

Helping children with upper limb differences live life without limits

# Within Reach

Summer 2023 | ISSUE 153



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Reach

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# Events

**AUG** · 26th - Wessex Branch - Great Windsor Park  
· 27th - West Midlands Branch - Sports Day

**SEP** · 2nd - Scotland Branch - Willowgate Activity Centre

**OCT** · 20th - 22nd - Reach Annual Family Weekend & AGM

**NOV** · 11th - Kent Branch - Cupcake Making Session

**DEC** · 10th - Berks & Wilts Branch - Steam Train Ride  
· TBC - West Midlands Branch - Christmas Party

**2024** · April 19th-22nd 2024 - 18-25 Retreat - Foundation Violet Farm, Devon \*Subject to funding

For details contact reach@reach.org.uk or your local branch coordinator



**STOP** Reach emails going into your junk folder!

Please add reach@reach.org.uk to your contact list.

## Hello!

From the Editor & Designer of withinReach

We're celebrating 45 years of Within Reach Magazine. When it began it was written on a typewriter and photocopied to send out to members, so Tom and I are very pleased for the invention of Word, InDesign and the Internet! We hope you enjoy this issue; we always welcome comments, requests, or suggestions for future issues, so please feel free to email us at [withinreach@reach.org.uk](mailto:withinreach@reach.org.uk). Your Within Reach Creators, Max & Tom



## Reach Membership

Membership is open to parents of children with upper limb difference, and individuals of 18 years and over who are interested in furthering the work of the association. The UK and Ireland subscription is from £36 (£35 via direct debit) and the International subscription is £40.

Views expressed in withinReach are not necessarily those of Reach and are not intended to reflect or constitute Reach policy, or in any way portray an official view.

# Meet our Wonderful Branch Coordinators

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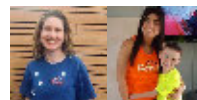
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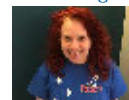
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## How YOU can help Reach!

Know of a local venue, sports club or hall that would be perfect for a private meet-up for our Reach families? Or perhaps you're keen to help but can't commit to being a branch coordinator, no problem! Help your local Branch Coordinator by simply making that first contact with a venue or getting a quote for an event. Every little really is a BIG help. Don't underestimate your impact. Get in touch with your local Branch Coordinator or the Reach team at [reach@reach.org.uk](mailto:reach@reach.org.uk).



## Stay up to date

All event news is on our website [www.reach.org.uk](http://www.reach.org.uk) and facebook page [www.facebook.com/reachcharity](http://www.facebook.com/reachcharity).

## The summer of 23

Whatever the weather, this summer, Volunteer Branch Coordinators all over the UK have been organising events to enable REACH families to come together.

Thanks to them Reach members, young and old(er), have ridden on tractors, talked, surfed, climbed, run, explored, played, bounced, picnicked, swum, balanced, rode, stroked, mat, raced, and paddled their way through the summer. From Polzeath in Cornwall to Perth in Scotland - THANK YOU Reach Branch Coordinators you are incredible!

And another incredible thing for me (there's been a few - I'm new!) was seeing RAW (Reach Activity Week) in action for the first time. To be honest when I heard about RAW, I had mixed feelings - an activity week run by mentors with upper limb difference for young people with upper limb difference - sounded a bit exclusive, but then I went, and I saw young people of all ages helping each other, challenging each other, doing things they didn't know they could do, supported by Mentors (youngest just turned 18, oldest... a fair bit older) with whom they had a natural affinity. I get it now - RAW rules!

### What's next for Reach?

At a local level Branch Coordinators have got to work organising the Autumn/Winter programme: Teddy bears Picnics in East Anglia, a Reach Bake off in Kent, a Steam ride in Berk & Wiltshire, a Christmas party with Santa in the Midlands are all on the cards + there's talk of a brand-new South Wales Annual Family Weekend offer for 2024 - watch this space!

Our National Annual Family Weekend, Gateshead 20-22 October, is proving to be popular with Reach families which is brilliant! New to the programme for younger members:

- Alex Brooker is chairing a Young Peoples Panel made up of Young Trustees, Ambassadors, Members, Writers, Creators, Campaigners, and Influencers all working in different ways to change the world. Line-up includes Influencers, India Sasha, Gemma Adby, Jesse & Megan Bacon-Evans (Influencer AND Reach Social Media Manager), Reach Trustee, Emily Tisshaw, Reach Ambassador, Ella Dickinson & Reach member, Owain Beesley.
- Pre-drinks in the Bar for 17-25-Year-olds hosted by Alex Brooker ahead of this year's GALA DINNER!

I've never been to a Reach Gala Dinner, from what I hear, they are 'fabulous'. So far for the Auction and raffle we've got a Body Shop Hamper, a Ski at the Snow Centre & Tickets for Phantom of the Opera. If there's anything you can offer, however obscure, we would love to hear from you. Contact ashleyb@reach.org.uk

### Charity news:

- In 5 years, we will be celebrating our 50-year Anniversary. To help us be in 'good health' as we turn 50 the Reach Trustees want to bring our Articles of Association up to date. If you have an interest in governance and would like to get involved, please get in touch. Contact sarah-janel@reach.org.uk
- On the 1st of October election papers will be published, & voting goes live to elect 3 new Trustees to the Board - please make sure to have your say - get in contact if you don't have email or you're not receiving Reach emails so we can make sure to include you! Contact ashleyb@reach.org.uk

That's me signing off for the summer - look forward to seeing you later in the year.



SJ

Sarah-Jane  
Charity Operations Lead  
sarah-jane@reach.org.uk

## Reach Board of Trustees

Chair: Chris Creamer  
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Co Vice Chairs: Ruth Lester OBE  
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Co Vice Chairs: Gary Phillips  
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## 1<sup>st</sup> January 1991 was the start of our journey.

Rita and I became the proud (but anxious) parents of Colm, our 4th son. I will admit to being a typical man and saying "He is our son and we'll take care of him." Rita could not rest however until she contacted Beatrice Hurley (recently deceased) of Reach Ireland and agreed a meet up. Beatrice very wisely brought her daughter Abigail with her. As she told us about the recently formed Irish branch of Reach, we were distracted watching Abigail picking the chocolate from a chocolate éclair cake with her fingernail on her short arm. We knew, right there and then, that our children always find their own way to do things.

After attending our first Reach event we got involved with Reach Ireland and later with Reach UK. Now we earnestly believe that our continuous involvement with Reach, at Branch level and later at UK Trustee level, attending AGMs and one of the earliest Reach Activity Weeks (RAW), has been so beneficial, both for us and for Colm. Initially, parents need to meet other parents, and their children, other children who are just like them so from that very first Local Branch meeting we all learn that we are not the only ones coping with limb difference.

Our local Branch Coordinators, all volunteers, are the backbone of Reach. They give their time generously as a local point of contact for new and existing parents. Many of them have created chat groups for parents and with support from Ashley and Sarah-Jane from our Reach Team Office they plan local events, such as Christmas parties and summer picnics so that families can meet up to share, support and encourage each other. Some amazing Branch Coordinators are now pairing up with neighbouring branches to create regional events for their families. Perhaps you know of a venue near you that would host a private group? Could you help your local branch in making contact or getting a quote?

Every October we host our Annual Family Weekend (AFW) and AGM. We bring together influential Reach speakers to inform us of current developments in the limb difference world. Many older Reach members, some leaders, and achievers in their chosen field, enthusiastically pass on their knowledge to the parents and children of today. In recent years, we have broadcast presentations on our YouTube channel, as well on social media, thanks to one of our very own "Reach Kids" James Jones. We host our AFW in different parts of the country to make it available to as many member families as we can, so come along, I promise you that it will blow your mind and your child will make friends for life.

