

Joely's Story

Joely is a such an inspiring young lady who is passionate about improving the lives of young disabled people. We feel so lucky that she is part of shaping The Chatterbox Project and helping us to make change happen.

[Read her BBC South Today speech below.](#)

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My name is Joely Colmer and I am 21 years old and I have a disability, a wonderful disability, my disability makes me different, unique, clever, caring, passionate, quirky, honest, hardworking, freaky and fun. I am far from what is considered normal, but I don't care, being different is fabulous- there is nothing wrong with it, I would not change my disability for the world!

You see my disability is my gift, my gift is Aspergers Syndrome.

Aspergers Syndrome is a disability on the higher end of the autistic spectrum. I also have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

I am here talking to you all today because I want to help infuse change from the very root of where it all begins- people.

It all starts with individuals like yourselves, putting yourselves out there, finding opportunities to help, volunteering your time and learning about other people. After all if I could do it- so can you!

I want to help create a swell of understanding, a stir of beauty within your hearts, a wish to infuse change within our society. As a team we can ALL make a difference- we just have to try and change our perceptions of the wondrous and curious things we don't understand. My life-long ambition has always been to make a positive difference to as many different people's lives as possible.

I think you should know that I have been discriminated against, I have been bullied and much worse abused, I have been subject to unpleasant behavior because people don't understand my disability and so they are afraid of what they don't understand - my disability- therefore me. This lack of understanding creates a fear, a fear that they don't know to cope with. As we know everyone is different and every one handles things differently.

A lack of understanding combined with the consequential perception that I am stupid means that not everyone knows how to react when conversing with me, some cope with this lack of understanding through bullying, others through discrimination, others cope with this through helping and learning about me and my disability through listening to me and making

an effort. Everyone is different. Although it is of course wrong to bully and discriminate against people, we have to try and help such people learn about these things to better help their chances at understanding and our chances of being understood.

I am going to try and do this by first telling you a little about my self- some of the difficulties I face because of my disability but more importantly what I have achieved because of my disability. I want to teach you all the glories of disabilities as well as the hardships too- I want to teach people that despite first judgment's having a disability does not make you stupid, weird, annoying, nasty, selfish or ugly. You see, beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and trust me beauty with in ones souls is the most precious beauty of all, all the people with disabilities I have met have had such beautiful souls, all so kind, funny quirky and just genuine people, I have witnessed no bullying, no tormenting, no back handed compliments, No mind games, no lies, just pure genuine wonderful people who deserve to be understood for what they are. Such beauty within people makes me even more motivated and eager to help them. So here I go in order to help you understand what life with a disability is like, I am about to tell you my whole life story!

So, personally I was diagnosed at 2 with Aspergers Syndrome. I was clinically deaf in one ear and partially deaf in the other, I didn't start talking until I was 6 or 7, and found it immensely difficult to keep up with all the other 'normal' children.

Even to this day I have problems with tying my shoe laces, social interaction, reading facial expressions, understanding spoken language and fine motor skills.

My goodness, my fine motor skills are pretty poor and I have a habit of dropping almost everything I pick up! Frequently every single day I will misunderstand something someone has said because they did not word it in a way I could understand. People don't realize it, but I reckon about 90% of their conversations consist of wording that does not make sense to people like me.



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As a child I was described frequently as a 'whirl wind' this is because as a child I used to sprint to each room at home, and play, my play was always imaginative and complete chaos so I would always end up wrecking each and every room I entered with-in a matter of minutes of entering.

The problem is I was definitely hard work, I could not hear my parents telling me to stop nor could I understand their instructions to do so when I did hear them.

I hear everything, I see everything, every-where I go is a multitude of sensory mayhem and it can become very distressing to cope with. If you can imagine having a pair of binoculars that can go on zoom, it is like that for me in every direction I look- I zoom in and see the detail, now if you zoom in as you are looking at 100's of things at once it soon becomes nauseating. Not everyone notices these things but I certainly do!

I have learnt from my parents how to best cope with such difficulties and now, I frequently hug, hang out and travel independently to go out with my friends. Even though these things I find difficult, I love these factors about me all the same- I feel like I can learn so much more from my surroundings because of this amazing disability that I have.

Yet, I have found that many people who look at me make a presumption that I do not need much help because I don't have an obvious physical disability. Let me tell you something, they are wrong, just because my disability is fairly hidden does not mean I need any less help than any other disabled person.

We just need and deserve help in very different ways. It's sad to say that many young people with disabilities suffer judgment and their rights for help are being avoided. This needs to change!

Some of the things that I believe that need to change are accessibility of more youth groups and people's perceptions of disabilities. So I am going to tell you guys why joining The Chatterbox youth group was the best decision I have ever made.

The chatterboxes are youth led group of volunteers with disabilities who make, write, design and illustrate a magazine for other people in our local area.

The CHATTERBOX group is so important to all the

young people who attend. We all have the rare opportunity to learn and gain our independence. The Chatterbox group is our voice, it is our sanctuary, our refuge- the only place we can visit to feel valued and accepted for who we are. Every young person has moved on and developed in ways you can't imagine, it has been wonderful to be with them for the past few years and watch everyone blossom and learn around me.

