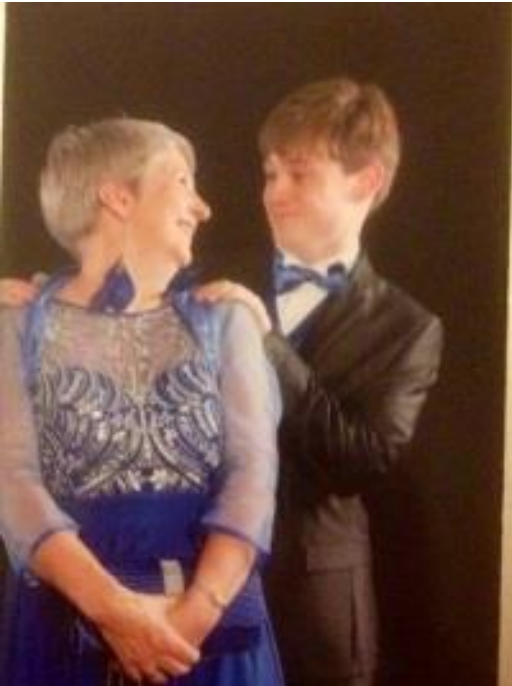


Gill's story



Joe was born normally at the right time and he seemed to be developing well although he was a little slow to walk. It was his speech that alerted me to the fact that he might have a problem, but I was told repeatedly that he would 'catch up' and not to worry. Eventually I could not bear to go on without some kind of recognition and a diagnosis was made at the Nuffield centre in London. He was diagnosed with severe dyspraxia with a significant oro motor component and I was advised he would probably be dys-everything. I was utterly devastated and back in 1994 there didn't seem to be much to read or many people to ask. The Dyspraxia Foundation was my life saver.

Joe's speech was totally unintelligible until he was over 6 years old and that in turn affected his literacy profoundly. If I could turn the clocks back I would have fought more in those early days for speech and language therapy and lots of it. It is easy with hindsight.

Joe has always been educated in specialist provisions out of county. It was a heart wrenching decision to send him away from home, but he never had a negative school experience and he was very well supported. He did not learn to read until he was 16 but now does very well, just not as quickly as others. His literacy difficulties hold him back and he has some autistic traits also, but his speech is excellent. He does have to rehearse what he is going to say next so can be seen talking wildly away to himself, which makes him look a little mad, but he says he is a bit mad so that's OK!

Joe is though extremely sociable and positive and people are very drawn to his sunny and honest disposition. You would never ask him '*Does my bum look good in this?*' because he simply doesn't do social dishonesty, but that is somehow wonderfully refreshing. We have always told him to be proud of his differences and never to feel he needs hide what and who he really is.

I would of course like things to be easier for him. I would like people to call and invite him out for a beer or to the cinema but that doesn't happen. Joe simply says 'that is just the way it is' and he has created a social life around creative, sociable and voluntary activities. That aspect of his life probably causes me more angst than it does him.

He has found everything very difficult to learn but he does get there in the end. He doesn't have a job but I never say 'never' and I hope one day he may be able to have a relationship and live out in the community albeit with support.

He is recognised as extremely vulnerable because he cannot recognise malice in others. He can be exhausting to live with as he needs to know every last detail about everything and asks questions none stop. However he is one of the most remarkable, non-judgemental and forgiving people I have ever had the pleasure to meet.

What I am trying to say is that academic qualifications aren't everything and whilst it is very much easier to have a child that successfully negotiates life and learning without much effort, for some people that isn't their journey and rather than trying to get them to change direction, we have to put on our walking boots and walk beside them until they find the niche that is theirs to claim. That's OK, difference is so much more interesting.



Vive la difference!