

You don't have to follow the traditional path to succeed

Entrepreneur and businesswoman Sue Carter tells **Sheena Grant** about being a teenage mother and doing Kylie's make-up.

She's done Kylie Minogue's make-up, taught English to children in Cambodia and run her own business for more than a decade.

But Sue Carter is the first to admit that her career path has been "a little unusual".

We're sitting in her stylish beauty salon in Ipswich, where everything is clean, white lines and bright light. I look at her beautifully manicured feet, painted nails and strappy sandals and surreptitiously attempt to shuffle my own shabby shoes and unloved toes under the seat.

But Sue doesn't seem to notice. And even if she did, I get the impression she wouldn't pass any judgement.

She's filling me in on her new role as a fellow at Suffolk New College and the talks she gives to aspiring business men and women.

"I think they like to hear my story," she says. "I had my first daughter young. I'm dyslexic as well. It shows that you don't need to follow a traditional path to succeed. A lot of young people suffer from poor self esteem and for those who haven't had the best of starts in life, I am the person to talk to."

Sue was just 15 when she had her eldest daughter. Her parents were supportive but Sue, then a pupil at Nacton Heath High School (which became Holywells High), left home when her daughter was just a few months old.

"I was one of the youngest people to have their own council house," she says.

She also had to leave high school to attend a centre where she could take her baby and have lessons.

"There were four of us girls there," she says. "But I don't remember ever finding my situation hard or difficult. I just got on with it."

"I've always had a strong work ethic. I was working in Cordys in Felixstowe before I had my daughter, and after she was born nannied for years."

Sue certainly doesn't fit the casual stereotype of a teenage mum.

Although she sometimes found school a struggle, largely because of her unrecognised dyslexia, she took some CSE exams, trained as a make-up artist and got



■ Sue Carter with her daughters Naomi and Kimberley.

a job with Lancome in Ipswich's Owen Owen store.

By her early 20s she was married, with a second daughter, but that work ethic was undiminished and in the late 1990s she accepted a role at London's prestigious Harvey Nichols store, on the Lancome counter, where she won a national award for her make-up skills.

"I was still living in Ipswich and commuting each day, which wasn't easy," she says. "But I just wanted to work. I don't know where that drive came from – I'm Ipswich born and bred, my dad worked in a factory and my mum was an auxiliary nurse. No-one pushed me."

It was while working in Harvey Nichols that Sue had her Kylie encounter. The Australian pop princess was shopping, alone, when she came up to the Lancome counter.

"She came in all on her own. She wanted some make-up, so I applied some blusher and lipstick for her – she bought both products."

"That was all she wanted. It was a bit of a strange encounter because I never said anything to her about who she was and she never mentioned it either. She was very pleasant and unstarry. It just shows how much things have

changed in the last 15 years because there is no way she would walk into a store like that on her own today, with no entourage. Everything was different back then."

The difficulties of combining family life with commuting meant Sue returned to Ipswich and set up her own beauty salon in 1999. Now in Old Foundry Road, her salon, Image, has won national awards, and recognition for its local charity work too.

"The community I was born into in Ipswich has helped me so much," Sue says. "It's good to give something back."

Her dyslexia was only picked up in adulthood and the diagnosis helped explain her lifelong difficulties with spelling and word order. "Dyslexia can so easily go under the radar," she says. "But it hasn't stopped me doing anything I wanted. I even went to Cambodia and taught English to children for three weeks. It was amazing."

"Going to university is something young people should definitely do, if

The community I was born into in Ipswich has helped me so much

they want. I think it's also good for them to see someone like me, who has a different story but has succeeded."

■ Sue is one of 10 new fellows recently welcomed to Suffolk New College. Fellows contribute to college life, helping increase engagement with business and the wider community.



■ Sue Carter, who runs Image beauty salon, has just been made a fellow at Suffolk New College.