

The Drop.



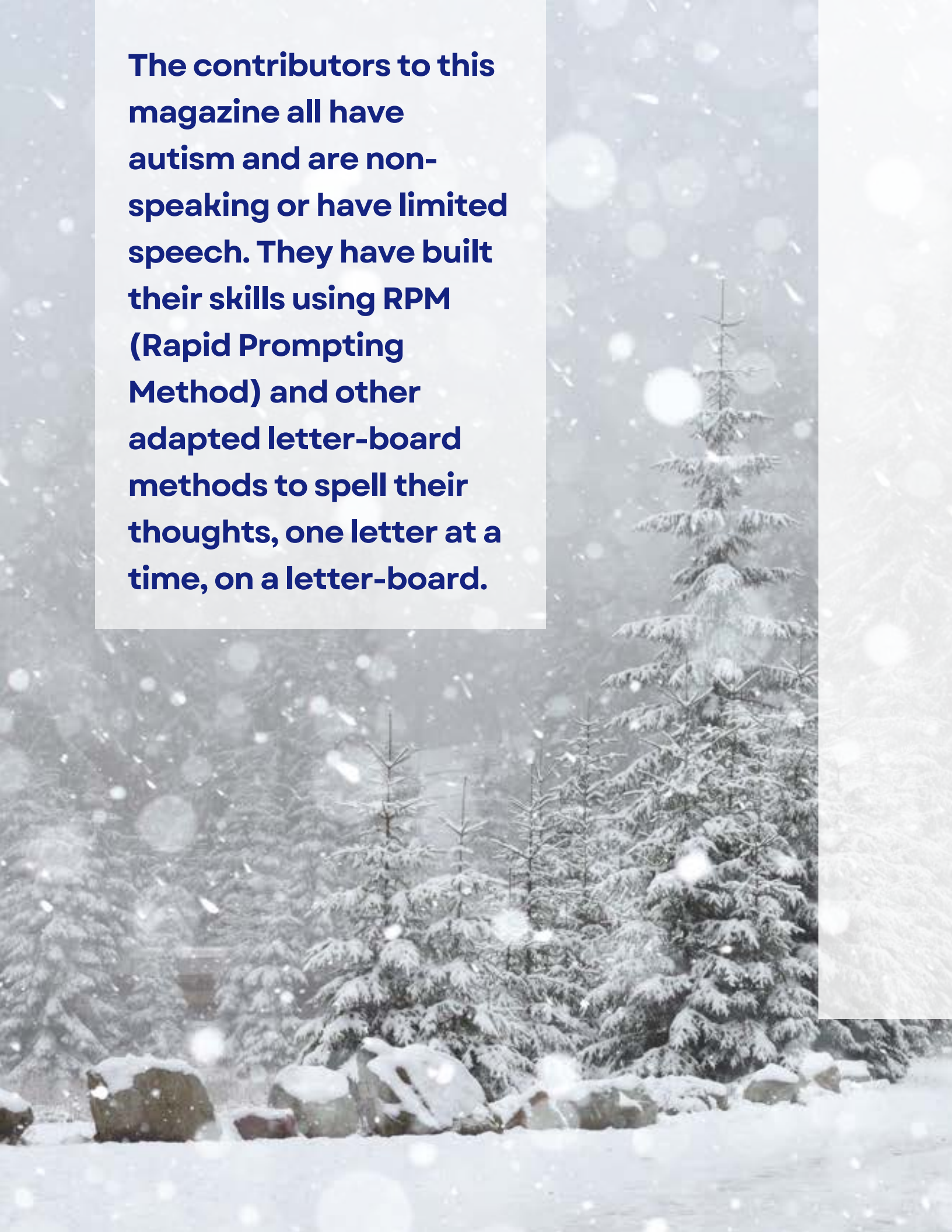
Looking Back to Look Forward

Unveiling our spellers' insightful reflections on everything from fairytales to crafts!

Unlocking Creativity: The Christopher Finnes Writing Award

We share the winning pieces and a selection of incredible entries.

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 other adapted letter-board methods to 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

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THE CONTRIBUTORS

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.

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.



