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Point Made, the real stories podcast from Centrepoint.

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Welcome to Point Made, the podcast from Centrepoint, dedicated to sharing real stories from the young people we have supported. I'm your host, Tamsin, and I'm the Senior Stories Officer here at Centrepoint. In this episode, I'll be talking to Cassie, who is a resident in one of our Yorkshire services before starting her degree back in 2020. Welcome to the podcast, Cassie. Would you like to introduce yourself? So...

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Yep, my name is Cassie. I'm 22 years old. I live in Barnsley and I've recently just qualified to be a teacher and I specialise in fine art and photography. I live in a flat with my dogs. Yeah, that's a bit about me. Cassie, tell me about, you know, back then when you needed support from Centrepoint, what was kind of happening for you? Do you want to describe that journey?

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So I came to Centrepoint when I was 17 due to a family breakdown. I requested from Balancy Council I believe for sheltering and due to my age I was put under Centrepoint quite quickly. I was given my own flat where I would pay board.

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They supported me with my mental health issues, they supported me with food parcels, they provided everything that I needed in order to get me afloat at that time and afterwards I was still on floating support which was very helpful and I was still receiving therapy through Centrepoint. Do you want to kind of explain a little bit about what you were...

01:56

you were going through during that time, how are you feeling when you were there and how did I guess Centrepoint help you make that transition? So when I was at Centrepoint I would say it was probably the worst time of my life for my mental health. I was definitely struggling a lot with depression, with anxiety, I was borderlining psychosis at some points due to what I was doing.

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I was going out and I was partying a lot, I was drinking a lot and that didn't help. I was definitely in a toxic work environment as well, surrounded by alcohol. Yeah, I really struggled and I didn't quite have an outlet at home and when I came to Centrepoint I was pretty honest with the fact that I struggle. I struggled to get out of bed in the morning, I struggled to clean the flat. I weren't in a good place.

02:56

But I received help from Monica, one of the therapists there, and she was wonderful. She helped me talk through a lot of the issues that I had, a lot of childhood stuff that I'd gone through. I was able to regulate my emotions better. I was able to set myself into routine better. And it definitely didn't happen overnight. I did a lot of the work myself after leaving.

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therapy and having to build my own routines and build better relationships and get into a better working environment and really just improve my life. I think my dogs helped as well definitely because during lockdown I was I was at Centrepoint during lockdown which was quite hard because I was already secluded from my family, my friends and then

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I was just in a small flat with sort of nothing to do, I guess. So I really just reached into my sketchbooks and did all the artwork that I could and experimented with my hair, experimented with makeup. Yeah, I really did just try and use that time to sort of focus on my creative side and I went and I finished.

04:22

Once I left Centrepoint, I went into university and sort of my life just sort of trajectory upwards from there. But it definitely had to get a lot worse before it got a lot better. I'd only say in the past year, I've really been able to feel the positive effects from it all. Yeah. It happens quite a lot. It's like, you know, I guess when you're in a place for a short time, some of those changes take time to kind of embed within yourself, especially with therapy and stuff, it's not instant, it takes quite a long time.

04:52

I know you just talked about COVID and stuff. And I remember back then, it was quite close to when I'd started at Centrepoint. I started in early 2019. And I think I remember you doing some projects. I think you met Prince William on a Zoom call and you've done a piece of art. I did. Do you want to tell me about that? Yes. So there was an art competition during lockdown at Centrepoint run. And...

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it was to recreate a famous art piece and I recreated one of Picasso's paintings. I can't remember what it's called off the top of my head. I'm not even sure if I still have that painting now. But yeah, I recreated one of Picasso's paintings and then I sent it off and I won this competition essentially and it meant I was nominated to meet Prince William.

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on a Zoom call and I recall talking about wanting to go on holiday, wanting to go to festivals. Yeah, you seemed really nice, you did. It must have been quite surreal. It was very surreal, it was very surreal because how do you just casually say to someone like, oh yeah, I spoke to Prince William the other day, you know. Told him how much I wanted to go to a...

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wanted to go camping in a festival, to learn about my music and that, yeah. Oh, you seemed pretty sound, you seemed like a really sweet guy. Yeah, it was very surreal, very surreal. I'm gonna move on to kind of talking about the specific support, you kind of touched upon it. What did you find particularly useful and why, and was there anything that stuck with you during that time from the Starport Centre point? I'd say I didn't find this out until later on.

