

'Open your mind' by the Young Campaigners' Group (video transcript)

Ralph: Sometimes I find things a little bit difficult. I find eye contact a bit of a problem Meeting people and asking questions is difficult. It feels like I know what I want to do for my future but I feel that I'm worried I'm not going to get there and I'm not going to get this job that I want. It's very hard to move on with what you would like to do with your life, so it gets you thinking.

Jacob: I'm autistic which means you have a different personality to most people. I like to use 'eccentric'. Basically, I don't make a good first impression. Unless you make a good impression, your chances of making a lot of friends are not very good. I accepted that a long time ago and just learnt to love it.

Hayley: People say I'm different and weird but to me, it's just me. I can't handle big groups at all. I need to be secure. I need to have my pattern in life. A lot of people think that girls can't have autism or anything and I guess yes, you see it differently in girls but that doesn't mean it's not there, even though it's different.

Hollie: No. The only thing that, really, I can see physically with my autism would be that anxiety part of it. I don't think being diagnosed has helped me become me. Everything that's happened, even all the really rubbishy things that have happened, helped me to be me.

Female voiceover: The Young Campaigners Group is writing its own charter, a list of things their ideal child mental health service should do.

Hollie: The first day that we all met together, I know I was nervous but when we started talking about autism and Asperger's and things, I think we clicked.

Hollie: This is our campaign. It's called 'You Need to Know' to make mental health services better for people with autism.

Hollie: There were people there who didn't want to be filmed. They did stuff the other way. They wrote the clips. I think it was Simon. Brilliant.

Male voiceover: The Young Campaigners Group is one of our most promising efforts to improve the system.

NAS staff member: Ben and Tom, do you want to go through yours?

Ben: Don't worry. I'm not a maniac.

Hollie: With the charter and the film, going to parliament and everyone doing things like that to get the point heard and things, I thought it was brilliant. It was such a good thing to have.

Henry: That you are ready to listen to the opinions of one boy with autism means a lot to me. At least now I have a name for my problems. I have been in some very dark places, places where no child should go. There have been a number of times where I saw no point in my life. I just did not want to live anymore. For many years, I was lonely with no friends, no one to be with at playtimes and no invitations to parties. To make it worse, I used to get into trouble at school for failing to complete work given to the class, which in any event, I did not understand.

Hollie: I think over time, as a group we'd be going to work better together and listen a bit more. I think as we went through, instead of just telling our stories, we just started actually doing something with them.

Hollie: I think the time after that when we met, we started using the cameras and filming each other. I think that's when I actually realised that when I started filming things, I actually really enjoyed, really enjoyed that form of things. Now, I'm doing Art GCSE and doing Photography and things. Yes, it's good.

Ben: The autism that I've got, I think it embiggens your emotion. For me, it embiggened my anger. A lot time ago, I had serious anger problems. Well, in primary school, I had no mental health at all. Everyone's considered me insane, depressed, freak. Being with a mental health service has not changed who I am, but just made me fit in more.

Hollie: Josh, a Psychology student with Asperger's came to talk to us, came and talked to the group.

Josh: I was able to come into the Campaigners Group as someone with past experience of campaigning with the NAS and as someone who'd experienced mental health problems and who was actively involved in mental health services. Autism is a spectre of conditions. Some people are very high-functioning. Other people have lower functioning. There are some individuals in the spectrum who have no language and have no real comprehension of the world around them. It's really important that we care for all of these views in the mental health campaign as everyone is entitled to good mental health.

Hollie: Yes, we want you to see that our lives are just the same as other people's, just maybe a little bit different. Maybe more interesting. We went off with cameras to collect footage.

Female (off camera): Say the words.

Ben: Yes. My little brother Charlie, he's got autism, see, like me, only a little worse. It means he doesn't really like playing with other children very much. One time, he actually wanted everyone else to get off before he would go on. There he goes, he's on.

Female (off camera): One, two.

Charlie: No, no.

Ben: Go.

Charlie: No way.

Hayley: This is where I live. Ice cream on a rainy day, nothing better.

Jacob: This is my brother. Say, 'Hello,' Jordan.

Jordan: Hello.

Jacob: I find that through growing up with me, he's very, very accepting which I do think you'll find with most autistic siblings. They'll be accepting and they'll have a better opinion than most people will.

Jordan: Yes.

Ralph: I've done my first week at college and just about to go back to my second week. Yes, it's been great. I've been doing a work-based learning program which has been good. This is my roommate, Max. This is where I'm sleeping. This is where my roommate's sleeping.

Male voiceover: Life is very demanding on the mind, and for those with autism, we might want to state that twice. The mind is the best tool that anyone possesses and if it isn't keep clear of doubts, worries or even mental disorders, they are surely heading for disaster.

Hollie: By October, I think we were working really well as a group and we were working pretty hard on getting the charter finished.

Henry: Just those are about the general autism, autistic spectrum or autism itself. They're going to write that out as general autism.

Henry: Holly or Hayley, could you tell us about a particular thing that made you feel uncomfortable when you visited CAM?

Hollie: When they asked me if it was okay if they could put some people behind the screen. They have a screen in one of the rooms where two people can sit behind the screen, but they also have a camera that films the appointment.

Henry: Did that make you feel really uncomfortable?

Hollie: Yes. I left. I left the room.

Hollie: We were working hard getting the charter finished and putting them into the right order from the clocks all the way to the bigger things that needed to be changed and trying to cut it down to a certain amount of points.

Jacob: The CAMHS service should give you choice on what you want to do and let you choose.

Ralph: The environment should not have ticking clocks.

Henry: It can be quite a distracting thing. When their mind's trying to focus on speaking to that person, it can take everything away and the thoughts can just go straight out of your head.

Hollie: I was at the point where I found it really scary just to walk to the shop at the end of my road because all sorts of things that I was worried about. For someone just to do that, walk with me-,

Hayley: The CAMHS service should take you out and help you through situations that you find scary.

Henry: The way that the CAMHS building looks, particularly in my area, is really not that appealing because you have to press an entry phone to get in.

Ralph: Also, when you look at the building, you think it's like a dark place.

Hollie: The CAMHS service should work with schools.

Henry: When our other teachers don't understand what's going on and why you're behaving in this certain way, if CAMHS can maybe put some support into place and help you with your certain needs and subjects, this could be good.

Hollie: As a group, I think we're hoping that a charter will achieve a change. I think as a group, we want to make a difference because now, the MPs are listening and they know that there are problems there. It'd be good to know that we contributed to making it better.

Ben: CAMHS professionals should understand autism and that everyone is different.

Ralph: How have you found working with the Young Campaigners Group?

Ben: I've found it incredibly warming to me. Yes, I've really liked it. It's like being a slightly dysfunctional family.

Ben: Cannonball

Hayley: I've learnt more. Like, it's not just me that's having these problems, which before I went, I was thinking, 'This is just our family.' I really thought about how much it affects other people.

Jacob: I've found it very fun, very stirring and I found it active and I felt like I've been listened to.

Hayley: How much have you enjoyed working with the Young Campaigners Group?

Henry: Yes, it's been really good. I've got to meet new people. It's really helped me get a better understanding of how everything works behind the doors of CAMs. It's been somewhere I've been able to open up and tell everyone about the emotions I have at school without anything being laughed at or thinking it was particularly funny. It's just been really, really helpful for me.

Ben: Give us a sound-check.

Female (off camera): How do you feel about the Young Campaigners Group?

Ralph: Yes, I think it's absolutely brilliant that I've been involved in this and helping people with mental health issues who are suffering from a difficult time.

Male voiceover: So I ask you to set aside what you know and to open your mind.

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