

THE DROP ISSUE NO. 2

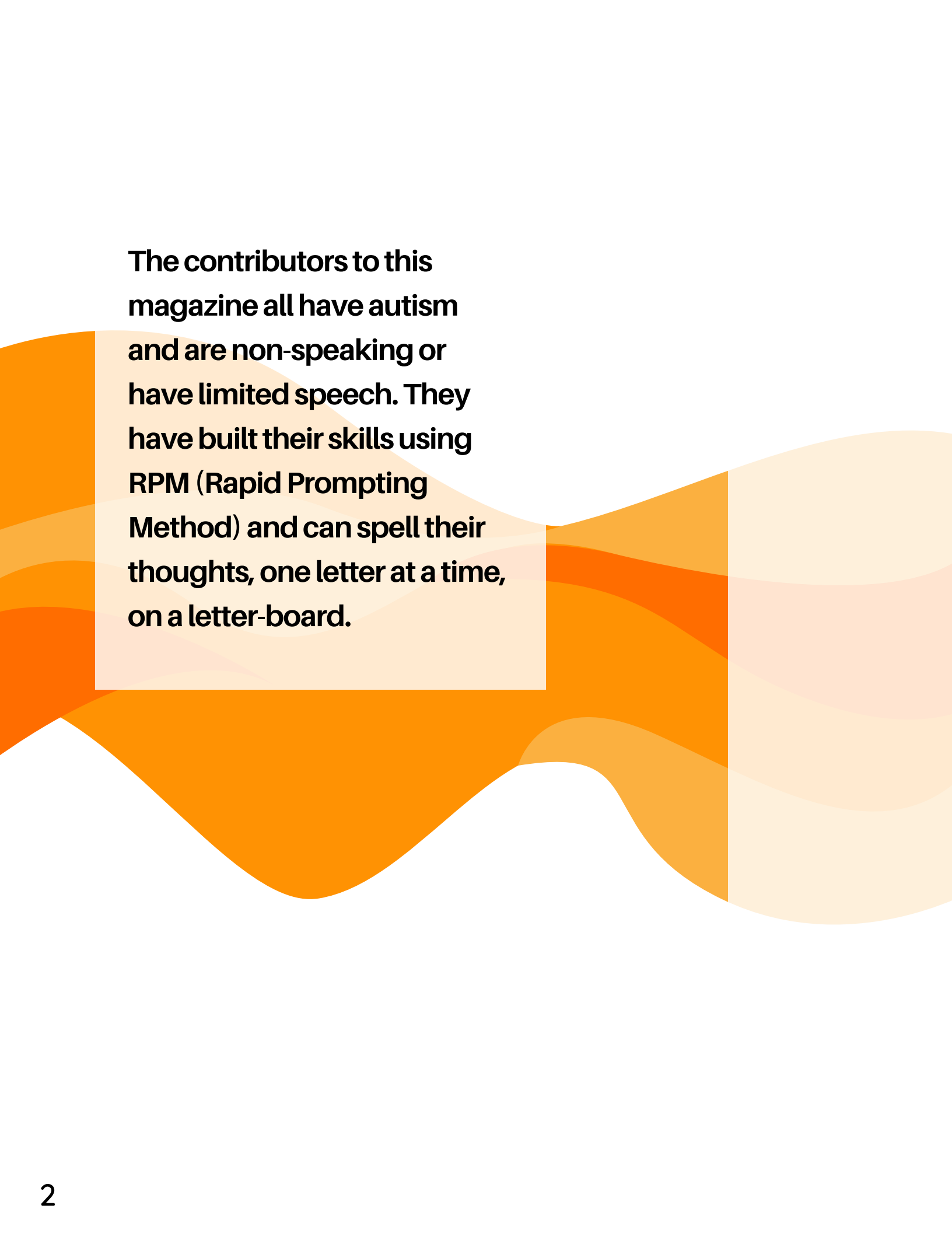
MAY 2023

# THE CHRISTOPHER FINNES TRIBUTE EDITION



**Remembering our friend**

**Each contributor gives their  
take on the theme:  
Connections**



**The contributors to this magazine all have autism and are non-speaking or have limited speech. They have built their skills using RPM (Rapid Prompting Method) and can spell their thoughts, one letter at a time, on a letter-board.**

# MISSION & VISION

**The mission of this magazine is to provide a place for autistic people, without purposeful speech, to share their great ideas and insights.**

**The intention is for this to be positive and fun, as well as informative and encouraging. We hope you will enjoy reading this, please share with others so we can make ripples that lead to changes in how we are viewed.**

**-Ellen O'Shea**

All words in this magazine are from the contributors, apart from photo notations which have been provided by families.