Is it a remarkable coincidence that our Reach Activity Week, our Within Reach magazine and our Social Media channels are now planned and run by "Reach kids"? And some of them are active on the Trustee Board. After all they "wear the t-shirt" every day.

Could you have a part to play on your Reach journey? Perhaps you have professional or experiential skills to bring to Reach, to RAW, to our AFW or to our annually elected and voluntary Reach Trustee Board?

45 years on from 1978, we are highly regarded amongst children's charities. That doesn't mean we are short of ideas or that we won't have plenty of challenges to overcome as we make our fast-moving world a more equitable and fulfilling place. Join us. Make Reach part of your journey. Your child will thank you for it.

Chris

Chris Creamer  
Reach Board of Trustees Chairman  
chris@reach.org.uk

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Instagram: @reachcharity1

Facebook: facebook.com/reachcharity

LinkedIn: Reach Charity Limited

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Registered charity in Scotland no.SC049805

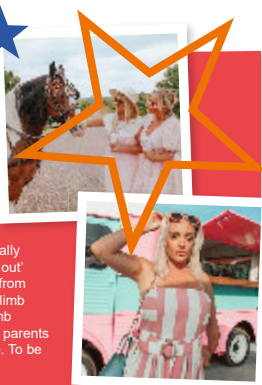
# Welcome to Reach

Megan Bacon-Evans is our new Social Media Manager, working alongside her wife Whitney on our social media outlets. Megan has a limb difference that she's named Handy and together with her wife they're luxury lifestyle, LGBTQ+ and travel social media influencers, and more recently LGBTQ+ Fertility Equality Activists. They're known collectively as 'Wegan', and have a combined following of 500k+. Wegan use their social platforms to showcase their love, break down stereotypes and inspire others.



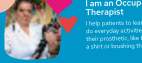
"It was through finding others with limb differences online that it really helped me to embrace and accept my limb difference. By 'coming out' about my limb difference online, I have received many messages from people saying I've helped them become more confident with their limb difference. I never realised the positive impact that showing my limb difference online would have. I've also exchanged messages with parents who fear what the future holds for their child with a limb difference. To be able to provide comfort & hope is an honour.

I am honoured that through this role I can give back to the limb difference community by running Reach's social media and increase visibility and representation. Plus, it's personally great to meet so many others with limb differences of all ages!"



## How are prosthetics made?

It takes a team of people to make a prosthetic.



## This is Layla



She is 8 years old. Layla was born without her left hand and uses two different prosthetics.



...and one for playing the guitar.

# Layla represents limb difference at the Winchester Science Centre

Winchester science centre, alongside Southampton University, created an interactive display all about prosthetics. Reach member Layla was invited to be the case study for the display to spread awareness about prosthetics, how they are made and how someone with an upper limb difference could use them. They have used pictures of her with her Koalaa sleeve and Paw. Well done Layla you star!



# Gymnastics!

British Silver Medalists Sophie & Iona

Congratulations to Reach members Sophie & Iona from the City of Glasgow Gymnastics Club who were the first ever disability gymnasts to represent Scotland at the British Championships.

"These girls... This team... the coaches... the club members are a gift to us.

The opportunities they have sought out for our kids is incredible and these girls have risen to each challenge with fun, dedication, hard work and immense determination. Smiling all the way.

Each child at our club is treated as a unique individual whose differences are celebrated and worked with carefully so our kids can achieve more than they knew possible!

I feel so lucky that Soph has been embraced into disability gymnastics. It's so much more than just what you see them perform. Her confidence has grown, her ability to manage a challenge, her strength, her social awareness, her self acceptance. She holds her head high and is proud of herself, her pals and her differences. I wish all kids could be so accepted." Sophie's mum Hannah



Poppy, Sophie & Iona



# Reach Trustee Election Poll

## GENERAL NOTICE:

We will be running an online vote for Reach members to elect 3 new Trustees to the Board of Trustees from 1st to 17th October 2023.

We want to make sure we have up-to-date email addresses for all members so you have the option to vote. If you haven't received Reach emails for a while, they may be heading to your junk folder, in which case, please add 'reach@reach.org.uk' to your email contact list. Or send your most up-to-date email to Ashley, at [ashleyb@reach.org.uk](mailto:ashleyb@reach.org.uk) so we can update your records.

With Many thanks!



# April was #LLLDDAM

Thank you to EVERYONE who shared, posted and spread awareness in April and let's continue to do so!



## Reach Annual Family Weekend

Friday 20<sup>th</sup> – Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2023

Fun workshops, phenomenal guest speakers, amazing exhibitors, a Gala Dinner, silent auction, the biggest bedrooms we've ever seen and the Reach clothes swap shop.

Find out more here: <https://tinyurl.com/3dnc8dn>



This year marked my third year as a mentor on the annual Reach Activity Week and if I were to count the times I attended as a child it would be my tenth year overall!

# RAW 2023



Having grown up being influenced by RAW, it is so special to pass down things to the kids that I learnt when I was younger, whether that be tying hair, doing laces or just being a role model for them to look up to as someone who is comfortable in their skin, the gratification I get from giving back is overwhelmingly positive.

By Emily Tishaw, Mentor 2023

At home, I live by the beach and I often miss this whilst I am away so of course I volunteered to be the supervisor for all of the water activities which there are many of at Carlton Lodge Activity Centre. We did kayaking, gorge walking, raft building, canoeing but by far the favourite among the crowd was the stand-up paddle boarding, which we all got to do as one big group on the last day as our last activity. This was definitely my highlight of the week, despite being shoved off the paddle board repeatedly into the lake by all the kids as they laughed hysterically!

Even though I took part in the water activities, I did manage to stand on the sidelines as an observer (someone needed to look after the biscuits!) for the activities that involved heights, but they really didn't need me to join in for those, but they were flying up the high ropes. We even timed a few of the older ones in our group who made it to the top of the leap of faith in 30 seconds! I am so amazed at their bravery, resilience and determination; their willingness and eagerness to take part in every activity and do it so effortlessly— especially the young ones who for some it was their first time doing some of the activities!

It's always such a pleasure to give back to a charity that has helped me grow up to be confident and accepting of my disability and I know this is something that the Reach Activity Week does brilliantly. It not only builds physical resilience by testing strength with new extreme sports, but it builds bravery in the face of new challenges.

I wear many different hats for this charity; I am a Reach adult, a trustee, I have written many articles for this publication, but being a mentor on the Reach Activity Week is by far my favourite!

## A letter of love to Reach parents...

Dear parents, I went to RAW for the first time and this is what I learned...

By Max Swinhoe, Mentor 2023

As a Reach adult I know what it is to live in a two-handed world, and to adapt, answer questions and overcome, but watching your children play, connect, problem solve, learn, and grow in confidence is something I will never forget.

They climbed boulders, trees, walls, ladders, poles, even on the wettest of days. They picked up bows and arrows - without a doubt that they could. They threw themselves into caves, tunnels, and down gorges. They battled it out on giant SUP boards, paddled kayaks, and canoes. They built rafts, hung on to rope bridges, tied laces, took on pony tails and tied knots. They made fire, constructed shelters, and baked bread on a stick.

Feel nothing but pride for your amazing children. Young and old helped each other, often without a word. They trusted each other, confided, laughed, cried, played, and chatted as if they'd known each other for a lifetime. Not once did I hear I can't because of their difference. Yes there was fear but it

was faced with love, encouragement, and support from their friends, new and old.

I now know this as the power of connection and the magic of RAW. Where the boundary that usually exists between strangers dissolves in an instant because you know your brother or sister understands just a little of your life, your lived experience and so friendships are formed on deeper foundations, from an unspoken understanding, respect, and gentleness.

