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IntoUniversity 

250,000
FUTURES

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From Support to Success: Stories from the IntoUniversity Community

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Why Reading for Pleasure Matters

How IntoUniversity's Readathon sparked joy in reading at a time of national decline, helping children build the literacy skills vital for confidence, wellbeing, and lifelong success.



Every Student Has a Story

At IntoUniversity, we believe every student's story is powerful and worth telling. Behind every academic milestone, every university place won, and every breakthrough is a young person who has worked hard, faced challenges, and grown with the support of those around them.

Each student who walks through our doors brings a unique perspective, dream, and voice. Some arrive unsure about their next steps; others are focused but need extra encouragement to get there. What they all share is potential and the power of their story to inspire others.

With nearly 250,000 young people supported since we began, the scale of impact is vast, but it's the individual journeys that remind us why our work matters. The stories in this edition offer a window into what that support looks like in action: a conversation with a mentor, a SMART goal set and achieved, a subject choice that opens a new path.

Every student has a story, and every story is a step toward a brighter future.

From Support to Success: Stories from the IntoUniversity Community

These interviews highlight the journeys of just three of the nearly 250,000 students who have been supported by **IntoUniversity**, from early academic support to university and beyond. Their stories show how mentoring, guidance, and encouragement can build confidence, shape futures, and inspire the next generation to give back.

Levi, IntoUniversity Clacton-on-Sea

Levi began his journey with IntoUniversity Clacton-on-Sea during Secondary school through our FOCUS programme. Now 23, he reflects on how that early support has shaped his path from student to mentor.

"[When] I went to Clacton Coastal Academy, there'd be classroom sessions. We would get pulled out of different classes to go do an **IntoUniversity** workshop," Levi recalls.

"I think mainly it was early on explaining the opportunities for university because it was kind of like everybody says, oh yeah, you could go to university, but then you're sort of like, what does that mean? What is a university like? [...] So [it was] very eye opening."

Though Levi always intended to go to university, **IntoUniversity** helped make those plans feel more tangible. "I wasn't sure what I wanted to do, but it was very helpful. I was directed towards a website called 'Whatuni' [which] would help you find options and all of that. I remember going to different open days as well."

Support from **IntoUniversity** also complemented the personal growth Levi was already working on.

"I'd already been working on [improving my confidence] outside of **IntoUniversity**," he says.

"It was a big thing that I struggled with, and I would say [**IntoUniversity**] definitely provid[ed] experiences [to improve it] which helped reinforce what I was already building on."

That early support has come full circle. Levi now mentors students through **IntoUniversity**, sharing the lessons he's learned. "I think now that I mentor for **IntoUniversity**, [I'm able to] reinvest stuff that I've learned. [...] I'd say I'm constantly still learning stuff." Mentoring has not only been meaningful but has also influenced Levi's career goals. "Obviously all the staff are super dedicated and getting to work with students is good. [It has] impacted what I want to do in the future."

Levi with his mentee from **IntoUniversity Clacton-on-Sea**.



In July 2023, Levi graduated with a degree in Criminology and Criminal Law from the University of Essex. "I've got my degree now, so I plan to go into a policing career. [...] **IntoUniversity SMART** target setting really helped with [my goals]."

"I plan to stay in Essex. One of the biggest things [for me] is keeping things local. Like if you're a police officer, it's easier to connect with people from the area that you live in."

Since studying at university, he's mentored several students at our Clacton-on-Sea centre. "There was a [mentee] who was very introverted and didn't like talking to others and so I gave him some conversational tips. [...] It's so rare to see, but you see [when students] have made the connection in their head and it's like a snap."

Reflecting on a recent celebration event, Levi says, "It's amazing to see not only all these students that are supported, but also all the parents and carers and guardians that get behind it." **"IntoUniversity** doesn't only provide academic support, they also provide guidance. [...] It feels good to be a part of that. I feel like I'm making a little bit of a difference."



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Hashem, IntoUniversity Oxford South East

Hashem began attending Academic Support at IntoUniversity Oxford South East when he was 13. Now 19 and studying Chemical Engineering at the University of Bath, he reflects on how IntoUniversity helped shape his journey.

