

Rosie's story



Ever since I was a child, difference has always surrounded me. I've always been very tall and if you add to that a mix of clumsiness and lack of coordination, it made me stand out like a sore thumb.

I was always the one who was last at sports day, the person nobody wanted on their team. I could trip up over thin air and I always seemed to have half my artwork down my top rather than on the paper. It made me feel very self-conscious and insecure and I used to stoop to hide my tallness. All this made me a victim for bullies.

My mum had a huge fight to get me proper help with my dyspraxia, even though I was diagnosed when I was four. The teachers at my primary school told her she was an overprotective parent and that I was "too clever" to be struggling.

It was then that I decided that I didn't want others to feel or go through what I had. I started doing work for the Dyspraxia Foundation to raise awareness and to get these often hidden conditions talked about. I started interacting on social networks with other organisations and people who had been through similar problems.

I also helped Mollie King from girl band The Saturdays win an inspirational dyslexia award two years in a row, and helped raise over £550 as part of a campaign for her birthday. In June, I was lucky enough to be able to present Mollie with her award.

On a personal level, I went on to get a Master's Degree, as I wanted to prove people wrong and show them what I was capable of. It was then I realised that I also had dyslexic tendencies, so another piece of my jigsaw fell into place.

It is important to remember that a lot of people have traits and difficulties associated with conditions other than the one they are diagnosed with. Dyspraxia and dyslexia, in particular, often go hand in hand. For me, though, my dyspraxia is more dominant; it can cause big problems with handwriting, organising myself and spatial awareness — a real issue when it comes to crossing busy roads, bumping into people and directing myself. Over sensitivity to heat and noise, especially in busy places, is also a problem and I have to take particular time and care using cutlery and making sure I don't spill drinks. To help manage these difficulties, I try to take my time and don't rush into situations. Asking for a second opinion can also really help.

What I find really helps with these issues is the use of assistive technology, which can help me to get ideas down and show me where I've made mistakes. It can also be great for spelling and I can even change the colour of the screen to minimise potential visual discomfort. I've found the use of technology to be a big help in overcoming my difficulties and using computers has been a source of strength for me.

Another useful strategy is always to focus on what I'm good at and keep a sense of perspective about the things I tend to struggle with, especially after some of the past situations I've found myself in. Everyone has things which they find more difficult in life, whether there is a label attached or not; you just have to accept it and not let it stop you. I'm very grateful for my experiences; they've made me a very determined person and, I hope, very understanding and empathetic too. When people question the existence of dyslexia or dyspraxia, they should be invited to step into the shoes of someone with the conditions to see what it is like to live a lot of the time in chaos while at the same time having random exuberant bursts of creativity and thinking outside the box.

Society tends to expect everyone to know the coping mechanisms they need to manage their difficulties and sometimes it can take a lot of courage just to say to someone that you struggle with organisation or memory, as people may think your difficulties are simply a result of carelessness on your part. One of the main reasons that dyslexia and other hidden conditions such as dyspraxia are poorly understood is because they are seen as just someone struggling with spelling, hating reading aloud or being clumsy.

Last year, I started writing a blog as a way to discuss various issues surrounding neuro-diversity. To date, it has received over 33,000 views and I hope it has reached out to those who need it the most. I have also moved to London and am living with my boyfriend Matt and work full time as a learning support in a college helping others.

In the future I hope to carry on working with the charities I'm involved with to help raise awareness and understanding of hidden conditions. It is so important that children, in particular, get the right help and support and, crucially, that their conditions are understood by others. I hope that by sharing my story people can see that there is light at the end of the tunnel and that they shouldn't let anything hold them back in life. After all, having a different way of thinking can be a very good way to see the world.