



10 years of student experiences  
TCD Disability Service 2000-2010



TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN  
COLÁISTE NA TRÍONOIDE, BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH

THE  
UNIVERSITY  
OF DUBLIN



Alternative formats are available upon request and a web version of this booklet is available at the following link:  
<http://www.tcd.ie/disability/docs/student-stories.pdf>.

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# Welcome

Trinity College Dublin is proud to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the College Disability Service. When the Service was established in 2000 a small number of students with disabilities attended Trinity. This number improved dramatically over the ensuing decade and, in 2010, we have almost seven hundred students with disabilities studying here. During the last ten years many students, both undergraduate and postgraduate, have fulfilled their dreams of academic success often overcoming significant fears, barriers and challenges to do so.

The College community has been greatly enriched by their talents and abilities, and their overall contribution to College life has enhanced the quality of the Trinity experience for so many of their peers. These students have become important role models for their families, friends and for future students.

On its tenth anniversary, Trinity's Disability Service is to be congratulated for so effectively delivering the College's commitment to providing an accessible and inclusive environment for all students, for supporting specific educational needs within College, and for enabling so many students with disabilities to enjoy full participation in all aspects of College life. Nonetheless, each student's success is their own personal achievement. To celebrate the many success stories, this special anniversary booklet presents an inspirational collection of student experiences of their time at Trinity College.

We hope that the many life changing stories in this booklet will encourage lots more students with disabilities to come join us at Trinity College Dublin.

**John Hegarty**  
Provost

## Foreword

**Ten years of student experiences** celebrates the 10th anniversary of the Disability Service at Trinity College Dublin. The Provost has outlined the University's commitment to ensuring Trinity College is an inclusive community.

The student stories of their experiences in Trinity College are a real insight into how they have succeeded. Many have had life-changing experiences; others have faced additional challenges in studying at Trinity related to their disability coupled with the everyday demands of College life. These stories are inspirational and will encourage other students to consider Trinity College as a real option for them.

I remember my first day so vividly, standing in the beautiful and historic Front Square of Trinity College on the 1st of June 2000 thinking, "I have my work cut out for me making these buildings and campus accessible". Although the numbers of students with disabilities at that time was low there was a real commitment to make the College more inclusive and supportive. Interested staff had already begun the process of identifying the challenges faced by students with disabilities, and through the work of the Senior Tutor and

Dr. Alan Tuffrey (the Disability Liaison Officer), I was able to make real connections in Trinity College early on.

The last decade has seen significant changes in Trinity College. The physical environment is being made fully accessible. Many historic listed buildings are now accessible including all the strategic offices in Front Square. The accessible pathway through the front square will send out a clear message that Trinity College Dublin is open to all. The Pavilion Bar and many of the campus residences are also enabled thus allowing students and staff to be able to participate in all College activities.

Trinity College has also developed clear policies and procedures that support the inclusion of students with disabilities. Our supplementary admission policies are recognized as progressive. TCD has the highest number of students with disabilities of all 3rd level colleges as per the AHEAD survey 2009. Most importantly, College has developed a range of support services which are tailored to meet the needs of a diverse range of students studying across all faculties and at all levels.

Unique services include UNILINK, a collaborative mental health project with the discipline of Occupational Therapy. A peer led d/Deaf project – DS3 (Deaf support in third level [www.tcd.ie/disability/projects/DS3/index.php](http://www.tcd.ie/disability/projects/DS3/index.php)) aims to increase and support d/Deaf students in colleges nationally. The Trinity Inclusive Curriculum Project (TIC [www.tcd.ie/CAPSL/TIC/](http://www.tcd.ie/CAPSL/TIC/)) is an innovative project aiming to ensure courses in College are evaluated for inclusive design.

With the introduction of the Disability Act 2005, TCD set out to audit all services, buildings and services to ensure they were accessible to all. Services were expanded to cater for the needs of staff and a code of practice was launched for staff. An accessible information policy was adopted in 2009 which set out commitment to ensure information is accessible to all. This resulted in the Disability Service winning an eGov award for web accessibility in 2010.

In addition, Trinity College has successfully achieved the status of 'Ability Company' in all six categories in the 02 Ability Awards 2010 including Leadership, Customer Service,

Environmental Accessibility, Learning Development and Progression, Retention and Well Being.

However, this ongoing commitment will not be achieved without the support of all staff across the University. Much recognition must be given to the staff of the Disability Service, Educational Support Workers, Academic and Administrative staff and other key individuals who are too numerous to mention, who have supported the work of the Service during the last decade.

Finally, I would like to thank those students and staff whom we have had the privilege of supporting during the last decade. For those prospective students thinking of applying to Trinity College be assured that our aim is to support you and ensure your college experience is positive.

**Declan Treanor**

Director,  
Trinity College Disability Service



# Lianne Quigley



# Think Positive and Believe in Yourself

## by Lianne Quigley

When I was fourteen years old, I fell in love with Trinity College. It was at my sister Dearbhla's graduation. I was watching her getting excited and dressed up in a black suit, gown and cap. The atmosphere was amazing and I felt her sense of excitement at receiving her Law degree. At that time, I really wanted to feel the same and I thought it was impossible for me to gain admission to Trinity due to my Deafness. A few years later, I was still determined to go to third level education and my family encouraged me to go to college after I finished secondary school. I decided to put BESS (Business Economics and Social Studies) in Trinity College on the CAO form as my first choice.

My dream came true in August 2002 when I got confirmation that my application was successful. I was over the moon and delighted. I was excited about going to Trinity and going to a mainstream college.

After my first week in Trinity, I began to realise that I am really Deaf. During my school days, I always attended a Deaf school. All my

classmates were in the same boat as myself – we were all Deaf. We always supported each other if some of us did not follow or understand the teacher. At Trinity I was in a huge lecture theatre with 400 students compared to eight students in my class in secondary school. In the next few months, I found it a struggle to cope with my studies and in socialising. I didn't do well in the exams in the first term. I didn't know how to use the support services and I did not know which support service I really needed to use for my studies.

In the second term I tried to use several different support services. I soon realised that an Irish Sign Language Interpreter was the most suitable for me to use. I also made several good friends in class who were fantastic and helpful to me over the following years. Some of them were my note takers too which was a great advantage for me because they understood what was going on in the lecture since they were taking the same course instead of outside note takers who sometimes found it difficult to follow the content of lectures.

During my four years in Trinity I was involved in a number of societies, especially the Sign Language Society. I was the chairperson of that society and my aim was to encourage other students to learn Irish Sign Language (ISL) to communicate with Deaf students in Trinity. Some of my friends in my class learnt ISL for a few years in the society. I also increased awareness about Deafness and Deaf Culture on campus, for example, ISL is now the third official language on the Trinity campus. This resulted in interpreters being provided at the student council's meetings. During my tenure in the Sign Language Society, it won the Best Small Society in Trinity.

I had a funny experience when I joined the Photography Society. At the first class they brought us into the darkroom to talk to us about photography. In the dark, lip reading didn't work very well – I couldn't see anything! Afterwards, I never came back. The next year, during fresher' week, I was the representative for the Sign Language Society to encourage people to join the society. The Photography Society stand was beside mine; they remembered me and they offered to give me and the other Deaf Students an explanation

about the darkroom before we went in there. So that is an example of increasing deaf awareness throughout the campus. I love fencing but the disadvantage is that I couldn't lip-read through the mask. I found it was a struggle to follow the training in fencing.

On the academic side, the studies were challenging but it was exciting to learn new ideas throughout the course. It was an up and down experience! I was involved in group projects, individual projects, and giving presentations to the class.

My course was broad so I had plenty of choices regarding subjects to study. Many lecturers were challenging also. A few of them were slow to change their perspectives about Deafness. Throughout the years, I had some influence on lecturers and increasing their awareness about Deafness and support services in the Disability Service.

My final year was very challenging. I was doing my dissertation which was a very stressful project but it was very worthwhile when completed.

Without support I couldn't imagine how I would have integrated into all aspects of College life. The Disability Service has always been there for me and other students who had a disability. Of course they are not perfect but they tried to address all my problems during my time in Trinity. They provided flexible support services. I was involved in the DS3 (Deaf Support in Third Level) project under the Disability Service. I gave presentations about the support services and my experiences in college. The core aim of DS3 is to encourage Deaf students to attend third level education and to provide information about colleges and relevant support services. I thought it was a wonderful idea for Deaf students who intend going to third level. Before I went to College I had no idea what support services would be available. This lack of information caused me to delay using the service.

