

SATURDAY 17TH FEB 2024

With Lavinia Donling

QUIET WEEK FOR SOME

It should have been a quieter week what with it being half term for many! And, in some respects, it was. A couple of families were away and moved their appointments back, which was fortuitous for one family who needed an urgent assessment in time for their Tribunal against a very determined Local Authority. Normally, we would not be able to accommodate, but because it was half term, we were. Unlike me, who was hoping to get on with other stuff, that got put back on the shelf.

Ellie has been on leave for the half term, well the kind of leave where all her children are home from school and that they have physically changed location to temporary accommodation normally referred to as a 'holiday'. I say this in jest as Ellie has been working hard behind the scenes of her holiday. Over the last month she and I have been looking at education and mental health. Over the weeks, in the news, there have been some interesting facts.

- 1 in 3 young people suffer with mental health
- 8 % of parents said their child had missed school due to mental health reasons, while the same proportion (8 %) said their child missed school due to anxiety
- that there has been a soar in numbers of young people attending A&E
- 33% of Children and Young People reported improved mental wellbeing during the first UK national lockdown
- 80% of secondary pupils with 10 or more suspensions also had SEN identified at any point in their school career
- Parents reporting there are no schools for their children
- 32% are in paid employment

Why might this be? A parent very kindly has given me permission to quote their comments following a discussion with them and their daughter. Here is what the opinions were as to shedding light on why these statistics might be:

I was talking to my now adult daughter, she missed most of secondary school and only diagnosed at 17. She is so bright and has self directed her learning at her own pace. So much more attention needs to be paid to the transition from primary to secondary - this was our breaking point (for both of our neurodiverse children) . Anxiety levels were so high, there was no reassuring that would work - it was all 'absolute' - so many hours spent on homework, rehearsing, choosing , re-doing. ... she commented that it is wrong to force children to do parts of a curriculum they have no interest or use for ... more down time is needed, homework could be completed in these free periods instead of after school when exhausted from social, environmental and educational demands ... Expecting children to adapt from one teacher and classroom to multiple, busy corridors, finding you are not



familiar with aspects of curriculum and supposed to have covered this are all huge demands. Never mind hormonal changesI wish for her that her thoughts could be echoed loudly to promote changes needed - they are all so rational and workable. Our children's mental health, development and uniqueness needs to be fully embraced within an educational system. I would hope there is so much greater awareness than back then when we were threatened with court for non attendance , told that 'educational psychology input' was very hard to acquire , given the wrong therapy , told by Camhs 'we don't label' etc .I'm so proud of who she is becoming but it's been such a difficult journey for us all really. This makes me so passionate about pushing for the changes needed, probably 3/4 of the patients i see as adults have a missed or wrong diagnosis , this has created a whole new depth of trauma over years . It's time for services/government to wake up and embrace the importance of supporting our children and families and to give priority to early diagnosis and support, not these horrendous long waiting lists ...

38% of adults with Autism are in employment. Please do not take this to heart. Firstly, 38% of those presumably are those with a known formal diagnosis - what about all the adults that have been missed, dismissed, or, worse, misdiagnosed and subjected to the wrong type of medication. Furthermore, a lot of adults with Autism and ADHD recognize they do not cope with demands or restrictions from an employer, and so go self-employed. Whilst some are so ill with their mental health never being addressed, that they are only able to work part time or in a volunteer capacity - yet these figures will not have been included. The reason as to why I assert this is because of my clinics - like a bell - there are some people at the outer edges who will be struggling to work because of their mental ill health, and others who are working part-time or self-employed. We are typically the self-



employed byunch having spent years being employed but finding it harder and harder to cope with the demands of employers than ourselves. Being disciplined by an employer to turn up to work by a certain time, attend meetings, do things in a specific manner, and engage with others is very challenging, and much easier when you work to your own rhythm and demands. There are so many successful business owners out there who are thriving, and this is what we need to remind ourselves when it comes down to our young people gaining an education. There are plenty of ways to learn, we just to need to find the right flight path for our children.

Next week is still half term for some of our young people. Strangely, we have moved to Leicestershire where their half term starts next week, yet for most of England, it has been this week. Wales and Scotland are on different timetables, having started back earlier than England, so if it is your half term, do enjoy. And for those who have had half term, I hope you have had a good break.

Lavinia