

Grace. 23 years old from Somerset



### **How does Dyspraxia affect you?**

Dyspraxia primarily affects my working memory and processing speed, which have been challenges for me academically (i.e. reading quickly, writing coherently, and organising my thoughts). On a personal level, I also overthink a lot and feel panic when things do not go to plan. Dyspraxia also affects my coordination and spatial awareness when I am walking down the street and try to avoid bumping into people. I feel drawn to the hedge or road as if there is a magnet in my body. My fine-motor skills are also affected, particularly in self-care tasks despite practising a lot (i.e. showering, shaving, applying make-up).

### **When were you diagnosed?**

I was diagnosed with Dyspraxia in my first term of University in 2014, when I was 18.

### **What is your experience of seeking a diagnosis as an adult?**

I was diagnosed with Dyspraxia after struggling in my first term of University. Initially, I was told I would have to pay ~£500 for the psychological assessment. I was then fortunate to receive a bursary from my College, which paid for the assessment. Prior to this, I had an assessment through an NHS paediatrician, then a referral to a speech and language therapist, an occupational therapist, and an eye specialist.

### **What does having a diagnosis means to you?**

Being diagnosed with Dyspraxia was an emotional journey towards understanding myself. The written report, for example, allowed me to understand more clearly what I struggle with and why (i.e. my weak reading speed at 13th percentile, reduced auditory working memory capacity at 23rd percentile, and reduced processing speed at 30th percentile). However, receiving a diagnosis is what led me to recognise my unique strengths because of the way my brain works, and discover the ways I can help others (i.e. spelling at 90th percentile, and verbal knowledge + reasoning skills and visual + spatial reasoning skills within the top 25% of the population). Knowledge of my strengths has allowed me to find coping strategies to compensate for my weaknesses.

### **Have you received any support? (if yes, please include brief details)**

After my diagnosis, I received permission for word-processing and extra time in exams. I also continue to receive Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA), including a laptop, 1-1 Study Skills Tutor, 1-1 Specialist Mentor, assistive software (Audio Notetaker), and a printer/ink/paper, although I no longer receive the funding for printing due to cuts.

### **What are the most difficult aspects of living with dyspraxia?**

1. Processing difficulties (e.g visual and auditory processing delays affect my productivity and ability to follow instructions. I am also a slow reader, which has affected my studies and research).
2. Emotional difficulties associated with dyspraxia, such as anxiety, stress, overwhelm, tiredness, and overthinking, which can affect communication in personal and family relationships as a result of feeling misunderstood).
3. Practical difficulties, including coordination and spatial awareness (i.e. walking without bumping into people in the street, getting lost easily, breaking things easily) and fine motor skills (i.e. unlocking doors and pen grip -including pain when handwriting essays).

### **How would you like to see things change for adults with dyspraxia?**

I would like to see improved rates of diagnosis and access to support, particularly for university students, who might feel misunderstood in academia as a result of their dyspraxia, which few academics have heard of. I would be interested in helping to develop a support booklet/guide for Dyspraxic students. I would also like to see greater awareness of the strengths of dyspraxic adults, as the focus tends to be on weaknesses and difficulties when we define dyspraxia. I would also like to be involved in further research into dyspraxia, which can shed greater light on adults' affordances.

### **Please add any additional information you feel would be relevant to our campaign here**

I have remained determined to overcome the above challenges, which I believe is a quality common in dyspraxic adults. I have realised that it is OK to fail but keep trying, which is how I learn. Through school, I was misunderstood by my teachers and bullied by my peers. My expected grades were significantly lower than my achieved grades. Since school, I achieved A grades in French, German, and Spanish at A-Level, and managed to gain a place at Durham University to read these languages. In my first term, I was really struggling with anxiety, self-care tasks, settling in socially, writing coherent essays, reading and understanding a lot of new material, and organising both my work and my thoughts. Following my diagnosis, I was able to access Study Skills and Mentoring support, which enabled me to gradually change my approach towards living and studying with dyspraxia, and understand myself better. The challenging process towards accepting myself as an adult with dyspraxia culminated in my third year, which I had to spend abroad. I did two placements -in Germany, I was I was an English

Language Assistant in a school. In France, I was a Receptionist at a real estate company, juggling the phone, making and spilling coffees, sorting the post, welcoming clients, using the photocopying machine, and setting off emergency security alarm... In my spare time, I was an Au Pair looking after four children (two of which were under the age of 4). I had to improve my practical skills quickly, including nappy-changing, toileting, and preparing food for the children. I started a blog ([misspraxic.wordpress.com](http://misspraxic.wordpress.com)), to document my progress on the year abroad and talk openly about my experiences to motivate fellow dyspraxics. It is one of my greatest achievements to have completed my year abroad without dropping out, as it involved some of my most challenging experiences to date. However, I also made friends by joining a German choir. I got involved in a life-drawing class, and developed my interest in painting and drawing, despite my poor pen grip. I also volunteered teaching English and German to traumatised refugee children and adults to help them integrate into the community, which taught me a lot about my potential to support others, through being aware of my own difficulties with learning. In my final year at Durham, I continued to explore this interest by teaching English to refugees from scratch with City of Sanctuary. These two teaching experiences led me to develop a research interest in the language processing of marginalised learners, including those with learning disabilities. I took a risk in applying for a Master's course in Research in Second Language Education at The University of Cambridge, and was overwhelmed to have been offered a place. I was worried about not fitting in at Cambridge, but instead felt very supported and understood by friends, supervisors, and the Disability Resource Centre. I have now completed my Master's, and will train to be a Modern Languages teacher from September, with aims to later work in education research and policy. I am sure that this will bring more challenges, but also greater understanding of the potential dyspraxics can have.