In December 2006, I achieved my goal which was to earn a 2.1 honors degree. Achieving my goal was my mission for a decade since my sister's graduation. My sister is my biggest role model. Just like her, I got to dress up in a black suit, gown and cap to be conferred with a degree on Graduation Day. My mum has been

the biggest inspiration to me in my life. She always believed in me and in my ability to pursue my education. Throughout my life, she fought to get all educational opportunities for me and for access to all available supports. She is the one in the family who most encouraged me go to Trinity College. Without her encouragement I would not have graduated with an honours degree from Trinity. Sadly she passed away last year and I want to say a big thanks to her for having believed in me and giving me the confidence to achieve what I have so far. My most vivid memory of her is giving me this piece of advice, emphasised with a waving fist, as I was leaving home to sit an exam: 'Attack those papers'.

Being a TCD graduate is the biggest achievement in my whole life; my confidence is solidly and soundly grounded from my time at Trinity.

Today I work in the Financial Services industry. My experiences and education at Trinity have prepared me well for this career. I have a high level of confidence and do not feel intimidated or disadvantaged in my workplace. I know what support services I need to do my job well and know how to ask for them. I know how to increase awareness of Deafness in my office and have the confidence to make my viewpoint known. I am also confident in putting forward my ideas and participating fully in all work-related decisions.

Any of you who are second level students or mature students with a disability who are considering taking a course in TCD should just go for it. It is a worthwhile and rewarding experience. It is much more than just the academic qualification. It will develop you as a person and give you the confidence to rise to every challenge you meet after college. It is not easy but your dedication and success will be rewarded by giving you confidence to meet the world as you find it.

THINK POSITIVE!

A photograph of three female graduates in black academic gowns with gold and white stoles, walking on a cobblestone street and throwing their caps in the air. In the background is a large, classical-style building with a clock tower. The scene is framed by stone pillars on either side.

# Barbara Voakes



# This is My Story

## by Barbara Voakes

My name is Barbara Voakes. I am now 28 years old, and I successfully completed the Social Studies Degree in Trinity College Dublin and graduated on the 9th July 2009.

After completing a one year Community Care & Social Studies course, FETAC Level 5 in Whitehall College of Further Education, I got the courage to take a chance and apply for Third Level College, Social Work in Trinity, as a mature student. I then had a 3 year old son called Adam and was a lone parent, struggling to keep meeting our basic needs. Applying to Trinity was very scary for me as no one else in my family went to College. My younger sister actually got into DIT but left a few months into first year. I considered my sister much more intelligent than me and she went to a convent school that I would have loved to go to, however as we had only moved to the area the convent secondary school said that I would not be accepted. I felt that writing the application form, saying why you feel this course would be suited to you, was so scary and tough to write. Writing out the application form did not happen overnight; it took over a week to

decide what I was actually going to write. I sent this off in March and never heard anything.

Summer began and my son and I were fortunate to have got a new council house in Finglas after completing the Whitehall course. A girl from my Social Studies class in Whitehall rang my mobile and told me that she was actually sitting on the third floor in Trinity College waiting to be called in for her interview and my name had also been called out. I was standing in my house in Finglas. I suddenly realised that I had not updated Trinity with my new address. I was linked in with the Finglas /Cabra partnership at the time, and they were very supportive and ordered me a taxi straight into the College.

August came and I was so scared waiting to see if I had been chosen to do the course. I had been chosen to do the course. It was great and I promised myself I would give it my best effort.

At the start College was sometimes intimidating, especially when group work was carried out and the warm up sessions entailed telling the class something that nobody else knows about you. I struggled on this area as I felt at the start that everybody in the class had better upbringings and more fun lives than me. I believe that I became insecure at the start of the first term in Trinity. When I look back, I recognise that yes others were different but that does not mean that they were better.

College was never easy for me although most of the time it was enjoyable. I started Trinity and my son started junior infants. Trying to balance the work load and family life was a huge pressure and I lost a recognisable amount of weight. Even though I seemed to study all the time I would be still lost in the class and at the lectures. After a few weeks my report came back from the educational psychologist who stated that I have dyslexia. From that day and from the proof of the report my life in Trinity got easier. Simple things like using mind maps really worked for me and in addition linking in with the correct services and people made life so much easier. I overcame the shame of always struggling to get my work a certain way like my friends and instead learned what's right

for me and how I learn and how I proof read my own work. I learned how I could make clear sentences - this might sound junior infant stuff but for me this was not always achievable.

In first year everybody knew how much I struggled and I knew before I saw the girls at the coffee dock what they were going to say. It was always "poor Barbara - she's struggling." Finally in fourth year I would meet the girls at the coffee dock and they would say "nothing wrong with Barbara - she's flying." If I were to have any advice for second level students thinking of coming to College I would say always explore your options and link in with the Disability Service at the earliest convenience. Try speaking to students that are in a similar course to yours or doing what you aim to do.

As a one parent family I believe the influence College has had on my life speaks for itself. I came out of College more confident and much more familiar with myself. When Trinity College comes on the news my son who is 8 now automatically says "Mam, there's our College on television".



# Lisa Walsh

## From Tape to Type

by Lisa Walsh

I am dyslexic. I have just completed a B.A in Drama and Theatre Studies, Trinity College Dublin. My advanced studies lay in the practical based courses: Acting and Devising. I also produced a 12,000 word academic dissertation paper on the performing body.

Having taken my Leaving Certificate examinations by Tape (I spoke my answers to a recorder), it was a difficult transition to third level education where academic work had be written on computer. Although the nature of my chosen third level course allowed me to be examined on much practical work (such as acting assessments, devising performances and drama based/ theatre work placements) alongside each practical course assessment an academic logbook was required. Achieving good grades in the practical elements to my course was not enough. Receiving academic support from DS was important to me and indeed my academic work and overall grade achievements.



A collage featuring a smiling man, a stone archway, a classical building, and a kayaker. The man is in the foreground, smiling broadly, wearing a dark jacket with a circular patch on the chest. The background is a collage of images: a stone archway on the left, a classical building with a clock tower in the center, and a kayaker in a yellow helmet and red kayak on the left. The name 'Mark Pollock' is overlaid in large white text.

# Mark Pollock





## Through The Front Arch...

by Mark Pollock

The first time you walk in through Front Arch is unforgettable. The first time I did it was in 1994, just as I started my first year at Trinity. Looking back, I think I was feeling pretty lucky to be there at all. After a great last year at school, I had perhaps missed the point that I might have needed to study as opposed to train for rowing and go out with my mates, so getting into Trinity was an unexpected honour.

Throughout school I used to watch the Trinity Rowers race and win. The chance to be part of those crews was my main goal; the fact that Trinity happens to be one of the world's greatest universities was a bonus. I had started to take my rowing extremely seriously, and I knew Trinity would be able to provide me with a great platform to improve my burgeoning sporting career. I had no doubts that I had made the right choice in making the short trip from Belfast to Dublin.

Looking back it is tempting to view the world through rose-tinted spectacles. But when I think of my first time studying at Trinity, I find it is hard not to. It was four incredible years of growing up. I had the opportunity to compete at the highest level including representing my country at my chosen sport and make friends who I keep in touch with till this day. Those years were some of the best in my life but the ending wasn't exactly the stuff of fairytales!

Just before I sat my final exams I lost my sight. I was 22, and I thought my life was over. I was devastated and saw no future.

The road to recovery was slow and sometimes painful. Small things frustrated me, like finding my toothbrush or distinguishing between the hot and cold tap. But I noticed an enormous leap forward when I was able to learn how to use a talking computer. This helped me to gain some of my independence back; I was finally rebuilding my identity.

With the help of one of my Trinity friends I secured a job and, with the help of a guide dog called Larry, regained my independence. In the chaos of the centre of Dublin, Trinity was always a safe haven and a place where I felt at home ever since the first day I walked through front gate. Negotiating my way across the cobbles, I was normally sure I would bump into someone I knew and this continues today.

Part of the attraction of Trinity is how compact it is. It offers more than just an academic experience; it offers the chance to be part of a community. For students who have a disability like me, there is support available. It is simply a case of reaching out and asking for it. I had the pleasure of living in Trinity as a postgraduate in 2002 when carrying out postgraduate research and was always given as much or as little help as I needed from the Disability Service.

I would certainly recommend Trinity to any disabled students who are considering it. It is an extremely friendly place and small enough to get to know people easily and quickly. The other great part of Trinity is the time and space to develop interests. I managed to develop my love of rowing. For others it could be paint balling or drama; it doesn't matter, Trinity will be able to cater for your interest and help you to push it as far as you want to.

Today, I work all over the world as a professional speaker, adventure athlete and author. Trinity was integral to me reaching this stage. It equipped me with a strong social and professional network that helped me in more ways than I ever imagined when I first filled in my CAO form all those years ago. It has always supported what I do, whether that is finding my feet again after losing my sight or assisting me develop my speaking business and write my book or even prepare for racing to the South Pole. It might be obvious by now, I am a Trinity fan but I feel I have reason to be.

