My name is Aracy Lima. I'm of Portuguese nationality. I was born in Cape Verde, Africa. I’ve been working at the Barbican more than 3 years, almost 4. I’m working at the moment on the 2nd floor. I worked before on Milton Court, doing weekends only.

This is the quiet time for me. So, I'm trying now. I'm, yeah, basically, I was living in Lisbon, more than 10 years. I lived before with my mother, then I decided to live alone because of our family problems. So I was living in Lisbon, more than three years, four years alone. I was studying and paying my studies, working, paying my bills, everything alone. So I was a bit stressed. And I couldn't attend my classes. So I was paying for nothing, basically. That's why I decided to leave everything and change my life.

When I came to England, the first time I went to Leeds, I was there looking for a job over a month. But I didn’t get any job. I don’t know… I was booking interviews. My English was very little, it's still not that good. But at that moment, I had some issues with language. So I couldn't find any job there. I start asking everyone, ‘Anything to do?’ So one of my friends told me her workplace was needing some people. So I could start anytime. I just took everything and moved on to London. So when I went… I stayed on the job for more than six months. Until then I tell them I was pregnant. Then they say, ‘Oh, no, I don't need you anymore.’ I said, ‘Well, where is my rights?’ Because I'm working. How you can say person you don't need her because she's pregnant? I mean, I used to work a lot there. Be there every time they ask. I was used to be… to do over time and everything. But I didn't have a proper contracts. I was doing…. I was working in a work agreement at that time. So I didn't know exactly what that what that mean. So I learned in the worst way.

And then I started looking for job. Every time I said I'm pregnant, people said, ‘I’m sorry, we cannot accept you because the work is very hard… I’m not sure you’re going to be able to do the things we’re asking.’ So when I applied for the job at the Barbican, I have to hide that first I was pregnant. I did my best so everyone could see the work I'm able to do. I was doing overtime, everyone liked my work, everyone was happy. But there was a moment that I tried to tell them, ‘I’m pregnant, but if you decide you don’t want to keep me, I’m not going to make a big deal about it, I just wanted you to know, to know me, to know my work, so it’s up to you to decide.’ I felt bad to hide the information because it's not simple information.

But the manager at that time, he said, ‘I mean you're pregnant, you're not sick. I can see you work very well, let me know if you have any problem. We are happy to keep you here.’ And things starts to go that way. So I'm I still here almost four years now and, like I told you, I work before I work on Milton Court. Then I moved back to the Barbican. I’m working on the 2nd floor. Working on the 2nd floor, I know the people from each area. I do the security area, the Directors’, I do the music people, I do the IT, I do the Box Office. So you have the opportunity… at the moment you're there, you cleaning, if someone is sitting in the area, because I do the kitchens and toilets… Normally, if someone is sitting there, you can have a good chat, you can get to know them. ‘Oh, seriously?!’ ‘Oh!’ I mean, we share impressions at that moment. Every time I go to the Security [team’s area], they are very open. They say, ‘Come on, sit here, eat something!’ And then we start talking because, I mean, a lot of people come from foreign countries. So we share this, our common stories. We come from different backgrounds. But we have similar values, so we talk about this and how our lives are changing and how we expect things to change in the future.

I decided to start studying because I was on maternity leave at home, and one of my friends was on maternity leave. She said she could go to the college and the college would help to pay a bursary. I said, ‘Oh, seriously?! Someone is paying to stay with your children so you can study?!’ That was wonderful news for me because I really wanted to go back to school and do my things, because I really want to change my future, I want to do something for me. And for my children. I'm doing my course, I'm doing science, because I have a chemistry background, from Portugal, but I didn't finish my Uni there. So I'm doing it again. I start from college because of my English – I need to improve as well. But also because I have children. And when I go to the Uni, I want to be more stable in this field. So yes, I'm giving time. I want to start and start strongly. I want to do it. I don't want to miss again. I don't want to miss that. Everyone’s asking why I do cleaning because I could do anything else. I mean, at the beginning was the first job I found. But it's not… for me, it's not that much, because I did a lot of different works. In Portugal… by the way, I'm 29, so I have some experience. And for me in any job you find, I mean you need to do the work you, you get the feelings you need to do it right. It doesn't matter if you're doing cleaning or if you're writing papers or you're attending costumers, you just need to do it right. So you do it for you, you’re improving that side of yours. And cleaning for me is a moment that I'm alone, I'm doing that thing, but my brain is thinking. I'm not… I never stop. It’s like my moment. When I'm cleaning, I'm thinking about the things I'm going through, and how I'm doing. So it's good. It's like mind therapy. So I'm doing, I need to see it clean, I need to do it properly. So it’s helping me as well at the same time. Oh my goodness, I wish I could tell you more about this.

If I'm at home before I start studying, I need to organise the things, I need to put everything in place, or I'll be distracted. It's like, everything needs to be organised, so my mind can be organised as well. So that's how I relate everything in the same page.

I quite enjoy it, because everyone is open to talking. When we work in a certain area, we know the people from there and people get used to you, and you also get used to them. So it's quite nice to keep the routine and relationships.

One of the things I enjoy about cleaning is the final results. We can see, when we finished the work, how clean, how shiny we can leave the things; the nice smell; there’s clearly a difference between before and after. And sometimes I do feel, ‘Wow’, okay, I did this, and how the people can see, and say, ‘Oh, thank you.’ They appreciate the work we do. So it's nice.

My kids, they are always so energetic, they take so much time from me. That's why I get the feeling I'm always running, always busy. But, I mean, they are mine. I love them. I enjoy, I love spending time with them. Every time we have an opportunity, we're doing something new. So it’s a new word for them. And even for me being ‘mum’ is a new word for me as well.

The college is going very well. I'm loving to see my efforts. Seeing my results, everything I'm doing. I can see I'm getting the results I want and was expecting. I'm feeling a bit proud of myself, about doing everything together and being able to see positive results.