

Case Studies

young voices



Charlotte Vicarage is 26 and has lived in Berkshire all her life. She was diagnosed with autism at three or four years old after she stopped talking aged two and was referred to a psychologist. Charlotte's special interest is animation, which she has turned into a career.

"My advice to parents would be 'please do not force your kids to fit into something they do not want to be'. That is, if you are thinking of moving your kids into a mainstream school, do not force them to get into something their peers are into, just for the sake of fitting in.

"My parents did that, as did a teacher at the time. I soon stood up to them. When a teacher asked me 'aren't you a bit too old for cartoons?', I just said 'no'. And that helped to define my career in animation - it is that honesty about who you are that people who are not autistic can see as troubling or difficult, but is actually better for you.

"They thought it would decrease the chance of me being bullied but it isn't always the best thing - it's removing the thing that you love and you actually need the thing that you love just to cope.

"Often the best way to talk about autism is through animation and the best thing to do with animation when describing autism in that time is you can describe your thoughts and feelings and illustrate them.

"It can be anything, from what Disney did with Fantasia, or you can contrast that to real life. Anything is possible in animation regardless, so I would say that's a positive experience in terms of describing it."



Conor Eldred-Earl is 19 and has lived in Berkshire for almost all his life. He is an advocate for young people, helping their voices to be heard by public services, such as GPs and CAMHS.

"I received my autism diagnosis around Year 5 at school, I think, or possibly Year 6. Personally, when I did receive the diagnosis, I found it both relieving and daunting.

"Relieving, because I could finally put a name to why I was so different, but daunting as I now had a whole list of things I supposedly could never do that I really wanted to.

"The vast majority of people reacted well, but mind you those were older people (20+). However, several of my peers did not react well. They resorted to bullying, name-calling and, in several cases, physical abuse.

"I would describe being autistic as wearing sunglasses when everyone else isn't. You still see the world, but everything is a slightly different tone and looks/means something slightly different too.

"After seven years of depression to various degrees I have seen not only the worst of myself and others, but I have also seen the best. I have seen how wonderful people can be, but often aren't, due to their own pain.

"I suppose I want to help prevent others going through it, so they can be unscarred and still shine, so they can laugh and love without knowing the pain people like me have been through, so they can be themselves to their full potential, without all the self-doubt emotional scarring brings, but most of all so they can be truly happy, as I still believe everyone deserves."



Carly Jones is an autistic campaigner. She has made two award-winning films, to explore issues around diagnosis of autism in women. She was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome as an adult after two of her daughters were diagnosed with autism spectrum conditions.

"I knew this kid once who got no GCSEs and then struggled getting A-Levels and did two years of a degree, but couldn't pass the tests. When she grew up, it turned out she had a learning difficulty. Her IQ, in her area of strength, tested to be 160, so she decided to stop trying to pass tests and try doing what she could where her strengths lie, creativity/philosophy/non-verbal reasoning.

"She's not rich and will never make a million pounds but hopes to end up helping a million lives one day - that kid was me.

"My aim is to support and raise awareness for all girls with diagnosed or undiagnosed Asperger syndrome and high-functioning autism, so they grow up to be confident, rounded, strong women.

"For some autistic females prior to diagnosis, life is very much a task of dressing up for what others expect you to be and just getting by... We concentrate heavily on the effects of decades of masking but do we concentrate as much weight on the process of unmasking and saying goodbye to the layers that aren't actually us at all?"

"At times I am anxious from attending events, due to 'imposter syndrome', a tendency to believe someone 'like me' should not be invited to certain places, or unworthy to be a deserving part of a group.

"What I think I really feel is all the ways I was trying to fit in. Yes, they don't belong here, but who I really am does. I realise that maybe I wasn't finding myself, I was learning to unfind myself and the person underneath it all is exactly where she needs to be after all."