



EHCP & EOTAS FUNDING

Background

MindJam is a service that provides emotional, mental health, and SEN, support and guidance through the use of gaming, and/or game related skills. By engaging with mentees in their own environment through virtual sessions we are able to connect on a more “peer-like” level, enabling mentees to build a lasting rapport and trusting relationship for us to fully provide our support. A typical session may see a mentee play anywhere between 1 and several games across an hour session and any emotional or mental health support typically occurs organically over that time.

We’re based in Lincoln, but, as sessions are online, we provide them all over the world. We work with many UK local authorities including Essex, Surrey, North Yorkshire, Oxfordshire, Nottinghamshire, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, NHS Kent, BCP, Hampshire, Cornwall, plus many schools and specialist provisions. We are now an ASDAN Programmes Plus Centre which means we are able to offer our mentees programmes and courses that suit their needs and interests in a way that remains demand-free and interest focused to support their educational development. MindJam can also help mentor, guide and tutor towards many aspects of computers - from game design, coding and graphic design to art, animation and music production. We have guided many young people through the Unity Junior Programmer Certification which once completed can lead to further education or a career. We have assisted with Computer Science GCSEs and helped young people with careers advice and pathways into game design, esports or other college courses based around ICT. We work closely with many schools and colleges including Access Creative College, Red Balloon Learner Center, The Holden School, Venn Academy, BAFTA, SONY, and other game design studios.

We also support young people in the US, Australia, New Zealand and throughout Europe. We are working with over 1000 mentees across MindJam to date.

All of our mentors are very experienced and trained in working with autistic young people and other areas such as ADHD, anxiety, trauma, PTSD and PDA. All of our mentors have enhanced-DBS certificates, and certifications in GDPR, Online Safeguarding, and Safeguarding.

Ethos

Through positive, non-judgemental social interaction, tuition and play, we aim to provide the right support for their individual needs, whilst also providing an educational benefit through furthering skills in gaming, game design and coding.

The future is becoming increasingly digital and it is a world in which young people increasingly feel at home. By harnessing the benefits of digital entertainment/creative platforms, we want to support them with aspects of life they find difficult, in an environment they feel comfortable.

MindJam is able to meet mentees on their level, exploring and building upon social boundaries and skills, in a way that feels organic and natural to the child or young person. A mentor is assigned to a mentee and this mentor will remain the same (unless requested otherwise), this enables mentors to build a rapport, relationship, and sense of safety with their mentee. This is achieved by playing games together, chosen by the mentee, and progressively building a relationship, so that mentee is able to engage with their mentor, both on a social level, but as a form of support if needed too.

B1 Communication & Interaction

With regards to the outcome (B1) socialising and communication would be met by having mentee engaging with a new adult in their life, while this can be difficult initially it is likely that over time the mentee will slowly trust their mentor and we hope that we would see positive engagement. For each child and young person this can look slightly different depending on their needs or what they're comfortable with, anything from frequent engagement by taking part in the session, or eventually communicating in some way with their mentor. MindJam works with many children and young people, who communicate in different ways, with varying outcomes. For some mentees text-chat or video call may be preferred while for others it may be as simple as being able to communicate with their mentor by sending emojis or gifs, others have things they do in game such as emoting or jumping up and down to say hello with their character.

These are all positive communicative signs and are things that we at MindJam know to look out for, if we begin sessions without this interaction, and over time gain it, that is very positive in terms of relationship and communication development. For our mentees who are happy to communicate directly either via message or call we are able to notice those positive changes, such as opening up to us about things outside of session, speaking more frequently or asking questions, or being happy to use camera where they may have been unable to before. Our hands-off approach allows mentees to develop their social and communication skills organically and over time, so that they never feel pressured or rushed, allowing them a safe space to build these naturally.

B2 Cognition & Learning Needs

With regards to outcome (B2) concerning cognitive skills and learning, we find that again, over the course of sessions mentees utilise and develop cognitive skills. For example, in a game of Roblox mentees may need to work out how many items they need to collect before they get to the next level, or in Minecraft where mentees need to work out how many blocks of wood they'd need for x amount of planks. We find that mentees are encouraged to read so that they can find games they want to play in Roblox, or to write their own signs in Minecraft for example. This hands-off approach means that mentees find their own purpose for learning, and as mentors we are able to encourage, help, and support mentee with this in session. While mentee would be learning, they are often less aware of it as it is not presented as a lesson in any way and thus removes any pressures, this is particularly important for mentees who suffer with school-based trauma or struggle with direct learning that feels like school. We are also able to develop cognitive skills for mentees to use throughout their lives, such as time management, team management, organisation and problem solving. MindJam is now an ASDAN Programmes Plus Centre which means we are able to guide our mentees through programmes and courses such as digital skills, with a demand-free, person-centred approach.

MindJam sessions are flexible and fluid, and for those that are interested the learning opportunities are relatively limitless. Sessions can range from playing together in Minecraft, Fortnite, Roblox and other games, to learning Java, hosting a server, modding, creating games in Roblox Studio and Dreams, coding games in Python and Lua, video editing, music production, animation, using Scratch, modelling in Blender, becoming trained and certified as a junior programmer in Unity and helping aim towards further education and employment to name just some of the options.

B3 Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs

With regard to (B3) mental health and well-being, a large part of our job at MindJam is building confidence and self-esteem, we show the children we work with what they can do and support them in the things they're wanting to learn. We support mentees with various interests aside from and including gaming, from coding and design, to music production, languages, art, and editing. We support mentees with their interests whatever they may be and build on their confidence to pursue them further. We have mentees working on YouTube channels, making music, and taking up art, after previously not having the confidence to do so. A large part of our role is to also support our mentees mentally and with their well-being, helping them work through anxieties or issues outside of session on a peer-to-peer level. In giving our mentees a trusted, safe adult to confide in they have a safe, secure place to express themselves and process their emotions and will develop skills to aid in emotional regulation, and guided strategies with their mentor. We are here to support mentees mentally, emotionally, and with their interests, in a way that feels unintrusive and safe for the children and young people we work with.

If you would like to speak to us here at MindJam regarding your EHCP or EOTAS package, please contact our SEN Advocacy & Advisory Lead Jess Wilson using the following email:

sensupport@mindjam.org.uk