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# THE CONTRIBUTORS



## PADDY

I am Paddy and I am the youngest of the group. I am happy to share my insights and participate in this magazine. Teaching others is something I'd love to do when I'm older so I need practise.

## CHRIS. R

Hi I'm Chris. I realise that people's views about autism can often be based on our appearances and what society shares about us. I am excited to share my experiences as a non-verbal autistic man who has enormous sensory challenges, rigidity and obsessions. I really hope my contributions can help to make a different world for autistic people.





# ELLEN

Hello, I am Ellen. I am a young adult making my first splash into the literary world. I am autistic and have the mouth of a parrot! It repeats familiar phrases and is sudden and loud. I can spread my ideas more easily by spelling on my RPM letterboard. I am so pleased to be part of this new magazine as words have a power to them and we can use them for good.



# JACK

I'm Jack. I love to be part of groups where I can contribute to something bigger than myself. Having this magazine is challenging me to think about how I can help lead change for lots of quiet voices. I look forward to taking part.





## **CHARLIE**

**Hello I am the one who took ages to develop my pointing skills but now there is no stopping me.**

**I am over the moon to be a contributor. Hope to inspire and be inspired.**

## **POSY**

**Hi, I am Posy and, like the other contributors, I am often misjudged because of my baffling behaviours. Having autism forces me to create mammoth routines! Each issue of this magazine will represent that, amongst the routines, I've been able to purposefully focus and contribute to society.**





# JOHNNY

Hello my name is Johnny. I like to make films and play with people. I also enjoy making stories which I hope will be made into films. I am happy sharing my stories, thoughts and struggles with people who might benefit from them.



# TOM

Hello I'm Tom. Since starting RPM my world has opened up to more possibilities. I am so happy to make contributions so that people realise that there's more to me and others. I am so keen to develop my poetry as poems are great at sharing messages. I plan to share one each issue.

I hope you enjoy this first one.







# MANDEEP

My name is Mandeep. Could anyone have imagined changing people’s views about autism ten years ago? Managing to dream about changing the world is now a possibility and I’m happy to be involved in the magazine.

We are delighted to feature these contributors in this issue too:



**ETHAN**



**FIACRE**



**ADAM**



**CIAN**



**DARRAGH**



**TOMMY**



# REMEMBERING CHRIS, CREATING CONNECTIONS



Posy Taylor

Welcome to our second issue which is dedicated to our friend and contributor, Christopher Finnes. Sadly Chris passed away in February after suffering a profound brain injury. He was a trailblazer in our spelling community and taught many of our parents to believe that we were capable of learning to express our inner language. **We are so grateful that Chris helped our voices unlock and that we are no longer misunderstood.** In this issue we will share some of his profound statements.

Photo: Christopher Finnes

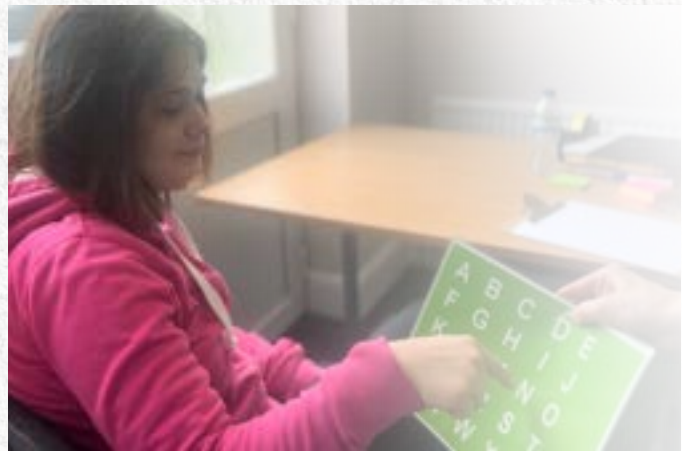




In each issue we come up with a theme that enables each contributor to put a personal spin on it. Earlier in the year we decided on 'connections'. **We felt this was still appropriate as a theme and feel that we will always be connected to Chris.**

Having this magazine has allowed us the contributors to connect with each other in a purposeful way to share our voices with the world. Being autistic people with speech limitations makes this really special for us as **it can be so hard to connect on a deeper level.**

**We are so pleased to have connected with people, far and wide and feel that we can offer society something significant.**



**Thank you for reading our magazine. We hope you feel inspired to think about what and who you connect with and how we can all connect with and help each other more.**



# WHAT DOES CONNECTION MEAN TO YOU?

Ethan Mean

Happiness feels like really connected moments with my family, precious relationships, and living positively.





