



## **Dyspraxia My story**

I am sure as many of you are aware that I have Autism and I talk a lot about my experiences of being Autistic on social media. What many people don't know is that I also have Dyspraxia. Ahead of a major launch for training sessions that will be available to organisations on Dyspraxia in the workplace, I wanted to share my story about what it's like to have Dyspraxia.

I think the one thing that really stands out for me is that few people outside of the Neurodiversity space have heard of Dyspraxia. Of all the areas of Neurodiversity, Dyspraxia seems one of the least talked about aspects of Neurodiversity.

Before I was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome a form of Autism when I was just 10 years old I was diagnosed with Dyspraxia at the age of 4. I had extensive trips to see both an occupational therapist and also a speech and language therapist. These are the best people who can advise appropriately on a diagnosis of Dyspraxia. According to research from the Dyspraxia Foundation, Dyspraxia is best defined as an 'impairment or immaturity of the organisation of movement'.

For me personally my early memories of Dyspraxia were constant trips to see a speech and language therapist, trips to see an occupational therapist and also visits to see a specialist optician at the hospital. I remember feeling like why I was being singled out for special treatment, why all these appointments to see strange people and why all these seemingly strange tests. Surely I was fine the way I was? I remember to speaking to my mother quite recently and she said that when I had trips to the hospital to see a specialist optician that one of the exercises that helped was the use of a lazy 8 diagram which helped control my eye movements.

One activity that I really enjoyed growing up and which really helped me to make friends was trampolining. Trampolining was particularly effective as one of the key characteristics of Dyspraxia is difficulties with balance. Furthermore, I would always attend swimming lessons every week and swimming helped with my core strength. As a person with Dyspraxia these exercises helped with what is known as gross motor movement.

Yet, my fine motor movements because of my Dyspraxia were more difficult to improve upon. One activity that I used to do to aid with the improvements in my fine motor movements were dot to dot exercises. I remember also been given a specialist knife and fork where I would place one of my fingers into the back of specially moulded cutlery to help with eating meals and these aids were a lifeline for me growing up.

I guess when I look at my academic needs growing up, I am indebted to my parents who fought so hard to get me an educational statement of special needs to ensure that I got the support I needed to be successful at school. According to research from the Dyspraxia Foundation, children with Dyspraxia will often exhibit the following characteristics. Finding it hard to take part in throwing and catching games or music and movement, essentially anything that involves hand-eye coordination. I remember during rounders at school throwing a ball without bothering to look, thinking that it would reach its intended target of another fielder. Alas, this ball hit another child on the head, leaving them with a gash to the head and some serious repercussion for me. Yet, my teachers failed to fully grasp that my behaviour in that moment was not me being wilfully disobedient but a trait of my Dyspraxia which I couldn't help. I also remember that I would be the last child to get ready for PE lessons. Tying up my shoelaces in particular also caused me such considerable anxiety and stress. I remember the challenges that I faced with my shoe lessons only started to ease when my Dad showed me how to tie up my laces. I would always find myself so stressed and anxious about this supposedly easy task that I would hate PE and would often dread that lesson every week. I also remember as I alluded to earlier in my blog about how I was often reliant on the need for a specialist knife and fork for mealtimes. I now look back at this period in my lifetime and remember how much of a messy eater I was, little realising that Dyspraxia was the major catalyst for why I would often be a messy eater and conventional knives and forks were just seemingly unsuitable to my needs and requirements. Another aspect of my Dyspraxia as a child was my inability to construct toys or do any so-called practical tasks. As my parents and my partner will tell you I am one of the least practical people on planet earth. I am far more likely to break something than actively put it together or fix it. As I got older I always thought that my difficult employment experiences, societal experiences, and day to day life challenges were largely perpetuated by my Autism. I look now and realise that many

of these challenges with social situations and communication were as much to do with my Dyspraxia as my Autism. I find that Dyspraxia on a day-day basis in a lot of instances impacts my life more than autism does. I get frustrated if I can't put a key in a lock properly or put my tie on properly. Handwriting has always been a challenge for me and I have never been able to grip a pen properly and this has always made my handwriting look untidy as a consequence. These simple tasks that many take for granted have always presented a challenge for me.

The links between Dyspraxia and Autism are also equally fascinating and I certainly find it interesting how many friends of mine have Dyspraxia, and Autism but from conversations with many of them, there is an innate fear of disclosing their Dyspraxia and Autism to employers for fear of pre-conceived judgement and exclusion from the labour market. Too often we are treated as the disability in the workplace and not as an individual human being that can creativity, problem solving and innovation to the workplace. As I was once told you haven't failed the employer has failed you.

In the workplace, processing speeds and organisational skills linked to my Dyspraxia have always presented a considerable challenge for me. Yet too often and not employers failed to factor in these challenges for me or provide the appropriate adjustments and support. This is despite me on many occasions requesting extra support for new tasks and structure to help support me with organising my working day.

Yet, people like me with Dyspraxia have a lot to offer the workplace if given the opportunity to do so. In the UK alone 3% of people have Dyspraxia. I have been lucky to run a successful Neurodiversity consultancy business, own my own property, study to a high academic level I am currently in the process of a completing law degree. I am proud of my achievements and Dyspraxia is just another characteristic of my life that I wouldn't change for the world. Can organisations really afford to miss out on Neurodiverse talent when it is estimated that around 30-40% of the world's population are thought to be Neurodivergent. If your organisation would like to learn more about Dyspraxia and Neurodiversity then we can help you on your journey to becoming a Neurodiversity Confident Employer.

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