



**Ami,**

**in her own words**



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# Foreword

Some people's lives are tied up in labels from birth; these can give people opportunities to access support, but more often than not they limit a life.

Professionals who work in the field of disability or mental health learn from early on that their practice is equally limited by labels; labels tell them who they can and cannot work with, what services and interventions they can or cannot offer.

Ami defies these labels.

Ami's life is owned and defined by Ami.



Getting to know Ami and seeing this book develop, it is clear that Ami is very much a woman of her generation who loves fanfiction and cosplay, uses her creativity to create cross-overs between comic universes and popular TV shows, visits Comic-Con and works with a local seamstress to produce costumes. What's more, Ami, like many people, uses her creativity to support her mental wellbeing.

Reading this book, Ami's love of life and passion appears in each word and photo. Working with Ami this passion shines through as she is a powerful presence in any room, strong in her opinions and love of life.

**Jayne Leeson MBE**  
**CEO**

**“** Working with people... It's all about understanding what makes them click, what works for them. I love working with Ami because she has so much potential; she's a blank canvas. A real live wire. She's come on a lot; she's so much more confident. I want to see how far I can push her. **”**

**Chris, who has been supporting Ami to  
live independently since December 2018**



# Hi, I'm Ami...

This book tells you about my life and what's important to me.

How would I describe myself? Well, I'm my own person. I make my own choices and I love my independence. There was a time in my life when I was bullied and when I lived in some really poor residential homes, but now I have my own place and I make my own rules.

Family is very important to me. With my mom and stepdad, my dad and my three sisters, I have quite a big family and I am always very happy to be around them.

Another important part of my life is fanfiction and cosplay. I'm a really creative person, so when Changing Our Lives said they wanted to make a book of my life and do a cosplay photoshoot, I planned which characters I wanted to feature in the book and thought about how I wanted to represent them in each shot.

Welcome to my book.





## Writing fanfiction

I spend a lot of my time writing fanfiction based on movies and TV shows that I love like Peaky Blinders, but I put my own twist on it. My sister, Kimberly, first got me into anime and I haven't looked back since.

I also write fanfiction based on Suicide Squad, WWE in a crossover with Scooby Doo, and Descendants in a crossover with Once Upon a Time. One of my own characters is Odette Gold, who is the daughter of Mr Gold (Rumpelstiltskin). I also really like DC's Captain Boomerang. I always have a notebook with me and as I think of things, I add them to the notebook.

I have had some difficult experiences in my life. I was bullied in college for having a learning difficulty. I also experienced awful things because I was a girl. One person even threatened to set my hair on fire.

A few years ago, I lived in some really shitty places and the people who were paid to support me and who were meant to be keeping me safe, treated me really badly. This affected my mental health. If I hadn't had a pen in my hands, I don't know what I would have done. Fanfiction and cosplay keeps me sane. When I talk now people listen to me, but back then no one but my family listened to me! I've come a long way since those experiences. I'm my own person now. I make my own choices. I love my independence; it's really important to me.



Writing fanfiction is a really important part of my life. I have a very active imagination and fanfiction is a way for me to express what I think and feel. I use all the emotions I've gone through in my life in my writing. For instance, I sometimes write about betrayal because some people are not who they pretend to be. I also write about happy characters and this is about being understood and accepted. Some of my fanfiction looks at good and bad decisions, and the fact that every action might have a good or bad reaction. I think it's also really fun to go from a character that's all sweet and innocent to go to one that's really dark. When I'm being a dark character, in order to get into that mindset I go back to my college days. There is always deeper meaning in my fanfiction.

Although I base some of my fanfiction on existing characters from TV and anime, I also enjoy creating my own characters because I have so much more to work with. Sometimes I even create and portray characters based on people I know and love. For instance, in my Suicide Squad fanfiction story, Captain Boomerang and Cassey are like my sister Kimberley and I. The character that's most like me is Captain Boomerang, though. That's because Captain Boomerang reacts immediately and then thinks whereas Cassey thinks then reacts. As soon as my sister Kimberley saw this, she said 'that's like us!'

# Cosplay

I also really love cosplay. Drama was the only subject I loved in school, so cosplay really appeals to me. When I'm writing fanfiction, I sometimes dress as different characters and read the fanfiction out loud. I might wear pigtails for one character and speak the character's lines, and then I might wear a ponytail and speak to the other character's lines.

Sometimes, if I'm struggling with something in real life, I ask myself what Cassey would do in this situation, so I put my hair up like Cassey, and that helps me to understand what to do. Acting out a scene like this really helps me to write.

I do a lot of research on how the character looks. I come up with lots of creative ideas and my seamstress makes the outfit for me. I've got a couple of designs for costumes my seamstress is going to work on at the moment. One is a demon queen for Halloween in October and the other is for Comic-Con in November.

So that's a bit about my life. You can see some of the characters I create in the rest of the book...



# Transforming Ami

The cosplay photoshoot





# About the photoshoot

Getting to know Ami, with her abundant passion for cosplay and fanfiction, it seemed that holding a photoshoot at the Custard Factory in Digbeth, Birmingham was the perfect way to capture her creativity and personality.

Set against a backdrop of grungy industrialism and colourful graffiti, Ami's enthusiasm and detailed commentary brought each character she chose to portray to life. The details of costume, make-up and pose were all directed by Ami, so as a photographer, the experience was effortless.

We were very thankful to have been hosted on the day by Baked in Brick, an independent eatery in the Custard Factory, who offered us great hospitality and shelter from the rain!

Katie Seymour, photographer











## Princess Aurora

Inspired by the 1959 Disney film *Sleeping Beauty*, the first character that Ami chose to portray was Princess Aurora.

‘Disney was an integral part of mine and my sisters’ childhoods because my mom loved it so much! I don’t consider myself a girly girl, but growing up Aurora was my favorite Disney princess because she didn’t want to marry a prince.’





## Harry Hook

Son of Captain Hook in Disney's *Descendants 2* (2017), Harry Hook is the second character that Ami cosplayed as.

'Harry's a character that I identify with. He can be tough, but he's true to his friends.'











## Odette Gold

'Odette is one of my own characters. The way I designed her is that everyone is telling her who to be. So this is like her breaking through, saying, "no, *this* is who I am."









## Cassey

Another of Ami's original characters is Cassey, a deadly assassin and anti-hero who remains loyal to those she loves and who will help those in need.

Originally named Hope Queen, she leads a dangerous existence, escaping the clutches of her murderous paternal grandmother by being sent to live with the Joker.







**Harley Quinn**

The final character Ami portrayed was Harley Quinn from the DC comic universe, taking inspiration from the recent Suicide Squad film.

'I've never cosplayed as a DC hero; I love the villains too much. Why be a hero, when being a villain is so much fun?'











**No one is too disabled,  
or too affected by  
mental health difficulties,  
to live an ordinary life**

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