

FROM ADVERSITY TO UNIVERSITY: A BRIDGING COURSE INTO HIGHER EDUCATION

“From Adversity to University” is a collaborative initiative pioneered by the University of Chichester in partnership with Stonepillow. Developed from an incredibly successful pilot project conducted in Spring 2019 and the first of its kind in the country, it supports those affected by homelessness to overcome the barriers they face to accessing and completing Higher Education through the development of an innovative bridging module designed using a “bottom-up,” widening, participation approach. Participants referred through charities Stonepillow and Bognor Housing Trust are empowered to reach their often unrecognized and unfulfilled academic potential.

Single homeless people experience huge health and social inequalities compared to the general population. Yet these incredibly vulnerable individuals have assets and strengths gained from their lived experiences. They have progressed along Stonepillow’s pathway to independence; this project gives them the opportunity to exceed their ambitions and start a new life.

Participants, who have often disengaged from traditional education, are given ownership of their learning and gain confidence in their personal and academic ability. Upon graduation from the bridging module, students are eligible to apply for degree courses at the University of Chichester via this non-traditional route into HE.

PARTICIPANTS



Phil completed the bridging course in 2020. From September 2021, he began supporting supporting other students on the course and worked tirelessly as an ambassador for the programme. Currently in his final year, has progressed from achieving grades in the 40s to grades of 60 - 70. He works as an ambassador for the university and has been reconciled with his son (after many years of absence as a

"It's the most fantastic opportunity. It gave me a future, it gave me hope and a chance to turn things around. To be able to achieve something is such a magical feeling."

father). In 2023 he became a trustee for Stonepillow.

Phil - Bridging Module graduate, final year BA(Hons) Sociology student and Stonepillow Trustee



Lucy completed the bridging module in 2019. She is 30 years old and has just finished her second year as a student of Fine Art. She believes that the bridging module transformed her life.

Lucy has been homeless several times. The first time she was 16 she lived alone in a van. She has been involved in several abusive relationships which have led her to flee to different parts of the country and caused the loss of the property she owned and an accumulation of debt. She describes herself as “a loner, a recluse,” someone who has never really “understood other people.” She

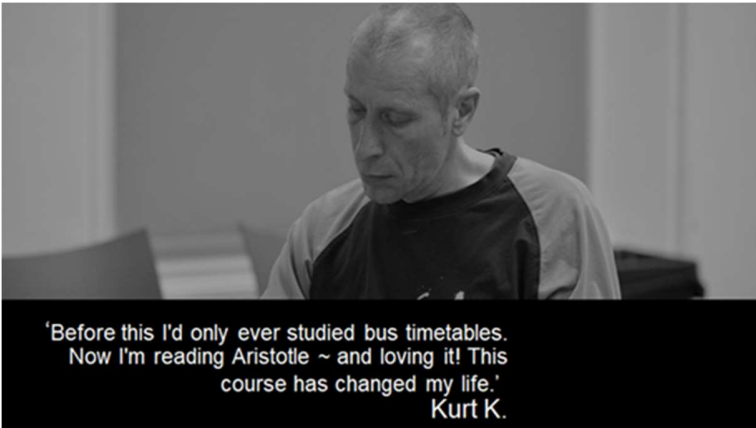
was home-educated from the age of 12 to 15 and when she returned to college, was bullied: “it was hell.” She did not engage with education and was ‘kicked out’ of college and home.

‘It gave structure and meaning in my life ... it gave companionship and the drive and belief that I could do anything I put my mind to, and hope for the future. It, quite literally, transformed my life.’

Lucy, BA(Hons) Fine Art, currently studying MA law conversion.

Joining the Bridging module and embarking on a degree in Fine Art has made her realise how much she enjoys learning. She likes the constructive criticism she receives. She believes that barriers are often “within yourself,” and feels that the bridging module has given her life purpose. She has overcome her introversion to appear on local radio and even Russian Television to talk about the module. Lucy gained a 2:1 on her degree and is currently completing a law conversion MA.