"I remember having a friend at the time when I went to a school that IntoUniversity worked closely with and that he was going to IntoUniversity," Hashem recalls. "I found it really did help throughout Year 8. The staff team really helped with the other stuff outside academics, like public speaking and that's something that I think I really improved."

Mentoring played a key role in helping Hashem think about the future. "I had one mentor when I was in Year 10. He was called Chris, who went to [the University of] Oxford. [...] He was just really going through how [Further Maths] is not as bad as people say it is. In the end, I didn't pick it. But that was just helpful to sort of gauge what sixth form life would be like."

"I also did Corporate Mentoring during Year 12 and I think that really helped to narrow down the choices of picking unis. [...] I think I wanted to apply to [the University of] Oxford at the time, but then my mentor

really helped me. [...] Bath was one that stuck out.

It was a top university for my course and also it's not too far from Oxford."

Hashem credits IntoUniversity with helping him look beyond sport to the academic opportunities available.

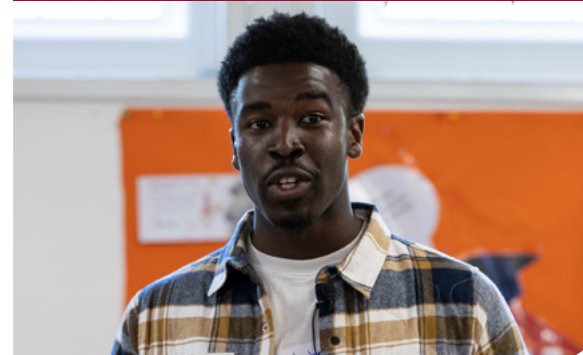
"At the time I just came for the sake of coming. I didn't really think about university life; I just wanted to focus on football. But then, [you are] learning about subjects to choose that would help you get into courses that you want to do."

"It helped with knowing what to pick for A-levels such as Maths and Physics for Engineering and personal development to just be confident in asking questions." Now entering his third year of university, Hashem is looking ahead. "I have a placement year in my fourth year, so I hope to successfully get one and to just learn a lot from that, to be able to gain an insight into what the working world is like."

Volunteering at the Oxford South East centre has been a meaningful way to give back.

"I found that it was really fun just working with young people who are in the place

Hashem speaking at the 10 year anniversary of our Oxford South East centre.



I used to be. [...] To just be able to pass on that wisdom was really rewarding."

He's also mentoring a younger student in Physics and Chemistry. "Right now we've been working on a Snakes and Ladders board game to help him revise. [...] He's so business-minded. He's been trying to see how this could be marketed."

Reflecting on his experience, Hashem says, "I feel really privileged to be a [one] of the people" or "part of the [group of] people that were helped and to also continue helping IntoUniversity."

Leena, IntoUniversity North Kensington

Leena first walked through the doors of IntoUniversity North Kensington at the age of eight. She was a quiet and shy child, unsure of what lay ahead. Today, at 16, she's not only a confident student at the prestigious Canford School in Dorset, but also a recipient of the Rank Foundation School Leadership Award - a testament to her remarkable journey.

Leena and her mother, Wahida, first discovered IntoUniversity through local parents. "We only lived five minutes away," recalls Wahida. "I'd heard about it as part of the Clement James Centre, offering support for both adults and children. I wanted something more for my kids and I found it."

Leena's early experiences at IntoUniversity were filled with support, learning, and fun. "Even when I didn't have homework, they'd find things to teach me, give me tasks, or play educational games," she says. From holiday programmes to student council, and particularly the mentoring scheme, Leena seized every opportunity. Her mentor, a UCL Psychology student, helped set goals in academics, confidence and future aspirations, which eventually led her to discover a passion for architecture.

Wahida witnessed a transformation: "Leena was extremely shy. But she became more open, confident, and empowered. I really believe IntoUniversity discovered her potential."

That potential was soon recognised through a nomination for a Royal National Children's SpringBoard Foundation bursary. Though the process initially paused when she was younger, by Year 9, Leena was ready and secured a place at Canford School. The journey wasn't always smooth, but the IntoUniversity team supported her throughout, finding a school that aligned with her academic and personal interests.