06:47

whilst I was at uni, that I have dyslexia. And I always struggled with forms and reading letters and things like that and formatting what I need to write and where. I'd be reading the same thing over and over again, like what does this mean? What do these words mean? And definitely having someone there that I trusted to go through sort of documents, go through application forms. Chantel.

07:17

I believe it was. Chantelle really did help with a lot of that, going through stuff for me and I felt like I could go to her for anything. Like sometimes I just needed a chat. That's all you know, Oscar hour days going and definitely having that good support network there really helped and I think she was still my support worker afterwards as well for a little bit. Yeah, I definitely, I went through two different types of therapy when I was there.

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I went through like a positive relationships therapy and then I also had Monica, which was like a 12 month therapy. They both weren't allowed to run at the same time because they both did different things. And Monica's was more to go through everything. Like I would sit and I'd tell her everything that was basically going on in my head, in my mind, and she would help me process.

08:14

what was going on in my life. And Hayley's work was more to do with building on the relationships that I have and how the things that have happened to me in my past can impact the relationships I have in my future or how to mend relationships. And the things that I've gone through and build healthy relationships with food, help build healthy relationships in the workplace. Yeah, just so I didn't have

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sort of mishaps again or to sort of see the warning signs in people. So that was quite helpful. Whilst I was in quite a dark place as well, I went completely radio silent and I think you tried to contact me, Lee tried to contact me, like I didn't go to uni, I just locked myself in my flat and I just didn't leave for a while and Hayley came and knocked my door and checked in.

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Yeah, she was just like, I just want to see if you're alright, see if you're okay. I was like, yeah, I'm okay. I do be sad, but I'm okay. Um, yeah. And I thought it was really sweet. I have to, I had to mature. I had to grow up a bit, get out of the teenage mentality of like, no mom, I'm not talking to you. Yeah. Cause I just, I locked myself away from the world for a while. And I went through different stages of that where.

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I just completely shut everything out, shut everyone out and did my own thing and then afterwards I'd be able to come out of it. And I would say the work with Hayley and Monica definitely did help me now that I'm okay because I think back to a lot of the things that they've said to me in my day to day life and I can definitely tell that it has heavily impacted me.

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Yeah, locking things away. It doesn't always, it's not always a bad thing. I had to do that for university in my final year where I had to, I did a lot of things at the same time. I quit my job, I quit my antidepressants, I got the implant removed, I deleted like 40 people off Facebook, I handed in my noticing, I told all my friends I'm not coming out, I refused to go out. I told my partner like, I'm not seeing you.

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for like at least a month and all I did was get into my sketchbooks and do my work. That's all I did. Wake up, pick up a pen, do my work. On a roll, went through a lot of Red Bull but it was worth it and I realise now that sometimes, sometimes it can be negative, sometimes it can be positive. I think it's communicating what you're doing and I think I had to learn that I had to communicate that with people. I had to tell them right, I'm doing this thing and I can't have people around.

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right now so I can do this thing. And I think when I was definitely struggling with mental health more, I would just lock myself in, not talk to anyone, and not tell them, and that would make them worry. And now I can communicate it because I'm okay. And I had to explain to people, I'm okay. If you see that, I don't respond to you. I've deleted social media temporarily.

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know if you don't see me posting anywhere that's why that's why I've privated all my accounts yeah I just had to take take a step back from it all and I think it definitely did help because I realized after that one month in uni where I cut everyone off for like a short period of time the people that actually stayed around and checked in being like how's your project going like those are my real friends yeah that's really interesting so you're kind of like it kind of

12:00

highlighted who was really important and who was healthy in your life, I suppose, during that time. Was there a point when you thought, right, I'm ready, what was the kind of like moment that you thought, okay, I'm ready to kind of re-engage with the world now? Definitely deadline day. The minute I pressed send and I looked at everything around me, there must have been about 50 cans of Red Bull.

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Like, all my artwork was on the floor, like, cut pieces of paper. It was insane what I did to my flat. But once that button was pressed and all my artwork was out of here, everything was in the studio, like, everything was set up and ready, I was like, okay, I can do this now. I can reintegrate, I can spend time with people because I put the work in, you know?

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I suppose what you're describing is learning discipline. You know, you had to get into a routine with yourself. You had to kind of focus on one thing in order to get through it. And you couldn't have that distractions and you needed to get up each day. You needed to kind of do the same thing. How how has routine in general kind of helped you with your mental health? So I'm forcing myself, essentially, to wake up at a good time, go to bed at a good time.