## From TAP to Graduation

### by Mary Ormonde

I did not know I was dyslexic until 2004 when I was studying in the Trinity Access Programme. I was told I would find it difficult to write down notes at lectures and that my comprehension would make reading tough going. I had already done my leaving certificate in Adult Education and was delighted when I got a place in Trinity College. The Access course gave me a great grounding and paid for me to have a test for dyslexia.

I was worried that I would not be able for third level college, but I need not have been.

Before classes started I was contacted by the Disability Service to come in and chat about what concerns I had. I was informed of all the ways that make essays and reading easier. Also I was given the loan of a tape recorder to tape the lectures, so I could write them out later. I only needed the tape for a couple of months; in no time I needed no tapes at all.

I also have a stammer at times, so I was worried about doing presentations.

The Disability Service did a practice run of a presentation with me in one of the tutorial rooms on the day and it really took a lot of fear away. I have done numerous presentations over the years since.

I have bad days when my confidence is low, so I just call in and ask to see one of the staff who reassures me, and in no time I am off again thinking what I have to do in the library. For me I can truly say that all you need is the motivation to do a degree course. There is great support in the College when it is needed.

The background is a composite image. It features a modern building with a curved glass facade at night, reflecting city lights. Overlaid on this is a large, semi-transparent gear graphic. In the center of the gear is an inset photograph of two women, an older woman with short grey hair and glasses wearing a pink jacket, and a younger woman with brown hair wearing a white cardigan. They are both looking at a computer monitor, with the older woman pointing at the screen. The name 'Sarah Maye' is written in a large, white, serif font across the middle of the image, partially overlapping the gear and the inset photo.

Sarah Maye

# One of the Best Decisions of My life

## by Sarah Maye

My name is Sarah Maye and I am a graduate of Trinity College Dublin with a B.A. in English Studies. A lot of people don't believe me when I tell them this. In Ireland, people still have preconceived assumptions about people with disabilities. Unless young people with disabilities have supportive families and a good primary and secondary educational background, their prospects of attaining a third level qualification are low.

When I was offered my place in Trinity, I was genuinely shocked: I honestly didn't think I was worthy of accepting a place at one of the most prestigious colleges in the world. However, my positive attitude carried me through during this challenging time. Before I started my course, I met my Disability Officer who helped me to decide what supports I would need in college: on-campus accommodation, note takers, a library assistant and a laptop being the most obvious. They were concerned, however, that I would not have the physical stamina to complete my assignments, because of my Cerebral Palsy, and so with their help, I secured an electric wheelchair.

This was the first time I had ever used a wheelchair of any description, mainly because of my stubbornness! I soon learned, however, that when you are busy with coursework, pride is neither useful nor helpful.

Trinity had a major impact on my life. When I was in College, my family fell apart, meaning that they were not always in a position to support me financially or sometimes even emotionally. I felt my only option was to stay in Dublin and start living my own life. The Disability team were very supportive of this decision and always helped me to find accommodation and work during the summer months. This meant that I did not have to move myself and my hordes of books and folders up and down the country twice a year. Staying in Dublin also gave me the advantage of having access to the TCD Library and getting ahead on my reading.



They also helped me maximise my productivity and reach my true potential. In third and fourth year, I was given the option of doing some of my exams by extended essay, as I tend to become rather fatigued. In addition, I was allowed extra time and rest periods. I believe this is the main reason I was able to achieve a 2:1 honours degree. Also, an educational support worker taught me how to write references and interesting essays. She also proofread and was quick to point out any mistakes!

I would like to say to any second level student considering a course at TCD to go for it. Studying and living in Trinity was one of the best experiences of my life and I remember those years with fondness and happy memories, and I always will. Having a disability shouldn't hold you back from enjoying college life, but having a negative attitude almost certainly will. If you're willing to come to Trinity, the supports will be there for you. Trust me, you won't regret it - studying English at Trinity has been one of the best decisions of my life!

## Becoming a Successful Graduate

I am now a 38 year old male mature student entering the 3rd year of my degree course. I am very proud of my academic achievements in the past two years with the help and support I got in College.

I went back to education to change career direction in 2007 by doing a FETAC level 5 post leaving cert course in the Liberties College. I was an unsuccessful student in secondary school repeating my Leaving Cert twice without passing. I did not like education, reading or exams. When needing a qualification to change career I chose the one year course as I thought that would be all I would be able to handle. During that year I struggled like I was back in secondary school and was encouraged to take a psychological assessment to see if I needed assistance.

I had given up a good job to go back to education and was willing to accept any help that was offered. It was disclosed to me that I was dyslexic and I needed regular help in certain areas to become successful. I was encouraged and motivated to use these supports and apply for a degree course where I

would be offered help to succeed. It was a daunting task but I applied to what I believed to be the best university in the country, Trinity College.

I was offered a place on my chosen degree course and was invited to meet with a disability officer to discuss my Needs for College. The supports I availed of were a digital recorder to help me in the lecture so that I could spend all my time listening rather than trying to rush down written notes. I found the software programmes for dyslexia were great tools as I could use them on my computer at home. The learning support tutors help me with my planning and structuring of essays as well as helping with my timetabling of study and workload scheduling. One of the most important factors for me was the fact that there was an office with a team of people there to help me around all aspects of my academic challenges. Knowing the support was always there gave me great strength to complete even the most daunting of tasks. With the services that are available I have found I need them a little less now than when I started with them.



Delia Villiers

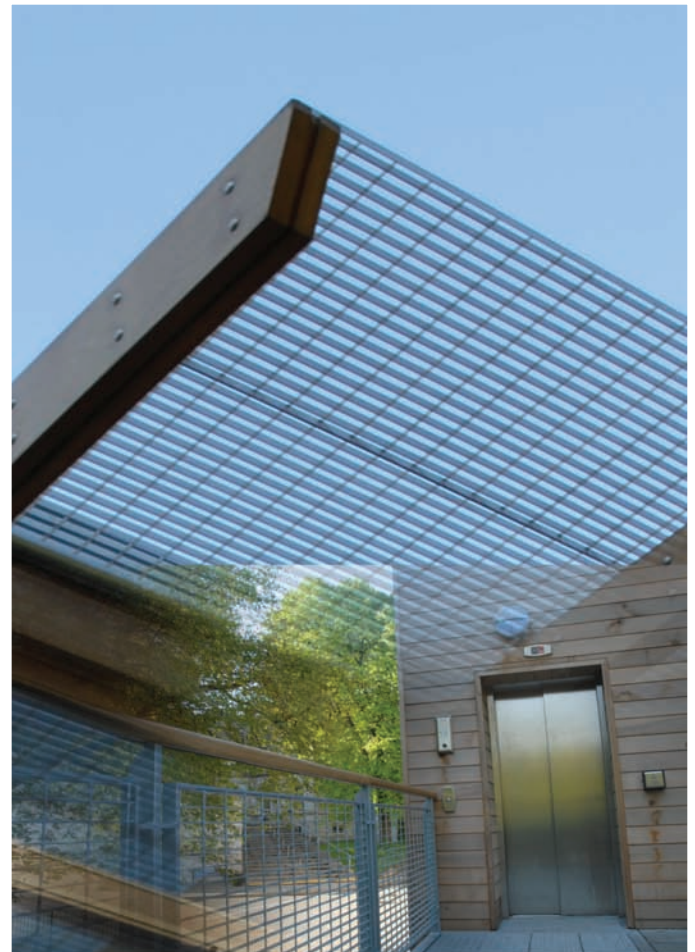


## Getting Good Grades

As I am based at the Church of Ireland Theological Institute, and am not frequently in Trinity, the team have facilitated me with suitable appointments. The Academic Tutor has helped me regarding structuring my essays. This advice has reflected in my improved essay grades. I also have benefited from the Dictaphone provided for me to tape lectures. I have found taking my examinations in a smaller room to be very beneficial.

## My Journey So Far by Delia Villiers

Well I have only been studying at Trinity for 6 months, however, I can say the Disability Service is friendly and very welcoming. As a person that struggles with dyslexia it is really nice to know there is somewhere to go for help and complain about the lack of words I can spell! Thank God I chose Maths.





# Ann Kenny



## Sound Advice by Ann Kenny

I had worked since I left school and gradually developed a hearing loss. I never told anyone at work and found that a strain. When a redundancy package was offered I decided to leave. I had coped well with my hearing aids but had not felt able to 'come clean' about my hearing loss.

I was a very mature student who applied to do Social Studies in 2002. I was given a place but was very apprehensive when I went to the induction week before the start of term. I was not sure how I would cope.