So, when we do have to say goodbye we are happy and sad although we might not know why. We look eagerly to next year because maybe for the first time, even subconsciously, we weren't thinking about our difference at all, but instead, about what we shared and learned together.

Your children are truly wonderful. Please never doubt their ability, try not to let your worry stop you from seeing their greatness; let them try, fail, do things their way, because they've got this, and so have you.



## Well, what can I say after such a full on RAW '23?

Should it be about the excitement, the fun and laughter, the occasional tear from efforts to achieve, new skills, friendships, the weather, the lodge and staff or what?

By Chris Knox, Mentor 2023

The first and most important thing to say is that I wish, and I should, have been involved with Reach years ago. Despite reading 'Within Reach' at every visit (and there were many) to the Limb Centre in Carlisle since the 1980's, I was always too busy and fiercely independent, thinking next year I'll make the time... That didn't happen for over twenty years until last year when I actually joined Reach. If you think you could volunteer or help as a mentor, just offer, don't dither like me.

The chance to volunteer as a mentor was taken up in spring, with training for all the new mentors at the wonderful Ashbourne YHA, and this was the first time I'd been in any gathering where we all had an upper limb difference. What was the etiquette? Who holds the door for whom? How do we carry more than two mugs of tea/coffee? Needless to say, we just got on with it and it was much the same at RAW!

Our coach was full of chatter with old friends catching up and new friendships being made as we picked people up on the long journey north. We were last to arrive, but dinner had been put ready for us and the early arrivals had made our

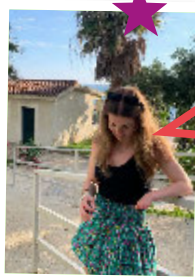
beds up (thank you) leaving plenty of time to meet everyone else and relax. Though the mentors work carried on after the youngsters were safely in bed, planning the groups around the activities program.

From the start it was such a joy to see (and hear) unfettered activity, teenagers helping younger members, and some of us new mentors around the centre and at the offsite locations. Our instructors were as enthusiastic as the rest of us and the activities - wow - never thought I'd try archery and bread making in the same week, and learn from at least two of the teenagers who play guitar, there's no reason why I couldn't learn. Changing into and out of caving suits/wetsuits is not easy, no prompting for anyone to help others, along with encouragement, support and empathy if a goal wasn't reached..... just yet, on any activity. I learned how to get twelve people on a paddle board..... and also, to get them off it very quickly whether they wanted to or not, several teenagers to thank for that!

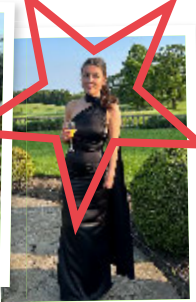
The activity week is all about you, the children, but as an adult, I learned so much from you all and also realised that the variety of prosthetics that I wear during my 'normal' working week, sometimes just get in the way of fun and learning. Sad that the week came to an end, and some very emotional partings as RAW 2023 drew to a close. Thank you to everyone who helped make this week happen.



# The Voice Within



By Fran Moylan



**G**rowing up I feel I've been quite privileged in the way my hand has been perceived by others. I started at my primary school's nursery and stayed there till it was time to move to secondary. Having made friends with people at such a young age meant that as we grew up and they began to recognise that my hand was indeed different, it didn't matter because I was still the same. Fran they knew from playing dress up. I took my prosthetics in to school, and everyone loved them, just as much as I loved the attention for having something so unique that no one else at my school had. Just like everyone else, starting secondary school was always going to be daunting, however having not had any problems during primary, it was never on my mind that I should be aware that I was different until my parents brought it up one day, while having my school blazer sleeve shortened.

One of the biggest issues that affected me, especially throughout secondary school as a design technology student, is how teachers automatically helped me without me asking for it, like a teacher helping me cut fruit in food tech, even though I was perfectly capable. This made me feel less capable than the others in my class and in a way embarrassed me in front of my friends and classmates. Sometimes if I wasn't in the mood, I took advantage of this and got my teacher to finish my class projects for me, however I found that it really diminished my confidence at school. I know that for many Reach members, if given the time and resources, we are able to do almost everything that people with two full arms can, even if we execute it in a different way. Which is what my parents realised as I was growing up, that I am able to do things, like putting my hair in a ponytail or tying my own laces, even though it might take longer than others. I've learnt that when trying something new, I don't ask for help until I've tried it and realised I cannot do it alone.

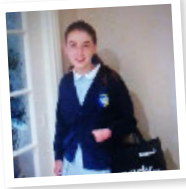
Throughout lockdown I spent a large amount of my time on social media, in particular TikTok. While many parents, including my own, were adamant that it was bad for me, I actually discovered a community of people with the same condition as me vlogging their day-to-day and doing things that may seem daunting to people like me to show us that there is nothing to be worried about. When I first went to the nail salon to get my nails done, I was worried about what they would say when they saw my hand, but the guy who did them was amazed at my hand and told me that I should join those people on TikTok and vlog how I do everyday things with my hand, such as getting my nails done. Now everyone in the salon knows that I only have one hand and I get more than half price off!

**“ The biggest issues that affected me, is how teachers automatically helped me without me asking ”**

A few months ago, I had the opportunity to speak to a few members of Reach for the first time in nearly a decade and it helped me more than I thought it would.

I often have the odd conversation with my friends about my hand; we joke around about me not being able to carry as much or me using it as an excuse because I feel lazy, but whilst talking with these other Reach members I was able to say things that I couldn't to my friends because they just wouldn't understand. Friends and family members can always sympathise with your arm and how you feel but no one can understand as much as other Reach members. They can empathise and help give advice about what's helped them get over the same situation which is what I love about this charity.

I often have moments when I wish I had two hands so I can do things my friends can do or whether or not someone will think different of me because of my hand, which leads me to unconsciously hide my hand in a sleeve or behind my back when I meet new people because I don't want to scare them away, but over time I've come to realise that it's not my problem if they think differently of me because of my hand - if they do they aren't worth me being friends with in the first place.

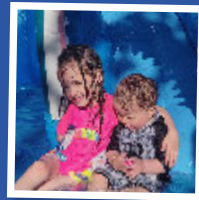


# Welcome to Reach

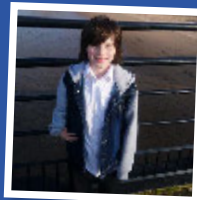
Henry



Ava



William



Josie

## Fundraising & donations for Reach

**Did you know:** you don't need to raise hundreds of pounds or run a marathon to fundraise for Reach.

We appreciate all donations and funds raised no matter how big or small. So even if you raise only £10. If every member raised £10 that would go a very long way towards enabling Reach to continue the work and support it offers its members.

**Help support Reach so Reach can support you. Thank You!**

## Ideas for fundraising



**Running Events**

Whether you're a first time runner or want to take on a marathon, we've got the challenge for you, join Team Reach!



**Virtual Fundraising**

If you are looking for ways to raise money online, here are some fun ways to fundraise - from the comfort of home!



**Community Fundraising**

Ideas of how to fundraise at school, with your clubs and in your work place, every penny counts!



**Fundraise for your Birthday**

Make your birthday extra special and ask for donations to Reach in lieu of gifts or cards.

**Find out more about fundraising here: <https://reach.org.uk/fundraising/>**

## How to donate



**Leaving a Gift in Your Will**

Including a gift of any size in your will is a wonderful way to support Reach. Email [reach@reach.org.uk](mailto:reach@reach.org.uk) to find out more



**Via Paypal**

PayPal Giving Fund passes on 100% of donations <https://tinyurl.com/4fbf9bnp>



**Via Bank Transfer**

Name: Reach Charity Ltd  
Sort code 40-52-40  
Account No. 00028547



**Via 'Work For Good'**

Flexible fundraising for businesses and charities. Find out more here: <https://tinyurl.com/34hjxm8h>

# Your Fundraising In Action

"Northern families met at adventure Valley in Durham. The rain didn't stop us having fun, soft play, farm, magic show, playgrounds galore. Lovely to meet two new families and have a catch up with all!" - Suzanne Parker, Branch Coordinator for Northern England.