CHARLES



Hello, my name is Charles and I am terrifically proud to be part of The Drop. I love The Drop and I am excited to add another voice to the non speaking community.

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.



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.



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.





BERTIE

During my time as a speller, I have benefited from the words of other spellers. I hope to, by sharing my thoughts, do the same so that others can benefit too.

My aim is to be honest and share thoughts that make a change.

RON

I would love to be involved in this magazine because I want people to hear my voice. This would show them how intelligent I really am.



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.

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.



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.

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.



WELCOME

Jack Armstrong

Many excellent writers have contributed to this issue of our magazine. We hope you enjoy reading or hearing each piece. I am delighted to be part of The Drop and have the honour to announce that we are, with the help of friends, going to surpass our initial goal of creating two or three editions to now make this a charity. This will allow us to continue and I hope that this will improve our ability to focus on spreading the movement. I believe words have the power to inspire and create diverse thinking.





I appreciate our sponsor, Unlocking Voices. They have been great in supporting our families and please do get in touch with them if you need information. They launched a creativity competition in memory of dear Christopher Finnes who was an amazing writer. The competition was to make creative pieces on the theme of celebration. We take pleasure in sharing some of the entries in this issue.

In this issue we have thought about reflection. Each contributor has thought about something personal to them so we have lots of variety.

On behalf of the contributors, thank you for reading our magazine.

REFLECTIONS ON LEARNING

Ron Arghojit

Learning gets harder as ageing happens. When I was younger I had less to learn. Challenging information was the best for my autistic self. I loved meaningful, important lessons that made me think. I am older now. Learning has changed. Challenges have increased. Headed into adulthood and I happily continue learning with higher expectations for myself. I must express myself in suitable ways to show my intelligence.



REFLECTIONS ON FAIRYTALES

Ellen O'Shea

I wrote a fairytale last year and had the idea to write a reflective piece about the process of working with an illustrator to make it a complete book that children can engage in. It has been a long process and I'd love to share more about it.

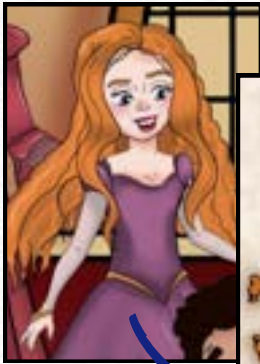
The Fairytale:

I wrote the story as part of a project in my sessions. We analysed what made a fairytale a fairytale, from the structure, to the repeating elements, to the speech between characters. After creating a plan, I created my first draft and the story was born. It is a tale of a ridiculous royal family who are obsessed with one thing and one thing only; looking good. My intention was for readers to see the silly nature of people who are obsessed with their appearances and to make this point in a humorous way.



The Characters:

I needed to give the illustration company clear descriptions of each character. This was difficult because interpretations can vary tremendously, so sometimes what came back was nothing like what I'd imagined. These were the final characters, but they started off very differently!



The first design for the princess was okay but she looked too old. The style also looked flat.

When I saw the next version I was delighted as the real spirit of her character shines through.

The main illustrations:

This was the most time intensive part. I had to split the story into short blocks and write a description in as much detail as I could. Sometimes the illustrator missed essential parts of the story which was frustrating at points. He also forgot which way body parts should go. It is funny to look back on but it was hard to feel reassured when the kings' legs were missing.



Final reflections:

Being the person I am, I never imagined I'd have the opportunity to write a book, let alone have it illustrated. It was a long experience, to be honest due to the illustration company, but it hasn't put me off doing it again (with a different illustrator of course!). Seeing your words brought to life is mesmerising for my mind and has made me feel I can meaningfully contribute to the world. Hopefully it can be available to purchase soon.

CRAFTY REFLECTIONS

Charles Blake

Life is long. Finding a purpose is important. It needs to be something enjoyable that can fill up your day and only takes your mind and heart to a precious place.

I personally have found my passion in life. It's crafting. I love crafting as it engages my mind and body equally.

People may not feel that crafting is that valuable or helpful. It is one of the only things that helps me in so many ways.

In terms of mental skills, it can work on creativity, imagination, logic and mental planning.

The physical skills that I acquire make me intelligent in multiple ways too as I can develop new motor skills and become more independent.