During the induction week we had a talk with people from the Disability Service who advised us to contact them if we needed help. I turned up in the Disability Office the next day and never looked back.

I was lucky that in my first year of lectures in Economics and Political Science there were two deaf students and I shared notes from a note taker with them. I also was able to link in with other students in my year that had dyslexia and we shared note takers.

In my first two years I had extra tutorials but by the time I reached third year I felt that once I had notes I could cope without extra tuition. Something I found very helpful was access to computers in the assistive technology area of the Library and the facility to borrow extra books. The Disability Service informed my lecturers about my difficulty and this proved helpful when I needed to look for notes or information.

I succeeded in my studies and left Trinity with first class honours and am now working as a Medical Social Worker in St. James's Hospital. Having 'come out' about my hearing loss to the Disability Service I have never looked back. My advice to any student with a disability who is considering studying in Trinity is to seek help both from the Disability Service and from fellow students - they are a great support.

I have written an article for the Irish Hard of Hearing Association which was printed in their magazine 'Hearsay' telling my story and encouraging those who have hearing loss to give it a whirl.

# Academic Success and New Social Horizons

## by Peter Finn

My name is Peter and I studied Law in Trinity College. I had a great time in Trinity, both in the academic and social senses. The College staff in TCD was extremely accommodating, from the security guards to the lecturers. I also found the student body generally quite mature and enlightened regarding disability, and thus they were always more than willing to help out when I needed it. Thus, with all of these safeguards around me, I became happily immersed in College life.

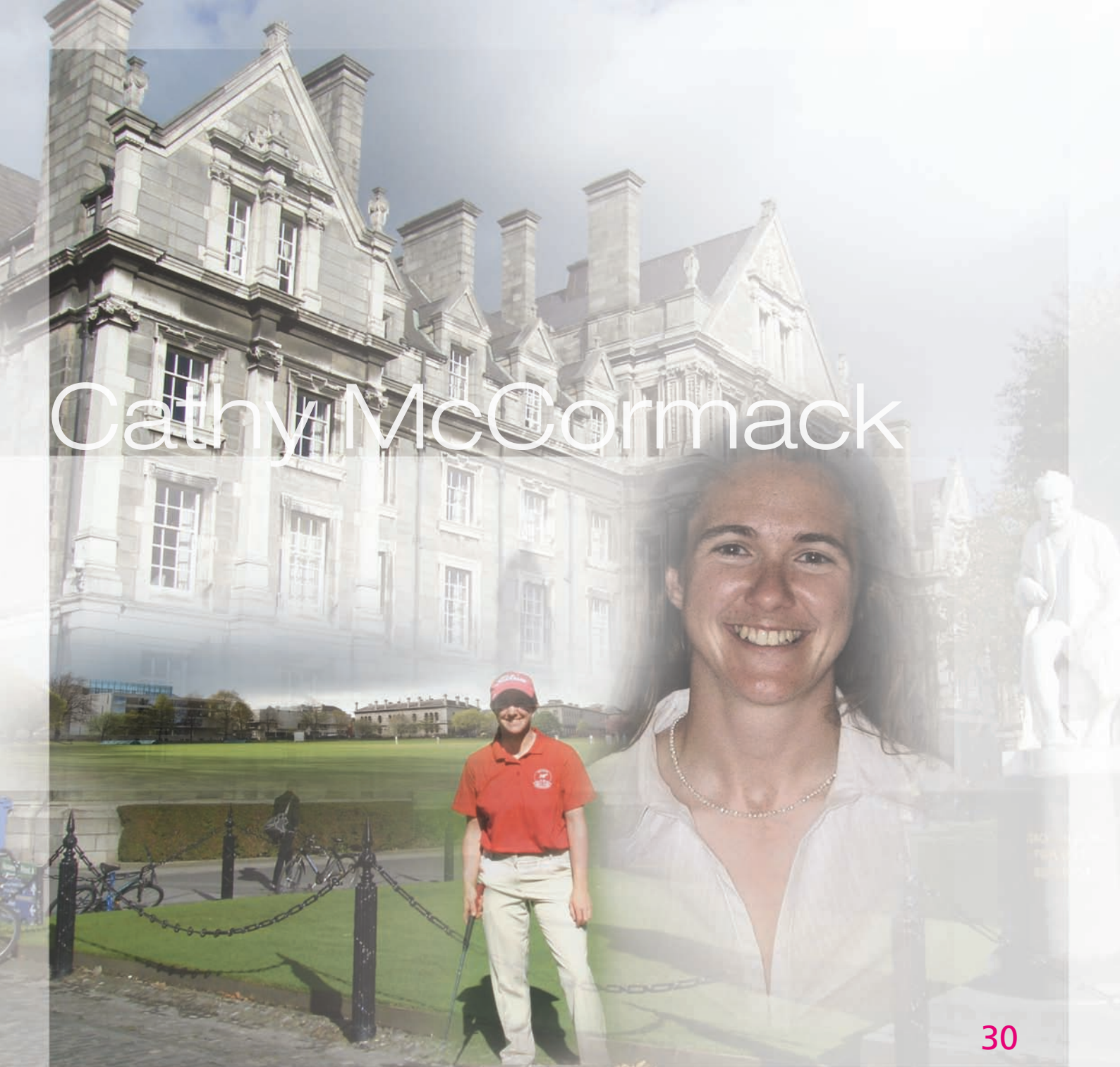
I only had a couple of gripes with the college authorities over a couple of wheelchair access areas, several years ago, it must be pointed out! I felt that the inaccessibility of the Pavilion Bar, at the time, proved to be the most difficult obstacle, because it is the social centre of the College. I felt that this hindrance became frustrating, especially on Friday nights. There were also minor accessibility issues such as the cobblestones on Front Square which were never impassable but just very irritating, and I always tried to avoid them.

However, these were my only complaints and they have been remedied since I've left in 2006, rendering all these areas fully accessible. The new Pav bar in particular represents a major victory for the DS and I just wish I was back there now as an undergraduate enjoying all the new facilities.

Physical accessibility improvements are ongoing in Trinity and the College seems to have made great leaps in this progress. The campus has been completely modernised, even in areas that I wouldn't have noticed needed addressing four years ago.

For all of these strides being made I'd recommend Trinity to any prospective disabled student who aspires to academic success and broaden their social horizons (oh, and being 2 minutes from the nightclubs helps too!).

# Cathy McCormack



## Overcoming Barriers

### by Cathy McCormack

When I began my studies at Trinity College Dublin in 1992, there was no Disability Service. The only sustenance I could hope for at that time was my own belief in my ability to graduate as an Occupational Therapist. I was determined that being Deaf was not going to be a barrier to my achievement.

Very soon though, I realised that my belief and my ability were only one part of the equation. The other part of the equation was environmental barriers to participation and accomplishment that I was about to face. These included, unquestionably, the lack of availability of advice about, and provision of, assistive technology and sign language interpreting. But these very practical barriers paled to insignificance compared to the entrenched attitudes and assumptions that reached almost epidemic proportion amongst members of my chosen profession that a Deaf person had no business being an Occupational Therapist.

I have never been inclined to accept the opinion of the majority at face value however and graduated from Trinity College in 1996 with the highest academic marks of my class. This feat was thanks, in no small part, to the provision of a sign language interpreter for the final two years of my four year degree course, after two years of self-advocacy and a fundamental refusal to take no as an answer.

What followed were twelve years of constant struggle establishing myself as an Occupational Therapist and challenging, often daily, the prejudice and injustice endemic in the Irish Health Service to disabled health professionals.

Now, after having the audacity to survive that work experience and then complete a M.Sc. in the US while on a Fulbright Scholarship in 2005/2006, I have (since November 2007) the personally satisfying privilege of returning to my alma mater as Practice Education Coordinator/Lecturer for the Occupational Therapists of the future.

My experience with Trinity College Dublin this time round leaves me nothing short of astounded. The support I have received is truly staggering. An 'Assessment of Need' by a Disability Liaison Officer in the Disability Service before I even started my job! Let me be frank, the fact that a Disability Liaison Officer and Disability Service even exists leaves me speechless, if you pardon the pun! I now participate in my workplace with all the assistive technology and sign language interpreting that I need to accomplish the demands of my job. No questions asked. No battles to commence and endure. I confess to an optimism I have not experienced before.

Do I believe that my students will continue my profession's historically less than exemplary ingrained negative attitudes towards, and assumptions about, its disabled practitioners? Thanks to the equal opportunities policy of Trinity College Dublin, the faith of the Head of the Discipline of Occupational Therapy in my capabilities as a Deaf Occupational Therapist and Lecturer and the support of the Disability Service, no I don't believe so. Not on my watch. I congratulate the Disability Service on its first ten years and wish it well for its next ten years. The service you provide is priceless. Take that

from someone who knows what it is like to experience a college education without it and is experiencing a working life at Trinity College with it. I haven't stopped smiling.