## Donations

£20 In memory of Marion Nelson

Selina Hunt & COOP £315

£220 Albie & Darnill Primary School

Roman & Noble Hill Primary School £118

£192 Clare Slade

Tracey & Jason Afternoon Tea £1080

£5000 Estate of Mr Hope

All Saints £1000

£207 Family & Friends of the Late Antony Paul Palin

£50 Debbie Grantham  
In memory of Ralph Buchan

Russell Keith banks  
In memory of Ralph Buchan £50

£417 Voyager Insurance Services  
Charity Fundraiser

In support of Albie and Mr Lambert we are holding a raising **Awareness Day** this April for **Limb Loss** and **Limb Difference**

On Friday 21st April 2023 wear something orange with your uniform to raise awareness.

If you wish to donate please pass to class teachers and it will go to local charity Reach.

Reach [www.reach.org.uk](http://www.reach.org.uk)  
[www.limblosslimbdifference.co.uk](http://www.limblosslimbdifference.co.uk)

## Fundraisers

£9065 George Blackshaw  
Charity Golf Day

John Desbois & Harry Brown  
London Marathon £4950

£550 Alison Forward  
London Marathon

£2645 Tom LLOYD  
London Marathon

Brian De Barra  
London Marathon £1910

Hayley Craswell  
London Marathon £2598

£1204 Chris Matthews  
London Marathon

£1258 Neil McDonough  
London Marathon

Jon Matthews  
London Marathon £2061

Abigail Collins  
London Marathon £1270

£85 Sarah Ballinger  
Park Run via Run For Charity

£2020 Tony Addison  
100 day Challenge

Gill Thomas  
London Marathon £3107

Lesley Goodfellow £1500

£455 June Medforth  
Craft Fayre at Village Hall

£105 Daughter of East Midlands BC and her friends  
School Cake Bake sale on behalf of her younger Reach sister



## George's Epic Charity Golf Day

In July, George organised a charity golf day to raise money for two charities that are important to him, Reach and Alder Hey. When George was 15 months old he was involved in a lawn mower accident which lost him his right arm and right leg. It was then he discovered the Reach family community and began attending meet ups and family weekends.

more money in the future. George's charity day comprised of 96 players (24 teams of 4). "They each received a complimentary goodie bag on arrival as well as complimentary breakfast baps and a hot drink. 18 sponsors supported each hole for the day and there was an auction and raffle after the game as well as a thank you speech from me."

The day raised a whopping £18,131 for both charities!

"It's absolutely my pleasure to be able to raise money for Reach! I'm completely over the moon with how much was raised, I can't quite believe it!"

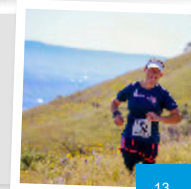


From Fun Runs, Marathons and Dog Jogs to Bungee Jumps, Bike Rides or Virtual Challenges...

Find a challenge that's right for you and then get moving for Reach!

Find out more by visiting:

[runforcharity.com/charity/reach-charity-ldt](http://runforcharity.com/charity/reach-charity-ldt)



# Rita's Reach Story

We brought Colm up with a positive attitude and that nothing would stand in his way. Along the way there were incidents, some funny some not so. There was the time a little boy in the swimming pool with Colm shouted at his mother that he wanted an arm like Colm, but there were times when Colm got a hard time about his arm. He was at swimming and as you know his arm is out there for all to see. The other kids were laughing at him. His instructor let the other kids know that Colm could swim as good as any of them and he soon showed them what he could do. At age seven his arm disappeared up his sleeve, this went on for a few weeks. We ignored this for a while but I did eventually say to him, "Very little grows in the dark". Shortly after that he started to fold his sleeves up again. Over the early years he had 5 operations to make his arm more functional.

Primary school was positive, I gave the school My Story before Colm started school in September so the other children knew there was a boy starting with a limb difference. Primary school was good for him. Colm hated wearing coats so coming out of school every day it would amaze me to see how much he could manage to carry with his little arm; his coat, school bag, if there was a note from the school and sometimes he would even have a book in his hands.

Secondary school was slightly different. One boy seemed to have a huge problem with Colm's arm and gave him a hard time. I arrived to pick him up one day and he was crying and told me what the boy had said to him. I had to go to the principal as this was not the first time there had been an issue. The principal spoke to the boy and there was never anything after that.

He got through his teenage years OK but in his 20s Colm was seeing a counsellor and he told me he had spoken about his issue with his arm. I was knocked for six because I had always felt we had brought him up with such a positive attitude that there was never an issue there. As parents we kept Colm involved in Reach from a very early age but like all of our children the physical difference is always there and the accompanying psychological issues too no matter what age they are.

Colm has a very successful career in IT (he types on a keyboard one-handed) and is getting married in July.

My advice to parents is to allow your child to try everything they want. Like all children there will be successes and failures but they will have tried. Never allow the words "I CANT" because they can and will always find a way. Our children are problem-solvers from day one.



My name is Rita. I am Colm's mam, wife to Chris (Chairperson). We had Colm after a 12-year gap. He has three older brothers, then 15, 14 and 12. I have been involved with Reach Ireland since my son was very young. I visited and provided information to new parents about Reach for many years.

When our son was born we did not know he had a limb difference, even though I had a scan on Thursday and he was born the following Tuesday. He was born on New Year's Day 1991. He was taken away for about 15 minutes and then handed to Chris when he was brought back by the paediatrician who opened his blanket and said "I need to show you something". She showed us his arm and our instinctive reaction was, "Thank God it's not his spine".

After 5 difficult months of concern for his future I started to look for a support group for children like Colm and I found Reach Ireland. We met Beatrice and her daughter who had two limbs affected. We met for coffee and cakes in Kylemore cafe and I watched what this beautiful little girl could do, in awe as she picked the chocolate from an éclair with her finger on her small hand very close to her shoulder. I realised then that I had little to worry about.

We visited maternity hospitals to draw attention to our children and to let new parents know we are here and to give them information about Reach. We had very little success as the hospitals felt that new parents expected to have the perfect baby, were not expected to concern themselves with disability and were kept focused on having a successful pregnancy. The attitude was one of protecting them from acknowledging the difference of every child.

**"We brought Colm up with a positive attitude and that nothing would stand in his way."**



# Prosthetic Occupational Therapist at Bristol Centre for Enablement

Victoria Bushell



The Bristol Centre for Enablement hosted a paediatric party for primary aged children that access our prosthetic service in April 2023.

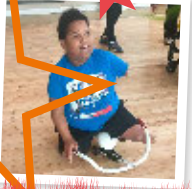
The covid 19 pandemic curtailed what services could be offered from March 2020 and we know that there has been a huge impact on children and families during this time. Most of the children and families I have worked with I have only seen whilst using a face mask, so it was a lovely surprise at the party to see such beautiful smiles.

Lots of the children and families that access our prosthetic service have not met others with a similar difference, and we felt it was important to promote inclusivity, peer support and have an informal setting for parents to discuss any concerns with other parents and professionals.

The children all got stuck in with the entertainment, and had a really good time together. There was a diverse range of children with upper, and lower limb difference that gained confidence and support from their peers around them, where everyone fitted in without any explanation. The children demonstrated some good dancing skills!

We had a lot of children with a variety of visible differences, and limb difference attend. It is known that having a visible difference can make children and adults self-conscious and worry about how they look.

Through television, Paralympics, and social media there is becoming more positive representation of limb difference and visible differences, which can only enhance public awareness and inclusivity.



