

An Interview with Emma

Why did you start Great Minds Together?

Initially, my children were young and I wanted to work in a field where I felt I was giving something back, making a difference and was also flexible around my young family.

I have always had a passion for Psychology, and seeing how the education system had not moved on in the 15 years since I left education (at the time), I wanted to be a part of that change and understand more, the psychology behind the system itself and why it was so fixed and archaic.

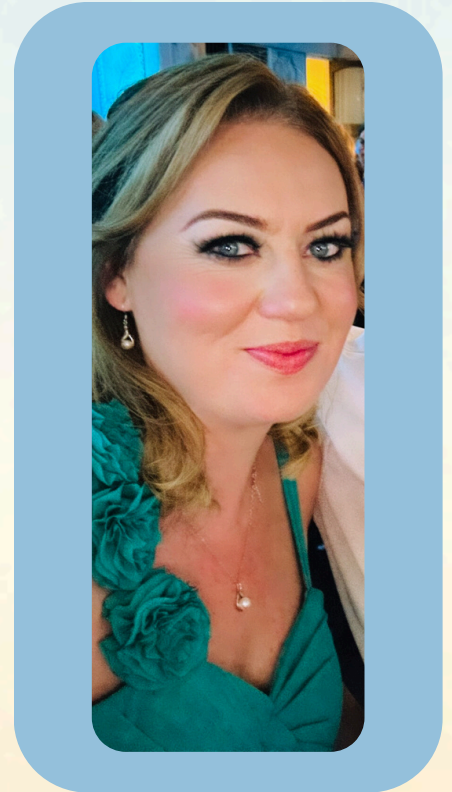
I wrote a Life Skills curriculum and began to deliver this in schools as an after school activity. This then quickly progressed to a holiday club in the local community centre and bookings began to flow.

Parents and Carers would ask “How does my child manage an 8 hour day in your holiday club, when they can’t attend school for an hour?”. I was then asked to support schools with looking at alternative ways of delivering education, in line with our practical and activity based learning programme. This was the formation of our Outreach team.

The rest as they say, is history, and hopefully history in the making as we are now involved in a lot of system change programs, and continuing to grow every day.

From writing a Life Skills curriculum in my living room, to having an organisation with five different services and being part of various national led programs, with an outstanding reputation, I am so proud of what we have achieved, and continue to achieve every day at Great Minds Together.

This could not be achieved without our amazing team. We now have over 100 people, which I wouldn’t even label as staff. They are all compassionate, caring, highly skilled human beings who are making such a difference every day and I am honoured to work alongside every one of them.



What's your background/lived experience?

Like many parents and carers, as I began to navigate the assessment pathway for my own child, I realised a lot about my own childhood and particularly relating to my difficulties surrounding education and sensory needs that were just not recognised in the 80's. I would definitely identify as Neurodivergent myself.

I am also a parent of a Neurodivergent child, and have first hand experience of managing barriers to education in particular.

***If many little people, in many little places, do many little things,
they can change the face of the earth***

An Interview with Emma

What's your background and how did you end up where you are now?

I studied Psychology after leaving school, amongst other subjects, however found that further education was not for me. I then worked in the care system for a number of years before landing an opportunity in housing, which led to my 15 year career across that sector.

When I had my children, I became a Governor of a primary school and my aspirations changed. I then decided to purchase a Soft Play Centre, and this led to a variety of child led businesses over a period of around 7 years. During this time I met a large number of truly inspirational parents and carers, and a lot of the focus was on ensuring Neurodivergent friendly environments for children that struggled to access these types of activities.

My parents then became poorly, and I had my third child around this time. It was at this point I decided to focus all of my efforts on writing the Life Skills curriculum.

As one of my children entered the world of the CAMHS pathway, and began to struggle to attend school, Great Minds Together started to grow, and so did my interest and passion for changing the system and making a difference for children, young people and their families, focussing on system change across Health, Education and Social Care. I decided to revisit my studies, currently completing a Psychology with Counselling Degree (at the grand age of 40!), and I have just completed a course alongside 14 others at GMT with the Association of Psychological therapies meaning we are now accredited as a DBT (Dialectical Behaviour Therapy) practitioners.

I am so proud of the model we have developed, and seeing time and time again the evidence of positive outcomes for families by having one person supporting and understanding the family as a whole.

A therapeutic, trauma informed approach is so crucial for children across our education and care systems, and it is my ultimate aspiration to ensure this is embedded across the countries schools and residential homes.

What are your future plans for Great Minds Together?

We are really excited to be working on a number of projects across Health, Education and Social Care.

We have recently had formal backing from NHSE in respect of our model, and we are in the process of this being formalised in order to apply for NICE Guidelines recognition.

We now have two residential homes, and a number of Tier 3.5 interventions across the North West. Our capacity to provide further placements is set to increase after a period of recruitment, and some excellent expertise now in our team, particularly a Clinical Psychologist and a number of Specialist Social Workers.

Our Autism Central North West Hub is on track to meeting all the targets set by NHSE and continues to thrive. We are very proud that our Autism Central team is 100% Neurodivergent!

Our Outreach teams across Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire continue to grow and the experience we have on those teams is truly phenomenal.

We have just established our new Complex Case Team for children on the DSR (Dynamic Support Register), and are about to launch our DBT programme in Greater Manchester. In addition, we now have a home specifically for respite, and are in conversations about supporting with respite and short breaks across a number of Local Authorities in Greater Manchester.