I am profoundly deaf and a sign language user and, since January 2006, a cochlear implant user. My advice for second-level students with a disability who are considering taking a course in Trinity College Dublin is: **Have belief in your own capabilities.**

Realise that your disability is not necessarily a barrier to third-level education. Most barriers exist outside of you and reside in the environment. Because of this fact, there is a lot that can be done to overcome those barriers and facilitate your participation in third-level education.

Get in touch with the Disability Service; they can work with you to overcome those environmental barriers and maximise your engagement with the College experience. Come to Trinity, you won't regret it! My life is incomparably richer because of my relationship with this unique university.



# Fun experiment! Try to be Me For a day!

## by Dr. Zehanne Kenny

I began studying for my PhD at the School of English in 2005. One of the first problems I encountered was the amount of computer based infiltration into virtually every aspect of the academic system. I am not a 'technophobic', merely someone who gets bad (understatement) headaches from being close to a computer; let alone trying to use it. I checked with NCBI (National Council for Blind of Ireland) and yes, they had all kinds of gee-whizz gadgetry for people who couldn't, due to their visual problems, manage the 'usual' computer screen.

All I can say is – we tried: "The problem is obviously not confined to the screen – could be the magnetic field."

This guess seems pretty accurate – I get the headaches if I close my eyes and approach a computer, or if I try to use a mobile phone. TV sets, landlines, radios and most electrical items don't cause a problem. (Sunlight does though – which could be a clue)

Anyhow – I propose the following experiment to anyone who doesn't think my problem is all that bad, and I refer them to NCBI (access officer) for more information on visual problems/computer and related problems.

Equipment needed: One pair of dark glasses  
You cannot use any of the following:  
Computer, Mobile Phone, ATM

Frequently asked questions:

**What are the dark glasses for?**

Evening.  
You need to get the feel of reduced vision.

**But how can I go into a pub?**

You can't.

**Q. Coffee Shop OK?**

A. If you can find one bright enough.  
I recommend MacDonald's or Burger King.

Q. **But I hate those places!**

A. Life's a bitch huh?

Q. **But if I go somewhere up-market and explain I can't see well...won't they bring a lamp or something to the table?**

A. How 'up-market'?

Q. **Well.....**

A. Be careful.

Q. **Why?**

A. Carrying cash around.

Q. **Oh the ATM - I forgot.**

A. Well maybe you have credit cards? I don't.

Q. **O.K O.K...so back to the experiment, suppose I don't want to go for coffee but I do want to phone a friend?**

A. You search hard until you find a public phone that works.

Q. **But hardly any of them do!**

A. Like I said, life's a bitch.

Q. **Aren't there... like...laws about such things?**

A. Probably

Q. **So....you know....disabled access....stuff like that?**

A. Sure

Q. **Oh...I get it.... enforcement?**

A. No – you mean 'lack of enforcement'!

Q. **So what happens...? I mean, if you need to send an email and can't use a computer?**

A. You get a middleman or woman. You write it out, they send it... they print out the reply.

Q. **But what about privacy?**

A. Lovely word.

Q. **So...you don't use email?**

A. I wish! These days everyone does.  
A good old fashioned snail mail letter  
usually gets ignored.

Q. **So how do you manage?**

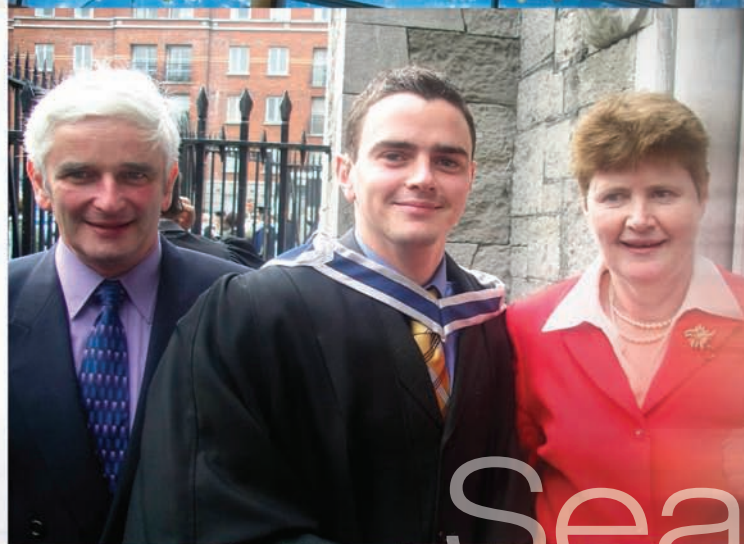
A. Oh... I manage

Q. **What do you do, in college I mean?**

A. I've just completed my PhD

Q. **A PhD? How if you can't even use a  
computer?**

A. How? With a lot of help from my friends.  
That's how.



Sean Herlihy

TCD 2004-05

by Sean Herlihy

I went to see a friend of mine who was doing a volunteer placement in The Gambia. She was teaching deaf children and had to leave her class for three weeks to do some training and asked me to come over and cover for her, so I did. Teaching the students was wonderful, and that was when I realised this was what I wanted to do. So I decided to apply to Trinity for the H Dip in Education having completed a B.Sc in DIT Bolton Street. It was a difficult process applying to Trinity but after a successful application form and interview, I was ecstatic when I got a letter to inform me I had a place.

I loved the Trinity lifestyle because it is a huge campus like a typical American film which I always wanted to experience. I had fantastic support from the Disability Service, without which I do not think it would have been possible to achieve such a high degree.

I also had some great lecturers and classmates who were such an influence on me. For one assignment we were videotaped giving a class. I was nervous about this, but afterwards I watched my teaching style with my lecturer to see how I could improve. This support gave me such confidence and made College life a lot easier and smoother.

Today, I am a secondary school teacher in St Joseph's school for the deaf. It is with great pride that I am able to share with my students my experiences of College and hope they will go on to have their own day in college.



## Experience of College life by Patricia Mary McCarthy

My name is Patricia and I am a person with dual disabilities. I have a severe form of Rheumatoid Arthritis which means that I have limited use of a number of joints, experience significant pain at times and have to pace myself due to chronic fatigue which is a side effect of this form of arthritis. I am also registered blind with no sight in my right eye and very limited sight in my left eye.

My first experience of College life started in the late 1990s in UCD where I did a degree in Social Science and a Masters in Sociology. At that stage I was in my early 30s and it was my first real experience of mainstream education. During this time I sought assistance from the Disability Support service which greatly enhanced my ability to study there. Consequently when I decided to go to TCD to commence my PhD. the first place I contacted even before I was a registered student was the DS.

In the summer of 2007 I made an appointment to see one of the disability officers in Trinity during which we discussed some areas relating to my ability to study which I would require assistance with. The two main considerations for me were around being able to avail of technologies which would enable me to do as much of my research as possible for myself. The person who provided the assistive technology support went to great lengths to allow me to try out a variety of different pieces of technology and equipment in order to determine what worked best for me. This is an area which I continue to revisit depending on what part of my research I am working on and what new challenges I encounter.

The second area which needed consideration was around how best I would access the vast amounts of material I would be required to read in order to complete my PhD. I was assigned an academic assistant who works with me for a number of hours a week.

Depending on my requirements at any given time he will do a variety of things from literally getting the books off the shelves for me in the library to putting some of my reading material into an alternative format in order that I can get my screen reading software to read it for me. Having had a variety of things put in place for me in these two main areas has given me the opportunity to follow my dream of undertaking a PhD which I am currently about half way through.

When I started in Trinity I knew no one so the first 6-9 months were particularly difficult. One of the things that I decided to do even though it was not a requirement for my PhD was to sit in on some of the post-grad courses. My main reason for doing this was to meet students who were currently involved in the same area of study as I found that doing a PhD in Trinity can be a very solitary endeavour.

At the beginning attending these lectures was daunting because I did not know people and when there was a change of time or location for these lectures due to my visual impairment I was unable to read notices (even if I knew where the notices were!) so occasionally I was left waiting for a lecture that had been rearranged without my knowledge. This was frustrating at the beginning but as people got to know me that situation improved.

For all students with a disability starting in Trinity the first thing that I would suggest they do is to get in contact with the DS in order to identify and put in place the academic supports they may need in order to pursue their chosen area of study. This should help to reduce some of the anxiety and stress that goes with starting College. I would also recommend that people join and get involved in a couple of the university's societies (something I did not do and regret at times) in order to make friends (which I believe is an important part of College life) and is not always easy to do within the academic setting.

