

Understanding Mental Health

A Young Person's Guide



Matthew's Story



No one should make fun of you
for the way you look or speak.

The People you Love.

I Love Horses and
Horse Riding.

Talking
to People

Staying Safe

helping
People

listen
to People

ambulance

6%

Empathy

9th
Cubs

Matthew's Story

When I was growing up I went to mainstream primary school. There was no transition. I was thrown in at the deep end. I remember very specifically what happened on my first day. I walked to school with my mum and dragged my feet all the way dreading it. My heart was pumping - I knew no one.

After many weeks I became aware that stuff didn't click and I didn't understand the social aspects of school and I would spend hours doodling or drawing giving me excuses to be away from the other kids as I didn't get what or why they were playing games or talking. I knew I needed to join in in order to be the same as the others but didn't know how to.

I wandered around aimlessly wanting to be part of the group but didn't know how to start a conversation. I remember once being invited to play a game of tag which stays in my mind. I was very aware that other people wouldn't understand me and the world I live in so I became isolated and almost a loner.

As time went on, I began to understand interactions with others. I later understood that for many the jokes and games they played were not for social company but to joke at me not with me for their pleasure.

I stayed at this primary school for about a year and moved on to a second primary school for a further two years. This school was exactly the same as the first. Some teachers kind of saw me as a little kid who they just let run around. I had a personal assistant who again didn't understand how I worked - she struggled to work out what my needs were and how to tackle them.

She became frustrated with me. I had more knowledge than most of the others but couldn't interlink this with other aspects of the curriculum.

Matthew's Story

At my third primary school things started to look up, although on the first day I was hanging out with a few kids who were explaining the school system to me when one boy started to have a go and get arsy with me.

This instantly got me annoyed and I flipped and my anger came out. This was the start of many fights I got involved in - this boy and I became arch enemies for a long time and my anger very often got out of control. As the years passed I became more aware of what caused my anger. The school sent me to anger management classes. This helped but wasn't the answer.

At the age of 11 I went to a huge secondary comprehensive school. The transition consisted of a quick generic tour of the building. It was huge and overwhelming. Where's the comfort of my classroom in which I had all my lessons with predominantly one teacher? Where's the structure? Where have my friends gone? I went from being the oldest in the school to suddenly being the youngest.

I felt like giving up as I had to start the whole process again; like making friends and integrating. I felt like I had progressed so far and then for it to be thrown back in my face again. All the 'bullies' from my last school became the popular people - I couldn't cope with this happening as their morals were completely alien to me.

My attendance fell as everything became too much especially the unstructured times like break or lunch. I had so many anxieties that I would stay up till really late at night. Lack of sleeping became was a real issue.

I would see my Mum in tears not knowing what to do for me and how to get help. At the time I knew she was upset but didn't understand enough.

Matthew's Story

At 13 my Mum found a school that she thought I would fit into. I remember Mum crying as she read a slip saying I hadn't been accepted a place - I didn't understand why Mum was crying as to me it was just another school.

Eventually I got accepted a place at this school. It was a special school. I remember being welcomed by the Head Teacher and my new class. I peeped through the door window that my class were in and suddenly one of the boys in the class opened the door abruptly and shook my hand and introduced himself.

I had learned the skills by then to 'go with it and act appropriately' mode. I had to be accepted and try hard to fit in being aware that I needed to become more socially accepted. I was aware this school had a plan and was able to go through my timetable with a staff member explaining lesson to lesson. I remember seeing a different type of pupil - as in not everyone was trying to be the 'top dog' or be someone they weren't.

I didn't notice a ranking system, I just noticed that there was a bunch of people each trying to do what they wanted to do whilst helping each other and no pressure was put on me to speak out. It was reassuring to know that I wasn't the only one in the class who needed help with this.

I remember some of the girls paying me compliments - this was really strange and completely out of my comfort zone having to deal with complex social situations but made me feel better about myself. I have been at this school for 3 years now and feel a sense of belonging.

Matthew's Story

I now know how to express my feelings and not necessarily do things for me anymore but think about others.

I feel I am at a stage where I am confident with my learning ability. I'm not sure if it's as good as many, but I am very happy with the results for the efforts I put in.

I have a sense of direction and aspirations. I know what I want and where I am heading. I want to study game design, coding and interactive media.

I think differently about the world now - I have had to learn to adapt to the world and overcome barriers. It's time now for others to understand me.

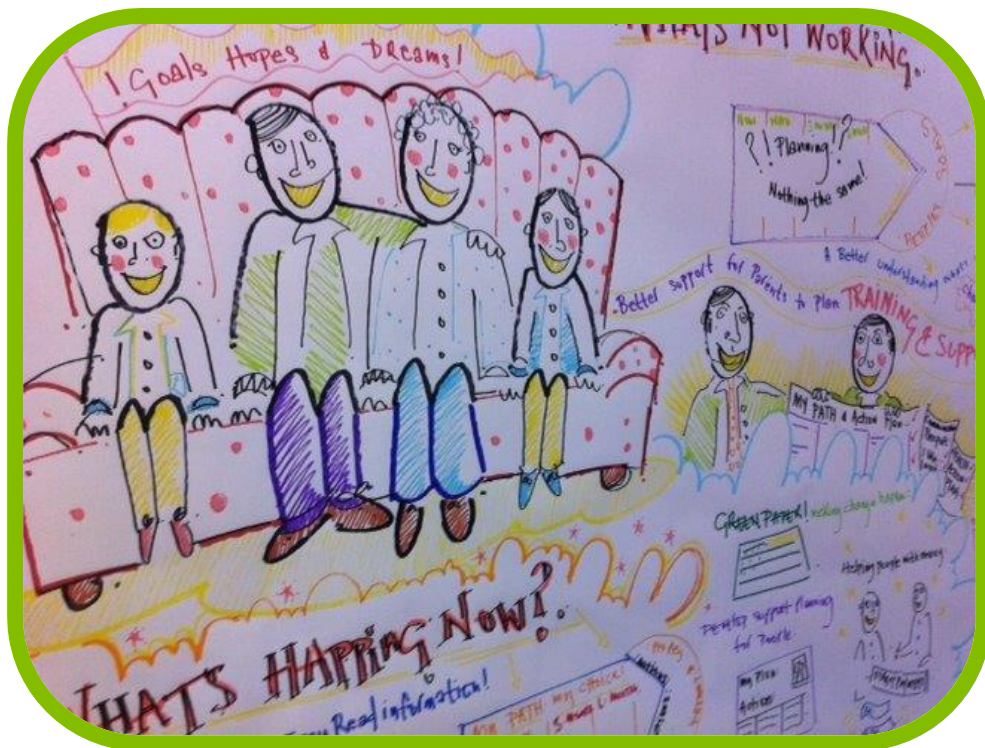


Photo from a workshop held at Northgate School looking at “what's important to young disabled people”
February 2015

Need More Help? Get in Touch



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We look forward to hearing from you

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- Making a difference across the system
- Making a difference to social care
- Making a difference in diversity and inclusion