# CONNECTING WITH MY RELIGION

Mandeep Sanghera

**Having religion helps me to see the positives in everything. I personally connect to my religion, Sikhism, to see what is important in life.**

**My main sense is that we are working to change ourselves for the better. Through changing ourselves we can try to help others. When we notice the needs of others and attend to them, we connect to them on a deeper level. You are someone valuable when you start to positively impact the lives of others. This is why I'm grateful for my religion.**

Mandeep and his family visiting the Holy Temple





# CONNECTIONS IN THE PARK

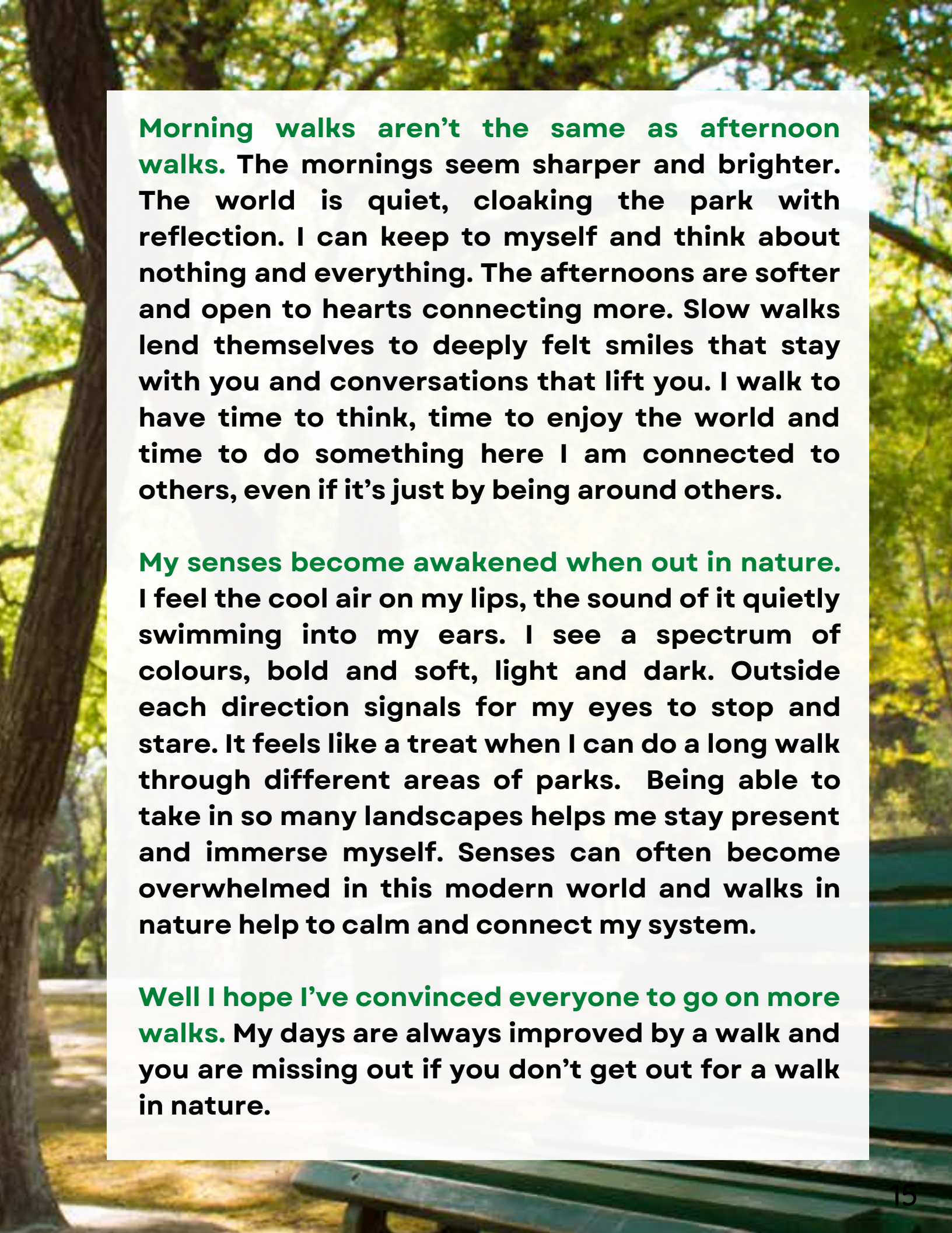
Ellen O'Shea



**Parks are beautiful places to go for connection. Strolling along provides me with the opportunity to create varied connections that bring me precious moments. The following points are some of my reflections I have made while out in the park.**