# Emma Clarke



## Take Two!

by Emma Clarke

I never thought twice about going to college; it was the generally assumed path to take. I was in mainstream and did quite well, probably due to the fact that you can learn and reproduce everything from your text book bibles! However, what I didn't realise was how unprepared I would be for the challenging transition from second to third level.

I had very little support in school. You had the use of a radio aid and an hour a week with a Visiting Teacher (VT). It was embarrassing being dragged out of class to go to your Visiting Teacher and to have to remind the teacher to "plug in" for each class. There was no choice but to go to your VT, but with your radio aid, the older you got the better you got with the excuses, "it was broken, it was getting fixed, a new model was on its way" ...., until one day you just didn't wear it all!

Before starting College I met with the Disability Service. The amount of supports on offer was overwhelming; having come from nothing in school I have to admit I was very reluctant to being "made a fuss of". However, from what I

had been told I knew College would be a different ball game and I would need something. I agreed to have a note taker but there was still no entertaining the radio aid.

I always felt I came across a lot quieter in school; I would laugh along to jokes at the lunch table I hadn't heard and never really told people that I was lip-reading so that didn't make it any easier. College was to be a new start and a chance to come out of my shell. What I didn't know was how hard that would prove.

I remember arriving for my first lecture at 9 am on a Monday morning (seemed awfully early for "College"; I thought they started at eleven, maybe ten) but I had picked Dentistry, so of course it was going to be a packed timetable! The first thing that struck me was the size of the lecture theatre, it was huge! My note taker was already there in the front row, so I said I had better sit beside them, and in a room this size the platform was so far from the front row that sitting there was going to be my only chance of seeing anything anyway.

However, the plan of getting to know people from day one wasn't hitting off to a great start; no one else seemed to sit up the front and I was stuck with my note taker.

So the lecture starts and first of all the lecturer can't help but make a little joke to get us all in the mood, so what is the joke only that "what a trendy student I was with a PA!" Well, if there wasn't a better moment for the ground to open and swallow me up. Then his lesson began, straight into it – there was no let's go around the class and say our names; no, that was school, this was College. So boom into the lesson and the lights go off so we can see the Powerpoint; how was I supposed to lip-read in the dark? And he's so far away and keeps moving around. On top of that he's using words I'd never heard of; it may as well have been a French lecture.

I let the note taker type away so I could concentrate on lip-reading, what I could anyway. But I was just so aware that while everyone else was there writing away I felt lazy not doing anything while the note taker did it all for me. I was genuinely trying to lip-read and follow what was going on, but I know

that's not what it might have looked like. When there were diagrams, which there were a lot of, I would look busy for a change and draw these but then when my head was down I'd miss the explanation, so it was a bit pointless really. Also my notes were all over the place - I'd end up with typed notes on a laptop, and loose-leaf bits of paper with diagrams, and no idea what bit corresponded to what.

Later on that week I had my first anatomy practical class where we had to stand in groups over a cadaver trying to identify muscles, and other parts of the body. That was a nightmare, trying to lip-read six people at once. There were also several blocks of PBL in our timetable "Problem Based Learning" which, to keep it simple, is learning through group discussions. I don't need to tell you what I thought of these!

So, here I was hating college, I hadn't got to know many people in my class, I had no confidence in myself anymore and felt quite isolated. I was too shy and too young probably to realise that if I tried to talk to my Disability Officer, I might be able to overcome some of these issues.



Instead I dropped out, thinking the course wasn't right and I would switch to something else next year.

The following year, I started in Physiotherapy. I felt I knew what to expect and was a bit more prepared this time. Most of all I was willing to accept the support I needed. While it was still tough trying to get used to practical classes and group work, by trial and error and playing around with different support options I began to find solutions. I grew to love my radio-aid and even got a second one as the battery would sometimes run out before the last lecture. How things had changed! The Disability Office staff were phenomenal and with their support I managed to find the balance between course work and getting involved in College activities. This time, I loved College! I got involved in clubs and societies and lived on campus for my last two years. It was everything I had hoped it would be.

I completed my degree in Physiotherapy and College proved to be the most amazing four years of my life. While I loved working with people and loved College, I decided as a career Physiotherapy is not what I wanted to do. So I have now gone back to study Dentistry and finish what I started only this time with a more positive attitude!



Kevin Cullen

# Trinity College: An Experience to Remember

## by Kevin Cullen

I was always overwhelmed by the big archway going into the front square, the beautiful walk past grass and trees, to the front square surrounded by beautifully sculptured buildings, an oasis from the hustle and bustle of a noisy car-ridden city.

I got the letter in the post one sunny morning and on reading the good news that I had been accepted into Trinity I jumped for joy round my bedroom. Any one would think I had won millions in the lottery, but that's just how I felt - after years of getting doors slammed in my face at third level it was nice that one of them had opened.

Services for people with disabilities when I was in Trinity were nothing like today. I used to visit the Senior Tutor Dr. Abrahamson, Jackie Acerkile and Professor Alan Matthews who was my tutor, who were very supportive of me.

In Sociology lectures I remember Brian Torode in the Edmond Burke Theatre (we attended lectures on MacDonaldisation). Brian Torode ran out onto the stage with an American

President's mask on and he tripped and fell in the process. I was sore from laughing at that. He was great guy; it was fun learning and studying with him and the Sociology Department.

History was great fun and a joy to learn, with brilliant lecturers who brought it to life, for instance Professor Aidan Clarke, who taught American History, was full of knowledge about the plantations in America and its new beginnings and Professor Helga Robinson Hammerstein who taught the Reformation and Martin Luther. These were two fascinating aspects of history. Helga would talk about Luther as if she knew him personally, as if she was there herself in those times; that's how real her lectures were - it always amazed me. It was a delight to be part of the lively debates that took place which were brilliant and nerve wrecking at times, but I always enjoyed them.

Along with a degree it was always important to obtain work experience, in my case part time jobs with Marks and Spencer who were great employers to work for. My first summer job was arranged through the Careers Office at

Trinity College, with Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Council, who are also fabulous employers along with Dublin City Council who I work for today. The part time jobs were important as they financed my way through College. The social life in College was second to none. It was always a joy to go to the Pav on a summer's day and have a tippie of your favourite drink after lectures or exams. The Pav was so popular in the summer it would sell out of everything by 9pm.

Trinity College in 1998 was learning about people with disabilities and was extremely accommodating of the needs of the disabled; I would regard their Disability Service today and earlier on as second to none. I never felt like a disabled student in Trinity, just a student, enjoying his studies and everything Trinity College had to offer; that's how good my experience was.

I would consider third level education as an essential tool for learning, maturing and getting a different outlook on life. My degree equipped me to deal with any situation in life.

The advice I would give is this, prepare yourself for College life, look into what you are studying, always know what you are getting yourself into,

study the course criteria and where it will lead in the next 4 years. When at University, join the different societies; join the gym or a sporting club. Join anything that will get you involved socially with the college and make friends with other students. When doing course work, attend your lectures, read your assignments, do your essays, learn how to study and assimilate the answers they require for your course work. Set up a study group (two or more heads are better than one). Look at past papers or essays to get ideas for your own work. If you miss lectures or assignments, catch up by getting notes from other students or the Department. If you have difficulty in catching up see the course Lecturer or your Tutor; never leave it till later as it can make your course work harder.

If you have difficulty with study, talk to someone - friends, lecturers or your tutor. If you stay quiet no one will know. When photocopying material, make sure it's the right material and relevant to what you require, learn it; extract what you need for your assignments and course work. Enjoy your classes; enjoy writing your own views on your subjects; live College life, and enjoy Trinity.



A photograph of a woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a dark turtleneck and bright orange leggings, sitting in a wheelchair. She is positioned in the foreground, looking towards the camera. Behind her is a large, ornate stone archway. Through the archway, a tall, domed church tower with a cross on top is visible against a bright sky. Several other people are walking on a path that leads towards the church. The overall scene is outdoors, likely in a park or public square.

# Rosaleen McDonagh

## Me and Trinity

### by Rosaleen McDonagh

I'd met this fella, really good looking: dark hair, brown eyes, and a smooth way of talking. He was animated, political and most of all, he had a thing for Travellers. A positive thing. He was studying Arts. At the time I didn't know what that meant! Even at eighteen or nineteen he was the first lad I spoke to outside of my family. He had rooms and invited me for dinner, and then I stayed over. I knew this was bold but I just had to! It was winter and it was snowing. All the ingredients for a very romantic story! As a Traveller woman from the west of Ireland whose family had just moved up to Dublin and were now living in Ballymun, St Margaret's campsite, it was a bizarre moment in my life. I was breaking all the cultural rules and norms within my community, but at nineteen he was just too handsome to turn down, and staying in Trinity, I didn't know any female in my circle who could say no.