**Children with limb difference are innovative, problem solvers and can overcome many obstacles**

All of the children with limb difference that attended, do have prosthetic options available to them. However, most of the children abandoned their prosthetics during the party!

Most children with upper limb prosthetics, start with a cosmetic limb before requiring task specific options as they become older and interested in a variety of sports and activities. However prosthetic arms can be heavy, a bit sweaty and limit the sensation and proprioception so most upper limbs for this reason are used for a particular task.

Upper limb prosthetics have been under the spotlight in recent months due to the multi-grip hand policy released by NHS England. NHS England have now commissioned multi articulating hands (MAH) as a prosthetic treatment option. These are available for individuals with congenital or acquired upper limb deficiency who meet a certain set of criteria. Those wishing to pursue the MAH's would need to be using a single grip myoelectric prosthetic for 12 months. Anyone wishing to have a multi articulating hand would need to have a thorough assessment to ensure it is the right product to meet their individual need. The paediatric hand size options are generally limited, and likely would be more suited for secondary aged children. <https://tinyurl.com/282vx478>

Children are inquisitive by nature and sometimes this type of attention if not managed effectively, it can have a negative impact.

It is really important for all families and children with limb difference to know that they are not alone. Reach has been an invaluable resource to many of them. And events like these can only build on courage and personal resilience of the child and the family.

Occupational therapy supports children and families with limb difference in a holistic way to improve performance and satisfaction in tasks that they find challenging. By supporting the child and the parents to find alternative solutions to mastering these challenges, it can be a helpful way to build on courage, personal resilience and improve enjoyment in tasks.

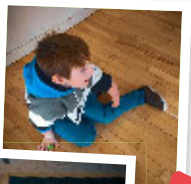
Every child is different with what they find challenging, but scooters and bikes, as well as zips on winter coats seem to be a common theme of such tricky challenges!

Part of my role is to support children who are transitioning into different environments such as preschool, primary and secondary education and give training and support to teaching staff.

Not every child will require adaption to activity but for example having access to the correct equipment or additional time, can be helpful when it is required in the classroom or getting between lessons.

Children with limb difference are innovative, problem solvers and can overcome many obstacles when given the opportunities.

I hope the party enabled the parents and carers to see their children mean a lot to our service, and we are proud to support them as they grow and develop.





# Parents, you're not alone

Interview with Nikki Webster, Co-Director at Bridge the Gap. A fully registered, experienced mental health nurse and ACT therapist.

Bridge the Gap are 'an Emotional Literacy based service, helping children to explore and understand their emotions, how they feel in their body, why they might be feeling different emotions, learn different ways of how to respond to different emotions, and putting it into action.'



**Hi, Nikki, would you mind starting by telling us how and why was Bridge the Gap formed?**

Bridge the Gap was born out of life experience following difficult experiences with mine and Jennifers (co-director) own mental health when we were younger, we both struggled to make sense of our own emotions during our teenage years and this invariably led to difficulties as we grew older. Jennifer founded Bridge the Gap following the realisation that when her own son started struggling with his own mental health nothing had changed. There was still no real support around children's mental health and no understanding about the importance of emotional literacy from a young age. I joined as a co-director a few months after she founded the service as my experience as a mental health nurse within the NHS proved the need continuously that emotions needed to be talked about in a proactive and preventative way.

**What is 'Emotional Literacy'?**

Emotions are intrinsically linked to our mental health – we feel emotions sometimes deeply, sometimes more quietly. But emotions are complicated – emotional literacy is the education around emotions – how they present, how they feel in our body, how they connect to our thought processes and behaviours/actions. Understanding emotions helps us learn more about ourselves, become less scared of emotions and learn triggers to understanding those times where we might struggle. What's 'speakeable' is manageable, and being able to take the 'sting' out of emotions for young people helps them be able to navigate those feelings better, make sense of them and ultimately move through them. It helps to normalise all emotions – they are all ok, there is no shame in any feeling.

“  
You matter,  
you are loved,  
you are not alone...  
”

**Why is knowing how to express/talk about our emotions important and how could it help some Reach parents?**

All children and adults have feelings – some of them are loud and big (never negative), by learning more about these feelings we can respond in healthier ways towards them and understand what they might be communicating to us. It is research proven that emotional literacy is a better indicator of long-term outcomes in children than intellectual ability. Children who might question their identity, where they fit in the world, and want to make sense of their differences can do so more easily when they are more aware of their feelings around these differences. If they understand when they are feeling a difficult emotion, they will be more able to articulate it to others and seek support and guidance to help them problem solve a situation and move through it. Ultimately emotional literacy builds authentic resilience.

**What do you mean by 'BIG emotions'?**

There are bigger ones and quieter ones – ANGER is a big, often visible emotion, irritated might be

a milder, quieter emotion. All emotions serve a purpose and it is important that we teach young people that they are ALL ok. If we term an emotion negative, how do we feel about it? We instantly feel we shouldn't be feeling that way. So, we bottle it up, through shame or embarrassment of feeling it. And when something becomes bottled up, it needs somewhere to go... Invariably this ends up being shown in different ways, through difficult behaviours, addictions, or anger management concerns for example. The more we open up the narrative around emotions, the less shame we feel about them and the more openly our children can navigate the world. This is not about always being happy – this is about teaching our children that happiness is just another emotion, it comes and goes like all of them – it is about teaching that life is about a mixture of emotions and if we can learn to sit with all of them, we're really going to be ok.

**What is the difference between worry and anxiety?**

In a nutshell, worry is our thought process, anxiety is the physical responses we feel in our body. For instance, when we worry it is often coupled with a couple of physical cues such as a slightly elevated heart rate, maybe some 'butterflies' in the stomach. When we feel anxious, the physical cues are stronger and more intense – they also have more impact on our life. For example, we might have raised heart rate, shaking, sweating, feeling clammy etc. A formal explanation of this is that we feel '4 or more' physical cues all at the same time when we are anxious. Our amygdala responds to 'perceived' danger and releases adrenaline into our body in order to keep us safe. This is our 'fight, flight, freeze, flop, fawn' response – in terms of what this looks like for young people: fight is an anger presentation in response to an anxiety trigger – if you have a child who constantly seems angry and emotionally dysregulated, more often than not this is driven by anxiety. Flight is an avoidance strategy to perceived danger – if you have a child who avoids separating from you, avoids sleep, avoids school this will likely be an anxiety response. Freeze is our 'hiding' response, this might look like withdrawing, isolating behaviours, shutting down, quiet responses to fear. Children might hide or 'feel very stuck'. A flop response is when our body is at a loss of energy, we shut down and literally fall to the ground. A fawn response is when we 'submit' to a perceived danger, or 'go along with' the danger – this is seen in examples such as when being offered illicit substances by a peer. For more information on the 'amygdala' hijack described here, you can check out this helpful page on our website: [www.ibridgethegap.com](http://www.ibridgethegap.com)

**How can parents recognise if their child is feeling anxious?**

If they are exhibiting a lot of physical symptoms in relation to anxiety, this might be a red flag – for instance physically feeling sick a lot, having diarrhoea, headaches, short of breath, panic etc. Also, if the impact on their life is getting bigger and more intense such as not wanting to go to school ever, isolating themselves, withdrawing from friends and family etc.

**Can parents get in touch if they need help or advice?**

Yes – get in touch with us through our website, join our newsletter, through our social networks (Facebook, twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube) or phone or email us – info@jwbridgethegap.com 01332 600827

Listen to their podcast 



<https://tinyurl.com/vynke46fr>

## Support & Resources

**Online courses**

Bridge the Gap offer some free as well as chargeable research-based e-learn courses created by professionals (website): <https://tinyurl.com/bdzc827>

- Supporting Child Mental Health: An Introduction (website) <https://tinyurl.com/vckvufi>
- What is Emotional Literacy? (pdf) <https://tinyurl.com/vmv589hd>

**Coping with BIG emotions**

Sometimes when we feel big emotions we need a way of working through them. Having a coping strategy is a great idea. Something that can help us to sit with the emotion or dispel any excess energy that might have been created in that moment.