Having things you are good at is good for your confidence and is fulfilling. I know I'm not the best crafter but I believe in the products I make. They are good quality and are nice additions to any home.

Have a look at my facebook to see what I make. I reflect on my life and crafting is a huge part of it.

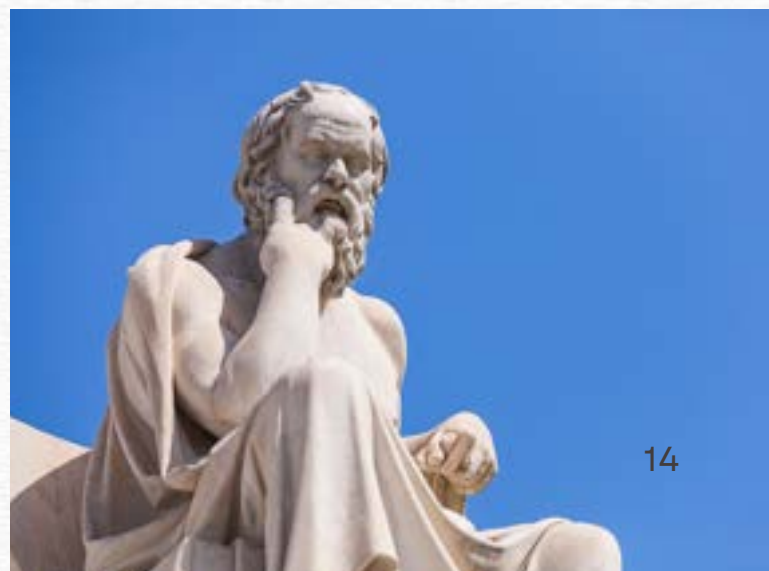
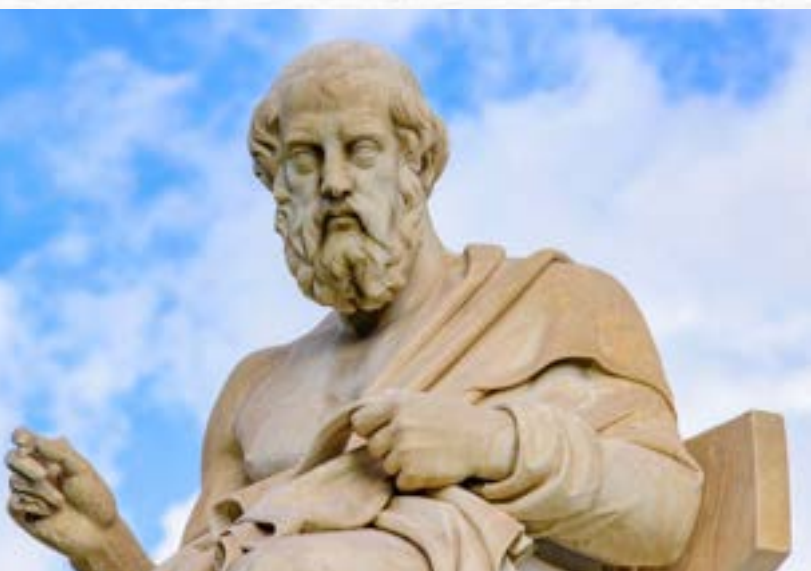


REFLECTING: KNOW THYSELF

Tom Grabiec



It is essential to reflect and ‘know thyself’. Aiming to look inward is what the greeks wanted us to do. Reflections help me to realise things I didn’t have any knowledge of before.



REFLECTIONS ON FRIENDSHIPS

Jack Armstrong

No one, autistic or not, can get by without friends. Finding friends is hard though! Finding someone who gets you and appreciates your differences can feel like an impossible challenge. Especially when it's very hard to see a person's thoughts under shouts and sensory excitement.

I wanted to find people who, like me, externally seem to have no interest in learning or deep discussion, but internally are very interested in both.

Have you got friends like this?

Eagerly I tried to make friends at clubs and activities. In my opinion, it is hard if you have not got a way to connect with a person's language. I feel real friendships build a deep connection with the language used in conversations and quietness doesn't allow for this. For this reason, I previously shared my desire to spend more time with people who communicate via spelling.



