

#MonthlyMotivation: Sarah Illsley (class of 2012)



Alumna Sarah Illsley has been pursuing her love of Psychology for seven years. Currently working as an Assistant Psychologist in the Memory Clinic Division of the South Oxfordshire Older Adult Community Mental Health Team, Sarah is hoping to become a Clinical Psychologist within the next five years.

What did you do after Putney?

I went to study Psychology at the University of Sheffield. After that, I went on to gain a Masters (MSc) in Mental Health Studies from King's College London. Whilst studying I had placements working on a Mental Health Triage Ward at the Maudsley Hospital and on an Acute Psychosis Ward at Lewisham Hospital. My experience in this particular field later led to a part time job on an Older Adult inpatient ward at the Maudsley Hospital and my current role as an Assistant Psychologist.

Have you always known you wanted to be a Psychologist?

While I was in Sixth Form, I decided I wanted to study Psychology at University. My teachers at the time suggested that I look for relevant volunteering opportunities, so I volunteered at the Royal Hospital of Neurodisability in Putney every Saturday. My volunteering further cemented my desire to pursue the subject.

How important was your volunteer work?

Very! It makes you stand out and demonstrates your experience in the field, volunteering is necessary; I still put my experiences from Sixth Form on my applications even now! It also helped me to secure other volunteer positions while at University. I assisted on a project with local autistic children, as well as at mental health hospitals and on community projects in Sri Lanka and Romania.

What is it like applying for Psychology jobs?

The competition is extremely high when applying for your first Assistant Psychologist job and to the doctorate programme. Jobs advertised for Assistant Psychologists are often closed within 12 hours of opening due to the high volume of applications, [so, having the] ability to demonstrate a long standing commitment to the field has really helped me with my progression.

What other tips do you have for anyone applying for Psychology?

Being able to demonstrate that you have other outlets and interests that help you deal with the pressures of working in this field is an asset. At Putney I was in the rowing team and dance society; I have carried on being in dance groups since leaving, and this is something that interviewers have always enquired more about and have responded positively to.