

ADHD and me

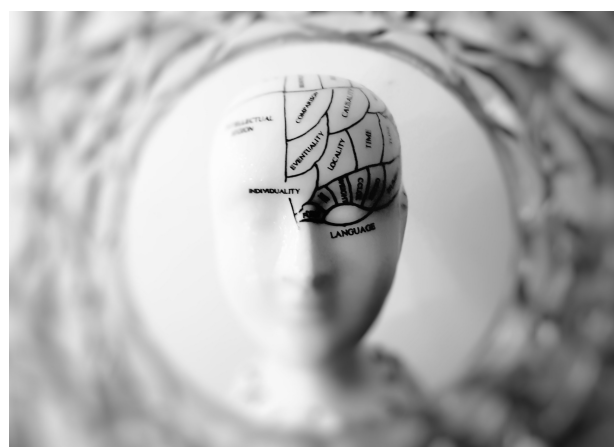
Mental Health Awareness Week 10-14th May 2021

This week, Neal Mankey, Director within our Health team, takes time to talk to us about his journey with ADHD. In three parts, he gives us a glimpse of his life from a child in the 80s to his diagnosis a year ago, how he has responded to it, and what organisations can be do to be more inclusive across the board.

PART 1

As an adult with ADHD, I've had my fair share of trials and tribulations from a professional and personal perspective, so it's incredibly reassuring to see that the attitude towards supporting neurodiversity and encouraging good mental health is changing.

Diagnosed at 41, certain traits, behaviours and emotions finally began to make sense to me. In the early eighties, there was often at least one problematic child in the class, and that was me. I was always the 'hectic' one, the kid who would do stupid things if it meant getting a laugh (and usually resulted in getting into trouble), the kid who couldn't sit still for a second, always engaged in some activity or other to avoid the incessant buzz in my brain.



I remember my mum taking me to see Dr. O'Donnell regularly because she was convinced that I was more than just that hectic child, and was told "that's boys for you", "it's normal, he'll grow out of it." and, worst of all, "perhaps cut back on the sugar!" – may as well stab me in the heart with a red hot poker.

What followed was a strict, sugar-monitored diet and, when I was allowed a small amount, it was in minute measures and I was watched like a hawk. This aside, I had a good childhood and was lucky enough to grow up as part of a family who didn't want for anything. We were comfortable and happy. My parents have some wild stories to tell about me, my favourite being when I took the milk float for a joyride aged five. Picture the scene...the milkman is chatting to my mum on the doorstep (no comments, please) and out I run, jump in the float and start cruising down the road with him and my mother in chase. He'd previously shown me how to drive it and, being electric, it was as easy as putting your foot on the pedal and steering. Another time, in France, I trapped my sister in my dad's new brown Audi (yes, brown), locked the doors, took the handbrake off and rolled his prized possession into a tree. These are just a couple of examples of this "normal kid" Dr. O'Donnell referred to.

At secondary school, I was incredibly sporty. It was something I loved and excelled in, be it football, athletics, rugby, tennis or hockey. Just being outside, exercising, having fun with my mates was pure bliss - and still is when I get the time. I did, however, struggle with the vast majority of academic subjects, finding it near impossible to focus and not be distracted. As a result of this and other behaviours, my headteacher had my parents on speed dial, and numerous detentions and suspensions followed for all sorts of misdemeanours.

Knowing what I know now, I can't help but wonder whether things could've turned out differently if my teachers had understood, and were trained to deal with, what were perceived as "problem children". I was told that I was a nice kid, well-mannered, heart of gold, but I never knew how to engage my brain before talking or acting - something that I'm still working on today! My typical school reports would always say "lovely kid, has the ability to do more if he put his mind to it and tried harder". Little did we know that my mind was half the battle!

VEREDUS TALKS

After failing my GCSEs, I attended college only to be asked to leave after three months as I seemed to have more interest in getting high than attending my lessons. Those I did attend, I was usually high in. This led to a period of around 9 months just dossing around, experimenting with drugs and alcohol, with no clear direction or passion. My parents were worried about my lack of focus and mood swings so arranged for me to see what would be the first of many counselling and psychiatric sessions over the next twenty odd years. I wasn't open with him about my drug-taking, and it seems so obvious now, that my relationship with drugs and alcohol was fuelled by the fact that I felt different from my peers. Later on in life, I certainly used alcohol as a way to try to fit in and bury all these emotions and thoughts that were constantly buzzing in my head. I've always thought I was weird or not normal (who is these days?) and that there was something wrong with me. That first session, in my early 20s, didn't uncover or resolve anything.

After a number of jobs for the likes of Norwich Union, Marsh McLennan and HSBC Bank, I got a job as an Estate Agent which was something that I enjoyed for a period of time. I wasn't confined to an office which was exactly what I needed; however, my lack of focus and my impulsiveness usually got the better of me. Twelve years on and five different estate agents later, I was forced into a corner by being made redundant - I'm pretty confident I was sacked as I always had the knack of telling my boss what I thought of his ideas, approach, and values, which were very different to mine, and I was the only one "made redundant".

In my early thirties I decided to try something new and joined a reputable recruitment company. I took to it like a fish to water. It soon became clear, however, that it was very much a numbers game, and the pressure was on to make money for the business. I'd been used to group targets in estate agency and was now thrust into a world of set individual quarterly and yearly targets. It was around this time that I became aware of some anxiety and depression creeping into my life. I'd settled into the new job well, was earning good money, hitting targets more often than not, however did put a lot of pressure on myself as a result of the competitive environment, which was very much siloed with little opportunity for collaboration. The stress ultimately built up to a point where I was crying on my way to work because, with my self-esteem at an all-time low, I simply didn't think I was good enough, even though I was the third highest biller globally out of 120 consultants. Whatever I did, professionally or personally, just didn't feel good enough; I was never happy or satisfied. I had everything I thought I wanted - house, kids, beautiful partner - but I always felt as though it wasn't enough, even though I tried so hard to be happy in the present...

Please come back tomorrow to read about Neal's diagnosis and how it has changed his life...

If you struggle with ADHD, here are some helpful resources:

Jessica McCabe's TED talk 'This is what it's really like to live with ADHD' - link [here](#)
Delivered from Distraction: Getting the most out of life with attention - John R Ratey
Scattered Minds: The Origins and Healing of Attention Deficit Disorder - Dr Gabor Maté

[ADHD UK](#)

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