



The impact of Sheffield CU Alumni Case Studies

Shannon's story

From Breakfast Club to the Courtroom

How early enrichment learning helped shape a career

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Children's University (CU) offers children opportunities to explore new interests, build confidence, and develop lifelong skills beyond the classroom. For many, these experiences leave a lasting imprint - shaping how they approach learning, collaboration, and even their future careers.

Shannon's story is a striking example of how small moments of discovery in childhood can evolve into lasting skills and strengths in adult life.

When she looks back on her time as a Sheffield CU member, Shannon doesn't immediately think about certificates or hours logged. What stands out most vividly is the graduation ceremony experience - the excitement of getting dressed up in a cap, gown and stole, standing on stage, and feeling, for the first time, the pride that comes with recognising achievement.

"I remember it being at the Town Hall," she says. "I think I was obsessed with High School Musical at the time, so getting to try on the gowns felt very special. Years later, when I graduated from university, my Nannan said, 'It's just like when you did it when you were ten!' She was right - it felt like things had come full circle." That sense of continuity runs throughout Shannon's story.

"I used to be really shy, but acting helped me overcome that. Now, confidence is one of the biggest parts of my job. CU gave me that foundation without me even realising it."

Building skills by stealth

Looking back through her CU record as an adult, Shannon is surprised by just how many activities she'd taken part in; the Herd Art Project, Let's Get Cooking Club, Sewing Club, Breakfast Club, Choir, Tennis, and even starring as the Queen of Hearts in a school production of Alice in Wonderland.

"At the time, they were just fun things to do," she reflects. "But now I can see how much I learned from them - teamwork, creativity, confidence - it all started there."

Breakfast Club, in particular, holds a special place in Shannon's memory. "My parents worked, so I had to go, but it wasn't just childcare. We did activities, we talked, we learned things. Looking back, that's where I learned a lot of social skills such as how to mix with different people and start the day feeling ready to learn."

Early interests, lasting impact

Some of Shannon's childhood activities have even resurfaced in adulthood. "I noticed 'Tennis Club' on my record and laughed because I've just started playing again with my boyfriend," she says. "You don't realise how these things stay with you."

Although she didn't pursue art, Shannon can see how creative experiences shaped her confidence. "I was the Queen of Hearts in our school play, and that's when I really started to come out of my shell. Acting gave me the confidence for public speaking later on." That early confidence carried through to secondary school and beyond. After completing A-levels in English Literature, History, and Law, Shannon earned a Law degree from the University of Sheffield.



Today, she works as a Paralegal at MJ Gleeson PLC (Gleeson Homes), after gaining early experience in the legal field at Irwin Mitchell. However, Shannon's first working role was in a higher education outreach team. "I've done a lot of presenting in my working life," she explains. "That probably started with standing on a stage at ten years old. Acting taught me not to be afraid to speak in front of people and now that's something I use every day."

Lifelong learning

Shannon also sees a clear link between CU and her attitude to learning. "The Booster Classes and Easter Schools show that I was already committed to learning," she says. "That carried through to university and into my work now." In fact, Shannon continues to study today, and for the last 18 months, she has been completing her Masters qualification of the LPC LLM Professional Legal Practice (essentially Law Masters to become a solicitor). She studies part-time whilst working full-time and is looking forward to completing her qualification in summer 2026. A third graduation!

Even the practical CU clubs have had lasting benefits though. "The Let's Get Cooking sessions definitely paid off, and Sewing Club comes in handy for fixing my dog's toys when he destroys them!"

The power of belonging

For Shannon, CU wasn't just about activities - it was about friendships and community. **"Breakfast Club meant we got to see friends before school. The plays and events brought us together. Standing side by side on the graduation stage, that sense of belonging really stuck with me."**

Advice for today's CU members

If she could speak directly to CU members, Shannon's advice would be simple: "Try everything. You never know what's going to stick." She smiles. "I did Tennis Club in 2011 and picked it up again in 2025. You just never know what will come back around."

More than anything, Shannon says CU gave her confidence and curiosity - qualities that continue to shape her success. "I used to be really shy, but acting helped me overcome that. Now, confidence is one of the biggest parts of my job. CU gave me that foundation without me even realising it."

Looking back, she's struck by how many experiences she gained through CU. "When I went through my CU record, I didn't realise how much I'd done. It makes you appreciate how all those small experiences add up."

She pauses, then adds: "If I could go back to Year Five, I'd do it all over again - and probably even more. It's such a good opportunity to just give things a go."