

Meet 10-year-old Jacob, who has turned his talents and wish to help other autistic children into a thriving business.

The biggest myth that Jacob and his family want to break is the idea that all autistic people are the 'same'.

While they do believe there is an invisible 'golden thread' that connects all autistic people, they firmly believe that no two are alike.

And that Jacob is very certainly *one of a kind*.

Jacob found mainstream school challenging. His strong need for perfection – a trait of some autistic people - meant that he shied away from challenges because of his fear of failure. Noise sensitivity, particularly when people are all around him, also affects his concentration and prevents him from retaining and processing information.

Since he was a baby, he has also struggled with sleeping and can often obsess about things, which can obviously be exhausting and stressful for him and those around him.

He is unable to regulate his eating and never feels full up, so he will eat all day. On the flip side he never feels thirsty, so he won't drink unless reminded to.

This proved extremely hard for him and his family.

Jacob was almost at the end of Year 3 when his teacher finally agreed to help his family seek an autism diagnosis.

Faced with another two-and-a-half-year NHS wait, they eventually went private and received many of the answers they had been looking for.

His mum Sophie says: "Getting the diagnosis was unbelievably emotional. I remember needing to go out for a drive just so that I could cry. Half of me felt relief that I wasn't mad, that I wasn't this neurotic mother 'imagining' that my child was different to everyone else's because that was the way that certain people had made me feel for years.

"The other half of me was terrified for his future – about how we'd get him through school and college, would he ever manage to maintain a relationship and get married? the questions loomed large and those questions still become overwhelming at times.

"When you receive a diagnosis, it can also feel like you're told your child is autistic and then that's that, you're sent on your way.

"I threw myself into reading as many books as possible to gain an understanding of how Jacob's brain needed to function day to day to try and help him feel less lost and more understood."

Some autistic children are very talkative and overfamiliar with strangers. But Jacob is the opposite.

He says: "Small talk is a waste of my time" and social gatherings are one of the most stressful parts of his life.

But what Jacob might lack in social skills, he certainly makes up for in intelligence.

His parents have always explained to Jacob that his autism is evidence that everyone's brain is like a computer - and that his just operates on a 'different' system.

He knows his brain works differently, but he doesn't yet like to view himself differently.

He says: "I'm still a person like everyone else, I just see things differently.... and better."

His autism allows him to see things in black and white, there's no middle ground.

It has also given him a phenomenal memory, a need for order that's helped him be more organised and he's great at following instructions to the letter.

He says: "I also say what I think, which I've learned is not a bad thing - it's just honesty that maybe the world needs to hear more of."

Jacob and his family persisted with mainstream education until the pandemic provided an alternative.

Lockdown proved a blessing. Jacob says he is: "made" for social isolation and that lockdown was a: "dream come true!"

He was no longer withdrawn, angry, or sad but re-emerged as the quick witted, smart, kind-hearted boy his parents thought they had lost.

His obvious ability to thrive during enforced home learning due to Covid led to the decision to permanently home school - and Jacob hasn't looked back.

He says he loves that 'home ed' gives him the freedom to learn how and when he wants to and allows him time to process information in his own way.

Jacob doesn't have a 'typical' day for. Sometimes they are structured, other days he learns spontaneously and opportunities to learn crop up frequently.

In fact, this is the way his very own business, Gadgets Gizmos & Autism, was born.

During a discussion about being self-employed with his mum Sophie, Jacob thought about gaps in the market and felt one of those gaps was that sensory and fidget toys are mostly sold by large companies, instead of someone like himself, who really understands the benefit of such toys.

So, he went away and started thinking of business names straight away.

To make sure his business was started correctly, he sorted through all his old books and with his mum's help he sold them, raising £150 in capital to invest in his first three products.

He and his mum also built his Gadgets Gizmos & Autism website together.

Jacob now has more than 20 products online and personally researches each one thoroughly before finding the cheapest version to be able to maximise his profit.

He has learned how to upload products onto his site and type in the descriptions for each one as well. He knows how to do stocktakes, as well as doing all the product photography, boxing of orders, sorting postage labels and of course making all those Post Office trips.

While Jacob's parents control the social media side of his business for him because of his age, he has full input on what's written for each post. He also makes videos for TikTok and reels for Instagram. And he loves reading the comments and feedback from other children and families who have bought products from him.

Aside from his business and education he loves to be outside - an empty beach is his "happy place".

His special interest is Marvel - there's nothing he doesn't know about it and he has a very special affinity with animals. His family joke that he is a dog whisperer!

Jacob says that in 10 years' time he hopes to have a flourishing business that he can run from home. He would also like to be able to work with animals.

Asked for any advice he can give to other children, he says: "Tell people all your wonderful ideas and then see what happens. I did."