**Seeing familiar and unfamiliar faces lets me enjoy interactions, big and small. A long time taking in conversations or a quick smile finds the happiness within and lets me shine brightly. I, outside, am more at ease, so interacting feels lighter. There is less pressure to socialise as everyone is out to enjoy their own walk and it's easier to get away if needed. Lovely people who have seen that I am autistic have said hello and also smiled at me. These people inspire me to smile back which I always feel good about.**





**Morning walks aren't the same as afternoon walks.** The mornings seem sharper and brighter. The world is quiet, cloaking the park with reflection. I can keep to myself and think about nothing and everything. The afternoons are softer and open to hearts connecting more. Slow walks lend themselves to deeply felt smiles that stay with you and conversations that lift you. I walk to have time to think, time to enjoy the world and time to do something here I am connected to others, even if it's just by being around others.

**My senses become awakened when out in nature.** I feel the cool air on my lips, the sound of it quietly swimming into my ears. I see a spectrum of colours, bold and soft, light and dark. Outside each direction signals for my eyes to stop and stare. It feels like a treat when I can do a long walk through different areas of parks. Being able to take in so many landscapes helps me stay present and immerse myself. Senses can often become overwhelmed in this modern world and walks in nature help to calm and connect my system.

**Well I hope I've convinced everyone to go on more walks.** My days are always improved by a walk and you are missing out if you don't get out for a walk in nature.



# WALKS IN THE PARK

Ellen O'Shea

**Your smile can lift my spirit  
even on a hard day,  
Your nod means I matter  
despite the words I cannot say,  
Your silence meets mine  
and takes loneliness away,  
Your movements like mine  
connect us in a profound way.**

Ellen at Sutton Park





# WALKS IN NATURE

Ellen asked the other contributors to share photos of themselves on their favourite walks.



Chris.R  
enjoying a  
stroll  
around  
Olton  
Mere



Posy at a sensory  
walk next to her  
horse riding  
lessons



Adam at the Old  
Head Beach. County  
Mayo in Ireland



Tom  
enjoying  
a walk  
around  
Matlock



Mandeep and his Dad at  
the Lickey Hills



Ethan taking  
stroll around  
Gibside Hall  
(National  
Trust)







Johnny loves the Japanese Garden at the Botanical Gardens in Birmingham and also enjoys visiting the secret garden at Birmingham Library.

Jack at Beeston Castle in Cheshire







Darragh at the breathtaking Patrick Head, Ballycastle in Ireland



Paddy at Brueton Park in Solihull

Tommy at Co.Wexford, Ireland, at a Zwartble sheep breed open day.

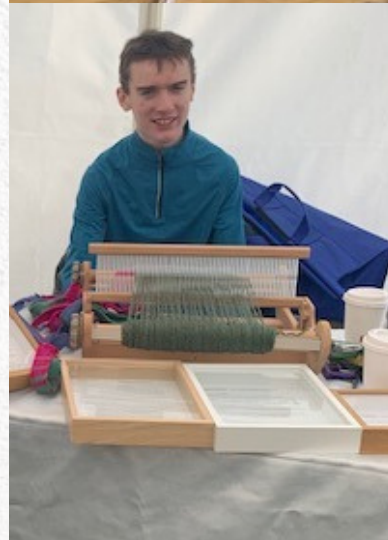




# MY CONNECTION TO MY HANDS OPENED CREATIVITY INTO MY LIFE

Tommy Naughton

Having fortune in my life has meant that I connect to my hands in many ways. Using my hands I'm able to become a creative craftsman. I fuse my ideas with my motor skills to light up my life. Enjoyment is your best way to free your mind and body.





# **AUTISM; A QUIET QUEST**

Fiacre Ryan

**Dancing free like an uncaged bird  
Pretences fall as my voice is heard  
Delighting as real stars appear  
Dissolving away my greatest fear  
My real self is here and I am shining  
Autism, a matter, no longer defining.**

Fiacre with his book, Speechless





# CONNECTIONS AND CREATING MOVIES

Johnny Curran

Q - What comes to mind when you think of connections?

It makes me think being autistic is hard for making connections. I'd like to connect with more people socially but it is anxiety provoking.



Johnny enjoys creating episodes of the 'Cuddly Toy Show' with his tutor Elle. He's recently released his second episode, please do watch, leave a comment and subscribe!



# CONNECTING WITH A FELLOW AUTHOR

Paddy Curran



I, at the moment, am focused on becoming a published author of stories that make people think. Connecting with people through my words allows me to share autism in a different manner, which is important to me. I am so passionate about that.

I wanted to contact an author to ask questions to help me towards my aim.