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Eating three meals a day because I had to, otherwise my brain would just stop working. I had to build a better relationship with food for definite, like eat good food that my brain's going to be like, okay, I can make more now. Giving myself regular breaks so I wasn't completely like overstressed out and ripping my hair out because I think it was a bit more than a month, it was probably about six weeks. It was extended periods of time.

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Because I spent the first part of the year, of the academic year, I wasn't going in much because my work was giving me a bunch of hours and I communicated to them, I can't do all these hours. Like it's the last year of my degree and they said, well, tough, we need staff. And I was like, well, okay, I can't do that. Like there was a week period for Halloween where they wanted me to come in.

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like five days straight like the entire week and I told them I can only do weekends I'm at university and it meant that I missed this trip to London and I missed the deadline as well and yeah I failed a semester of it which impacted my grade so I was not very happy with them and I think they were quite shocked when I put my notice in because I'd worked there for four years and that's a huge commitment and they were like no we can do this we can give you a month off so you can

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You've pushed me too far. I'm out. It takes a lot of courage because I think you were working there. I think, was it at the pub that you were working at? Yeah. So you were working there when we spoke. So you'd kind of given them four years and they didn't really have that understanding about kind of what you needed at that time. I find that quite surprising. But props to you for kind of having the courage to say, actually, I need to focus on this. Which is hard when you've got kind of financial issues and you're kind of maybe struggling with money. But yeah, that must have been quite tough.

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It was, it definitely was. I very much undenied about it for a while and I had to just be like, right, this place is, I've just got into a sort of a better place and I'm trying to get, like I've gone through so much and when I go there I'm stressed. Like it got to a point where I could be walking up and I'd be like tearing up, entering the building because I knew.

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that it was going to be a stressful day, there's going to be people that would shout at me for god knows what. Like it was like clockwork, a lot of heavy lifting. But there was parts of it that were quite fun, there were parts of it that were quite positive and leaving that, leaving all the friends that I had and the social environment, like I knew everyone in Barnsley. You know, it was quite a very, very busy pub, very, very busy.

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everyone goes to this pub when they go out on a Friday, Saturday night. So going from that to sort of nothing and not speaking to as many people. It was hard, but it was worth it. It was worth it for the sake of my art. It was definitely worth it. Yeah. Now look at you, you know, you're you're you know, you're going to be an art teacher. So exciting. You know, you must be so proud of yourself. Yeah, it's just show, you know, it paid off that commitment.

16:47

I just want to jump back a little bit because moving into your own flat and obviously you were going through quite a hard time at that point, it's a big transition to move out into independence. So you've been having difficulties at home, moved into kind of like supported accommodation where you have got someone there to talk to and then you're managing a tenancy and things like that. How was that process for you? What were some of the difficulties? I guess what would you say to other young people moving into independence?

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I'd say it does seem scary but trust me you will love your own space. You will love it. Honestly, once you, like I started off with a mattress on the floor, I had now, you know, and I stayed on that mattress on the floor for a little while and I would much rather sleep on that mattress on the floor than anywhere else. Like.

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It was so nice to have a place to call my own, that I could put my own posters up. You know, that I could paint my own walls, that I could decorate and make it truly my own. And I wouldn't have changed it for the world. Like, I definitely needed my own space in order to grow, in order to learn. To learn who I was as well. Because you learn a lot about yourself when you live by yourself.

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you learn about your routines and it's quite, it's therapeutic in itself living by yourself. It is, it is. Because you soon realise if you put a plate down it doesn't end up in the sink like you would if you lived at home. You know if you leave a plate down it's there, it stays there and it will stay there until you move it and you need to get into a habit of moving it and cleaning and yeah.

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I guess that leads me on nicely to kind of this sense of home. Like, how would you, what does home mean to you? How would you define home? Home is where you feel at peace. And home doesn't necessarily mean that you've got a house. When I spend time with my friends, I love and adore, I'm home. When I am in a place where I feel good about myself, I'm home. When I'm with my dogs.

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and I'm taking them out on a walk and you can just see that they're really excited and tails wagging and they're just looking back asking me to take them off the lead so they can go crazy. I'm home. It's where you are at your happiest and where you are at peace and I'd say to any young people that don't have a home right now, or don't have a good place where they feel happy and at peace, it does get better. You will find that.

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I just don't think I realised when I was in a sort of mental, like a poor mental health state that I was at home with certain people. And the minute I realised that, I was able to centre my happiness around these people and around these positive things. Like when I've got my AirPods in and I'm blasting my chemical romance, I'm home. You know, I'm happy.

