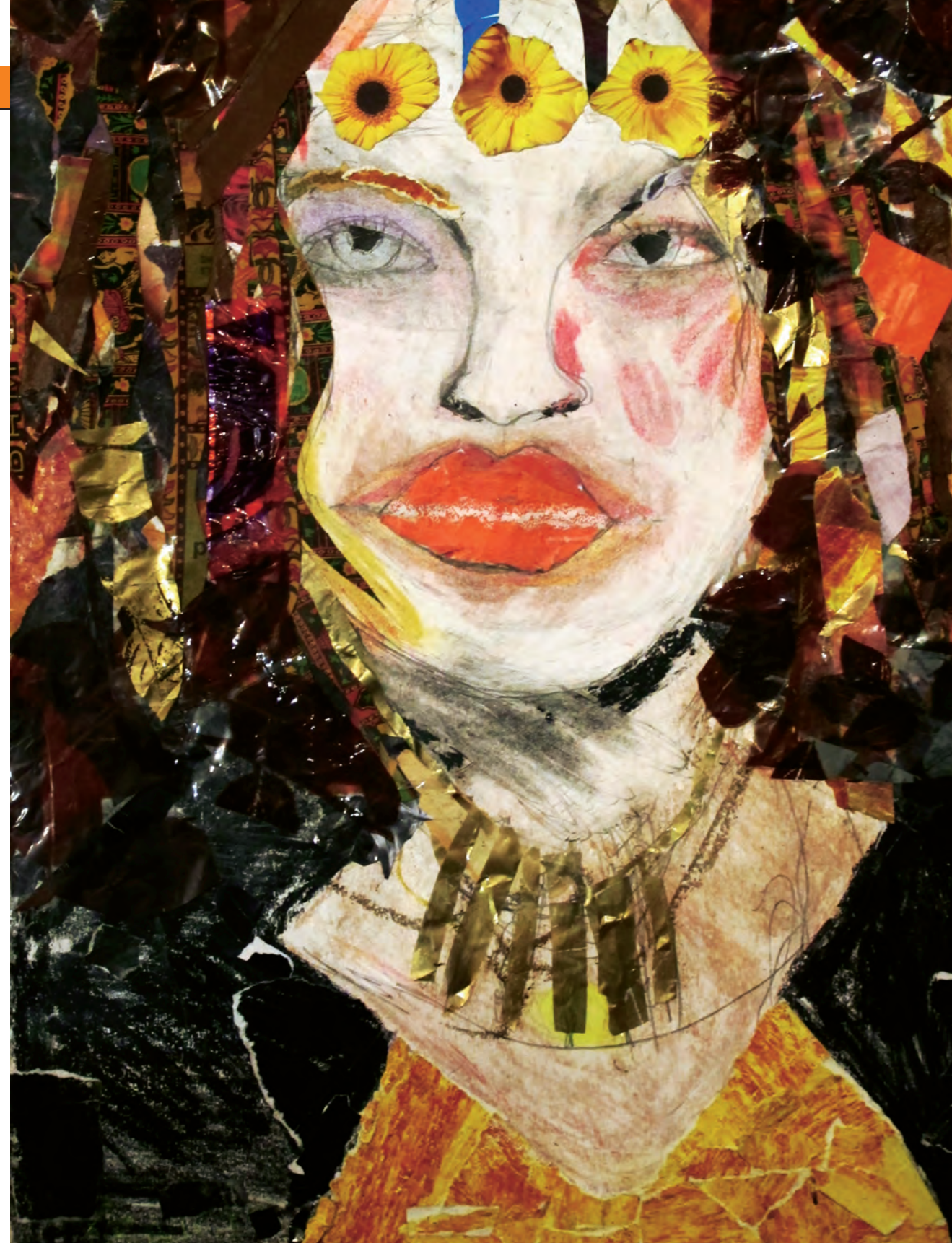




Coming of age

Eddie Callis turns 21 this July. A prolific artist with an ear for music, he has already come a long way in his young life. Debra Hosseini charts his progress in overcoming difficulties that began the day he was born...



The steel forceps clamp on his little head, causing baby Eddie and his mum Jacqui much trauma. The first night after his delivery, Eddie experiences a massive seizure.

Jacqui awakes the next morning shocked to find her newborn is in intensive care. She and her partner are counseled on the possibility of living with a child with brain damage.

When Eddie successfully breast feeds, Jacqui knows he isn't as brain-damaged as the hospital staff are making him out to be. She is relieved, too, when the MRI of Eddie's brain shows no abnormalities.

Nine days later, Eddie is released from the hospital.

The seizure is attributed to 'birthing trauma'.

Several months later, with his first fever, Eddie experiences a febrile seizure, a convulsion associated with a significant rise in body temperature.

At the age of five, Eddie receives a formal diagnosis of epilepsy.

When his seizure activity is at its worst, Eddie draws a huge face with a circle in the forehead. A bunch of people are drawn inside the circle. This is Jacqui's first indication that her son may be able to communicate his complex feelings through art. His sketchbook becomes an intervention.

"Whenever we are to meet people we take his



“They have every bit as much to teach us, as we have to teach them. Maybe more...”

Eddie and his art: the artist, far left, and pieces entitled *Harriet* (centre) and *Painting in the Wood* at Penquoit

sketchbook. He likes to draw their portraits. Without it he would be dancing on the ceiling," Jacqui explains.

Eddie's talent isn't only with art: Jacqui soon discovers he has an ear for music. "Although he finds it impossible to remember words, he can recall a tune on one hearing. He has an exceptional ear for picking out music," she says.

Eddie's early school years were challenging. His mum attributes his difficulty with retrieving words, mood swings and behavioural problems to the side-effects of epilepsy medications. His teachers, however, blame his behaviours on parenting.