‘D’: COMPLETED BRIDGING COURSE MAY 2022. JOINED BA (HONS) SOCIOLOGY. CURRENTLY IN HIS 2ND YEAR, HE WAS ALLOWED TO STAY IN A STONEPILLOW MOVE ON HOUSE FOR THE INITIAL SEMESTER. HE IS HALFWAY THROUGH HIS SECOND YEAR AND IS CURRENTLY PREDICTED TO ACHIEVE A FIRST CLASS DEGREE.



“As a result of the bridging module and Uni I finally feel I might be able to provide a decent life for my family. Really grateful to you, Becky and the whole team at the University of Chichester. Thanks.”

Year 2 undergraduate student

"It built my confidence and made me realise that I do have staying power."

Student, PGCE Primary Education

"Coming to Uni has helped my recovery and given me ambitions. That's a confidence booster. It's made me realize that I can do something with my life."

Student, BA(Hons) Outdoor and Adventure Education

IMPACT

Students directly affected by homelessness and addiction who have accessed this course since 2019:

- Supported by the module to date: **33**
- Currently on bridging course 23/24: **6**
- Graduated or currently studying on a degree course: **9**
- Completed PGCE and started teaching: **1**

The programme has also positively impacted University staff and students; opening their minds to different groups, challenging their assumptions about academic ability, developing new ways of teaching and learning and creating a more diverse and inclusive university culture.

The programme has made participants more engaged in society, enabling them to contribute to local communities and become economically active, reducing the pressure on public finances.

It has also given the University a greater civic presence and increased its standing in the local area as a key part of the community, reaching out to local government and other agencies.

Fees and support costs are funded solely from Stonepillow individual giving, with an initial set up grant coming from the UPP Foundation.

RESEARCH

A longitudinal qualitative study has been conducted to measure the consequences of the project for those who have experienced homelessness. . This research has stimulated interest around the country, with other educational institutions expressing a desire to initiate their own schemes. Our activity contributes to the limited academic research related to homelessness and widening participation. To date most research has focussed on the experiences of students who have been made homeless, rather than on how those already affected by homelessness can be supported into higher education. In addition, the underpinning principle of our research has been 'giving voice to the voiceless'. We have taken a co-productive approach to sharing and disseminating the findings from the research, including joint presentations with academics and students at research conferences.

MEDIA COVERAGE

WONKHE article: [‘Homeless people need more than housing – and universities can help’](#)

UPP’s “Belonging to the future,” article: <https://upp-foundation.org/belonging-to-the-future/>

Award winning “Be You,” Podcast: <https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/university-of-chichester/episodes/S3---Being-given-a-second-chance-Ep-26-elg503r>

BBC Morning Live Broadcast: [From Adversity to University | University of Chichester](#)

<https://stonepillow.org.uk/stonepillow-clients-are-off-to-university/>

<https://www.chi.ac.uk/news/chichesters-pioneering-project-helps-homeless-people-university-madeatuni>

<https://www.justgiving.com/campaign/StonepillowUniCampaign>

BBC ‘One Show’ Report:



PUBLISHED ARTICLES

Lyndon, S. and Edwards, B. (2021) Beyond listening – the value of co-research in the co-construction of narratives. *Qualitative Research* March 2021. doi:[10.1177/1468794121999600](https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794121999600).

Edwards, B. and Lyndon, S. (2021) From adversity to university – the transformational power of a bespoke bridging module to support those affected by homelessness into higher education. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning Journal*. 23(1):102-122

Lyndon, S. and Edwards, B. (2023) How does learning space shape students’ experience of a bespoke higher education bridging module for those affected by homelessness? (submitted to the *Journal of Further and Higher Education* – waiting to be reviewed).

LINK TO TOOLKIT: <https://www.chi.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/from-adversity-to-university>