This could be: jumping up and down, skipping, playing a game, popping a fidget toy, or listening to music we know helps us in those moments.

- Coping ideas (pdf): <https://tinyurl.com/5bann2za>
- Build your music playlists (pdf): <https://tinyurl.com/bddbsj9n>
- Coping with big emotions (video): <https://tinyurl.com/26kkfepw>

**Self-esteem journal**

Download it here (pdf): <https://tinyurl.com/s2te8zve>

**Find your 'third space'**

Talking to anyone face-to-face can sometimes feel difficult or too intense. Finding a 'third space' where you can both relax and speak more freely can be helpful. This could be somewhere you enjoy going together or an activity you can do together like driving to school, walking or drawing. The key is, focus is diverted away from them, which can create a more relaxing environment, here in this space it can feel more natural to chat, open up or ask questions.

**Grounding exercise**

This can help to distract or move away from big feelings that threaten to overwhelm.

- 5 things you can see?
- 4 things you can touch?
- 3 things you can hear?
- 2 things you can smell?
- 1 thing you can taste?

**Create a Relaxation Kit!**

A 'Relaxation kit' are great to help us unwind and relax before bed, but also help us during times of feeling stressed or anxious. It's made up of things that promote relaxation, we're all different, but a few ideas are a fidget toy or ribbon, a colouring book or paper to doodle on, a Rubik's cube or a small puzzle; a reading book or an audio book on an old iPod or mp3, a scented bath bomb or essential oil, a photo that is special... The list is endless, why not have fun making it together, each member of the family could have their own!

What are 'Relaxation Kits'? (Video):

<https://tinyurl.com/wdr8tzw8>



# Unforeseeable Opportunities, Rugby & Mental Well-being

**S**am Zeller talks to Within Reach about unforeseeable opportunities, all things rugby and how he takes care of his mental well-being.

**Hi Sam, let's jump straight in shall we... I believe you've been a part of Reach since you were very young?**

Yes! I was born with my upper limb difference, although my parents only found out at birth and so I was involved with Reach from a very young age - I think my parents first took me to a Reach event when I was around aged 1. I'm from the East Midlands, from a small town near Northampton, although I'm now aged 24 and living in London.

I was much more familiar with Reach when I was younger, and as a family we were quite involved, my mum being the local branch co-ordinator for our area for a number of years. This meant I was able to volunteer at the events my mum would put on, the Christmas parties for the local branch for example, and we frequently went to the AGMs.

**What was your experience of growing up with a limb difference?**

I was quite lucky when I was younger that I didn't really experience any bullying, and around class mates etc I was rarely ever shy. I think this came from a combination of knowing my classmates, but also playing sports from a very young age. I attribute quite a lot of my confidence and personality from lessons I learned from team sports when I was younger.

I was and can still be a bit shy around new people now, I think that's just down to the unknown, you can sometimes feel like people aren't sure how to react to you, or to you having a limb difference. I think this often comes from people not wanting to address or acknowledge the disability, which often comes from a place of people not wanting to offend or single people out, although as I have grown older I have found it odd that people try to ignore it. The way I see it, it's a part of me.



**How do you deal with comments and questions about your difference?**

This comes back to what I mentioned earlier, I used to not like people asking questions, as I almost tried to ignore my limb difference when I was younger, and act like I didn't have it. I guess this was because children often don't like being seen as different, although as I have gotten older I have accepted it as part of me.

With reference to questions, the majority come from children, and I honestly don't mind that. Most of the time I am happy to explain, as it may stop the question being asked to someone who may not be as comfortable discussing it as myself.

With children I try to use analogies and relate it to something they can understand to normalise it. Often saying how people are born with different colour hair or eyes, and just like that some people are born with different hands, and that's what happened to me!

I find comments that you get are a different thing, and to me there isn't much you can do around that, and dealing with them can be quite hard. Dealing with it for me comes from having self-confidence, although comments don't seem to happen as much as I have grown older. When they do happen, I try to think, if someone is going to comment on your appearance, there's a number of things people could say, and they've just chosen to mention my limb difference over my ginger hair, for example. So why should it upset me any more or less.

It hard to explain, and that's not to say I am fine with people making comments [about my appearance], it is just something that unfortunately happens, and there is not much externally you can do about it, but how you react is something you can control.

In addition to this I am quite lucky that I have a group of friends who see my disability as I described above, just as part of me and one of my physical features, as opposed to something which people try not to mention or acknowledge.

**When did you start playing rugby?**

I think my dad first took me down to play at Kettering Rugby Club when I was 5. Throughout all my junior and senior rugby career I played for Kettering in the able-bodied sides. I also played at University for the University of Birmingham Rugby League team, and it was whilst at university that I heard about PDRL, and I now play for Leeds Rhinos and I'm part of their England set up.

**Have you ever lost your confidence in playing rugby?**

Yes, I think confidence in my own ability is something that I struggled with when I was younger, although I think for me it was important to focus on what I could control. I think I also used to put too much pressure on myself which would then lead to me not feeling good enough, although as I have gotten older, I have tried to remind myself that it's just a game.

**Can you tell us about PDRL and how you got involved? Would you recommend it to others who love the sport?**

My dad first told me about PDRL, which I think he had seen in FortyTwenty magazine (a rugby league magazine). I was a little worried at first, travelling up to Leeds to play with people I had never met, although the team could not have been more welcoming.

PDRL stands for Physical Disability Rugby League, and the basis of the game is similar to the able-bodied game; there are 6 tackles and if you are tackled with the ball on the last tackle, there is a turn over.

There are 10 players a side and it's played on a slightly smaller field in a domestic game, but full size in an international game.

The rules are a little different when it comes to tackles and knock-ons, a knock on is just considered a tackle, and the attacking team keep the ball.

There are also players with red shorts, this means that their disability doesn't allow them to play full contact, so they play touch, although the number of red-shorted players which can be on the pitch at one time is limited.

**How did it feel to play for England at the RLWC?**

It sounds odd but representing my country was something which I thought was long gone; I had always been good at rugby, but came to the realisation I wasn't international or professional standard at a relatively young age, so it is something I thought would never happen. It is very corny but it really was a dream come true. Playing in the inaugural WC just made it more special, being able to be a part of history and help push the sport forward was fantastic.



**Do you feel you ever struggled with your mental health growing up? And if so, did you ever hide your true feelings at any point?**

I don't think mental health is something I struggled with when I was younger, which I appreciate makes me very lucky, although I probably have hidden my feelings from my parents at times. Thinking back, it was normally something to do with feeling different, which is a way no-one wants to feel. I assume I used to hide my feelings essentially to save my parents from feeling upset as well.

**If you could give Reach parents one piece of advice about supporting their child's mental well-being, what would it be?**

I think for parents it is important to understand that most of the time, they won't have experienced what it is like to have a disability, and that although you may want to wrap children with a disability in cotton wool and protect them from the world, it may not always be what is best. Children learn from experience, and although they may not always be positive, I think it is how people find their place in the world. I know if my parents hadn't let me play rugby for fear of me getting hurt, or be social for fear of me being singled out for my disability I wouldn't have accepted and come to terms with having one hand. I think I learned the most socially, particularly the belief that having a disability doesn't have to be a negative thing, and it is perception which determines this.

**What one piece of advice would you give a Reach child or young adult about keeping their mental health in check?**

I think it is important to talk about issues if you are having them, and parents, family and friends are a good place to start to do so.

