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Autistic artist backs Dorset charity's bold new campaign

An autistic artist who fought for years for her son's diagnosis is urging people to join a bold new awareness campaign by a Dorset-based charity.

Inter-disciplinary artist Deborah Goatley-Birch was diagnosed as autistic at the age of 41 and spent six years seeking a diagnosis of autism for her son Danny, now 17.

As Artist in Residence at the specialist Portfield School in Christchurch, which is operated by leading charity Autism Unlimited, Deborah is sharing her own experiences as part of the charity's new campaign: *Autism, the same, but different*.

She explained: "*Autism, the same, but different* invites people, both neuro-diverse and neuro-typical, to share life experiences on our forum, positive and negative and to come up with tips for how everyday life can be improved for everyone."

She continued: "Autism in its many forms is complex. But better understanding of what makes autistic people both different and the *same* as everyone else is of huge benefit to us all.

"Through the campaign we are saying: "Let's spare a minute from our busy lives, take a breath, have a cuppa and sit and learn about someone else, their story, their life experience and perhaps see life through a different lens.

"I truly believe that with a little more kindness and a few more conversations we can learn about each other, appreciate our differences and create a more inclusive world."

Deborah, from Hampshire, spent six years seeking the correct diagnosis of autism for her son Danny, while also caring for four small children alone.

She said: “This was obviously a very traumatic time for me – and him. I constantly asked myself what I was doing wrong to prevent people seeing what I was seeing.

“But I don’t want to place blame or express anger. It’s my dearest wish to share my experiences, so we increase our understanding and autistic people and their families can ultimately lead the lives they deserve.”

Deborah believes her own autism is a gift to her art, giving her the ability to hyper focus and enabling her to see things which many neuro-diverse people might not take the time to notice.

“Art, as it is for many autistic people, helps me understand myself and the world,” she added.

“A piece which I produced after Danny’s eventual diagnosis, is Form, an acrylic on paper collage of some of the official letters I received during those years.

“These letters were so impersonal and detached. Yet, they were about my child – my own flesh and blood.

“In putting them together and on display they became a kind of residue or skin I was able to shed after his eventual diagnosis.”

She added: “I’m extremely proud to be part of *Autism, the same, but different* and am looking forward to reading the stories and comments people share.”

Siún Cranny, CEO of Autism Unlimited said: “We feel privileged to be able to benefit from both Deborah's huge talent as an artist and her knowledge of what it is like to be an autistic person in a largely neuro-typical world. Her personal story and stunning art form an important part of what we hope will be a highly effective campaign.”

Read the stories and comment on the *Autism, the same, but different* forum at:

<https://www.autism-unlimited.org/forum/>

Picture captions: Deborah Goatley-Birch, Artist in Residence at Portfield School in Christchurch, Dorset, with Form, an acrylic on paper collage of some of the many official letters she received while she was fighting for a correct diagnosis of autism for her son. Deborah's story is amongst those being told by Autism Unlimited's bold new campaign *Autism, the same, but different*.

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www.autism-unlimited.org

Autism Unlimited, based in Parley, near Christchurch in Dorset is a leading regional charity which provides specialist education, care and support to autistic children and adults. The charity's Portfield School, in Parley, supports primary and secondary school students aged 4-15.

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