At Canford, Leena has thrived beyond the classroom. She's taken up hockey, rowing, drama, and even cross-country skiing in Norway through the Combined Cadet Force. "It's a really well-rounded school," she says. "I've been encouraged to try new things constantly."

Most recently, Leena was awarded the Rank Foundation School Leadership Award, recognising her leadership and contribution to school life. "I had to show how I've led initiatives, like captaining the hockey team and co-directing a play," she explains.

"It's exciting. I'll now be part of a leadership network and get support for university."

For Wahida, the award was a proud moment: "I was over the moon when I found out. [The school has] put forward candidates before, but Leena is the first to win. That's very special."

Reflecting on her journey, Leena says: "My eight-year-old self would be shocked. But I hope she'd see me as a role model. I'd tell her, and other students, take every opportunity and never stop working hard."

Leena with her mum, Wahida.



"Leena was extremely shy. But she became more open, confident, and empowered. I really believe IntoUniversity discovered her potential."

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Rosie Dunford Wood,
former Education
Worker and current
Fundraising Officer

As we reflect on working with our 250,000th student in 2025, we're reminded that every

young person we support has a unique story. Visiting even a few after-school Academic Support sessions reveals just how **Into**University staff build relationships with students, tailoring support to match individual needs and personalities.

While every student's story is different, one thing remains constant: the power of reading. At all of our centres, we promote a love of reading because it improves literacy skills and boosts well-being, empowering students to shape their own stories.

Recently, we ran a network-wide Readathon for our Primary Academic Support students. Hundreds of children took part, reading books and writing reviews. Year 6 student Maya from **Into**University Hull East, won first place for her insightful review of 'Stella by Starlight' by Sharon M. Draper. Centre Leader Jade Hinchliffe reflected, "this event highlighted to students the wealth of books we have in the library and since then, the students have been very engaged with our library and reading corner."

We also witness the impact of reading in everyday moments. One mentor from Leeds South shared that her favourite moment from volunteering was, "when I introduced [my mentee] to the 'Mr Gum' books.

Initially, she said that she wasn't interested in reading. After a few chapters, she absolutely loved it, and now says that she really likes reading because of that book."

Sadly, reading for pleasure is in sharp decline. According to the National Literacy Trust, just 1 in 3 children and young people aged 8 to 18 now enjoy reading in their free time, a 36% drop since 2005. Yet research consistently shows that children who enjoy reading are more likely to have better mental wellbeing and achieve stronger outcomes at school.

When children fall behind in literacy early in life, the effects can be long-lasting. Literacy, the ability to read, write and communicate effectively, underpins a child's confidence, self-esteem, and ability to succeed at school. As adults, poor literacy can make everyday life hard to navigate, from booking a medical appointment to supporting their own children in completing their homework.

In 2023, over 185,000 children started school without the literacy, communication, and language skills they needed to thrive – a stark reminder of the importance of early intervention – with a quarter of students leaving Primary school not meeting the expected standard for reading (National Literacy Trust, 2024; GOV.UK 2025).

Children living in poverty face additional barriers to literacy development due to a lack of resources and information at home, with parents under increasing pressure from the cost-of-living crisis and cuts to early years services. 1 in 8 children on free school meals don't own a single book, compared to 1 in 13 of their

peers (National Literacy Trust, 2024). By GCSEs, they're 18.8 months behind in their attainment at school (EPI, 2023). These gaps matter, book ownership and early literacy are linked to long-term academic, economic, and social outcomes, making literacy a pressing issue of social justice.

Reflecting on the 250,000 unique stories we support, reading remains a vital part of every young person's journey. Reading for pleasure should be a right, not a privilege. The recent announcement by Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson declaring 2026 as the National Year of Reading marks a significant step forward.

Planned strategies include increased investment in literacy teaching, the expansion of English Hubs nationwide, and the targeted distribution of books to communities facing the highest levels of deprivation. Described by the National Literacy Trust as 'a multi-sector response,' this initiative aligns closely with **Into**University ongoing commitment to fostering a culture of reading for pleasure.

Everyone deserves the chance to discover stories that inspire them and to develop the literacy skills that give them a fair chance at life.



Maya, winner of best Readathon book review, and her mum at IntoUniversity Hull East



We would love to hear your feedback about *aspire*.

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