Paddy reached out to Frank Cottrell Boyce, an award-winning screen-writer and author, who has a book and film coming out later this year. He sent Frank a set of questions and was delighted to receive such insightful responses.



## THE INTERVIEW

(Frank 's words are in black, Paddy's in orange)

**Hi Paddy. First of all thank you for contacting me. I loved watching you spell out the questions. Your superpower is patience!! I think the competition is a great idea. Anything I can do to help, just let me know.**



### **1. Please tell me how you got into writing**

How did I get into writing? I just ... wrote!!! I wrote stories when I was still at school and read them to anyone who would listen. At university I got a group of friends together and put plays on. When a soap opera (called Brookside) started up in `Liverpool I sent in some of my work and they let me try out for them. After that I just kept writing.

### **2. At the moment I am trying to plan a story and I'm not sure how to go about it. Are you able to give me any advice?**

YES! Two really good bits of advice from a wise old man (me)  
First of all, just jump in! A good story should surprise the reader so let it surprise YOU first. A lot of people like to plan a lot and maybe they're better writers than me. But I like to just get going and see what happens.

Second .... When you are stuck, have someone read the story out to you. Listening is a great test! You'll know right away which bits work and which bits don't.

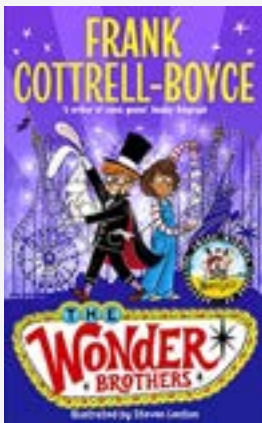
### **3. Underestimated and autistic, I am thought to be not very able and it is hard to break through fake stereotypes. Would you assume all people are able to share a story and have you ever been underestimated?**

I'll tell you a story about that. I helped create the opening ceremony of the 2012 Olympic Games. Everyone everyone everyone said it was going to be rubbish. But then it wasn't. People went crazy about it. I think it was good. But the real reasons that people went crazy is that they underestimated us. Being underestimated can be an advantage. D'you see? It means that people won't just be impressed by your work - they'll be surprised that it's so brilliant.



#### 4. Tell me ways to engage an audience, and keep their attention

Oh that's a hard one. Hitchcock used to say "Make them laugh, make them cry but most of all make them wait." Making them wait is the hardest part! Don't tell them anything until they really need to know it. Leave out the boring bits. Make sure the main character is interesting.



#### 5. Any future projects you're able to share with us?

I wrote a film based on Michael Morpurgo's book Kensuke's Kingdom which I hope is coming out soon. I've got a new book coming in July and would love to send you a copy. It's called The Wonder Brothers. What about you?

Recently I finished my first book and published it to Amazon. It's called Notes to a Friend and it's an interactive journal.



I'll definitely check this out!!!

After receiving Frank's responses, Paddy replied:

To Mr Frank Cottrell Boyce,  
Thanks so much and for answering my questions I am so grateful for your time. Please send me the book about the educated immigrants, it sounded interesting. Changing views about marginalised groups is also a passion of mine. To have too many able bodied and able minded people at the centre of so much media, puts people like me in the background. Change a 'not', to a 'not yet' and ask all the intelligent questions as I am the expert in autism as you are in this field of writing.

Thanks again, love Paddy



# RPM AND CONNECTIONS

Three of our contributors reflected about how RPM had brought connection that they hadn't previously thought possible



Charlie McGowan

**Feeling that my tapped out sentences are in some way inspiring is a triumph. Wearing a silent mouth does act as a hidden mask.**

**Now my real voice demands to be heard.**

**Through effort, determination and good skill progression, a strong and speaking mind can now be heard.**

**Finger, hand, elbow; they work together, fighting against my sensory system to participate and connect with people.**



Tom Grabiec

**RPM is my method of learning and sharing expressive thoughts. It has made genuine connection possible. I have very intense OCD speech with restricted words. This can make me look simple. Sharing my inside thoughts helps me to be seen as more than my speech and as a person capable of complex thoughts.**

**Please know I do want to make meaningful connections.**

**We are all valuable members of this world.**







# **CONNECTING A SILENT SPEAKER TO THEIR VOICE**

Darragh Kiernan

**RPM and Autism are a brilliant match for connecting silent speakers with loud voices. Each silent speaker has a loud and meaningful voice that needs to wake up and be heard.**

**Autism wordlessly aims to cause chaotic disconnection.**

**When I started RPM it helped me to connect my silents hands to a loud voice. Taking an approach that develops strong connections in the brain is what we need, not a focus on what we cannot do. Bring connection to autistic silent speakers.**



# **COMMUNICATION AND LEARNING CONNECTED ME BACK TO MYSELF**

Posy Taylor

If my life was to be written down, pages would be filled with sadness and loneliness. I had no reliable speech and no way to communicate. I wanted to learn like my sisters but I was stuck.