Over the last few months, I have spent time with a student called Ellen, who is not able to speak her thoughts. She does say a lot of words that seem a bit random. I feel that finally spending time in the presence of someone like me, on a regular basis, has allowed me to achieve this type of connection.

It has been amazing to experience. This is worth celebrating because it is a long term goal I have had and I'm actually doing it! My quiet goal is now realised.



It has also helped me to be part of the spelling community. I'd love to meet many more spellers in 2024!

Here are some parts of our conversations:

Jack: It's good to see you again

Ellen: Yes, have you had a good week?

Jack: Yes, thanks. It is hard to stay sitting

Ellen: Move if you need to. I shout random words'

Jack: Hi Ellen, how are you? I am tired after writing a speech.

Ellen: That sounds amazing. What was it about?

Jack: My mum is getting married and needed me to write a speech

Ellen: That is exciting. So are you creating a video?

Jack: I've just asked for a man with a deep voice to read it.

Ellen: Do you know any?

Jack: No I don't. It is nice to be asked to do a speech. It isn't something I thought would be possible.

REFLECTING ON EXPECTATIONS

Bertie Wardrop

I have learnt about the benefits of having low expectations. You, like me, might have set your expectations too high and now you're stuck. Make your life easier by having low expectations.

Less is more. When I expected a lot, I did less. Now I am open to do more as there is no invisible line being drawn that I need to cross. I can find progress when I try. These are quotes I like that shaped my quiet reflections:

“

Blessed is he who expects nothing for he shall never be disappointed.

Alexander Pope

”

At the time, I thought yes, expectations can make you worried you will never live up to what you feel you should.



“

I'm not in this world to live up to your expectations and you're not in this world to live up to mine.

Bruce Lee

”

I like it as people can expect too much.

It's astounding he thought this and then achieved so much. It shows that expectations don't create achievements, action does.

“

My expectations were reduced to zero when I was 21. Everything since then has been a bonus.

Stephen Hawking

”

Overall, I reflect the action has far more benefits than expectations. Each day I'll try to do a bit more and that will get me far.



THE PAST DOES NOT REFLECT YOUR FUTURE

Posy Taylor



Reflecting on the past,
Is a hard thing to do.
Where I am now
And if I've improved.

Worry about the future,
And you will fear it all.
You are the person,
To act so cool.

But emotions remain inside,
So patiently they have to hide.
Worries and regrets happen in us all,
The various difficulties we had at school.

Teachers that didn't understand me,
Teachers that didn't teach me.
Seeing your past struggles is hard and
emotional,
Stop overthinking and be rational.

Tell people about what you want to
achieve,
You need people around you that
believe.

You are unique,
You are bright,
You can set the world alight.

The past does not determine your
future.

REFLECTING ON ROUTINES

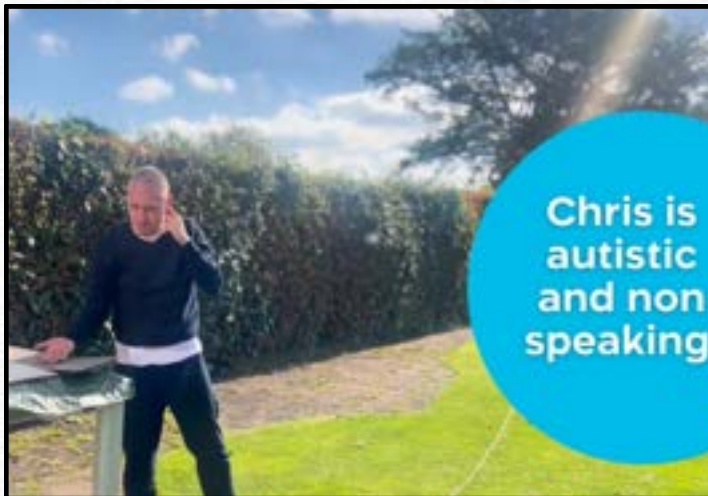
Charlie McGowan

We all need good routines. Doing the same things can feel tedious, however it's better to feel purposeful and get something done.



REFLECTIONS ON ADVOCACY

Chris Rochford



As part of advocacy week in November, I shared my thoughts about advocacy and created a short video (screenshots included).

