

## Angela's Story



**Angela recalls visiting Maynooth University in school and the feeling of security and comfort she felt when she was on campus. Navigating life as a wheelchair user, Angela has additional considerations as a student. Here, she shares how she has navigated campus and academic life at Maynooth University, supported from the beginning by the Maynooth Access Programme (MAP). Angela is determined to be the teacher she always wished she had in school, helping children of all abilities pursue their dreams.**

*“My motivation to become a teacher is to show younger kids that no matter what disability you have or no matter what obstacles you face, you can get to wherever you want.”*

In 5th year, my parents signed me up for a Summer School programme at Maynooth. I had been to similar programmes in other universities, but in Maynooth, everywhere I went was so accessible and accommodating to my needs. Everything was so different. Everyone was so nice. Everybody was so calm. I ended up putting Maynooth top of my CAO and I was delighted when I got offered a place to study Sociology and Irish!

I remember being invited onto campus by the Maynooth Access Programme before the semester started, not having a clue what the programme was at this point. Ger, the Student Advisory Manager with MAP, came out and I remember looking at him like, wow there's somebody like me, with cerebral palsy. Seeing someone in a higher position than me with cerebral palsy, I recall thinking 'OK, this is going to be interesting'.

He wanted everything to go smoothly for me from the beginning, and from the very start he made arrangements so I could experience university in my own right, with independence. Most importantly, MAP provided me the space to advocate for myself and my own needs from day one.

I remember the first day on campus I saw another student in a power chair and I was surprised. When I went around campus, nobody batted an eyelid at me, it was a different experience from school where nobody had any sort of physical disability and I sometimes felt outside the loop.

Starting on a big campus is daunting, but from the start I felt like I was surrounded by supportive people. Most importantly, people who understood my needs, who I didn't have to explain myself to. They just understood it straight away and it gave me more confidence.

I learnt – and experienced – that no matter what I was going through, I never really felt on my own knowing that there was a team of people from MAP there to support me. Even the MAP alumni were always just a text message away, always there to answer any questions.

Returning to Maynooth was an easy decision for me. When I finished my undergrad, I decided to take a year out and return to study to become a primary school teacher. I suppose I just want to be the teacher that the younger me needed. The place I'm coming from is a kid who didn't have much confidence, who always thought she was kind of stupid in school. I want to be the teacher that the 8-year-old me wanted. That's why I do it.

Reflecting on my time at Maynooth, I can see the impact MAP had on my confidence. When I got into MAP my confidence started to improve, and having that support network to lean on if something went wrong in college was amazing. Being supported by MAP means having caring people I could go to if I had a problem, and if they don't have the answer, they will figure it out!

My advice to anyone entering Maynooth via the MAP route is just to relax. You don't know what's about to happen, you might be a bit nervous, but it's going to be the best chapter of your life and that's what Maynooth University is for me.