

Where there's a will, there's a way

Lieze Platevoet about her studies 'Communication Management' at Artevelde University of Applied Sciences

The physical disability of Lieze Platevoet did not stop her from taking the bachelor programme in Communication Management at Artevelde University of Applied Sciences. Lieze will soon graduate. She talked to SIHO about her approach and experiences during her studies.

A big gap

Lieze shares her story before starting at Artevelde University of Applied Sciences: 'Due to oxygen deprivation at birth, certain parts of my brain are not developed. As a result, my brain gives the wrong signals to my muscles, so I am not able to stand on my own and I also have spasticity in my arms. Because of this I need help to go to the toilet, to shower and to get in and out of bed. I had a manual wheelchair until I was 12 years old, but after that I switched to an electric one. This made me feel **independent**. Since I was 13 years old, I've had an **assistance dog** that helps me with a lot of practical things like taking off

my coat and picking things up. I also attended special needs education. In primary education I actually noticed little difference between me and the other children. My classmates also didn't realize that I was different in a certain way.'

"In high school I started to feel the differences more and more and that was very confronting.

During high school, Lieze was not in a good place: 'The differences between me and my classmates became more visible. During the last year I was also bullied, and I didn't feel good in the group. The **gap** expanded. They were able to go out and learn how to drive a car, while that wasn't possible for me. I started to feel the differences more and more and that was very **confronting**.'

Transition to higher education

For Lieze, the transition to

higher education was the logical next step: 'The transition to higher education really came at the right time for me. I needed a completely new environment and a fresh start. I've always wanted to live **as normal as possible**, so going to college was the **logical next step** for me.'

Lieze determined her choice of study based on the **practical possibilities**: 'I studied Secretariat Languages' in high school, so I wanted to do something with languages anyway. The programme 'Communication Management' fitted in perfectly with this. Both my parents and my disability coach helped me with that choice. I had guidance during primary education and high school. My coach offered support in determining the support measures at school.'

Reasonable adjustments

Before Lieze started at Artevelde University of Applied

Sciences, she spoke to her Inclusion coach Cia Muylle: 'Together we discussed the necessary reasonable adjustments, such as lesson recordings, classrooms on the ground floor, laptop use and more time during exams. Courses of communication management take place on Campus Leeuwstraat, where there was no lift. Artevelde University of Applied Sciences immediately built an adapted and larger toilet for me there. An inclined plane was also provided so that I could enter the ground floor. Of course, not everything of any necessary adjustments can be predicted. But they were always available so that I can use them if necessary. So together with Artevelde University of Applied Sciences, there has been a lot of thinking about the startup and avoiding as many unexpected situations as possible.'

A period of uncertainty

Lieze lives far away from the university, so living in a dorm was necessary: 'Because I have had an assistance dog since I was 13, my parents allowed me to live in a dorm. I have an adapted studio in Ghent. That's a studio of Ghent University, which has been arranged by Artevelde University of Applied Sciences. The studio is spacious and adapted to my capabilities.

There is also an agreement with students who help me in the dorm.'

Lieze always wanted to live in a dorm, although everyone around her did not believe in it: 'I always wanted to live as normally as possible like the other students. And if it doesn't work, we will find a solution. The first months were really tough. I was also really feeling stressed out because I felt that I had to prove myself to all those people who said it wouldn't work. But eventually, I was able to let go and I realized that I should be doing it for myself and not for the others.'

"I was feeling stressed out because I felt that I had to prove myself.

Since Lieze receives nursing care twice a day, everything had to be adjusted. They had to make sure that this help does not overlap with the lesson breaks and physical therapy: 'This was one of the biggest challenges for me: estimating the time correctly and planning everything well. You need the support of many different people, so you have to see that everything is coordinated. At first there was a lot of **uncertainty**. You are confronted with things that you

have never thought about before. I also constantly compared myself to fellow students. They were able to go out late. I felt that I didn't match the **cliché image** of a real student in Ghent.'

Don't give up

In the first few weeks, Lieze had almost given up. Fortunately, one of her roommates encouraged her: 'My roommate was once in the same situation and encouraged me to hold on. Living in a dorm was also a major confrontation with reality. I needed more help than I thought. At home everything was evident. Fortunately, I could also count on my roommates for help and tips. My first exam period went well, and my grades were good. This gave me confidence. I got to know many people with disabilities who also stayed in adapted studios. Eventually we became really good friends. It has always been my intention to be as normal as possible, but I have accepted that I will not always be able to participate and have searched for solutions. We all have fun together in other ways, such as going for a drink or going to a concert. Not being able to go out like the other students hurt a little bit sometimes, but I have accepted it.'

Lieze also has a message for everyone who finds himself in the same situation: 'Just keep holding on. Where there's a will, there is a way. If that one friend hadn't said "hold on", I might have given up. By making the transition to higher education, I slowly started to regain **self-confidence**. Whenever I succeeded, I wanted to be able to do even more. The more you can do, the more you want to achieve. If they asked me if I would do the studies again, I would immediately say "yes".'

“To everyone who finds himself in the same situation: just keep holding on.”

'In the end, it is the person himself who can best estimate what is possible and what is not', Lieze testifies. 'It is often a misconception to make the course immediately easier for people with disabilities, although that is not always necessary. I'm still on schedule and am almost graduated, so I believe that it's best to let the person try what he or she wants and see what works.'

Support

Throughout the study programme, Artevelde University of Applied Sciences

offered Lieze always the best possible support and customized facilities. The diversity coach offers great support: 'I think it is an added value that I have one point of contact within Artevelde University of Applied Sciences that coordinates everything concerning support services. She ensures that everything is adjusted as well as possible for me.'

Internship

Lieze is currently doing an internship at a communication agency in Ghent. Because of the fear of not finding an internship, Lieze started her search very early: 'After all, I quickly found a great internship. I also really like that they made an effort to make the building accessible to me. Besides the accessibility, I can do my internship like the other students. Because of the current corona situation, I'll do the rest of my internship from home.'

“I would definitely do it again.”

Lieze will graduate soon and start a shortened Marketing Bachelor programme: 'I am glad I got here and I would definitely do it again.'

