

This is the story of one participant who was referred to FOTA through CAMHS, in their own words. All names have been changed to preserve anonymity.

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In 2014 my mental health was so bad that I was out of school for much of the time due to depression. I was attending the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) where my occupational therapist suggested that it might be beneficial if I considered doing my Duke of Edinburgh's Award and referred me to FOTA's DofE delivery officer, Lizzy Treacy.

I met with Lizzy a few times. She treated me as an individual and convinced me that I could do well. We agreed that I should start my DofE programme as a direct entrant to Gold. I am keen on sport and was doing athletics at the time, so this was seen as the most obvious place to start. We agreed on my goals and I began my DofE programme. From there we discussed what I could do for my Skill. I had intended to do a blog, but had never got around to starting it. This became my skill section. With two sections progressing well we turned our attention to my Volunteering. I got involved in two conservation projects working alongside other young people. In addition, I did some volunteering with FOTA and at my school. For my Expedition I signed up for FOTA's Open Expedition programme which involved me working as a team with young people I had not met before this time. Our qualifier was a coast to coast walk across Scotland.

The support I received from FOTA made me feel worthwhile and capable of doing anything I set my mind to. They gave me the self-belief that I could be a leader. During this process I gained the confidence to re-engage with my education. I returned to school, worked hard and achieved excellent grades.

Through my work with FOTA I became interested in supporting other young people through their DofE programme. For my Residential I attended Mountain Leader Training in North Wales as I am keen to assess Gold Expeditions in the future.

I have now completed my Gold award and am about to start a University Degree at Glasgow University studying Psychology.

The belief shown in me by FOTA and the achievement of my Gold DofE have made a huge difference to my well-being. My health has improved significantly and I believe in myself and have the confidence to get on with my life. Both my parents are very proud of my achievements and both now volunteer to lead DofE expeditions with FOTA.