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There's just that couple of minutes where I'm just transported into this beautiful world of music and I'm at peace, I'm happy. I totally relate to that. Nothing better than just going for a walk on my own with my favourite music in my ears. Sun coming through the trees, but it doesn't matter, it can be a cloudy day, but if I've got the right music, it helps centre me for sure. I love that.

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I guess, is there any other advice that you'd give to a young person kind of going maybe with like where you were when you were 17? What tips and pieces of advice would you give them? I am going to let my uni teacher out and say stay in school. Yeah, I think the help from Centrepoint, I needed that. And I say that I was in a place at 17 where I needed all the support that I could get.

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and with the help from Centrepoint and academic mentors that I had, like they were telling me where to go whilst I was at college, they were telling me all these different schemes, I was worried about funding, they explained to me like about the Unite Foundation Scholarship, there's all the different scholarships that you can get from different universities, how some universities offer accommodation for free.

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stay in school, speak to your mentors, tell them what's happening, because it did help. And if you want to go to university, I'm not saying everyone should go to university, but go to university because it's worth it. It is 100% worth it. It definitely helped me get into a routine and sort of stay where I had other people to sort of talk to about things and find people that I could relate to. Yeah.

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Stay in school. I love that. And I guess what you also drew out of that is don't be afraid to ask for help. There is kind of help out there and it's kind of doing your research and finding out where that support is because it is out there, but talking, not being afraid is not a weakness to kind of say, actually, I need some help here. Or have you got any advice for me? Yeah, in terms of like mental health, I remember feeling like I could not get out of this.

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I was going to be like this for the rest of my life. And it was this constant feeling of like, is there any point of getting better? Cause I'm always going to have this issue or this thing that's happened to me. And it's going to traumatize me for the rest of my life. And every time I thought about, oh, I should get better. And everyone's around me like, it'll gets better. I'm like, no, I'm still going to be stuck with this. I'm going to be stuck with this forever. And I look back and laugh, but like.

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Oh God, I just want to give myself a hug. Like, it's okay girl, it's okay girl. You're gonna get through it. Cause I really didn't think I was. And going to university, having help from CentrePoint, becoming a teacher, that helped. I know that's not for everyone, but definitely having a space where I could see like the artwork that I did in lockdown, like with the meeting Prince William, you know.

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The artwork I did in lockdown, continue to make art when I was at my most depressed. Seeing how all that sort of paid off and now I can work in an environment where I'm teaching other kids that are also depressed and also struggle with mental health and also have bad home lives and they tell me what the stuff they're going for and I'm like, they're like, I don't get it. Like no one gets it. No one understands. And I'm like, girl.

24:00

sit down, let me show you the ropes. I know it's not going to get better, I'm like, it is! I can hear everyone that said it to me come out of me and I'm like, you just need to regulate yourself more, you need to build healthy routines, healthy habits and everything that was ever said to me I've regurgitated to my students and it's quite beautiful because it just means that

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When I see other students struggling, I can pick it up like that. When I see someone struggling, I just know. I know instantly. It's like, because I've gone through it myself, I'm able to help people because of it, which is quite nice. So for those that are struggling, yike. Reach out, speak to someone, be careful who you speak to, make sure it's a trusted, like a trusted worker.

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speak to your teachers, speak to your college mentors, speak to your uni mentors and just ring up Centrepoint. I'm pretty sure I rang up Childline and it ended up with me coming to Centrepoint. So speak to someone because it does, it really does get better, I promise you. That's really lovely to hear, thank you for sharing that and it just struck me how lucky your students are to have someone like you teaching them, you're such an inspiration.

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I think, you know, going through some of these experiences, they're so hard at the time, but they do give you such strength and power, you know, like experience and knowledge is power. And to be able to share that with other young people, it's really moving and they're very lucky. I was thinking about something, you know, when you are a teenager and you're going through stuff, and sometimes those relationships with parental figures or family members can be really strange during that time.

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your brain's doing all sorts of things. You know, you mentioned to me previously that your relationship with your family is really good now and having that, so do you want to talk a little bit about how those relationships change a little bit when you have space? So as I have matured and my frontal lobe has started to snap into place, I've realized I was not the perfect teenager that I thought I was.

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I was not this little good, this good little angel. Like, oh, I don't know why, I don't know why I'm no longer living with my family. I don't know. I very much had a victim complex. I thought the world was out to get me. My hormones were all over the place, which definitely impacted my mental health because I was all over the place. And my mom was trying to help, but.

