

ADHD & Mental Health

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I left school with little to no qualifications. I was undiagnosed with Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Irlen Syndrome (visual stress condition), sensory issues, and ADHD. This impacted my career choice, my confidence, and my self-esteem in so many ways. I always wanted to work with young people. But, because I did not have the qualifications to do this, I ended up in a career that I disliked for many years.



I was that child that would be sat in school with total anxiety, as I didn't understand the concepts that I was being taught; particularly Maths and English. For over 20 years I used to think that I was 'stupid' or 'thick', because I did not learn like everyone else and I found it difficult to learn. My confidence and self-esteem were so low that I was not able to ask for help, but I was an expert at masking how I felt. My earliest memory of school was being told I was a "numbskull", as I couldn't recite my timetables. I faked stomach ache until my parents realised I wasn't really ill. I cannot explain how difficult it is for a child to not learn like their peers. Your self-esteem and confidence are eaten away daily.

At the age of 43, when I studied for my first degree (psychology), I was diagnosed with Dyslexia and Dyspraxia. It was whilst studying for this agree that I had to reflect back on my own experiences of education. It was then I remembered my Headteacher, Mr. Forshaw. The first time I went to his office, I

couldn't understand what I had done wrong. Whatever he did, it worked. He taught me how to read, for which I am forever grateful.

Last year, whilst working for the amazing organisation -The ADHD Foundation, I was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). For the first time in my life, my ADHD diagnosis made sense for me. Why I behave the way I do. Why I learn in the manner that helps me more than my diagnosis of Dyslexia and Dyspraxia.



I now work in schools and services with young people and adults that are experiencing the same difficulties I had. They are potentially undiagnosed with a neurodiverse condition - such as Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, Dyscalculia, ADHD, and/or Autism. Some of the young people, aged 16+, are still not diagnosed. They are struggling to find a college or career where they can thrive. Sadly, they got lost in the education system.

Trust me, I am not having a go at teachers here. I know what a difficult job they have, with limited resources. But what I cannot understand, and what saddens me, is that when I studied for my degree and masters, I was provided with assistive technologies and tutors to support my academic writing. I would not have needed this support if this had been in place at school.

Research informs us that early intervention works. Why should neurodiversity be so different? Thankfully the ADHD Foundation have implemented a teaching module, with the department for Education, for new teachers on how to teach young people with neurodiversity. Research also shows that 40% of young people not in education, training, and are in the youth justice system are undiagnosed with some form of neurodiversity.



For parents/carers that don't want their child to be 'labelled', I would say to consider the implications of them not understanding how they learn has on their mental health, confidence and self-esteem. Diagnosis got me the support I needed, to work as a therapeutic social worker, which I gain so much satisfaction from.

To the Government, I say neurodiversity impacts how you learn. Please put the support in early, so children do not have to experience low confidence or self-esteem that impacts on their mental health. Having neurodiversity offers companies so much. We know lots of successful people that are neurodiverse - sports people, actors, chefs, entrepreneurs, comedian, musicians, and scientists are some examples. Some research even suggests that Silicon Valley, California, which hosts technological experts, has the most amount of neurodiverse brains in the world!