

Paul, 40 years old from The Netherlands



How does Dyspraxia affect you?

This manifests itself in three ways

- social interactions: I've very blunt with people and tell them exactly what I think. This has strongly influenced my decision to move from the UK to The Netherlands - my directness, which used to be a curse, is now an asset, and leads to good, clear decision making in a professional capacity.

- languages: I have an extremely poor memory. Again, I have turned this to an advantage. I'm extremely organised and like to design systems which support my abilities and cover up their gaps. This has lead me to be an IT systems designer - helping organisations understand, document and improve upon their processes; my ideas are scalable whereas trying to store everything in memory isn't. The less shiny downside is that I'm very bad with languages and am only picking up Dutch very slowly, and have to see a special tutor.

- clumsiness. Both a blessing and a curse: I have inexpensive clothes as I tend to stain and tear them, and I don't have a lot of expensive possessions as I tend to break them - this extends to the kitchen where there is definitely no fine china. The advantage is that I don't spend a lot on these items as I know they won't last long!

When were you diagnosed?

In my early 30s.

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

As a kid in the 1980s I clearly suffered from dyspraxia, but it was only as an adult in 2011 that I went to see a Neurologist about something else, that she gave me the unexpected diagnosis that I "probably" had dyspraxia. No additional resources or signposting was given to me at that stage, as I was told that I have learned enough coping strategies to both cover it up, making a formal diagnosis impossible. Extra resources weren't suggested, just a brief explanation of some of the condition.

What does having a diagnosis means to you?

It's extremely important. Rather than blaming myself for being "clumsy", weak" or "lazy", I can now comfortably focus on where my skills are best and not worry about the things that are never going to be strong for me. As a consequence it's hugely improved my mental health, which was poor (so now it's less poor, certainly not perfect).

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

No. Reading Victoria Bigg's Caged in Chaos was a revelation and I recommend it to everyone with Dyspraxia. It's the best book I've read on the topic.

What are the most difficult aspects of living with dyspraxia?

Surprisingly not the lack of coordination. I can live with that. Shirts and personal possessions are replaceable, if I fall over, I can stand up again. The lack of memory really hampers all sorts of social interactions, both in a personal and business capacity.

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

More research into the cause, but also coping mechanisms. At the moment it seems very "crowd sourced" but I would love for some properly funded research to be done to see what are the best techniques for learning/memory for example.

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

Being socially awkward and feeling very much an outsider has inspired me. I now run a group for IT professionals, that meet every two months to discuss databases; we're part of a network of 1000 such groups worldwide. Visitors regularly comment that our group is one of the friendliest and welcoming of all. This is directly influenced by dyspraxia and lack of social skills. The experience has taught me to welcome everyone, and give them name badges when they arrive (which helps everyone with poor memory, and avoids newcomers feeling like they are being singled out); when people are standing by themselves, we have members on specific watch to find those people and involve them in conversations; in presentations we also remind people to be their "authentic selves" - to not pretend to be something they are not, and to bring all their experiences into the space.

As part of this, in the last 2.5 years, I have grown our group from 10 to around 80 attendees per meeting, as well as a helped host a big one-off 350-people strong conference.