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I became a volunteer because I was eager to share my journey with the younger generation. Despite today's job market shifting towards more varied and portfolio careers, there is still enormous pressure on children to "get it right" first time. This can start as early as picking extra-curricular activities in primary school, and certainly it is felt by the time they have to choose their GCSE subjects. Hopefully, my experience of exploring as many as four very different areas of work before becoming an artist can provide a reassuring voice that it is perfectly acceptable to try out different paths, and that the answer to what is our perfect job sometimes can take years to become obvious.

There needs to be a shift in the mindset that taking risks is to be avoided: it is how we learn what we like and, above all, what we do not. Through Inspiring The Future I have both a permanent mentor role at one of my local High Schools, and I also attend as many career events as I can fit in. Every time I make sure that I reinforce the lesson that the biggest and most difficult subject children should prepare to be studying all their life is, in fact, themselves. The other big lesson is to approach every new path they take not only with hard work but above all with enthusiasm, as this is the secret to always gaining something and learning valuable transferrable skills, regardless of whether it is going to be the job of their life. For the shorter events, I often take with me a large travel bag filled with objects that represent my version of this accumulated knowledge, in the form of uniforms, tools, books and other reminders of my previous work lives. It is always such a pleasure to see their eyes light up and their smiles grow the more different objects I take out!



Being a volunteer is all about providing a caring external voice: it is the privilege of sitting neither on the parents' nor the teachers' bench. It gives children a glimpse of an outside world they are sometimes scared of peering into or, in the worst case scenarios, prevented from exploring by obstacles of a social, cultural and economic nature. For many children, it is about bringing that outside world literally into the classroom, and with it possibilities and opportunities they might not be otherwise exposed to.

When writing this piece, I was asked who had inspired me when I was very young, and I was confronted with the fact that the person who truly opened my eyes about the way I could shape my future did not appear in my life until I was 20. Through being a volunteer, I can make sure I can be a positive influence for children when they need it most, and before so many of the insecurities that we face in adulthood have had a chance to set in. Inspiring The Future for me is not just about helping shape the lives of those much younger than us, but recognising that, by doing that, we also help shape a better future for all of us, where success is not achieved by unquestioningly ticking somebody else's boxes but by allowing and even encouraging mistakes and by slowly learning to walk happily with our own feet.