Seeking connection was far from anything I thought possible, so I disconnected from people and then myself. I had no opinions, I had no interests. Describing that time is hard as I felt so much emptiness.

Starting RPM was a new chapter. It allowed me to reconnect with my brain and movement. I poured my learning into my difficult body and it was euphoric to know that my brain was capable and ready for new connections. Tedious motor practice was eased with stimulating topics. Soon I was expressing thoughts, discovering how I felt and I started to consider what my views were.

I have since reflected that this was when I felt like a person again as the empty void was filled. I had hope. My beliefs and my personality were at last able to be shared. Finding knowledge, moving purposefully and thinking about my own thoughts perfectly connected me back into life.





**Autism and its affects are embedded into my life story. It is experienced differently by each individual but for me, autism means obsessive routines (endless routines!), sensory fears and challenges, feeling emotions fire out for no logical reason, and no speech. In a way, autism has disconnected me from a normal life and it is a lot harder to connect with people and myself as a result. In a different way I am more connected to people now than I ever would have been as I tend to make personal connections quickly and deeply. Overall I am grateful for the deep connections I have because of Autism.**

**As I move into my new chapter, I have promised myself to raise awareness of RPM so more non-speakers can experience connection in its many forms. I am desperate that we end isolation and make autistic non speakers access more of what life has to offer.**



# HAVING FUN



Chris having fun in the Cafe at Flip out (the trampoline park)



Tom celebrating the Coronation



Ellen and Posy getting ready for horse-riding (supported by the lovely Dawn in the middle!)

They both enjoyed a bowling session too!



Ethan and Charlie taking a break from RPM lessons for a quick cycle (with a small push from Alex at the back)



Jack participating in the 'Creating Adventures' art club in Warrington (above), and with his brother, George, tobogganing at the Snowsports Centre in Llandudno (right).





# BECOMING CONNECTED TO PEOPLE LIKE ME

Jack Armstrong

This year it is my goal to connect with more people who do RPM. I already go to several clubs but now I am focussed on developing friendships with people like me: people with speech limitations, autism and who spell out their thoughts.

This feels important for many reasons:

Firstly, I have only met one other person that used RPM, called Bertie. At first, it felt strange to meet another person who was responding to the world in a different way, sniffing everyone's hair and moving around the room energetically. **Then he sat and spelled.** Near the end my heart felt so happy.







**We were able to have a meaningful connection instantly.** Occasionally we do meet and send messages to each other. Personally it made me feel that we are there for each other as we can relate.

**Secondly I know that seeing another person pointing and sharing is really helpful when you are starting to build your skills. I'm always inspired when I am witnessing people doing things that I want to do. Together we can inspire and encourage each other.**

**Finally, I realise that friends help you to move forward. A friendship is like a well oiled machine - when each part supports the other parts it runs well and gets you moving.**





**When you only have one part you can't do much. Friends are my way of making it through life with more fun, more connection and more progress in my goals.**

**Where am I going with all this? I want to schedule in some regular sessions where all of us can meet and see each other. I'd love some group activities where we can inspire each other to practice more and really connect. Who is up for it? We can do more together.**

**Hopefully my next article can share how it's gone.**





# CONNECTING TO NATURE

Adam Galvin

**My connection to nature helps me to feel peace. One breath of fresh air makes me relax and one step forwards finds my inner sense of heaven. My dense senses relax and feel free outside in nature.**



# How can I develop deep connections to people and places when everything is overwhelming?

Chris Rochford

I'm eager to make friends and experience new places, but sensory issues can mean it's very difficult. I need to build familiarity with people and places in order to create and enjoy a connected life.

People need to help me build familiarity so that I can overcome challenges and make friendships.

*I really want to enter the cafe but my whole system freezes. Hearing becomes blurred as I become overwhelmed. You think I don't want to go in.*

*A quietness comes over my system as I cover my ears and stand still. Slowly I move towards the door and you see me hesitate even more. Can you see that I'm trying so hard? I eventually get inside and enjoy myself. Something so simple for most people but challenging in an extreme way for me.*







### **Top tips to help me are:**

- Please know that I do want to go out to different places but my body finds it overwhelming.
- Persevere right through my challenges to help me live an open life of activities.
- Give me time to let peace enter my body, rushing is not helpful.
- Over time I'll start enjoying activities very much
- Once at a stage of familiarity I can connect to others more easily.

