

BTEC Child, Health and Social Care Learner of the Year

Aliyah Black



Aliyah Black, winner of the 2021 Child, Health and Social Care Learner of the Year awards, can only be described as a true inspiration. With cerebral palsy and moderate to severe deafness, Aliyah also suffers with chronic pain, which at times make it difficult to cope. But her dream of becoming a SEND teacher and her passion for making a difference to children's lives and in the domains of mental health and diversity and inclusion more generally, keep her motivated. "I am determined not to let this stop me and I continue to strive to be the best I can be regardless of my condition," she says. "I am determined in my studies and always aim for Distinction grades regardless of what I go through on a daily basis with chronic pain."

Camilla James, Deputy Head of School South West College in Northern Ireland says: "Aliyah has been committed fully to her studies since the first day and has always given of her best in everything she has done. She has excellent attendance, has always submitted her assignment on time and has achieved Distinction grades

in all units. She has excelled on placement, having had exceptional praise from her placement mentors who commented on how well she developed relationships with staff and children, on her caring and gentle nature, and her passion and enthusiasm for working with children."

One placement, Panda Cross Community Playgroup said: "Aliyah was an inspiration to us all. She never let anything get her down. We were privileged to have her." And it seems it's not only on placement that Aliyah inspires. Camilla says: "Her energy ripples out amongst her peers and she works to strong values and ethics. During lockdown, she used her initiative to create a buddy group to enable classmates to support each other online. She has continually developed her skills as a reflective practitioner and brings a positive and uplifting energy to the classroom and placement settings."

"I strive to be a positive role model for the children and also my peers," Aliyah confirms.

"I am a keen advocate for promoting deaf awareness and I want everyone to see how you can do anything, regardless of your physical challenges. I set out every day with the intention of being the best I can be and to be helpful and supportive to everyone I meet. On work placement, my priority is to be supportive and caring to the children and to help them see that having a disability does not have to hold you back."

Advocacy is an area in which Aliyah goes above and beyond at her college and within the wider community. She has worked with the Student Services department at South West to develop a mental health ambassadors programme and has designed a range of resources to support peers within the college, speaking at events to raise the profile of this project. She has also worked with teaching staff to develop provision and help the organisation become more deaf-friendly. Most impressively, she also advocates at a national level, playing an active role in the National Deaf Children's Society where she has helped establish the BSL 'Right to Sign' campaign which aims to make BSL a subject within the national curriculum. She further helped the society launch their 'Deaf works everywhere' campaign aimed at showing how vocational education and placement providers can enhance their service for those with hearing

loss, presenting to educators and professionals across Northern Ireland alongside The Education Minister.

On top of all of this, Aliyah also does voluntary work outside of college with the Girls' Friendly Society and local charity Kind Minds, reflecting her interest in promoting positive mental health, especially among children and young people. And in her 'spare' time has completed Level 3 in British Sign Language and is a member of a wheelchair basketball club.

Of her course, Aliyah says: "I chose the BTEC National Diploma Level 3 in Children's Care, Learning and Development because I want to work in the educational sector and eventually specialise in SEN/D education. By choosing this course, it allows me to have practical experiences at various placements over the two years. This is the reason that the BTEC course appealed to me as I enjoy practical learning as well as classroom-based study and I love working with children."

Summed up by her Head of School: "Aliyah is an inspirational student who has engaged exceptionally well with her course, whilst being a dedicated advocate for raising mental health awareness and facilitating better education for those with hearing difficulties."