

Don't tell me I can't change the world

Paulina Sporek reflects on how her life has changed since starting her midwifery studies.

Recently, I had a privilege of attending the *British Journal of Midwifery* Awards, held in Manchester on 8 February. I was even more privileged to be awarded joint 2nd place in the Innovation in Midwifery Practice category, for the Ultimate Clinical Placement Buddy notebook I created (Sporek, 2015a). Being around inspiring people who strive to make a difference and improve maternity practice got me thinking and encouraged me to reflect on the past few years.

I come from a lovely community in central Poland where opportunities have been hard to come by over the years. However, I've always been a bit of a dreamer, so I set my ambitions high from early on. None of my family had ever been to university, so deciding to move to the UK and continue my education after graduating as a paramedic in Poland was going to be a learning experience for us all—and what an experience it has been to date.

When I first arrived in the UK in 2008, it wasn't easy. I had a huge language barrier and even though I had learnt English at high school, I was just too scared to talk and interact with people whose culture was so different from mine. It took me a while but, after few months, I had enrolled at college to complete my GCSEs, followed by the access course. I was working and studying at the same time, and it took 3 years before I had all necessary qualifications—and another year to grieve after losing my father to cancer—before I could apply to study midwifery. I must say, all my efforts have paid off and I'm extremely proud to be a part of the midwifery profession.

I commenced my training in 2012 at the University of Salford with high spirits and motivation. In addition to my studies, I have developed a passion for women's

reproductive rights and equality issues in society. I've always been proactive and wanted to undertake extra projects. I really wanted to utilise my past experience that I brought with me from Poland. As a result, I founded the Deaf Nest project (Box 1), an initiative which aims to support Deaf parents on their journey into parenthood. I remember going to the local Deaf Centre and sharing my idea with others. At that point, I would never have anticipated that this idea would grow into a nationally recognised project and that my 10-page proposal would turn into a 65-page report!

In June 2014, my partner and I welcomed our first baby into the world, and I interrupted my studies to go on maternity leave. This year away from midwifery was probably the most challenging time for me. Two weeks after having a baby in Manchester, I moved in with my partner in London, leaving my friends and familiar environment behind. Most of the time I felt isolated and depressed, struggling with the daily tasks of parenting. My life changed completely, and I slowly started to accommodate these changes. During my maternity leave, as a way of staying connected with midwifery, I created the Midwifery Learning Toolbox (Sporek, 2015b), a platform for innovation and inspiration for modern midwives.

In May 2015, after transferring to the Kingston and St. George's University of London, I resumed my studies. I was anxious about going to a new university, being part of a new Trust, meeting a new group of students and having new lecturers. However, I had no reason to worry—everyone was extremely supportive and welcoming. Again, I set my ambitions high and decided to use all my skills and talent as much as possible.

So what is the major lesson I have learnt from this journey so far? I suppose it is that if there are issues that concern you and that you are passionate about, you must use your voice to bring attention to them. Don't be afraid to try—and certainly don't think you can't do it. Your voice and your ideas can

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have a profound impact on maternity care provision, so let it be heard. Remember, as Steve Jobs once said, 'the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones who do.'

BJM

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For more information about the Midwifery Learning Toolbox, visit www.midwiferylearningtoolbox.com

Sporek PE (2015a) Ultimate Clinical Placement Buddy. *British Journal of Midwifery* 23(10): 758.
doi: 10.12968/bjom.2015.23.10.758
Sporek PE (2015b) Midwifery learning toolbox. *British Journal of Midwifery* 23(4): 302.
doi: 10.12968/bjom.2015.23.4.302

Box 1. Deaf Nest

Deaf Nest encourages positive experiences for mothers and families with hearing difficulties. The project provides clear guidance, visual aids and information on all stages of pregnancy in British Sign Language. For information, please visit www.deafnest.com

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