When he invited me into his rooms in Trinity, even though he had a disability and he would have known the history of special ed and all that belongs with my generation of people who endured it, I was still embarrassed to tell

him I had no real education. There was no real syllabus, no real potential – we were just left with a burden of shame and guilt that somehow going to special ed had been our own choice and therefore it was our own fault for not being educated. To be honest, I think he enjoyed the fact that I was in awe and way out of my depth. (That settled male ego!) Eventually, during the course of the evening, I did tell him about not being much of a scholar. He just laughed. As things progressed into the cold winter night, I made a joke saying, "Now that you've carried on with me, you're expected to marry me!" The poor guy! He nearly lost his life with fright. I couldn't hold the laughing in. (On a serious note, my reputation and that of my younger sisters all depended on what I considered my chastity). I explained to him it was to do with honour and shame. Traveller women were not supposed to be carrying on – and if we do, well then, the man is supposed to be decent enough to marry us. He said to me, "If you were trying to get liberated, you should have told me". I looked at him and said I didn't know what he meant and that I wasn't cheap or easy.

That was the sexual politics of the 1980s, or at least that's what it was like for Traveller women. We had a long conversation about Traveller culture and the role of women. Afterwards, he said, "Rosaleen, you could go to college. You could get educated – a woman like you doesn't need a man to take care of her. And you definitely don't want some settled man in charge." I nodded.

And that's how it started. The following autumn I applied for Trinity, to study English Literature. (Now I did know what studying Arts meant!) My parents were absolutely ecstatic with pride. They put the acceptance letter in a photo frame. They were worried, but they were brilliant and I'm so glad that I gave them this reward as a daughter with a disability. My mother, before she died, frequently used to say, "I'm so glad you went to that College in the middle of the town. It made you into a grand, decent woman." I had a whole lot of angst about not being educated, not to mention angst about other stuff.

I thought if I didn't try to manage to deal with not being educated, if I didn't try to rectify some of the angst, my head and my heart would just explode and there'd be nothing substantial left inside of me. Everything, even the good things, would get rotten with disappointment and lack of confidence.

The young man was kind enough never to break it off with me. He's still in my life, the kind of man that's decent, the one that says, "We're going to be friends" and means it. He inspired me to go to Trinity and occasionally I remind him that he owes me a ring and a reputation. He's a decent man, the kind that hangs around in your life and supports you when others get tired. He started a different career in television and radio.

I had done night school before applying to Trinity but it didn't cure my hunger. Sometimes I think that Trinity was my main educator. What I mean is primary, secondary and the bits in-between. People were patient with me. Learning to read, I mean real reading, with a critical eye and a critical ear, was a skill I had to work hard at.

My writing ability was non-existent, even my vocabulary was very limited and that had nothing to do with my speech impediment. I felt socially and culturally way out of my depth. Academically, well I wasn't even at the table. But people were patient with me. Regardless of what type of tripe I turned out in my essays, regardless of how often I failed, one or two key individuals still believed there was something inside me.

I got extra tuition. My favourite thing was the Library – I read everything apart from what I was supposed to be reading! Eventually I got a bit of structure into my tuition. The deal was, I had to read a book that was on my course reading, and I could also have a novel. It was like a carrot and stick! Enid Blyton, Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë – this was the happiest time in my life. I could start a book and finish a book and then talk about it. Unfortunately, it wasn't enough and my confidence didn't gather the momentum that it should have. I failed lots of essays and lots of years. I didn't want to repeat any more. I was ashamed of myself.

I felt like I got what I deserved for thinking that someone like me could come to Trinity. Anyway, I got really sick and I went to the garage to get my head fixed.

I took a year off. Again, key individuals kept in contact and persuaded me to do another pre-Leaving Cert course and just to be a bit easier on myself. The pre-Leaving Cert course – I hated it! But by Christmas I had decided by hating it I wasn't giving it my best shot. So I gave up resisting and I started making much more of an effort and it paid off. I did the Leaving Cert, got decent enough results and I came back. Ironically, I had changed my course – I had been doing English Literature and I was ashamed to go back to the department, so I switched over to Theology and Biblical Studies. Here was where I was knocked into shape. It was a whole new discipline – history, Greek and Roman civilisation, theology, feminist theology, ethics, humanities and a whole lot more. It suited me – I worked hard and finally I got happy. I felt I belonged somewhere. I felt I could see an end or a progression – no more repeats. I was an average student, I was never going to be a First; and that was fine.

Then, my third year results were the best I've ever got in my life - in subjects that I didn't show a particular aptitude for; I just worked hard. Friends and socialising – I wasn't really good at it. I was never cool, I didn't hang out - but I think a lot of that is a myth. I made two life-long friends who both were Schol students and went on to do their doctorates. Their love for academia and learning must have brushed off on me! They'd read my work, I'd read their work, they'd explain stuff and yes, the paradigm shift happened. I wasn't cool, but instead I was a chic, sophisticated, confident woman. I had read Simone de Beauvoir while listening and talking and admiring a well known Traveller activist, Nan Joyce. I was now practicing the feminist project, not just reading it or theorising it. My ethnicity was something to be embraced rather than be embarrassed about.

Doing a Masters was never part of my expectation, but then again, we do limit ourselves by having an internalised low expectation manifest in our own heads before anyone else has a chance to create a good, bad or indifferent expectation of us.

After my fourth year results, I found out about the Ethnic and Racial Studies MPhil. I didn't feel quite rounded enough in my learning yet. My Traveller identity wasn't being nourished as it should have been. I applied and was accepted. That Masters reaffirmed everything positive about being a Traveller at Trinity.

I'm not saying it was easy, or that I made loads of friends. I didn't. I went to the Ball twice and I ran out of the place. I never really joined any societies. Looking back, it was the confidence thing that held me back more than anything. After Trinity, I ran for the Senate twice and I did reasonably well. I got a good job in Pavee Point Traveller Centre and now, seven years on after my Masters, I'm going back to the English department! A Masters in Creative Writing! Issue of access and stuff like that – I'm sure it was difficult, but to be honest I don't remember. I had to concentrate on the academic stuff and keep up with the pace. There was racism, both casual and formal. Knacker jokes were everywhere like in the rest of Irish society. I didn't always respond; it took a lot of energy to hold my frustration and emotions inside.



But my family had always impressed upon me that I should maintain my dignity and not lose it over some stupid remark or comment.

Travellers are Travellers; we know what some settled people say about us but during college you need to come out the other end without being swallowed up or assimilated. The anger was in me but sometimes you have to lose the battle to win the war. I knew that if I graduated and did my work I would someday be in a position to challenge it. And I did when I felt the time was right.

I've been a very fortunate woman. I'm grateful, not in a beholden way but in a real way, the way that gratitude is meant, for those people who believed in me – for the lecturers who went that extra mile, for the people who failed me and said, "Ms McDonagh, you'll have to try harder." Trinity has been kind to me.

The background is a collage of three images. The top left shows a church tower with a cross on top, set against a warm sunset sky. The bottom left shows a cobblestone courtyard with a statue on a pedestal in the center. The right side features a large, classical building with columns, with a portrait of a smiling woman with short brown hair overlaid on it.

# Joanne Ogmore Tilley

## Help from a Little Technology

### by Joanna Ogmore Tilley

I am a 2nd year science student and I always wanted to go to Trinity and study Science but I was afraid that being dyslexic would be an added burden, causing me to fall behind on reading and course work. I had known a few dyslexic students who had gone through the College system without any help but they had struggled badly to keep up with everyone else and therefore had not enjoyed College life to the full.

When I started first year, I didn't know what to expect regarding the type of support I could get. I had heard rumours of gadgets but didn't think much of them until I went for a meeting with one of the Disability Officers. I never knew such things existed. I got 3 gadgets, a scanner dictionary pen that can scan words, read them aloud, tell you the meaning of them and even store the word on your computer for future reference. I also got a talking Franklin dictionary which is far more than just a dictionary.

I am still discovering new things it can do and finally I got the Texthelp Read and Write mobile USB. This one has changed my life altogether and I have recommended it to other dyslexic people I have met, who have left College now and it has helped them immensely with their work. This USB can read aloud any text on the screen of a computer. It has revolutionised my study ability as I can only really learn by hearing things more than reading.

## Perseverance by Geoff Harte

Having been out of rehab only 3 months, going to Trinity was a daunting prospect. It was over a year and half since I broke my neck playing rugby in sixth year of secondary school. College was not high on my list of priorities but I knew it was important to continue my studies.

