

# Walking and talking autism in 2015

## *A volunteering project offering support to families of young children in Lincolnshire/Norwich with autistic spectrum disorders*

Last year I had a try at volunteering in the UK and it turned out to be one of the most astonishing experiences of my life, so I am doing it again! I hope to be, 'walking the walk and talking the talk' as I travel on foot from Lincoln to Norwich. Along the route I will happily volunteer my services to families of young children (pre-school or Primary age) with autistic spectrum disorders. Starting out in Lincoln on the 17<sup>st</sup> July, I will walk old pilgrim routes and footpaths and offer free consultations to parents and families in exchange for a meal or packed lunch, concluding my journey in Norwich on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August.

I have been lucky enough to have a career working in a field I find fascinating and have learnt so much from the families and children I have worked with. I began thinking a while ago that it was time I gave a bit back so I am going to try and do a bit of volunteering each year whilst I am still fit and in possession of all ( or at least most ) of my faculties! Walking the walk and talking the talk is just an idea but I won't know if it works till I do it so the time has come for action and real planning with maps!

For most people the summer holidays means more down time, and for people who work in schools it means time away from the classrooms, time to relax and enjoy the break. For families with young children on the autistic spectrum the long summer holiday period can feel daunting and exhausting - and support can be harder to access because other people are often away themselves.

I hope that by offering direct support to families in their homes along the route, my little bit of volunteering might go some way to help. The consultations can only be 'one-offs' but offer the chance to think through practical daily challenges of things like communication, planning for holidays or visits to different places, sleeping, eating, behaviour, and a host of practical strategies for getting by. I am also more than happy to offer talks to groups of parents and carers or those working to support families if this is of use and on the understanding that no charge would be made.

Alternatively if you would like to walk with me for a couple of hours and share ideas about autism your company and thoughts would be welcome. Last year I was joined by parents, colleagues from educational psychology, speech and language therapy and education. The discussions were enthusiastic and thoughtful as well as great fun as we shared experiences and considered how we might tackle things differently.

In the past I have had a go at volunteering in South America and Romania, but feel it might be more useful to offer support closer to home. The time seems right as we have endured a long election campaign knowing that in reality services for families are getting squeezed as budgets get smaller whoever gets in!

The concept of walk the walk and talk the talk arose out of several recent experiences. I was lucky enough to walk the pilgrimage route to Camino de Santiago de Compostela; then I came across the book *Walking Home*, by Simon Armitage, where poetry readings were exchanged for overnight accommodation; then I found myself sitting in a talk given by adventurer Dave Cornthwaite who urged the audience to try an adventure every day and, 'say yes more' to ideas about doing things differently. The walk planned is my attempt to follow through. Perhaps the most challenging part of the whole adventure was giving a presentation on it at the National Autistic Society Annual Conference in Harrogate!

The route from starts in Lincoln on to Peterborough (via the Spires and Steeples footpath and Viking Way), then Ely (via The Hereward Way) and up to Kings Lynn and the Norfolk Coastal Path, on to Cromer, then onward to Great Yarmouth using the Weavers Way footpath, finally arriving in to Norwich (via Wherrymans Way). Along the way I will be staying at local B&Bs and hostels.

The volunteering is not designed to take the place of existing services, but rather the offer of experience gained over the years to families who might like to try. The project is not designed to be a marketing strategy, nor a fund raising event, and no sponsorship is involved. It is just a small try at getting out there to share skills. If you would like to check out the kind of things I do please look at the website [www.ginadavies.co.uk](http://www.ginadavies.co.uk)

If you are interested in this project and would like to find out more or book an appointment please get in touch by email and we can send you more details of the route and dates.

Please contact us on

[gina@ginadavies.co.uk](mailto:gina@ginadavies.co.uk)

## Walking and Talking Autism 2015 Route details.

**17<sup>th</sup> July.** Guildford to Lincoln by train

**18<sup>th</sup> July** via the Spires and Steeples footpath. Lincoln, Washingborough, Heignington, Branston, Potter Hanworth, Nocton, Dunsden, Metherringham

**19<sup>th</sup> July** Digby, Dorrington, Ruskington, Sleaford

**20<sup>th</sup> July** Via High Dyke and Viking Way. South Rauceby, Carlton Scroop, Marston

**21<sup>st</sup> July.** via Viking Way. Westborough, Long Bennington, Woolsthorpe by Belvoir, Denton

**22<sup>nd</sup> July** Near Skillington, Greetham, Exton

**23<sup>rd</sup> July** Stamford, Peterborough

**24<sup>th</sup> July** Rest day

**25<sup>th</sup> July** via Hereward Way. Whittlesay, March

**26<sup>th</sup> July** Wellney, Little Downham, Ely

**27<sup>th</sup> July** Via Fen River Way/Ouse Valley Way. Littleport, Southery, Downham market

**29<sup>th</sup> July** via Nar valley Way. Wimbotsham, Watlington, Wiggan Hall St Peter, Kings Lynn, South Wooton, Sandringham, Ingoldisthorpe, Snettisham, Ringstead, Sedgeford, Hunstanton.

**29<sup>th</sup> July** via Norfolk Coastal Path. Thornham, Brancaster, Burnham Deepdale, Burnham Overy Staithe

**30<sup>th</sup> July** Well-next-the-sea, Wighton, Great Walsingham, Walsingham

**31<sup>st</sup> July.** Via Norfolk Coastal Path from well-next-the-sea. Great Walsingham, Wighton Well-next-the-sea, Stiffkey, Blakeney

**1<sup>st</sup> August.** Cley-next-the-sea, Weybourne, Sheringham, West Runton, Cromer

**2<sup>nd</sup> August** via Weavers way. Felbrigg, Sustead, Hanworth, Aldeborough, Erpingham, Aylesham

**3<sup>rd</sup> August** North Walsham, Honing, Stalham, Martham, Hensby, Great Yarmouth

**4<sup>th</sup> August** via Wherrymans Way. Reedham, Cantley, Surlingham. Norwich (for a bit of a lie down!)

It is ok if families live close to the route e.g. 1 mile, otherwise if possible please could they pick me up from the route and drop me back on the route after the appointment. Appointments can be morning, afternoon or evening the only limiting factor is that I must be able to get to my accommodation each night.

We will confirm days and appointments once we have worked our way through the applications but priority will go to families on a first come first served basis.

Appointments are very informal so there is no need for complicated preparation or anxiety, I will only have myself and perhaps a memory stick to work with (my rucksack will have my clothes in!) and with regret I must be clear that I cannot carry out Formal assessments or write/supply reports. The emphasis is on the practical and do-able with the resources families have at home.

I will have a mobile phone with me so access to some recharging power points would be great and I will be writing a blog daily so ideas and experiences can be shared as widely as possible but no material, names etc. will be posted without full permission of the families.

To check out that I am who I say I am and the kind of things I do please check the website [www.ginadavies.co.uk](http://www.ginadavies.co.uk) or contact me for information [gina@ginadavies.co.uk](mailto:gina@ginadavies.co.uk)