

LIFE AFTER TANFIELD



NAME Sara O'Brien née Landale

PUPIL AT TANFIELD FROM 1985

TO 1990

MY LIFE AFTER LEAVING TANFIELD

It's been 32 years since I left Tanfield. Let me break down my life's path briefly since 1990.

I wasn't the most academic pupil and wasn't very good at revising so didn't do well in my GCSE's. I was too short to join the Army and having considered being a truck driver or a bricklayer (unheard of in 1990 for women to do those jobs). So, I left school and worked full time at the hair salon that I worked at on a Saturday while I was at school. That didn't last long so I ended up on a YTS placement doing admin roles for £29.50 per week through Myson Training where my mam worked as the Office Manager.

Fast forward the next 6 years and working in a variety of administrative roles, I had my wonderful son Leon in 1996 at just 22. When Leon was 8 months old, I started a new job at Northern Electric call centre but had only been there 3 weeks when my son's dad had a motorbike accident which left him with brain injury at age 24. So, at just 24 myself, I had to give up work to look after my baby and care for his dad during his rehabilitation phase until 1999.

In 2000, after a couple of house moves and a very challenging couple of years, I was a single mother, with a toddler, no car, no money, no assets, and no job. But what I did have was tenacity and determination, so I took out the telephone directory, picked up the landline and started calling local business line by line, starting at the letter 'A', to ask if they had any part-time admin vacancies. Luckily, I didn't have to get too far through the alphabet when I found a part-time vacancy at 'B' with Bradford & Bingley in Stanley. I applied, interviewed, got the job as a Sales Associate and that's really where I started my career in January 2001.

After spending 10 years in banking in which time I'd progressed and developed my career becoming a Branch Manager of various North East branches throughout those years, I took a career move into Business Development in the training and apprenticeships sector. The past 12 years in the apprenticeships, skills, and training corporate world, I've been lucky enough to work and travel all over the UK, carving myself a 2nd career in sales, business development and leadership, working in several training companies during that time. Also, during that time I got married in 2005, had my beautiful daughter Mollie in 2006 and now here we are in 2022. The past 22 years have flashed by. I've not had an easy ride either career-wise or in my personal life, but they say life isn't meant to be easy, but I've learned lots through those times and still do.

Now I'm still working hard as a Sales Director - it's funny how life plays out. I started out as an apprentice or, as they were then, a YTS, and ended up appearing in the North East Chamber of Commerce's book of Apprentice Greats in 2018, featuring as one of 200 North East Leaders who began their career as an apprentice! Starting as an apprentice and building a career working in apprenticeships, feels like I've come full circle. Bizarrely, the NECC is a career fact I've rarely mentioned since appearing in the book, but spending time writing this recap, it's a lovely fact to remember, and a nice one to share with you.

So, here I am, officially middle-aged and nearing the big 'Five-O', with amazing children myself, but I sometimes still find myself feeling like that 15-year-old girl who left Tanfield all those years ago in some ways. Wiser, older but still youthful inside. Feels just like yesterday since I was 15.

I have some good memories from my time at Tanfield, like hanging out of the Tower Block windows (*no Health & Safety*), being 'forced' to join the Cross-Country team and pretending to sprain my ankle running against Blackfyne because I hated CC, only being let into the Christian Singers because I cried as I didn't get picked because I couldn't sing (*only to be thrown out weeks later*). But I'm an example of how you can still create a good career and life without good exam grades and maybe even being a bit of gobby, school tinker..!

Although I still haven't forgiven the teachers for not letting the 'Class of 90' have their final year school disco because we were too naughty!