



# Meet Ben and Emma



**Ben and Emma's brother Ollie was diagnosed with ADHD and ADD at a very early age. Along with these conditions, Ollie also has many characteristics normally associated with autism.**

In addition, Ollie suffers from several other conditions including severe anxiety, stress and depression. At the age of 12, Ollie also suffered a Vestibular Dysfunction which profoundly affected the right side of his brain, causing severe visual disturbances and tinnitus, which had an enormous impact on his vision and balance.

As a result, Ollie was unable sit up, stand on his own or remain stood up, as the Vestibular Dysfunction also had a significant impact on how he processed motion, leading him to lose the ability to walk for almost two years. Ollie's mum Rose recalls, "Ollie's perception of motion was so hard for him. He couldn't read a book or watch TV as the motion caused him great distress and constantly made him jump. On occasions, he would even collapse when exposed to any visual motion, such as if you waved your hand near him. His brain literally couldn't calibrate the movement."

Ollie's sister Emma was only five at the time, and Ollie's health inevitably had a huge impact on the way the whole family lived. After the Vestibular Dysfunction, Ollie spent a month in a hospital an hour away from the family home and thereafter, was routinely in and out of appointments.

“As a family, our lives very much changed. We stopped watching the TV, we couldn't do many things like go to the cinema for example. We mainly listened to music or audio related things in the house. It was hard for the family to adapt, but obviously our choice was to live with similar limitations that Ollie was faced with.”

Rose recalls the difficulty in taking the children to regular trips to the hospital in distant locations- “Ben and Emma had to come along to many appointments to various different hospitals- St Georges, Great Ormand Street, Cromwell, Wimbledon and so on. These trips were often challenging as Ollie would suffer from motion sickness, and so he frequently vomited. During these trips, we regularly had to call doctors and lift him to move him. Naturally, these journeys often caused great anxiety for Ben and Emma.

## Being young carers

Inevitably, Ben and Emma have assumed a caring role in their home, as Rose explains, “Our family naturally clubs together, so just doing the small things like holding the wheelchair for Ollie, pushing him, helping him in and out of the chair, and occasionally picking him up from school, became part of Ben and Emma's lives and Ben was left to fend for himself more in school.”

“The truth is, you rarely know exactly how much a sibling's life has been affected,” says Rose, “as they look okay on the surface.”

Ollie's health condition also meant his behaviour was challenging and often volatile. “For two years, Ollie's medication caused him to be violent and very aggressive.” adds Rose. “There were even times when Ollie's dad has had to physically restrain Ollie- and Ben had to intervene. Ollie was fortunately weaned off the medication, but this period was so difficult for Ollie's siblings.”



# Finding Camp

It was after asking staff at The Young Carers Project if they could recommend anything to help Ben and Emma, that Rose discovered Over The Wall camp. Since then, Ben, (now 17), has attended three sibling camps and in 2019, he attended camp with Emma, (now 10).

“Camp provided them with a week away that they could really enjoy- which they needed so much. It sounds wrong- but they both needed a break from Ollie. The truth is, we don’t know how much a sibling’s life has been affected because, as children, they tend to look okay on the surface.”

“Emma really needed camp. She really needed a break where she could just be Emma. Camp gave her the opportunity to simply sit, or play, or enjoy, or have fun, or eat as she pleased. Camp gave her a true experience of freedom, a moment of living without the factors that ordinarily come with her day-to-day life.”

“For Ben, camp gave him time where he can go to just have fun- not be disrupted, not be on edge, anxious or worrying. Now he is thinking about coming back to camp as a volunteer, to be there for other campers- because of what camp has done and meant for him.”

“Young carers are never asked, never consulted, never given the choice to do what they do, yet there is an expectation to simply carry on and this really means a part of their childhood is lost.”

“Camp is unique. It is the only thing I know of that allows siblings of children with health conditions to go and just be themselves. It is a blessing and a godsend for our children to have a week to themselves. And of course, at the back of their mind, they know they have to return, but for that moment at camp they don’t have to think about it.”

“For that moment they are what they want to be - children.”



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