### **Good and bad**

**Connections in my brain  
Pave ways for a harder life  
Connections in my brain  
Let me see the world differently  
Connections in my brain  
Irritate others when I overreact  
Connections in my brain  
Can bring joy to everyone around me**



# CONNECTIONS AND ACTIONS


Cian Cotter



**Finding out about the connections under my actions is useful and interesting. Autism is very obsessive for me and it's slowly starting to become complicated.**

**Doing good work is important and my obsessions can add to a lot of wasted time. Seeing connections as something I can work on gives me hope. Sharing this is good.**





**I wish to challenge people's  
beliefs about autism.  
I am without the skills that  
other people have  
but I have an  
intelligent brain.**

**CHRIS**



# REMEMBERING OUR FRIEND, CHRIS

Chris had a huge impact on us all. Here we look at the different ways he connected with people, from his family, friends and local community to families across the world.



## *My Amazing Family (an excerpt)*

I am incredibly fortunate to have the family that I have. There are challenges with autism and my family are great at helping me through them.

Autism is not easy to live with but it can be a lot of fun. We have a lot of awesome times together and understanding that my autism is part of creating that fun is important to me.



Chris was a much loved member of the YMCA Stepping Up group in Sutton Coldfield.







Chris developed great friendships with his team! Here he is with Dawn (and her daughter Isobella), Karen and Bob.



Chris attended Special Olympics with his Dad, Stuart, who became the Chairman. Weekly sessions helped Chris to build his skills while connecting with peers. Chris and his dad also enjoyed their weekly swimming sessions at Wyndley Leisure Centre where Chris was always met with smiles from the 'regulars'!







rpm 9may12sue sustainable dev4 biology (trimmed-3)



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1



Share



Chris and his Mum, Sue shared their RPM videos on YouTube, showing the highs and lows of their RPM journey. Families from all over the world were inspired to try RPM with their child/adult.

**Unlocking  
Voices**

*Using RPM*

Chris inspired his Mum, Sue to set up 'Unlocking Voices - Using RPM', a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to empowering other parents to learn RPM. Today there are over 8,000 members on the international Facebook group.

Chris contributed to our first edition of 'The Drop' Magazine and was delighted to have a joint platform to keep sharing the message to not underestimate non/limited speaking autistics. Here was the introduction he shared:

**People are often under the impression that autistic and non-speaking people, like me, don't understand very many things. I aim to inform and inspire, opening people's minds to the assumptions they have and showing that with support we can achieve so much. I am Christopher and I'm so glad to have this opportunity.**



Inspired by Chris' joy and profound messages, his family and friends are setting up a charity, in his name, to support the causes closest to them. They are nearly at their £30,000 target, but we would love to help them smash it! Please [donate](#) if you are able to.



# Unlocking Voices

Using RPM

## UK RPM CONFERENCE

 SAT 10TH JUNE 2023

 BIRMINGHAM

[MORE INFO/ REGISTER NOW](#)

Join us for a day of networking and learning

Topics include:

- What is RPM: the fundamentals.
- Functional v. expressive communication.
- RPM skill progression: video demonstrations.
- RPM everyday: parent experiences.

 [www.unlockingvoices.com](http://www.unlockingvoices.com)

There IS more to your autistic & limited speaking child than meets the eye

*'I am intelligent but happen to have a body which does not cooperate with my thoughts'*  
- Chris Finnes

Key Speakers:

Sue Finnes, Director  
Unlocking Voices UK



Alex Hopwood,  
Director of  
RpmUK

Unlocking Voices are a fantastic parent-led Community Interest Company who reach other parents wanting to pursue other options for their non/minimally speaking child. Information, inspiration and key messages will be offered at this learning event to turn misconceptions about autism upside down. We encourage everyone to attend! - Ellen O'Shea

'If you had been able to meet my son Chris you would have seen a young man who at the age of 24 still loved to watch teletubby clips on YouTube. He was non speaking and when excited he still jumped and flapped his arms. You would not expect him to be highly intelligent, to be able to express his thoughts and opinions or to be able to create beautiful poems. RPM enabled him to do all these things and now many more autistic people are demonstrating their abilities in this way. Please come along to our conference to meet successful uk families and find out more'