From personal experience I also use sport to keep my mental health in check, whether that is going for a run, going to the gym, or playing rugby; I use it as time to switch off, and focus on myself, and I think it is a fantastic tool which can be used to aid mental and physical well-being.

As an aside I would also like to say to Reach children and young adults something that I used to forget... Having a disability can sometimes feel like a negative, but it is so important to focus on the positives, and what having a disability can do for you. There are many opportunities which you wouldn't have as an able-bodied person, take these opportunities, PDRL is a perfect example!



# Representation Matters Online!

**Adaptive Athlete**

**1:1 Personal Trainer**

**Online Coach**

Interview with Louise Hawkins

**Hi Lou, welcome to Within Reach, please tell us a bit about yourself...**

"I'm Lou, I'm from Barnsley in Yorkshire, a mum of two beautiful girls and someone who wears a few different hats career wise. The first half of the week I work for the local authority as a career adviser for vulnerable young people and the second half of the week I'm a 1:1 coach. Amongst this I'm an online coach/ personal trainer and am what some might call an 'influencer'. I'm what's known in the industry as an adaptive athlete. I train 5/6 times per week (Olympic weightlifting, conditioning, and elements of gymnastics). I also recently launched the 'Loup' strap. The idea behind Loup was to help other people just like me to hopefully be able to take part in their chosen sport."

**It's wonderful to hear you're going to be a guest speaker at the Reach Annual Family Weekend 2023, have you been to a Reach event before?**

I've never been to a Reach event! I'm excited and nervous at the same time. I'm looking forward to meeting new people in the Reach community but nervous about being a guest speaker. I'm absolutely brand new to this side of things so it's very much out of my comfort zone, however I'm going to give it my best shot and hopefully help to inspire others :0)

**You're a personal trainer and nutrition coach... How did you get into fitness personally and then as a career?**

I always enjoyed fitness as a child and represented the school in many sporting events. As life goes I went to Uni, enjoyed the social side of things a little too much and then found sport again a few years after having my second child. My mental health was at an all-time low so I needed to change something in my routine to get me back on some sort of even keel. Fitness quickly featured heavily in my life (CrossFit was my chosen sport at the time), my mental health began to improve, I was entering competitions, I had a new lease of life! I really



wanted to become a PT but just didn't think it was possible because of my arm (I didn't think I would be able to show people the correct form etc.) But out of the blue I was asked to do a promo video for Nike - my first instinct was to say No because I was so scared but thankfully I didn't and it was one of the best days I'd ever experienced, that day changed my life. I remember saying to myself "If Nike believes in you, then you should believe in yourself". The same day I signed up to the course to become a Personal Trainer and the

my say, is history



**What do you do to maintain your mental health?**

Over the years I've reflected on my life and mental wellbeing a lot. Reflection has taught me what triggers my anxiety and therefore how to pre-empt prevent any further episodes from occurring. I live by a set of values that determine how I live, the decisions I make, how I conduct myself and how I present myself to the world. Being aligned to my values is incredibly important to me and has also made life much clearer and decision making simpler. I now protect my mental health like royalty!

**How do you manage your mental well-being in relation to social media?**

In the main I have been very fortunate in terms of negativity from social media. I find it's the opposite, I receive many, many gorgeous comments/well wishes and have made connections with people I wouldn't have otherwise met had it have not been for Instagram. If/when I do receive any negative comments I generally block the person and delete the comment, they're simply not worth my mind space. However, I do sometimes react and this is generally because I want to have my say to something I feel to be unfair and unjust, I then go on to block and delete. Social media has allowed me to help and support so many people from across the world and for this I am truly grateful - there's no finer gift than giving!

**Did you have any role models growing up?**

Unfortunately not. I didn't know of anyone I could look up to who looked like me. Representation matters hugely and whilst I think we're getting better at this I still feel we've got a long way to go!

This is another huge reason why I do what I do, not only in the sporting world but in the world of fashion, make up and everything girly. I want little girls to see me and know it's ok to wear a dress with no sleeves, to be as individual and eccentric as you want! Yes we already 'stand out' but in a world where everyone strives for individuality I want us to embrace our differences and show them to the world, we deserve to! The world wouldn't turn if we were all the same but by the same token, to have someone to look up to, to be inspired by is crucial if we are to accept ourselves and our differences



# Self-love, social media & acceptance

Gemma Adby | Disability Advocate & Disabled Model

**H**i there, I'm Gemma, and I was born with a limb difference. For the past four years, I've been proudly serving as a disability advocate and a disabled model. This incredible journey began on Instagram, where I found a platform to share my story and make a difference.

As a disabled person, I never saw anyone like me represented in the media while growing up, and this lack of representation was challenging. Nowadays, thanks to platforms like Instagram and TikTok, disabled individuals are finally being seen more than ever before. Yet, there's still a long way to go, and I'll explain why later. But first, let me introduce myself and my arm, which my family affectionately calls "Stumpy."

I was born in '96, and during the 20-week scan, doctors informed my mum of a congenital abnormality that required genetic testing. They knew my arm hadn't fully developed, but the extent of the difference was uncertain. This news was shocking and overwhelming for my parents, especially since information and representation were scarce back then.

On February 14th, I came into the world with my little stump, a happy and healthy baby. This part of my story is particularly important for my mum and dad, as raising a child perceived as "different" in society was incredibly challenging. I faced questions about what school would be like, making friends, future job prospects, finding a partner, and having my own children. At that time, there were so many unknowns, but my parents did everything in their power to make me feel included. They supported me in attending Reach events, provided me with prosthetics, and encouraged me to pursue my interests, always ready to help me get back up when I fell.

I grew up as a bubbly child, and even though I had mixed feelings about my arm, I never hesitated to answer questions. I would even tell people it was a shark attack just to get an enthusiastic "OH COOL" reaction. However, as I reached the age of 16, the lack of representation in the media began to weigh on me heavily. I couldn't find role models or people I could relate to, which led me to hide my arm under clothes for about six years.

Then, around the age of 22, something changed within me. It's hard to pinpoint the exact reason, but I believe it was years of not feeling free to wear what I wanted without being stared at. With my passion for modeling and an urge to express myself, I joined an agency called Zebedee, and that's when my life took a turn.



From that point on, I started working with brands, getting modeling opportunities, and building a community on Instagram. I discovered a whole world out there and felt my confidence growing. This journey has been one of self-love and self-acceptance, which I'm still on today.

Before this turning point, I had a fulfilling career in design and marketing, never feeling limited by my limb difference. In fact, I saw it as an advantage that made me stand out and leave a lasting impression. About a year ago, my Instagram presence caught the attention of my current boss, Emma, who offered me a role in marketing for an adaptive intimates brand called Liberare. Our team consists of disabled and non-disabled allies who create bras and underwear for disabled individuals. This career path has allowed me to dedicate myself fully to raising awareness about limb differences, a journey I wouldn't change for anything.

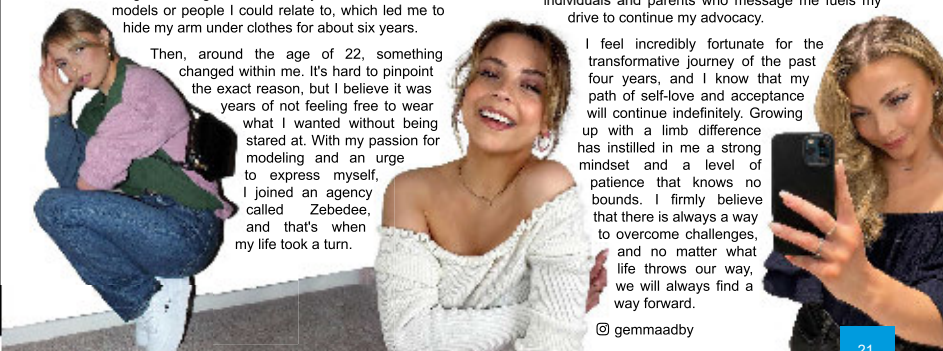


*"To protect my mental health, I keep a healthy distance from social media."*

Social media has been both a blessing and a curse. While I'm grateful that the next generation can feel more represented through influencers and increased media visibility, the platform also comes with its share of negativity. To protect my mental health, I keep a healthy distance from social media. However, connecting with other limb different individuals and parents who message me fuels my drive to continue my advocacy.

