



Daisy- Life as an autistic female

I grew up not knowing I had autism or any other difficulties. I thought this is just how everyone felt. I had always been different to other children. I was extremely shy and was not interested in any type of interaction with others. I was very needy and clingy and my mum described me as her shadow. I would scream, cry and hang off her neck when she would drop me off at school. I would wait in the car until the very last minute, so she wouldn't leave me at school.

Secondary school was the worst years of my life. I went to two secondary schools due to intense bullying. This led me into a dark and lonely place in my life. Nobody understood me because I was different and because of that I became a target of bullying. My bullying got so bad that the school put me in a separate room full time so I would not cross paths with the other students. I did not receive any work from teachers in a year and a half. I taught myself by buying revision books and took 4 GCSEs. I passed my English which I was proud of because I had no teaching in any subjects. I felt like a problem that they just locked away from the world and they just didn't know how to deal with. I had no friends and struggled to eat. I used to throw my lunch away or just not eat it because students weren't allowed to eat in the learning centre and I was scared out of my skin to go anywhere but the learning centre. My parents were and still are my biggest supporters. They were at the school most days of the week fighting my corner to stop what was going on at school. The school forced me back into lessons with my bullies which was a very traumatic experience for me. My dad made an agreement with the school that I would only go to school half days which turned into 3 days a week because of how much I was deteriorating mentally and the weight I was losing. I got diagnosed at St Thomas' Hospital in London when I was 16 while doing my GCSEs. The school were beside themselves and speechless to my diagnosis of autism, language disorder, learning difficulty and mental health. I felt that I had been failed by the school system.

When I received my diagnosis, I didn't know what to take from it but as I learnt about it, I was happy that I got it because it puts everything together and just explains why I am the way I am.

College did not work for me because again nobody understood me even with my EHCP. I had no support that they initially agreed to so I dropped out as my mental health was on a spiral downhill. I had a year out of education, and I focused on getting better mentally where I spent my year with continuous psychological help so I can have a positive future and be able to achieve my goals. In the summer of 2019, my dad and I found a charity called Caretrade, The Autism Project which is a full-time two-year programme for young adults to find employment. When I got funded for the programme, I was so pleased and hopeful that I might get somewhere with it.

At the Autism Project, I am the only girl in my year which shows how hard it is to diagnose girls. Girls mask their autism and I do. My appearance would not show I have autism or difficulties, but I have always been classed as shy when all along it's been more than that. I experience a lot of comments like "you don't look autistic" or "does that mean you're not



normal?" which can be upsetting because I am a young woman who wants the most out of life who craves to be liked and have valuable friendships.

Friendship has always been a difficult one for me. I have had friendships in the past that just have not lasted which have hurt me. The thought of "I just want to be normal" is a regular thought because you just want those friendships, that career and that ability to be able to do things that you struggle with. Being autistic can be very lonely, but it is about learning and exploring your autism and making it your superpower. I have made friends in the past, but it's been hard to keep them as I tend to be misunderstood. At Caretrade I have gained friends for life and that is what is so special about it. We are all different from each other, but we are on this journey together.

The work placements the programme provided were hard for me because I was not comfortable and felt the employers did not understand. After trying with different employers, we found one I was able to feel comfortable with which was in a nursery. I enjoyed this placement because I have always wanted to go into childcare but then lockdown came around and this ended.

Lockdown was very hard for me. Especially having autism with the changes and no routine it was a lot to adjust to. The Autism Project was extremely supportive during lockdown. We did our classes on zoom which meant we still got the similar routine.

Currently I am in year 2 of the project doing Employability skills and Functional skills while searching for employment. I have found a job in my local area in a nursery which will hopefully be a success. I want to work with children and help them in the way I didn't get help growing up in the educational system. I want to write my own book about my life and growing up undiagnosed and life after that. I've started writing my book so hopefully one day you will get to learn more about my journey.