I have loved having Lynn as an independent trusted person who can help me make decisions and share my voice.



It's led me to feel empowered and like an adult. I personally need more support than your average adult so it is really great to feel capable and intelligent.



Enabling me to have all the information I need is essential when thinking about important life decisions.

Advocates are able to come in with a fresh view and help you get the information you need. This is really important as my autism and sensory challenges can limit my exposure to information and experiences.



REFLECTIONS AND THE FUTURE

Paddy Curran



Reflections are pointless unless they teach you something. I look towards the future, picture the place I want to be and reveal outlandish goals for myself which seem unrealistic to everyone else. In the end, it is your own self belief that makes things happen.

RANDOM REFLECTIONS

Johnny Curran

- **Emotions can make it hard to be logical. They get in the way of trying.**
- **I like learning about my personality.**
- **I get scared to try new things. More confidence would be great.**



A special thank you to

Unlocking Voices

Website:



for kindly sponsoring this issue of The Drop magazine. The following information has been shared from them:



Unlocking Voices (UV) is a not-for-profit organisation in the UK, dedicated to empowering the families of autistic people with speech limitations to unlock their voices!

Earlier this year UV hosted their first conference, with speakers Sue Finnes (founder and director) and Alex Hopwood (teacher and founder of TEfA, Transforming Education for Autism). Highlights include:

- Discussion: 'Why are autistic people underestimated?'
- A lesson demonstration with Fiacre Ryan (a non-speaker)
- Student videos and journeys.

You can watch the conference NOW by visiting the UV website.



"I want to thank you. I feel that I now understand my son. I have learnt more about him in the last one and a half hours than in the previous eight years of his life. If I learn nothing more today this conference has been worth every penny."

Dad to non-speaking 8 year old



THE CHRISTOPHER FINNES CREATIVE WRITING AWARD

“In honour of the remarkable Christopher Finnes, who spread magic with his own words through his letter-board, we launched a writing competition with the theme ‘celebration’, reflecting chris’ ability to find joy in all things.”

Continue reading for a selection of fabulous entries.

NURTURE NON-SPEAKERS

ERIK HERZOG



**Celebrate non-speakers
Like a flower celebrates spring
Budding before we blossom
Give us time to grow
Nurture us with knowledge
Water us with support
My letterboard my roots
My voice flowers
My peers and I form a garden
Here we are heard
Celebrated**





THE LAST CELEBRATION

FIACRE RYAN

The hospital receptionist raised her brown painted antler eyebrows when we arrived: Nana in a wheelchair for her back operation, me the non-speaking autistic wheeling her in and a frazzled Mam balancing the bags, and just wondering how the hospital cancellation appointment had happened when Dad was away, and there was no-one around to help out. Except me of course!

The over-worked doctor called Mam into the tiny office to complete Nana's admission forms, and a look of panic crossed her face as she looked back at the two of us. The blind leading the blind. However, Mam being her usual resourceful self, sighed as she parked us in a corner opposite the desk.

She sat me down beside Nana in the orange plastic chair, draped Nana's large bulging handbag around my neck and hissed sternly, "do not move an inch until I get back, either of you". Nana winked at me, and I knew then that we were in trouble. "Check if she's gone", she whispered. "I'm dying for a bit of chocolate".

There was a refreshments vending machine at the end of the corridor. Nana had the money and I knew how to operate the machine. Antler eyebrows was busy on her phone planning her outfit for her date night, so we swiftly weaved our way down the corridor, partners in crime, rivals to Ant and Dec!

I selected a can of coke, but Nana couldn't make up her mind between the dazzling chocolate choices, and I was beginning to panic that we would be caught.

Eventually she settled on a pouch of Celebrations that we could share, and with a clunk click, the machine coughed out our treats. We polished off the goodies, hid the evidence and were sat innocently back in the corner when Mam came back, smiling smugly to ourselves.

Sadly, Nana passed away peacefully a few weeks later. While I still miss her terribly, I will always treasure the memory of our last secret celebration together.

Me and my Nana, partners in crime, forever and always.



BAD MEMORIES

VINAY LINGAMPALLI

Bad memories in life are my kind of celebration.

