



My Story – J Grange
Young Ambassador
for the ADHD Foundation



Anger, frustration, despair and the constant feeling of being misunderstood , these are just some of the many emotions I experienced and in a serious war against. Trapped by the devil and isolated inside my own head, I felt like my voice was being taken away from me.

Countless sleepless nights battling my negative thoughts as my mind never stopped ticking. A disruptive education, relationships deteriorating rapidly, struggling in society, encounters with the law and eventually ending up in court, This was my struggle of being 'different' , however I knew I had to change my life before it was too late.

I realised from a very young age that something 'wasn't quite right' with me. I felt different to others and extremely out of place. Somehow I was just 'failing' to be normal in the eyes of the norms of society. My challenges with ADHD started to become serious when I entered secondary school.. At this stage I was around 11 years old and in year 7.

I went to Chingford Foundation school in East London and my time there was extremely difficult. The first few months of secondary school were actually okay but then it suddenly went downhill. I started to struggle with numerous issues including feeling rejected, despite me feeling that I wasn't doing anything wrong. I missed a huge amount of lessons and important tests and was excluded numerous times. I was labelled as the 'naughty kid' of the class and a 'troublemaker'. It made me feel humiliated, worthless and I questioned myself . Why Me? Why does no one else act in this manner? What's wrong with me?

Dark clouds cascaded over my head. I was deeply troubled but no one else seemed to care or even notice this at the time. The Majority of teachers used to think I was purposely misbehaving had no idea of what

was going on inside my head. This knocked my confidence. Why weren't they helping me? Why were they turning a blind eye and not trying to help me?

In July 2016 after nearly 3 years of pain, anguish, depression and every single other negative emotion you can think off , me and my family decided to move to Chelmsford in Essex. This was an extremely tough decision but ultimately it was in hope of a fresh start.

I joined my new secondary 'The Boswells School' at the end of year 9 when I was 14 years old. I didn't like the change as most people with ADHD will understand but I accepted it. I found it hard to settle in, I didn't really like a lot of the people there. I didn't know them.

Change was tough and detrimental to my mental wellbeing on this occasion. I knew straight away that this place wasn't for me and my gut instinct started to begin to be proven right.

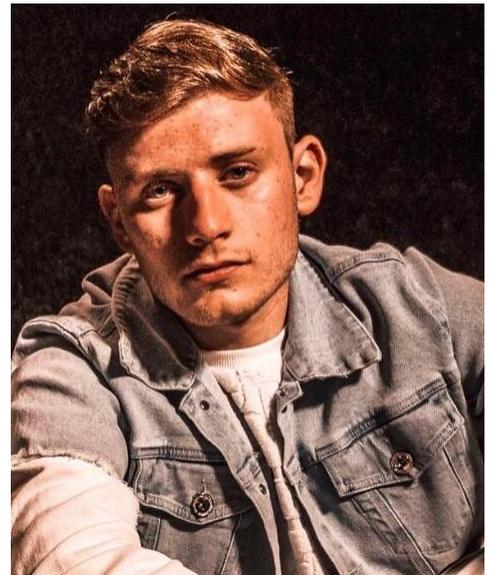
It mirrored my previous school as it all began well for the first few months but then after the summer holidays and the start of year 10 things started to change. The feelings of being misunderstood and rejected came racing back ,as did the challenges in the classroom. I already had much more anger and hatred in my veins after my experiences at my old school so here everything seemed much worse. My anger mixed with my problems with self control led me into sticky situations and again to numerous exclusions. Mental health issues and teenage hormones are not a good mix.

Me and my parents had many meetings with the school. One of the only ways that here was different to my previous school was that they picked up on aspects of my behaviour and advised me to get tested for an underlying condition. I worked with numerous SENCO teachers and got to know them. My parents contacted the mental health services and after a long wait I went for numerous tests with different specialists. I was told lots of different things. One said I had autism the other said ADHD etc. I was really starting to lose hope and couldn't bare the uncertainty.

I couldn't accept myself for who I was , in fact I didn't even know who I was. It didn't help that during all of this I was still getting in trouble in education and had no support . The school tried to put things in place for me to improve my behaviour. Unfortunately schools are not mental health experts. As time went on and everything built up I was permanently expelled around the end of year 10.

My parents appealed but the appeal. I felt betrayed and so did my parents. I had been let down again by people I thought I could trust.

Due to everything that was going on I started to go down the wrong path, turned to drugs and would hide away from the world. I stopped everything I'd usually do . I had encounters with the police and eventually ended up in court. Everything was taking a massive toll on me. I began to feel more and more suicidal.



The end but a beginning:

I was empty of emotion and reasonable thought. I walked to a train station and had every plan to jump. Luckily, a man who had experiences similar to me and had only just left prison saved my life. He realised I was upset and traumatised, spoke to me and actually gave me hope and positivity which I hadn't had before. I owe my life to him and yet I don't even know him!

At the start of year 11 I was told I would be sent to a Pupil Referral Unit called Heybridge. This seemed like the worse thing in the world but how different it turned out to be. This place made me accept who I was. I had 1:1 teaching here and this really helped me to focus. With there only being a few months till my GCSEs when I joined and after the amount of education I had missed I still managed to pass all of my GCSE's and achieve my grades. I found my passion and love for music here as well.

A passion for music. A purpose. A path:

One 30 minute lesson a week with no equipment gave me a purpose in life beyond being angry and pushing the self destruct button. I knew music was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life from the very first lesson.

During my time at heybridge I was eventually formally diagnosed with ADHD. I was placed on medication. This was a massive relief and weight off my shoulders. I eventually knew why I was acting the way I was and why I had faced these traumatic times. I felt like my life had began again, this time with a purpose!

After my time at Heybridge I continued to follow my dream with my music. I started it as a hobby but from late 2019 onwards I started to take it seriously. In October 2019 my second release 'Buena Vida' accumulated over 100k views on YouTube via platform Link Up TV. I also Appeared on BBC Radio stations to be interviewed, BBC National and Look East news and the BBC National website talking about my mental health experiences and how my music helped me. I experienced great admiration of my story from newspapers and magazines.

My own personal experiences gave me a massive passion for creating vital awareness around neurodiversity and to use my unique platform to make a positive change. I currently go into PRUs and schools and deliver presentations to both students and teachers.

I have recently attended a APPG (All Party Parliamentary Group) for ADHD speaking to a number of MPs, have worked with numerous charities including The Princes Trust and have hosted webinars for NASEN. I am also an ambassador for the ADHD Foundation and have spoken at the United Nations/UNESCO event for the future of education series. I have most recently been nominated for the National Diversity Awards 2021 – Positive Role Model Category.

Believe and achieve! - J Grange