



Hi, my name is Leah, I am 26 years old. I was diagnosed with ADHD at 19 then Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) aged 20. I work in a mainstream school in Solihull based in an inclusion classroom as a teaching assistant supporting children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. The majority of the children I work with are diagnosed with ASD, I love my job as it allows me to be myself but also pass on strategies that have been passed on to me.

There are three main things that I love but my main special interest is the Smurfs and everyone who knows me well, knows my love for the Smurfs. The thing about the Smurfs that I love is that they always stay the same so nothing is unpredictable; I know who are bad and I know who are good, which makes me feel relaxed and happy. I really enjoy going horse riding every week, as it's the one thing I can do which allows my brain and body to feel free. I love the connection I can have with a horse, being so close to them, feeling every movement and seeing my reflection when I look directly into their eyes. I feel so relaxed when I get such close interaction with a horse and I love this feeling as I find it so difficult to connect with people. I love things that light up as it allows me to zone out of such a busy place and block out what's going on around me, I find it hard to sit still and relax so when I'm sat around lots of sensory lights it gives me the time I need for myself to simply recover from my day!

I started to attend Resources for Autism in June 2018. It was very good timing for me, as it was the year I finished my university course. Therefore, this was a big transition for me, leaving everything and everyone I knew to being out in the world alone. RfA were amazing! I started by attending the women's group in Birmingham, throughout

college I struggled with people supporting me, as they didn't seem to understand my needs. Therefore, I just fought against them and perceived myself as hard work, as no one seemed to 'get me'. After the first session at RfA I realised it was not me at all and absolutely loved it. The staff were amazing and I looked forward to it every week.

After 8 weeks, I moved over to the Adults Monday club. There were a lot more people there, which has taken a while to get used to, but it was ok because my key worker stayed the same and she got to know me very quickly, so that helped me feel comfortable when transitioning to a new club.

I have helped develop the homelessness guide for people with ASD alongside RfA. I was able to reflect on my own personal experiences and make sure others are aware of how to support homeless people on the spectrum, so that less people have to go through what I did. The more understanding that people have about ASD the more helpful others can be. I love it at RfA! They have always been there for me when ive needed them and they gave me support when I've been at my lowest. I can't thank them enough for everything they do, I would truly be lost without them. I may moan at them every week if I'm being moody but they all know that I love them and that I look forward to Monday club every week.

