

BBC Three series "Living with autism" starts April 22nd

BBC Three presents a ground-breaking series of programmes about young people with autism.

Most young adults take their freedom for granted. They can choose their friends, stay out late, learn to drive, and decide what they want to do as a career. For people growing up on the autistic spectrum, life can be very different.

But what is it like to grow up living with autism? In a series of warm and insightful films, BBC Three explores the complex lives of these young people as well as the challenges they face.

April 22nd The Autistic Me: 1 Year On

Following on from last year's acclaimed documentary, *The Autistic Me*, this new film catches up with Oliver, Alex and Thomas, a year after Director Matt Rudge first met them. For the lives of these young men on the autistic spectrum, the last 12 months has seen some dramatic changes and upheavals in all of their lives, as they continue their journey into adulthood.

Oliver, 25, has High Functioning Autism and had been searching for a job. In the first programme, temporary contract at the British Library had come to an end, and he was desperate for something to do so he could have a routine and find self worth.

A year on, Oliver has moved out of home but is still desperate for work. Attending a course specifically designed to help people with autism find work, he's been attending mock interviews and has work experience at a supermarket. But with an encyclopaedic knowledge of British History – is stacking shelves really all he can get?

Tom, 16, has Autistic Spectrum Disorder. His frustration with a lack of independence was at boiling point and his parents thought it best he spend some time away from the family in a residential care unit.

Tom is no longer at the care unit. He and his family have moved over 300 miles to start afresh in Cornwall; however, their idyllic dream move is proving a challenge for everyone – especially Tom. He finds himself isolated in the countryside, with no friends and contemplating the pressures of having to attend a mainstream college.

Alex, 25, has Asperger's Syndrome. Alex was using the internet to find a girlfriend, and had been on a first date with Kirsty, 20, another girl with autism.

A year later, Alex is doing well at work and Kirsty has become his girlfriend - but he still hasn't actually seen Kirsty since their first date. They live in separate towns and travelling to see each other is difficult and challenging. But Kirsty's birthday party is fast approaching and he plans a trip to see her. What does the future hold for a relationship such as theirs?

April 29th Autistic Driving School

Most teenagers want to learn how to drive. It represents a coming of age, a new beginning and a sense of freedom, but it is a daunting and stressful experience even for the calmest of individuals – much more so for those with autism.

For some young people on the autistic spectrum, learning to drive represents the independence they often find so difficult to achieve in the rest of their lives. Many Autistic people cannot cope with noisy and unreliable public transport, crowds, or even being looked at by strangers. Learning to drive is a crucial aspect in their transition into adulthood – but it's not easy.

This new film follows a group of young people on the Autistic spectrum all coping in different ways with their condition, and at different stages along their journey towards learning to drive.

From first lessons, to taking theory and practical tests, the programme captures the highs and lows of their experiences revealing how varied and surprising autism can be.

The programme introduces 22 year-old twins, Lucy and Lizzy, who share everything in life, including their driving lessons. After three and a half years with their instructor they are ready to take their tests.

Karting enthusiast Chris was diagnosed with Semantic Pragmatic disorder when he was very young, but is a super confident driver. He's booked in for his practical test, but with a tendency to drive too fast – will he pass?

David and Laura are complete beginners but hope learning to drive will help their career prospects and personal lives.

The programme also examines what life is like for people with autism who have their driving licence. 26-year-old Sarah passed her test first time in 2004 – but she's too scared to drive. Her Asperger's syndrome means she is full of anxiety and terrified of crashing, but she is desperate to get back behind the wheel.

Julia is the only driving instructor in the UK to have been diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome. She's studying for two degrees, is a member of Mensa but how will a new student do under her guidance?

Taking a driving test is something that everyone can relate to – but a rite of passage many people may take for granted.

May 6th Autism, Disco and Me

Andy and Sheila Hobley have three children, 16-year-old Alex, and 10-year-old twins George and James. But they are not a typical family - all three boys have autism. Alex is an Emo, George likes playing computer games, and James likes dancing – he is in fact a champion disco dancer.

Two years ago, James couldn't read or write; he struggled at school and was happier playing with his cats than talking to his family. Then, a leaflet for disco dancing lessons dropped through his door – and changed his life forever. Within six months, he'd won countless competitions and was crowned "best beginner" at the World Disco Championships.

Now, James' goal is simple; he wants to win what's arguably the biggest disco competition out there – Disco Kid – in Blackpool.

James' family believes dancing has 'unlocked' his mind. Since he started dancing, his reading and writing has improved drastically, his memory and coordination has got better, and for the first time in his life he has friends. Andy & Sheila have invested thousands of pounds on dance lessons, travel, and fancy costumes preparing James for competitions, but believe the remarkable transformation they have seen in their son has been worth it.

This one hour film reveals how dancing has transformed James' life and follows him on his incredible journey. James believes that dancing has fixed his brain – but will his progress be enough to see him through to the final of Disco Kid?

May 13th and 20th The Autistic Proms

A two part documentary series with a unique event at its heart has been commissioned as part of BBC Three's *Living with Autism* season. *The Autistic Proms* follows a group of young autistic people with a passion for music, as they prepare for what could be the biggest night of their lives.

Fronted by Reggie Yates (BBC Radio 1), the 2 x 60 minute documentaries will follow a cast of young people aged 11 to 23 during the build up to a one-off performance to be held at a major London venue.

The line up includes young people from right across the autistic spectrum. They all have exceptional musical talents, but behind the stage curtain it is a very different story. Everyday life poses many challenges, for them and their families, but through creativity they become freer to communicate with the world around them.

The documentary will allow access to each of the cast members' lives, revealing their daily struggles and triumphs, helping to shed light on a condition that affects over 500,000 people in Britain. The event is an opportunity for young, autistic people to show us their talent and creativity on a high-profile stage, within an atmosphere that is sensitive to their condition.

Samantha Anstiss, BBC Executive Producer says: "The Autistic Proms (w/t) is an inspiring addition to the upcoming Living with Autism season. As well as witnessing the determination of young people with Autistic Spectrum Disorder taking on a momentous challenge, the audience will be led on a journey of awe-inspiring moments towards a celebration of artistic excellence."

The first film will introduce the UK and US cast, unveiling their established or untapped talent. Through the build up, training and mentoring for the public event the film will reveal the hurdles, conflicts and personal triumphs of these young people, and the professionals and relatives that care for them, as they prepare for the night of the performance.

The second film will bring us closer to the big night, with everyone arriving in London and rehearsals taking place. The American performers will also arrive, and join in with the preparations. The final part of the second film will document the event itself, capturing the energy, excitement and inevitable ups and downs occurring on and off stage.