Personal statement of Olga Fuseini

Olga wrote this statement in 2017 as part of her application to study Sociology at the University of Sheffield. Her application was successful, and in 2021 she graduated with a degree in Politics and Sociology. Olga now works as a Roma consultant, and as a Research Associate at the University of Sheffield.

I’m passionate about making a difference in my community. I want to improve the life of Roma in the UK, help others to understand them and see the positives. I’m sure that by studying Sociology I can achieve this. I would also like to be a positive role model to other Roma people including my own family.

To anyone who knows at least a little bit about the Roma history or their current situation, they will understand how unusual it is for Roma children to finish basic education which means that to study at university is a dream that many won't even dare to dream.

I've had the same growing up experience as many Roma kids in Czech Republic. I grew up in the ghetto, faced many barriers,

segregation and discrimination. My way of dealing with all the negativity in life was to use it as a fuel to better myself. I refused to be a victim and was determined to prove others that we "gypsies" are not the same and that we are more than their limited picture of us in their head. I found it fascinating to see how I can change people’s perspective of Roma people just by allowing them getting to know me as a person. I was the only Roma in college. But in order to change their minds I had to impress. I had to work twice as hard to earn my place, and at the same time stay true to myself and still proudly say: “I am Roma”. But sometimes I felt like I don't fit anywhere. Often my own family would call me “Gadzi” [white or non Roma] because I wasn't interested in spending my time in streets with my peers. I would prefer to read, talk politics, go to Salvation Army youth club where I can practise my English and help organise church activities, lead worships etc.

My parents meant well, they did their best but even they had very low aspirations for us kids. Just finishing the dressmaking course was more than enough. Unfortunately there were just too many barriers to get higher education in Czech, but I managed to get qualified as a dress maker after I finished secondary school. It was a 3 year course equivalent to NVQ 3.

I live and work in UK since year 2005. I worked as an au-pair for two years in Guernsey. I moved to Sheffield in 2007 where I worked in a restaurant. Later I worked in Primary school as a teaching assistant and I worked as a Youth worker in a Community Centre.

I have learned so much during this time. I learned how to work in a team, how to be more responsible and how to deal with different people's personalities. But mostly I have learned about myself and my abilities, my strengths and weaknesses. I have learned to be more organised and more open minded.

While I was doing my NVQ3 in Child Care, Learning and Development I was working in the restaurant and volunteering in CAB. I have a good knowledge of the UK benefit system especially for EU migrants.

I have also spent lots of my time helping Roma families with form filling, interpreting and to access services. I think that studying NVQ3 helped me to realise my abilities and gave me confidence to think about higher education.

Currently I work as a Community Development Worker for a charity, Clifton Learning Partnership. My role is to help the community to access services, give advocacy, help and advice, deliver important messages, work with local organisations and agencies and help other services to improve their engagement with Roma people.

In the past I have been delivering CSE (child sexual exploitation) awareness sessions to Roma parents and to Roma children in our centre and in schools. I have been co-delivering Roma awareness sessions to other professionals like nurses, social workers and detectives of human trafficking.

I am also honoured to be a Roma Champion for Rotherham under Migration Yorkshire. I did some work with Migration Yorkshire and Salford University. My role was to help undertake research with Roma communities in Rotherham. This involved me identifying and recruiting community members to a focus group, running the focus group and translating the audio recording. I have also actively participated in several local engagement meetings for the project with Roma communities and service provider. Recently I helped to disseminate the results by co-presenting the findings at the National Roma Network in June 2017.

When I got this amazing opportunity to apply to University of Sheffield, I found the Sociology course. I got so excited when I saw what it covers. I believe we can't help anyone unless we understand them first.

There is so much that I want to learn. I want to understand the mind of society and how to change it. With the right education behind me, my voice gains stronger value. I hope to get access to higher places and influence decisions about Roma people in my area, in UK or in the world. Living in England gave confidence and made me feel that only I can limit myself. I am a Roma and I am a single mum of a five year old boy. One day I want my son to see that if he works hard, he can overcome the barriers and achieve anything he sets his mind on.

It would mean so much to me, my family and my community if I got the place at the University of Sheffield.

Thank you.

Olga’s current biographical details are provided below:

My name is Olga Fuseini, I am a Roma activist, freelance consultant and a Research Associate at University of Sheffield where I graduated in Politics and Sociology. I have years of experience in community work and I have worked on various projects led by universities, government-led organisations and NGOs to improve Roma inclusion and integration in the UK.

For example:

- I worked with the University of Salford on the Supporting Roma Voices project (2016), which aimed to address the gaps in inclusion of Roma migrants in the UK when accessing health care, employment, housing, education and other services.
- I worked with the Roma Support Group, which is a non-profit organisation involving 900 families and Roma and professionals across the UK. When I can, I help them to support Roma families going through family court proceedings in my area or contribute to some of their research projects and reports.
- My involvement with Migration Yorkshire started in 2016 which was long before my studies and during my

employment as a Community Development Worker. I took part in several projects: the South Yorkshire Roma Project (focused on segregation of Roma in education); the Roma SOURCE project (involved gathering data about Roma and non-Roma participants of six EU member states to identify experiences and needs of Roma), and the Roma MATRIX project (targeted intolerance, racism and xenophobia). I was also involved in meetings of the National Roma Network.

Publications

My dissertation:

https://hipatiapress.com/hpjournals/index.php/ijrs/article/view/9141/3506

Co-author of:

https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1467-9566.13411

Source URL: *https://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/personal-statement-olga-fuseini*