Eddie's only childhood friend, Emma, is a girl who >>

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It gives teachers more feedback on their assessments and makes it easier to see how pupils are progressing and assists with planning, report writing and targeting. As well as improving on existing features, Connecting Steps V4 also has a variety of new features including comments, regression and user access control.



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Main image:
Eddie mimicks the expression on a sculpture he created for college that incorporates a latex mask he made of his own face.
Above left is one of Eddie's portraits and, above, Life Drawing

connects with Eddie through the arts.

Eddie becomes an easy target for students, who encourage him to play pranks. But his parents are determined to find a proper educational setting for him. After many battles they secure a position at Swiss Cottage Special School in Camden, London. Eddie is happy in this school and thrives.

A few years later, when the family moves to Cornwall, they find another school for him that specializes in complex communication, learning difficulties and disabilities.

Diagnosis

Throughout his school years, Eddie has the diagnosis of epilepsy, associated learning disability and autistic characteristics.

When Eddie reaches his teens, Jacqui begins researching autism. The more she reads, the more she becomes convinced that Eddie is autistic. His obsessions, lack of flexibility in moving from one activity to another, difficulty in understanding the concept of time, sensitivity to loud noises, tendencies to make socially inappropriate comments, and his lack of friends are all clear signs.

At the age of 18, Eddie finally receives a formal diagnosis of autism. The diagnosis comes as a relief to Eddie and his family. Jacqui wonders if the autism has always been present. Probably.

Programmes in the arts are scarce for people like Eddie in Cornwall, so his mum and dad try to help him and others to find their voices by setting up their own. After Jacqui starts singing with a choir group, Eddie insists that his mum sets up a singing group for people like him. Thus, in 2010, is born the Apex Singing Group (www.apexvoiceoutside.org.uk), in which Eddie

“Whenever we are to meet people we take his sketchbook. He likes to draw their portraits”

performs. “Eddie has a lovely voice and comes up with great spontaneous melodies,” Jacqui says.

After a long search, she finds a mainstream art teacher, Peter, who allows Eddie to work alongside Level 2 college students. Peter overlooks Eddie's challenges, appreciating and nurturing Eddie's natural talents and enthusiasm.

In the first year working only one day a week in Peter's class, Eddie produces more work than the other full-time students. Two of these portraits are now going to an exhibition at Falmouth Art Gallery.

Distinction

Peter customizes a Level 1 course for Eddie, who completes it the next year. Then Eddie goes on to the actual Level 2 college course, which he passes with distinction. Eddie is now taking a Level 3 Access Course in Art and Design.

Last year Eddie made his first best friend since Emma. Although non-verbal, his new best friend, Kyle Coleman, sings with perfect pitch and recently released an album. Eddie encourages Kyle in the arts and feels he can help Kyle one day begin communicating by speaking.

One day, Eddie hopes to become a famous artist, exhibiting his work around the world. He would love to be in a band, singing and playing his harmonica on



ruskinmill re-imagining potential

for people with ASD, learning difficulties and/or disabilities
mental health issues and challenging behaviour

“Four years ago I could never have imagined I would have changed so much!”

Josh is now employed full-time at the Ruskin Glass Centre Café following three invaluable years at Glasshouse College

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Student working with 1000° C in glassblowing at Glasshouse College

A specialist residential and day school for boys aged 11-19 with Autism.

Swalcliffe Park School



Communication

Social Communication
Formal Communication

Empathy
Relationships

Weekly Social Communication groups are designed to improve our students' perspective taking skills. Through school day and residential activities students learn about the importance of communicating for different purposes.

Students are encouraged to:

- Share and convey their ideas and feelings.
- Use communication for different purposes.
- Respect and appreciate the ideas and feelings of others.
- Develop positive, meaningful relationships.

"Students develop into self-confident and articulate young adults" (Ofsted, 2012)

Independence

Self-Care
Safety

Life Skills
Community

The Independence curriculum offers a variety of activities and opportunities designed to enable students to develop essential life skills in a range of settings.

Students are supported to:

- Care for themselves
- Manage their lives safely
- Take an active role in their local communities
- Learn how to problem solve and manage personal affairs

"Pupils are fully supported to partake in an impressive range of activities both within the school and the wider community" (Ofsted, 2012)



Self Management

Self Awareness
Behaviour

Sensory Regulation
Physical & Emotional Health

We offer an extensive range of curricular activities throughout the school day, into the evenings and at weekends. By following personalised learning pathways students plan and prepare for their futures beyond school.

Students are supported to:

- Recognise their own emotions and physical reactions to different situations.
- Manage these reactions positively and behave in an expected way.
- Use strategies to manage their anxieties.
- Look after their own physical and emotional well-being.

"The school is very effective in helping students to overcome and understand some of their difficulties in relation to their Autistic Spectrum Disorder" (Ofsted, 2012)

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Swalcliffe Park School



Art spot



Seaside scene: a landscape entitled Whitstable

“He can recall a tune on one hearing. He has an exceptional ear for music”

world-class stages. He would love to learn how to drive a car.

For now Eddie, who turns 21 in July, wishes for what most people his age wish for – an independent and fulfilling life. Next year, he hopes to move into supported living with some of his new friends. Things are looking promising...

Jacqui's advice to parents is: "Follow your hunches. If your child isn't verbal, use your intuition to listen. Know that our children are the future. We might as well join in their world, if we are ever to expect them to join in ours! They have every bit as much to teach us, as we have to teach them. Maybe more..."

To find out more about Eddie, visit his website: www.eddiecallis.co.uk. Eddie's artwork is also on display in the Art of Autism gallery: www.the-art-of-autism.com and he has an exhibition entitled Making Faces at Falmouth Art Gallery, Cornwall, from 29 June to 14 September.

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