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Her trying to help, instantly I was like, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah

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I would not want, I would have not wanted to be my mother. I really, she did, she really, really, really did her best. And I just was having none of it. I was just having absolutely none of it. And I can remember the first day that I did placement in a school, first day I rang her up and I apologized for everything. I was just like, mom, I'm so sorry. I am so.

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so sorry because I could see what I was like and how my behaviour would have impacted my mum because I saw how other students behaviour impacted me. Like you've got to keep your chill, you've got to keep your chill and these kids are effing and jeffing at you and you've just got to keep your calmness, you've got to be like okay but this is what you need to do and I'm like okay it's okay.

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I've been as someone who's, my daughter's 19 and we've been through some ups and downs but the fact is, I think as a parent you want to lean in and you want to solve it, how can I help you and the natural reaction for a teenager at that time because of what their brain's doing is like, no, get away from me and they push back, you lean in, they push back kind of thing. And I think what you're talking about getting that

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that fresh perspective, it comes later, it can't come then. You're so, you know, it's all your ego, it's all about you. You can't really put yourself in someone else's shoes, but you know, what you're describing is so beautiful because a few years later you're like, ah, right, I can sort of understand what was going on there. And that's really important. 100%, 100%. Like, I was not an angel, and accepting the fact.

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that I was not an angel and I was in fact a very bratty teenager, it definitely helped me build a relationship with my family and I go and see my mum every week, I talk to her every day and I needed that, I needed that space, I needed that time away to realise yeah I'm a nightmare. But I am my own nightmare and I've accepted that.

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Accepting yourself and loving yourself. I loved what you talked about, like giving yourself a hug. I think that's so important. In fact, you're the second young person that said that's a kind of a strategy for her. Like she gives herself hugs now and again. She's like, you know, you have to give yourself a bit of self-love. And it's like we're all complex human beings, you know, we have to kind of be a bit kind to ourselves, talk to ourselves like we would a friend. We're fallible. Thank you so much for sharing all that with me. Thank you. I am.

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Yeah, I am proud of myself. I have to think back and be like, you know what, yeah, I did do that. I did do that. And getting out of that negative mentality of like, woe is me. Everything is awful. Like, I have to sort of just like, having my artwork in places, having my sketchbooks in a place where I can see them, all of them, just to be like, yeah, I did do that.

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Because I feel like as an artist, or just for people in general, they feel like everything they do is rubbish. You know, I had very much that mentality. And there's still a part of me that is like that, that's a perfectionist, like, oh that doesn't look good enough, let me redo that, let me retry that. You know, using that to sort of fuel me rather than crush me.

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because that's again, part of me. It's a balance, right? It's just, we can be self-critical and that can be useful if it kind of pushes us to be a bit better, but if it kind of paralyzes us, then it's really not useful. So it's finding that balance, isn't it? 100%. And I definitely think working in a school very much helped because it's a very linear routine. You know, you get up at a certain time, you're there for a certain time, you leave at a certain time, you have your dinner.

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You have your lunch and everything's just ch ch ch ch ch and then weekends off like that beautiful. That just made me into like clockwork. Like loved it, still love it. I'm very grateful that I was able to get out of it because if I didn't lock myself in for that one for that slight six week period in my final year of uni.

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I find a year of art uni, to do all my artwork, I wouldn't have been able to become a teacher. I wouldn't have been able to get the grade to become a teacher. It also forced me to sort of build those good routines and know that I can do it. I can do a bulk of writing, even if I have dyslexia. And I did a lot of writing for the PGCE, a lot, and I were very stressed about it.

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hated it but I did it I hated it but I did it and I was able to learn from that stint like actually maybe I should start a bit earlier maybe I should you know maybe start maybe a month earlier right a bit by bit you know like everyone else told me to do maybe I should listen to that and I did I did do the bulk of it on the last night but that's that's a part of me that I'll always have

33:07

Oh Cassie, it's been an absolute pleasure. Thank you so much. I'm very glad that you sent me that message. Like, it just made me realise like, I've left something unfinished. You know, I've let, I set off and I wanted to help young people that went through the same stuff as I did. And when I saw that you messaged me, I was like, you know what, let me finish what I've started. Cause I want, I wanted to do stuff like this. I wanted to be an advocate.

33:35

You've been listening to Point Made, the podcast from Centrepoint. Huge thanks to our guest Cassie for sharing her experiences. And if you like what you heard, or you might know a young person who might benefit from listening, please like, subscribe and share. Thank you.