Without them, I cannot step up in life. I move everyday, from getting up in the morning to going to bed, using my memories as my inspiration. Every movement within my day shows my celebration of my success, no matter what the outcome is.

From going to places with so much noise I cannot withstand, to meeting judgemental people, these become my celebration because it shows my effort in overcoming my insecurities.

Keeping my loneliness to myself and loving others requires great courage, but doing so with grace is my kind of celebration.

Today might be rough, tomorrow could be even worse, but hoping for the best in the future is my kind of celebration.

Moving forward, no matter what obstacles you face in life, the future gives you more opportunities to celebrate. Life needs to continue no matter what. We should not lose hope because loving and hoping are both God's way of celebration.

Enjoying each and every moment to the fullest without worrying about petty things is a kind of celebration that one can give to themselves.

Out of every obstacle, there is something you can learn and celebrate.

CHRIS, THIS IS A LETTER TO YOU

HASAN

Dear Chris,

I am just a young lad reporting from earth.
I just feel that you have moved to a different planet, so I want to
update you with good news from here.
Your family misses you a lot, but they celebrate your words every
day.
I too, feel there is a lot to celebrate.

I celebrate the silence we broke and the dreams we build.
I celebrate the questions people have about us and their disbelief
in awe now.
I celebrate the fact that I now enjoy my lollipop whenever I want
and not wait for it to be given to me as a reward.
I celebrate my playful body.
I celebrate the choices I have and the chances I get.
I celebrate every family that has a story like yours and mine.
I celebrate all those who tuck us in and say goodnight.
I celebrate every letter my finger types.
I celebrate that you are reading this from another planet.

Overall, things are improving.
Tell me about your joys there.

More later,
Hasan

Only autistic students don't get much to celebrate about. Most of their energy is spent on stims and impulses which they have no control over. They have no spare time to spend on reflections of positive aspects of their life in autism.

Independently, I am able to share with you the joys of living with autism (there are some, believe me). I am a non-speaking, autistic, terribly noisy individual who loves anything. Ok not anything, that's a stretch. I love Teletubbies and Trevor McDonald, proving how wide my interests vary.

I am so lazy. I am so picky. I am so loud. I am so miniscule in this incredibly huge Earth but I always stay positive when I try to exist. That is something I am forever proud of.

May I always celebrate my tenacity and appreciate silliness, fun and mentors who treat me as I truly am. I celebrate the people riding this tsunami wave with me without a life jacket.

In the deep end I can drown in emotions without my support system. Yes, I am reliant but I am so happy to be here and to be seen.

CELEBRATE EVERYTHING

FOX BAILEY

**I celebrate moving my hands
In the way that I choose
I celebrate moving my mouth
In the way sounds make sense
Happy to celebrate the mistakes
Made along the way
They have meaning
They mean I'm trying
They mean I'm on the road to progress
They mean I'm learning something new
They mean that I'm getting the skills I need
To take time to myself
To make my own decisions
To always have interesting learning
When I think of being that good
At telling my thoughts
The mistakes are what I
Celebrate**

RAM AND THE MOON

DHURUVA THILAKAR

Ram was sad and crying. Moon hopped happily over the sky. “I am in a celebration mood”, said the Moon to the Ram. “but why are you sad?” asked Moon.

“I have a big problem”, said Ram. “I always wanted a lovely pet, a puppy. But I am afraid of its teeth because it might bite me”, Ram sobbed. “You have no worries, always sparkling like a diamond”, replied Ram.

“I have my own issues. But I choose to be happy and celebrate every moment of my life.” said the Moon. “How can a person be celebrating life with a number of problems?” asked Ram.

“Always be thankful for what you have got. Because there is no time to waste in our very little life. Always celebrate life”.

The Moon winked at the Ram and said “Good morning”.

UNDERESTIMATED NO MORE

LUKE VERHOEFF

Half of the team dropped their gear as Howard drove onto the field.

“How will he play?” they murmured. Howard was bound to a wheelchair after a tragic crash. His passion was soccer and he refused to give it up. He rolled up in anxious anticipation. He wasn’t sure how his teammates would react.

