for me. I accessed the services I knew how to navigate through Changing Our Lives and my own experiences. I then went back to university in the following September with a fresh head and a fresh start to my third year.

There were times when I thought "I can't do this." But, like I said before, my friends (especially April who made sure our fridge was stocked with all the snacks to cheer me up) listened to me complain about how hard writing a 3000 word essay was. Beth and Jess were always available for brunches, afternoon teas and just generally making dinners and "lying on the sofa" dates.

I will always be grateful to them.







Taking that break was the best decision I made because I graduated in 2019 with a 2:1 in Law! Something I will probably brag about until the day I die. Taking the break also meant I was able to graduate with Beth, which made graduation even more special and the week was full of celebrations. I could not have been prouder.

I have never felt pride like it and I think it took everyone along my journey to get me here. At one stage university felt like a dream and now, to this day, it is one of my biggest accomplishments.

Back in school I missed time due to medical reasons and teachers often doubted me and I always doubted myself. But the hard work and the hours of studying paid off.

I could finally tell my mum that all the hard work she put in to push me and the way she held me to the same standard as any other child had paid off too!







“ Being a parent to a child or adult with a disability is not about doing everything for them but listening to their voice and adjusting your parenting. So instead of “no you can’t do that because of your disability” it should be “how do we adapt or challenge practices so that you can achieve your goals.

- Ann

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After graduation I then met my boyfriend Dan. He has been so supportive through everything, including all the job interviews and the stress I had when we were first seeing each other.

I am so grateful that I met someone who understands me. Having a boyfriend seems like an ordinary thing but there can be such a stigma around disabled people dating, which I never understood. Dan has never seen me as anything other than just Caprice and I am so glad.

I also got my graduate job in a large law firm in Manchester City Centre. All the skills I learnt on my journey helped me to land a job that I really wanted. My workplace is somewhere I can progress my career and makes me feel that I make a difference.

This is a slight change to my original plan of being barrister. But plans can change and I felt this was the best move for my career. My goal is to become either a Human Rights Solicitor or a Medical Negligence Solicitor, and I cannot wait to make that happen.





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*She's never let her cerebral palsy hold her back or prohibit her from living her life like everyone else and I find that determination remarkable. She's a woman who will inspire me every single day. I find that determination, just like her, to be truly beautiful. I think that just shows how big a heart Caprice has. She's a credit to herself, her wonderful family, and everyone around her.*

”

- Dan, Caprice's boyfriend



# Chapter 4

## The future

It feels like there was so much in the last 6 years with Changing Our Lives that helped me grow to this point but this is only the beginning. I am so proud to have been asked to be an Associate with Changing Our Lives and use all of the experience I have gained over the years in this new role.

After recently receiving my first promotion, I would love to progress further inside my firm, study for my LPC (Legal Practice Course) and become a solicitor, maybe in medical law or human rights law. Then I can be a true advocate for people who need a voice.



In the short term, I will be moving into a nicer flat in Manchester with my flat mate April and continue our traditions of brunches, afternoon tea and general Manchester fun with Jess and Beth. I will hopefully continue to annoy my boyfriend Dan. My life has changed so much in the last year alone and I am so happy with my progress and the life I have built.

I will continue working with Changing Our Lives to truly help deliver their ethos of an ordinary life and show other young disabled people there is nothing they cannot do with a little thought and assistance.

“*I strongly feel, then and now, that cerebral palsy is not what defines Caprice. It is just another part of who she is, like her curly hair and caring personality. Disability is not a label or a reason not to drive forward, push boundaries and challenge limits that are put in the way.*”

- Ann



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*Equality is not about treating everyone the same, it is about giving everyone the same opportunity and the support they may need.*

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**No one is too disabled,  
or too affected by  
mental health difficulties,  
to live an ordinary life**

Changing Our Lives

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