

Young Inspector's Foreword

Why this matters

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The world wasn't designed with us in mind. Like many young people with SEND, I am constantly adapting myself to environments, systems and ways of communicating that weren't designed for me. Healthcare is no different. A GP appointment might look simple from the outside: you book an appointment, turn up, sit in the waiting room and see the GP. Except it isn't that simple for me.

Before I have even left the house, my brain can already be spiralling. Where do I go? What does the building look like? Who am I going to see? What will they ask me? Where will I wait? How long will I be there? What if I can't find reception? What if I don't understand what someone says? What if the plan changes? What if I become overwhelmed?

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And then I arrive, the lights might be bright, the TV is on, someone is talking, a phone rings, a door slams and people are moving around me. Things that might barely register for someone else can feel like a constant stream of information that my brain is trying to process. And I'm expected to sit there, wait, regulate myself, remember why I'm there and somehow hold everything together until my name is called. Then I need to walk into a room, sit opposite someone I have never met before and explain what is wrong with me. By that point, I may have already spent so much energy navigating the environment, managing my anxiety and trying to stay regulated that there is very little left for the appointment itself.

A quieter place to wait, clear information about what will happen, a choice of where I sit or lighting that doesn't overwhelm me might seem like small adjustments, but they can make a huge difference. They can mean I arrive regulated rather than overwhelmed; I can communicate and actually engage with my GP rather than spending the entire appointment trying to recover from the environment around me. I can just be a young person who needs healthcare. And we all have the power to create that difference.

By Louise Chandler



Designing Inclusive GP Services with Young People

Summary

One of our SEND Young Inspectors visited two GP Surgeries in the Thames Valley Region, to give feedback on the accessibility of these surgeries, comparing and contrasting between the two. What followed were thoughtful, yet easily achievable, adjustments which may help improve accessibility across the Thames Valley and beyond to make sure that primary care can be as inclusive as possible to people with SEND.

Louise identified five key themes across GP inspections. While staff culture was welcoming and supportive, barriers remained around:

- Signage
- Visibility of reasonable adjustments,
- Information organisation,
- Sensory environments
- Pre-visit information.

These barriers can increase anxiety and make healthcare more difficult to access. This report shares practical recommendations from young people about how GP surgeries can become more inclusive and accessible.

We thank the GP Surgeries who hosted us, and our visits have led to staff making changes in their practices. We hope that in reading this, you and your surgery will implement some of these to make your service more inclusive!