

The Career Path I Never Planned

(By Rebecca Coulson)



Fresh out of university in 2013 with a degree in Textiles for Fashion and Interiors, I had been a finalist in the New Design Britain Awards in Birmingham and landed what I thought was my dream job at a laser-cutting company. I thought my career was beginning exactly as planned.

Three months later, I was made redundant

I found a temporary job soon afterwards ... and that company went bust before I had really even started! Eventually, I became a Team Leader at my local Canal & River Trust Museum. I had some brilliant times there, but deep down, I knew I hadn't found *my thing*.

In my spare time, I was also a Brown Owl, running a Brownie group.

One of my greatest achievements still has to be taking 24 Brownies on the London Underground and not losing a single one!

Through Brownies, I became friends with some of the parents. One day, I was chatting to one of the mums about feeling stuck in my career. I didn't want to move to London to pursue interiors — I've always been far too much of a country bumpkin — but I felt I was outgrowing my job.

Then she said something that would change everything:

"You're a fantastic Brownie Leader. Why don't you do activities in a care home? It's not that different."

Honestly? I wasn't convinced.

Apart from being incredibly close to my grandparents, I had never considered working with older people. I also had some of the same misconceptions many people have about working in care — low pay, limited opportunities and the stereotype that care work was little more than "wiping bottoms".

Thankfully, I looked beyond the stigma.

I didn't know it then, but one conversation with a Brownie mum had just changed the direction of my entire career.

Finding my career

In 2014, I became an Activity Coordinator in a care home in Oxford, then progressed to Activity Leader and completed my Level 3 in Health and Social Care.

Then, in November 2018, I became a Home Trainer with a care home company. During my three years there, I completed my Level 5 in Leadership and

Management and discovered how much I loved helping other people learn and develop.

That led me to become a Learning and Development Partner with another organisation, where I gained my PTLLS qualification and spent another three years building my knowledge, confidence and experience — while making some friends for life along the way.

But then came uncertainty again

The organisation was being acquired by another one, meaning redundancy was a possibility.

I'd been here before.

Rather than wait, I decided it was time for another new beginning.

And that's when I found an organisation where I genuinely felt, for the first time in my health and social care career, like I belonged, joining their regional team as a Learning and Development Facilitator

My manager was supportive, understood my anxieties, could have a laugh and a joke, but most importantly, respected my knowledge, skills, strengths and weaknesses.

She encouraged me to be the best I could be.

She even taught me something I'd never been particularly good at: how to say no!

I supported 11 care homes, built relationships I was incredibly proud of, and thought I had finally found my place.

Outside work, life was changing too.

On 13th September 2025, I married the person who has always stood beside me, supported me and believed in me, even when I struggled to believe in myself.

My person. My biggest supporter. My co-pilot. ❤️

Neither of us could have predicted what our first year of marriage would bring. Just 18 months after joining the new company, the organisation entered consultation and in April 2026 we were told the likely outcome for our roles: redundancy.

Seriously? Again?

It was the second time in just 18 months that redundancy had affected my career. But work wasn't the only uncertainty we were facing.

The sale of my husband's house fell through — twice — and we came frighteningly close to losing our dream home.

Suddenly I was dealing with the possibility of losing a job I loved, while trying to navigate one of the biggest financial and emotional decisions of our lives.

Eventually, it took its toll

My mental health took a dive and I reached a point where I knew I needed support, so I completed an NHS Talking Therapies course.

One of the most important things I learnt was simple: asking for support when you need it is a strength, not a weakness.

Meanwhile, I still had 11 homes to support, inductions to deliver and people to train.

Most of my homes were incredibly supportive. Others perhaps didn't realise how difficult the situation was.

One comment will always stay with me: “We’re trying to get all our new starters through, before you get made redundant.”

That was the moment the penny dropped.

I’m just a number now.

It was time to dust myself off and get back on the job market.

Here we go again.

CV updated.

Application after application.

Rejection after rejection

Then finally, an interview progressed from the first stage, to the second, to the third.

I thought this might be it.

Instead, I experienced one of the most disrespectful interviews of my career. A regional director spent much of it on his phone, stayed on it while I delivered my presentation and eventually walked out to deal with something else.

Everything inside me was saying: *If this is how the interview feels, is this really somewhere I want to work?*

But another voice was saying: *You need a job* - because we were in the middle of buying our house.

I remember sitting down with my husband’s parents and my parents to talk realistically about what might happen.

Someone said, “We have to be practical. You may not have a job.”

Then my dad said something I’ll never forget: “That won’t be an issue. She’s been here before. She always ends up with a job. She’s good at what she does.”

Sometimes, someone else believes in you at exactly the moment you're struggling to believe in yourself.

So, I kept going.

Then everything changed

Fast-forward to the end of May 2026. After months of uncertainty, applications, interviews and rejection ... I had three job offers.

Three.

I'd gone from wondering whether I'd have a job at all to being in the incredibly fortunate position of choosing my next chapter.

And this time, I wasn't simply looking for *a job*.

I wanted somewhere I could feel safe, respected and valued, while continuing to do something I genuinely loved.

In June 2026, I joined another healthcare organisation as a Learning and Development Coordinator, supporting 11 services.

Today, I feel happy, content, safe and respected.

I still miss the previous organisation, the one that felt like home. It will always hold a special place in my heart. I walked away with experiences I'll never forget and the friendship of three people from my direct team who I know will be friends for life. I'll always be thankful for their encouragement and support.

But sometimes one chapter has to close before you can discover what the next one holds.

Looking back

When I look back at that textiles graduate in 2013, I wonder what she'd think if I told her where she'd end up.

My career hasn't followed a straight line.

I've gone from textiles and laser cutting, to museums and Brownies, to care home activities, training and Learning & Development.

I've experienced redundancy, escaped potential redundancy and then faced it again.

I've had rejection emails, terrible interviews, brilliant managers, difficult moments and opportunities I never saw coming.

But every chapter has given me something.

And that Brownie mum who casually suggested I might be good at running activities in a care home?

She probably had absolutely no idea that one conversation would change the direction of my life.

A year ago, I stood at the beginning of an aisle with my heart racing, about to marry my co-pilot, with

no idea what the next 12 months would bring.

Since then, we've faced redundancy, two failed house sales, almost losing our dream home and moments where everything felt overwhelming.

But now?

I'm happily married. ❤️

We got our dream home. 🏡

I have a stable job and an exciting new chapter in my career.

And I've learnt that asking for help when you need it doesn't make you weak.

Now, looking back, there's one thing I know:

If I can get through that year, I can get through anything.

So, if you're facing redundancy, rejection, uncertainty, a career change, or simply wondering whether life has gone completely off course, don't assume this chapter is the ending.

Dust yourself off.

Ask for help when you need it.

Listen to the people who believe in you.

But most importantly, learn to believe in yourself.

Your journey doesn't have to look like anybody else's.

You don't have to have everything figured out.

And you certainly don't have to follow the career path you thought you would when you were 22.

Sometimes you just have to keep going long enough to see what the next chapter holds.

Your story isn't defined by the chapters that didn't go to plan. It's defined by having the courage to keep picking up the pen — because sometimes the chapter you never planned becomes the one you were always meant to write.