



Healios

“He sees autism as his superpower” - mum of autistic son inspired to help other parents in her career helps to raise awareness of the condition

A mum who's using her lived experience of having an autistic son to support other parents in her role at leading digital mental health provider Healios has been speaking about her family's own journey ahead of World Autism Awareness Day this Sunday (April 2).

Meghan Routhorn works as a Clinical Experience Coordinator at Healios, booking appointments, answering queries from clients about autism and ADHD assessments, as well as coordinating with schools, booking interpreters and much, much more.

Healios adopts a digital-first clinical approach, and has redefined the way mental health, autism and ADHD services are delivered to children, young people and families in the UK since it was founded in 2013. It has the largest clinical workforce specialising in children's mental health, autism and ADHD services outside the NHS and offers online assessments and support to thousands via secure video sessions.

Meghan has worked for the company since August 2022 after a varied career from working as the Assistant Dean of Students at a University in Switzerland to starting her own business baking lactation cookies and brownies for breastfeeding mums.

However, the 49-year-old from Northamptonshire is also the mum of 16-year-old boy/girl twins and since the age of three her son Alex has had an autism diagnosis. The family's journey since has inspired Meghan to pass on her extensive experience.

“I feel I have a lot of lived experience being a parent of a neurodiverse child, that I would like to share,” she says.

“I enjoy explaining the details of our sessions to parents with anxious children, because my son needed that sort of clarity and reassurance before doing something new too, and I know how much I appreciated anyone who would indulge my many questions.

“I enjoy being able to empathise with parents and I love being able to suggest websites, books or strategies to help them deal with some of the challenges of raising a neurodiverse child.”

Meghan spoke about the challenges and frustrations her son and her family have faced during their journey and how they have attempted to overcome them by ensuring what works for Alex is always top priority.

She says: “We noticed something was different with Alex when he was 18 months old and the health visitor sent out a list of things that children at this age should be doing. His sister was doing everything but he was doing nothing.

“He was offered a place in a preschool for children with developmental delays. At this time he did not speak, rather made noises to indicate things he wanted, which was difficult to understand and frustrated him. The preschool showed us how to use PECs (Picture Exchange Communications) to help him and it really worked.

“Alex is a very visual person and showing him two pictures as a way to ask what he would like to do or eat, opened up a whole new world for him. I read every book I could find and I was convinced that Alex had autism, but it was a year before he was diagnosed.

“Luckily for us, he was diagnosed prior to starting primary school, so he had a 1:1 support worker the entire time he was there. Alex loved school and soon after starting he began to speak full sentences.

“He was actually the first child in the class to read properly because he had such an extensive knowledge of sight words due to the flashcards and PECs we used with him on a daily basis - Alex has an amazing memory.

“Towards the end of year six, Alex became extremely anxious about leaving primary school and moving on to a very large secondary school so we decided to home educate him through secondary, which has been a challenge, but it has meant that the anxiety has lessened and we have our happy boy back.

“Through home education, Alex has been able to spend a great deal of time learning about what interests him most - computers. It can be difficult to get him to focus on maths, but he excels in English - everything is a balancing act.

“For us, the most important thing is that Alex is happy and able to work in a way that is comfortable for him, learning topics that interest him.”

As a parent with an autistic child and now working at Healios and talking everyday with parents in a similar position, Meghan is well placed to offer a view on the myths around autism.

“I think people view autism in two extremes,” she says. “The super intelligent savant or the non-verbal recluse. Autism is different for every person. I like the saying 'If you've met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism'.

“You cannot paint all individuals with autism with the same brush, all have their own quirks, challenges and greatness. I think it's important to look for the positive. My son considers autism his superpower because it allows him to concentrate for hours on end on a single task. He can be extremely focused and driven if he is interested in a subject.”

With autism as his 'superpower' Alex has developed a love for technology which has created some issues over the years, but has also been a great comfort to Alex and led him onto a possibly lucrative career path.

"Alex has always loved technology," Meghan says. "He loved the remote control for the telly when he was little and he quickly progressed on to tinkering with phones and computers.

"I'm afraid he called the emergency services more than once when attempting to press buttons on my phone! He also managed to get onto a grocery website and put 200 Fruit Shoots into our cart – luckily he did not know how to check out!

"In primary school he was given a great deal of support and encouragement to learn more about computers. By the time he left at the end of year six, he was being called to different classrooms to help teachers with their computer problems, which he loved

"Alex now has two YouTube channels, one for his Scratch animation and the other for all things Tech. He absolutely loves creating videos and he takes it all very seriously,

"His plan for the future is to be a content creator on YouTube and make his millions!"

This Sunday (April 2) is the 16th annual World Autism Awareness Day and comes at the end of World Autism Acceptance Week (March 27 - April 2) which aim to put a spotlight on the hurdles that people with autism and others living with autism face every day.

Anyone interested in joining the team at Healios can find out more about the latest opportunities at healios.org.uk/careers

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For more information, contact James Brindle, PR & Communications Officer, at james.brindle@healios.org.uk

Notes to editors

About Healios

Healios is the leading digital provider of specialist mental health, autism and ADHD services for children and young people in the UK aged 25 and under. Healios is reimagining the care experience by optimally combining an expert multidisciplinary care team with evidence-based, family-centred approaches and great technology.

Proudly working in partnership with 62% of the UK's NHS children and adolescent mental health services, Healios is the largest private digital provider of specialist mental health and neurodevelopmental assessment, diagnosis and intervention services for children and young people, supporting over 37,000 patients.

For more information visit: Healios.org.uk