“Loser”, he heard one boy say.

Coach spoke right away. “Howard is a member of this team and will be respected as such. Anyone who is incapable of that will be asked to leave the team.” Shock rippled through the crowd but Howard stuck around. He trained all season, and mastered kicking from his chair. The team made it all the way to the finals and Howard was so pumped. He was living his dream!

When finals came, the team was hungry for another win. Time was racing down the clock and the score was tied. All the boys were sweating as the game was seconds away from over. It was coming down to one final shot. One player suggested to put Howard in.

“They will underestimate him”, he shared.

Howard accepted the chance to prove himself. As he rolled onto the field, the other team scoffed. “easy win boys!”, they cheered, but Howard wasn’t phased. He set up his shot, ready to bring home the championship trophy. The crowd went silent and Howard could hear his heart beating. All rested on this moment.

The ball came towards him and... Goal!!

The crowd roared in celebration. Howard had carried his team to victory and it tasted great. Howard was underestimated no more. Legendary.

FREEDOM IS COMMUNICATING

ELLEN O'SHEA

**Where am I going to?
How can I know?
If I stay in chains
How can I grow?**

**Freedom is distant,
It is a memory,
I wander around,
My mind for a story.**

**Trapped in this body,
With my mouth in chains,
I search for poetry,
To stimulate my brains.**

**Arms become free,
Hands start to spell,
Now I have a voice,
And now I can tell.**

**Where am I heading?
I am no longer dreading.
My life is now mine,
To write and define.**

**I will share my writings,
For people to delight in.
The chains are long
gone,
And the story is now
mine.**

CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION

IVEN EWELL

To me, Christmas is a very special time of year. Spending time with friends and family, giving to those less fortunate, and I love receiving gifts... Who doesn't? One of my favourite Christmas carols is 'little drummer boy' and my favourite line is 'Shall I play my drum for you' which really points out the spirit of Christmas, because no matter your circumstances you can still bring a smile to someone's face.

I enjoy spending time with my mom's family, like my uncle and my cousins. Christmas is my time to fill my heart with memories of laughter, love and playfulness. My right hand full of words, my left hand full of food, my soul overflows in loving adoration of our savior. Yearly traditions that unite us and weave the fiber of our lineage. Flavors best developed over generations. Smells that yearn for days passed.

The thought of giving to others makes my heart so happy. I remember when i gave my mom a gold locket necklace with my photo and my mom's photo. My mom was overjoyed and tears of joy ran down her face. Last year, I donated clothes, books and various succulent plants to local thrift stores and to my nonprofit school. To give to others means you care and show selflessness. There's always people in need and it's our responsibility to help. This can be done anytime of the year, not just the holidays.

Over the years, I received some thoughtful gifts such as a basketball, headphones, belts and clothes. My fondest memory of a gift exchange was when my late father surprised me with a train set when I was five years old.

Another gift is to make tamales with my family, the process is difficult but fun. My job is to separate the corn husks from the corn and clean them, then I mash the corn. While I do that, my uncle prepares the prok that will be the filling for the tamales. Afterwards, we wrap the tamales in the soaked corn husks and tie with a string, then we steam them. Once they're done, we all gather around and enjoy them. I usually eat around three to four tamales, that's how good they are.

In conclusion, my favourite time of year is Christmas, because I get to spend quality time with my family and friends. Make sweet memories, by giving to others, making delicious meals with my family and celebrating my loved ones. I can't wait to make new memories this Christmas! Happy holidays friends.

A message from Sue and Stuart Finnes, Chris's parents, who judged this competition:

"Thank you to everybody who participated in this competition, the first one in tribute to Christopher. We were overwhelmed by the quality and range of the entries from different age groups and we loved reading them all: poems, stories and plays. There was the use of imagery, poetic devices and humour, and themes such as inclusion, community and positivity. We can always find something to celebrate in life! This time we had two winning entries but we wish to celebrate everybody that participated, thank you so much!"

If you're able to support the missions of this magazine, we'd love your help!

Whether it's helping to spread the word, covering printing costs or graphic design support! If you have any feedback, we'd love to hear from you too.



admin@tefautism.co.uk

Please put 'The Drop' as the subject header