I feel incredibly fortunate for the transformative journey of the past four years, and I know that my path of self-love and acceptance will continue indefinitely. Growing up with a limb difference has instilled in me a strong mindset and a level of patience that knows no bounds. I firmly believe that there is always a way to overcome challenges, and no matter what life throws our way, we will always find a way forward.

@gemmaadby



# Harnessing Acceptance in the Face of Difficulty

**The most important thing I have learnt, that is most beneficial when dealing with difficulties, is acceptance and that I have to maintain a mindset focused on this if I want to build a fulfilling life.**



By Emily Trishow

Acceptance is something that we may have no choice in adopting at some point in our lives and especially so when you are born different or have a child who is born different; you have to accept that these are the cards you have been dealt.

I haven't always been lucky when it comes to my mental wellbeing. I was diagnosed with depression at nineteen and spent the majority of my twenties thrown around hospitals and mental health services but my personal story and what I have overcome is not important, it is only important that I share what I have learnt so others do not have to suffer the same consequences as I once did.

The world isn't always set up to accommodate every single person, but that doesn't have to be a bad thing, in fact, it can steer us in the direction of the things that are meant for us. There are some truths I have had to learn to deal with throughout my life and they are: people will stare, people will make comments, and you may be excluded because you are different which can then leave you feeling misunderstood, left out and feeling alone. I know when put like this it doesn't sound great, but I don't say this stuff to depress you, I say it to allow you the opportunity to build up enough courage to go out there and face it. Plus, the reality is, you are not alone, everyone feels lost and misunderstood at some point in their lives and there are plenty of accessible resources and education out there for anyone desperately struggling.

The reason I like to remember that I will have to go through life encountering prejudiced behaviour is because then I can begin to harness the tools needed within myself to be okay when it happens.



I can build up resilience, think of clever comebacks, educate people when they are wrong and accept that some people are just destined to be annoying and that's okay. If I am constantly fighting it, avoiding it or trying to stop it from happening, I will become exhausted—I know this because I have lived it.

My Mum always used to say to me "knowledge is power" and the more I learn about the world and how different people operate, the more powerful I feel in my own ability to handle it. This acknowledgment of others and the world around us also means that we are able to choose what we will and won't accept: pick your battles and know when you are okay or not okay to take something on.

Acceptance, for me, is not letting the words or actions of others change the way I show up in the world. So if someone tells me my arm is strange, which is something that was said to me the other day, I will turn around and say "it is not strange it is normal", I will not then hide my arm, I will not let the anger I felt take over, I will not become someone else, someone smaller than what I am because other people cannot accept me. I will remain the person I have worked so hard to be, do what I can to try and change people's perceptions without going out of my way to put the whole world to rights and continue to live my life as I wish.

**“ I will remain the person I have worked so hard to be ”**

# Self-limiting stories & 'I can't'

I've often felt judged or limited by strangers, from their lack of belief in my ability or their surprise by what I can do. I've never wanted to admit 'I can't' because that somehow will make me feel less in their eyes, getting annoyed when people ask in supermarkets, "do you need help packing your bags?" or at questions like, "can you drive?" but how should they know. It's kind to offer people help, or maybe they just don't know. What about the self-limiting beliefs or behaviours I use against myself?

There have been countless situations in my life where my own self-limiting stories have stopped me from pursuing an activity, never mind the judgement of others. Admittedly, thinking that even if I did give something a go I wouldn't be able to do it 'properly' so why bother.

what has become apparent, even over the past several weeks is my amazing ability to self-limit. You don't need others' doubting you when you can do it all yourself.

I've realised that it's one thing to throw yourself into things for fun, proving that you can do all the 'two-handed' activities people don't expect of you, but this is the first time where it's serious. This is real life. This isn't about my ego, about proving myself or about feeling confident, I need to be confident, and that means I have some fears to face; fear of being rejected, of being 'exposed', of not being able to do everything and having to accept that.

On my application to join the team I made sure I included a paragraph about my upper limb difference. I felt it was important to tell them ahead of time as my difference will impact my training and my ability to help others. I can't just say 'I can do everything and anything.' I clearly stated that I wouldn't allow my ego to get in the way of the safety of a casualty or the team. But forget ego, not only have I recognised negative self-talk, but I've been holding myself back, subconsciously weighing myself down with assumptions about what the others 'must' be thinking about me.

In a recent training rescue scenario, I battled with an internal monologue of, "should I volunteer for that or not, what if I can't do it, it'll be embarrassing, and some people are probably already doubting my ability..." I built a wall of doubt for myself based on nothing. Instead of getting stuck in and trying; figuring things out and letting the others see how I do things I allowed the self-talk to hold me back. The team has been amazing, nothing but friendly, welcoming, and helpful, assuring me that over time I will figure out what works for me and then to communicate that, but still, doubt creeps in.

In the past few months, I've felt so proud and excited to have been accepted as an aspirant trainee with our local Mountain Rescue team here in North Wales. There's a long way to go and I so hope to be accepted as an official trainee, but



After some mulling, I've come to realise this comes from years of hiding my difference and wanting to blend in, never wanting to stick out or stand out because of my arm, whilst also being defiant against anyone who doubted me. As a young person I became adept at hiding my arm, using it as naturally as possible as to avoid detection, but this is different. This is health and safety, about helping people that may be injured or lost. I have to put my ego to one side because not only do I want the team to have confidence in my abilities, it is imperative that I do too. This might mean standing out, speaking about my difference, adapting, asking for help, or simply saying, "I can't do that because I can't do that safely enough," and that is OK.

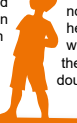
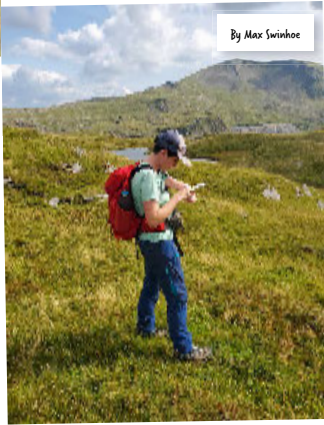
**I have to put my ego to one side because not only do I want the team to have confidence in my abilities, it is imperative that I do too.**

So, I'm going to try to put that self-limiting talk aside, and change the script. There are always going to be people that doubt me, so I don't need to doubt myself. Plus, everyone needs help sometimes.

I'm going to try to change the stories I tell myself, and I hope you will too. The ones that threaten to break down our confidence, the ones that tell us that 'can't' means we're less, because if and when we find something we 'can't' do, that's fine, at least we tried wholeheartedly and we did it with kindness.

Because we are enough, we don't have to do everything, and there's always a way around it if we can't.

By Max Swinhoe



## A NEW inclusive book

"I contacted Reach a little over a year ago, to get some insight from one of our reach ambassadors, about life with an upper arm difference. I was, and have now completed my novel, which has a main character with a little arm. Lilla, a warrior fairy has had a little arm since birth. It doesn't stop her doing the job she loves or prevent her from saving the world."  
C. L. Mears. Author of A Very Tiny Adventure.





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**Reach**

Helping children with upper limb differences live life without limits