- Sue Finnes, Director of Unlocking Voices



**I hope that I will be able to autistically contribute to the world and I will make a positive change.**

**Yes I have so many trials and challenges to overcome but I can do this and I will do this well.**

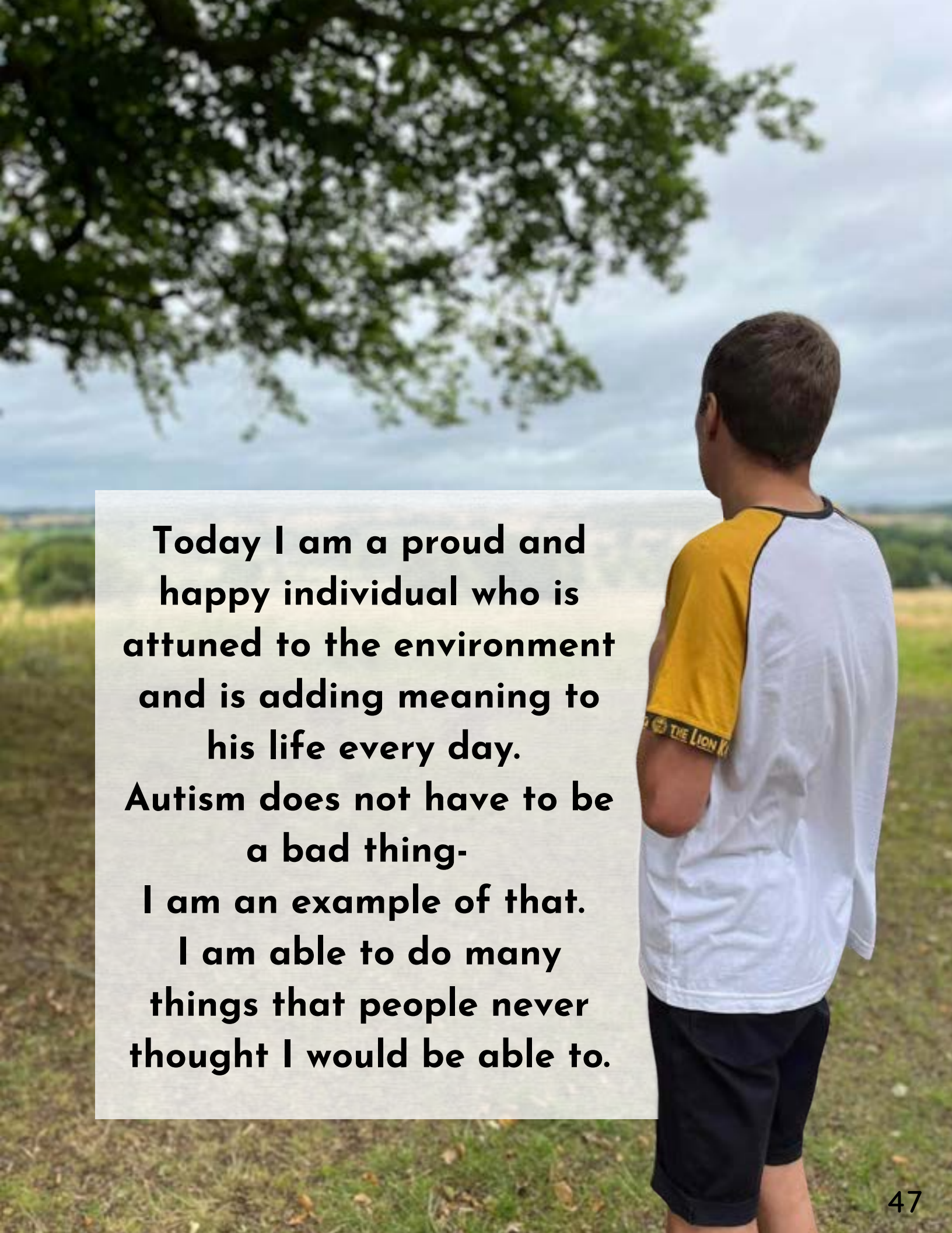
**I hope I am starting to autistically make real steps towards changing for the best.**

**I understand it will be hard at some points but if you don't try then all that hard work will have gone to waste.**

**CHRIS**







**Today I am a proud and  
happy individual who is  
attuned to the environment  
and is adding meaning to  
his life every day.  
Autism does not have to be  
a bad thing-  
I am an example of that.  
I am able to do many  
things that people never  
thought I would be able to.**



Thank you for reading this issue of 'The Drop' dedicated to our friend Chris Finnes. If you are able to make a donation, Chris' family are setting up a charity in his name to support the causes closest to their hearts. Click [here](#) to make a donation.



If you would like to get in touch, please email: [support@rapidpromptingmethod.co.uk](mailto:support@rapidpromptingmethod.co.uk)  
Please put 'The Drop' as the subject header