As my educational background was mainstream before my injury, I had no experience of what supports I would now need being wheelchair bound. Even though my first encounter with the Disability Service was nothing but positive, I was still unsure if I was going to be able to really manage or if I actually wanted to. There were so many different things that needed to be organised, like how would I manage transport into College? Not having an electric wheelchair at the time, how was I going to get around between lectures? Who was going to take notes for me? Thankfully most of my concerns had been met before I started in Trinity by the Disability Service, still, there was definitely going to be a learning experience on my part.

To be honest, everything wasn't smooth sailing at the start or even for the first year. I wasn't enjoying College life. I had been looking forward to College so much before my accident. I found myself literally just going in and out of

College for the actual lecture times. I wasn't getting to know anybody, nor did I really want to either. I was still very uncomfortable introducing myself being in a wheelchair, not being able to shake somebody's hand properly among other things had shattered my confidence.

Thankfully as the years went on, I got slightly stronger and less dependant on PA's etc. By year 3, I was getting the DART into college, I had an electric chair which allowed me to travel independently, and essentially I went about College not too differently from other students, apart from not being able to partake in most extra-curricular activities. I had notetakers who would email me notes after each class, which was great because it meant I didn't have to have a notetaker by my side.

Long story short, I just finished my degree, and although it wasn't the college experience I had planned for before being in a wheelchair, I'm glad I continued with my education. I don't think I would have persevered without the support of the Disability Service. Undoubtedly, I definitely would not have achieved the same level of grades.

(Geoff Harte achieved a first class honours degree.)





## 'SAFES': Sleep, Air, Food, Exercise, Study by Theia Regan

I am a 4th year student in the school of Religions and Theology. In this course I have been learning about the Judaic religions which include: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. When my school friends heard I was taking this course they teased me by saying that it was a soft touch. But don't be fooled - it is quite hard work. It is very interesting and I have learned far more than I ever knew about religion in school.

If this is your interest don't let any one put you off by putting you or your course down. It is when you do the things you like that you get the best results. Enjoying what you do is very important but putting the work in to the course work is essential to success. One of my weakest points is that I have not balanced play and work, leaning far too heavily in the direction of work.

As a teenager I learned a very helpful acronym: "safes". This stands for sleep, air, food, exercise and study. If you do these things in equal measure and in that order you are well on the way to success. I have also found that doing three hours of study a day is plenty; don't fret if it is only one hour a day. But if you keep this up through the academic year there will be little cause for worry at exam time. By the exams you will have covered the essential readings and you will only have to revise. Believe me - this pays off. I have also tried and tested doing one hour of study a day over holidays; that way you come back to college with your brain ready to take on the tasks ahead. It makes it less of a shock after such a long holiday to come back with even the lecture notes you took last year in your mind. I asked for reading lists in advance so that I can have my materials accessible to me in a format I can manage. I won't lie, the work load has been huge and at times very daunting but you will always achieve what you want to if you try.

It is really easy to give up in college, but don't. There have been many occasions when I have wanted to drop out completely but with home encouragement and the will to win I have not. It is greatly rewarding at the end of a year of very hard work to say to yourself "you did it".

There will always be help available to those who ask for it. The Disability Service has been great in giving me an academic assistant, who helps me to access my material. She is a saint in human form! That brings me on to my next word of advice. Reporting back to your tutor and the Disability Officer you are working with is very helpful.

Finally, while in Trinity, no matter what your degree, enjoy the surroundings. I think it is amazing to be in the middle of a busy city and enjoy such calm. At Christmas I was walking down Grafton Street with my sister and could not believe that in a few minutes I would be walking amongst the ancient trees of Trinity. I have not done it yet but intend partaking in the tours that leave from front gate. Be a tourist in your own college. It is very exciting to discover new things that way. At risk of sounding like a tour guide, there is the book of Kells, the magnificent long room, super gym facilities and in the spring, a wonderful tree walk.

I hope you enjoy your time in Trinity. Best of luck.

## TCD...

# The Best Years of Your Life

I'm a 2nd year student studying History and Economics in Trinity. I have a visual impairment and so ticked the disability box when I applied through the CAO. It's something that's well worth doing. It won't be held against you and may even work in your favour as colleges will often take the obstacles you face as a result of your disability into account. Having said that, an important part of the word disability is **'ability'**. So while colleges will do everything to help you succeed they will push you to help you achieve your potential. There is a lot of good support and equipment you can avail of to help level the playing field in terms of access to materials and books etc.

So why did I choose to study at Trinity? It was just based on courses that I was interested in and Trinity happened to be top of the list. I did go to visit the disability offices of other universities during my final year in school. While they were all excellent that wasn't what swung it for me although it was nice to know that there would be supports available. I was also fortunate that my school was very clued in to things in terms of supports. I did my exams

in a room on my own. I also typed some of them on a laptop which was a great use. Teachers were very accommodating with little things like using dark markers etc. This trend continues as you continue your studies to third level. Lecturers will be made aware of your situation and are usually very open to changing the way they do things in order to help.

College is well worth the slog to get there. There's guaranteed to be a club or society to interest you. The problem is when there's so many that you're out 3 consecutive nights a week! The freedom to attend what you like is also nice but it becomes more difficult as exams draw near and there are crowds of people sitting outside in the sun. In College people are all so accepting they don't care or bat an eyelid if you have a disability which is a great mindset to encounter. So, if I had to give any last advice it'd be this. Work as hard as you can, decide what you want to achieve and you'll get there. Then kick back and look forward to the best years of your life.

## Trinity Success

I arrived at Trinity College as a first year graduate student, with a diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome. Being quite label conscious, I was slightly apprehensive that when accessing support services, I would be met by someone who wouldn't see past the diagnosis or that they would preach to me about the latest techniques for dealing with the condition. I can happily put my hands up and say that I was flat-out wrong in this respect. Most of the time, the label is not hugely important. I didn't want special treatment, just recognition that I do some things a little differently. This was acknowledged without judgment and in a positive way. Having being diagnosed as an adult I was not used to using services (specialised or otherwise). My undergraduate college did not have a disability service so accessing services in Trinity was a big transition.

Navigating TCD as a whole is also an experience that takes time because although it's in the heart of Dublin, it's still a jungle.

My first year in College was somewhat chaotic and admittedly I was a little bit lost at sea. However, after settling in, I became very determined to ensure that I would be ready for

the marathon that was my final year. My final year was very intense and stressful, but through support from the disability service, and Unilink in particular, I was able to build on the skills and habits I had developed in earlier years of my College career. Most of the things you do through the service are gradual. It is a bit like doing an essay – you can't manage it in one sitting. You have to be patient with yourself. Developing good skills and routines takes time and practice.

It is crucial that you begin to feel that things are manageable. I developed skills and habits such as working through your least favourite module, learning to say 'no' socially, managing anxiety, and acknowledging that it's acceptable to reward yourself. Using the service helps you to feel confident about working on your own or in your class.

Although I graduated in the midst of the recent economic turbulence, I have a clear sense of direction. I can work on things and know that I have good coping strategies. I have happy memories from using the service and won't forget it, or its benefits, any time soon.

## Student Disability Service - Recollections

### by Alan Tuffery (Staff)

As Senior Tutor I introduced in about 1990 a proposal to Council to establish a formal committee to oversee the provision of services for students with disabilities. Up to that point there had been a rather ad hoc arrangement under the aegis of the Academic Secretary, Salters Sterling, recently augmented by Gaye Fallon from the Examinations Office. The enthusiasm, persuasive skills and commitment of these two meant that there was extraordinary provision for a few students but there was no consistent procedure or provision for a large numbers of students. Gaye Fallon was secretary to the new committee under the chairmanship of firstly Prof. David Howie and then Prof Aidan Clarke. That system jogged along for several years and slowly established some basic protocols and application procedures, but services were very limited.

Gradually Government and EU funding improved and in about 1998 the then Senior Tutor, David Abrahamson, asked me to serve as Disability Services Coordinator – or some such title — to try to move the service on a step. My stated aim when I took the post was to appoint a full-time professional within three years. By the end of the first term that had changed to ‘we must have a full-time professional in here by the end of this academic year’! I cannot begin to describe the nature of the workload during this one year, but the addition on top of everything else of an HEA survey on facilities for students with disabilities was overwhelming.

After many difficulties Declan Treanor was appointed to head the Disability Service — and the rest is history.







The Disability Service Reception is located  
in Room 2054, beside the Lecky Library,  
in the Arts Building, Trinity College Dublin.

By Phone: (01) 896 3111

By Text / SMS (for Deaf Students): 086 3442322

By Email: [disab@tcd.ie](mailto:disab@tcd.ie)

[www.tcd.ie/disability](http://www.tcd.ie/disability)



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