Through the help of peer mentors and brilliant youth groups such as The Chatterboxes, I have seen teenagers that previously would not utter a word to any one, they had virtually no self esteem and would rarely venture out because they had very little independence.

I have seen those teenagers change. The beauty of the change in them as you watch their confidence grow and see them gain their independence, mingle and laugh with other people their age is just simply wonderful. Just watching such young people getting out of those taxis, chatting and laughing walking to the youth group just swells up my heart with pride- even little things like that is a huge task for some of us, you know!

At the Chatterboxes everyone is welcome no matter who you are and where you come from, we celebrate our differences and work with them.

Everything and everyone in society should be like this, in the best interest of everyone.

Life was difficult I used to feel like a zombie, not quite living my own life. I started volunteering with the Chatterboxes and my whole world changed, suddenly I was needed, suddenly I was a worthwhile member of a beautiful little close knit community.

So, I was becoming confident and travelling the country to give speeches-Just like I am now, suddenly volunteering became the best thing I have ever done with my life and will be something I will always look highly upon!

I now know that this is what I want to do with my

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life, I will dedicate my life to helping to change lives, changing perspectives and supporting those with disabilities in any way that I can!
And just like that, after barely a month of attending, my un happy Zombie exterior fell away.

Suddenly I became happy again.

Alongside my disability, I have something called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, which is a traumatic stress disorder usually associated with battle scarred soldiers out at war. This is the disorder that made me feel like a zombie all those years ago, before I started volunteering.

I have found that even with insane pressures and such horrendous things even with my PTSD I am very lucky because despite difficulties life is brilliant!

Life is incredible, to be alive, disabled or not is an amazing adventure- this is why all life deserves the right to be listened to, respected and helped, to aid in making this adventure as supported and wonderful for everyone as one can.

Our world is a beautiful place, filled with exquisite nature, love, wonderful opportunities and amazing people, so many of these amazing people need help and support to see such beauty, just like I did. Disability should not be seen as a bad thing because it is not.

I want to help those who are suffering in the dark see the beautiful light. I know what it is like to suffer in the dark in silence, I have PTSD and used to suffer with depression, so I know what it is like to feel isolated and that nasty feeling like no one cares.

I used to have flashbacks daily, the terror would grip at my very soul, depression would corrode at my happiness and fear would crush my lust for life, after every flash back it would feel like my very heart was turning into ash that much more.

What I am saying is that even though it was very hard to become happy again, even with such feelings you can still see the light- you can still become happy again, just like I did- we all just need a little help! It's

possible so long as you want it to happen and access help. I have never been happier, I have been working my way through every dream I have ever had, I have succeeded and have achieved so much- and it's all down to my disability, my wonderful gift of a disability. No matter what the difficulties are, the positives far out weight the negatives!

I am learning the language of sarcasm and I am excellent at Art and English. I could read for England, I used to go to the library every other day and take out 16 books at a time!

I am currently looking into publishing my book I have written about life with a disability on the Autistic spectrum. It's all very exciting as I have been writing it for so long and now I am very pleased to say it is now finished!

I have a love for writing stories and have always done so since I was a small child. My current book is called "Life A.S we see it" and is a guide for parents, professionals, carer's and young people with said disabilities, it includes insightful stories, advice on a huge manner of topics and is insightful to life as a child right through to growing up into a world of adults and independence.

I embrace my Aspergers and my PTSD because it makes me a very hard working and honest person who cares deeply for others.

Despite my difficulties I got great GCSE grades and have achieved 3 A-levels at the Arts University in Bournemouth, I have completed my NVQ 3 in child are with ease, I am doing my SENCO course and will start NVQ 4 shortly. Alongside completing my mathematics exam with a shocking 91%- that's a lot considering it is my absolute worse subject, my mother and I used to think I had dyscalculia because I found it so difficult.

Next year I will travel and plan to continue to raise awareness and understanding of disabilities. I am currently training for a sponsored triathlon, to raise money for a charitable project I intend to do abroad and money to charity too- I imagine I shall choose either volunteering my time in building schools and teaching in areas in need.



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Consequently I love sports, you could say I have been inspired by this year's Paralympics events; I would love to inspire others like that incredible event has inspired others too!

This is why I work and volunteer to help infuse change and make things right for everyone, including individuals with disabilities. I am constantly challenging myself to enhance my own understanding, I have a job as an assistant manager and key worker at my mother's outstanding Nursery, where we work with various children and young people with various SEN and difficulties.

This is why the Chatterbox group and people simply learning about disabilities to understand disabilities more is invaluable to so many young disabled people in Bournemouth.

I hope I have piqued some of your interests and I certainly hope you will all learn more about disabilities to better expand your knowledge.

Remember, all people are amazing creatures, we are mammals of intellect, friendship, justice, love and most importantly difference.

We ALL need help to best enjoy life, we all deserve to be understood, cared for and treated fairly- different is good, and having a disability certainly does not make you stupid.

If you would like to learn more about the work of The Chatterboxes. Please contact Poppy on

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