

Finding Belonging

By Olivia

I've been writing a lot of poetry recently, and one of my most recent poems brought me back to a question I often ask myself & others: **Where do you feel like you belong?**

Belonging is something I have searched for at different points in my life, particularly as a neurodivergent woman with autism and ADHD. The path to feeling at home in the world has not always been straightforward, but writing has helped me make sense of that journey.

This poem came from those reflections.

Belonging

It's the quiet knowing
that you can be yourself,
with a person, or in a space.

It is a feeling.

a gentle safety,
a reassurance that you matter.

When your differences are accepted
and
they are **valued**.

When your internal compass is your guide
While you are struggling to find your place,

before the world opens up to you –

It's the quiet knowing
that you can be yourself,
with yourself,
in your space.

O.R

Support • Educate • Empower

Belonging is more than just being somewhere - it's the feeling that you can be yourself, that you are seen, heard and understood. It's a quiet safety, a reassurance that you matter and that you have a place.

Reflecting on my own life, I realise how often I've walked into a new team, a job, a sports club, or even a relationship - searching for that sense of belonging. For many years it felt difficult to find. Sometimes I felt like I didn't belong anywhere - not at home, not at school, and not always in the environments around me.

Some people go to work, do their job and go home to their lives. For me, I often needed something more. I needed to feel that I belonged there. I needed to feel safe. I needed to feel seen and understood.

When I am coaching cricket, I recognise the importance of belonging. I try to foster that sense of safety within a team. We might not always agree and we all have different personalities, but we share a goal and we work together. It should be a space where people can be themselves and know they are safe.

The idea of *home* is closely connected to belonging for me. Home is not just a physical place. It is a feeling - a place where you can rest in your own skin and be authentic. But not everybody has that. Some people cannot fully be themselves at home, and some people do not have a home at all. Others grow up in environments where who they are does not quite fit the expectations around them.

For many neurodivergent people, the path to belonging can be long and complicated. It has been for me. There have been times when I felt uncertain and anxious because I did not know where I fit. When you do not feel safe or settled, it can be difficult to perform, to focus, or even to feel calm.

One of the things I have learned is that we cannot get everything we need from one person or one place. Belonging is often built from many small sources of warmth and connection. Together they create something steady and sustaining.

I have also learned the importance of empathy. For me, Empathy is not about understanding why someone is feeling the way they are, but trying to connect with that feeling. If someone is hurt, upset, happy, stressed, anxious I try to make that my focus. The best way I can explain this is through football... I get happy when Arsenal score but I can't expect a Chelsea fan to identify with the reason I'm happy, but they can understand that I'm happy.

People need different things from different places. Some people need more reassurance; more support or more connection. Instead of asking *why*, I feel it can help to pause and quietly consider what experiences might have shaped that person's needs. I think that pause and quiet reflection is an act of empathy in itself. Maybe someone does not get the reassurance or support they need from anyone else (including themselves).

There may be people in our workplaces, schools, clubs or teams where the environment is the only place that they feel safe to be themselves. That is a powerful thing to remember. A space that feels ordinary to one person might be a lifeline to another.

Self-compassion and self-acceptance have helped me fill the gaps when I did not have a safe space to go. Learning to be kind to myself and to accept who I am has helped me build a sense of belonging within myself, even when the world around me felt uncertain.

I am deeply grateful for the support I have received from CAAS, that has helped me understand my autism and ADHD. To understand myself more. Their belief in me and their understanding helps to create a space where I feel safe, accepted and encouraged. *That quiet knowing that I can be myself.* The support has meant more to me than I can fully put into words, and I will always be grateful for it.

I wholeheartedly believe that belonging is a fundamental human need. It supports our self-worth, our mental health and our overall wellbeing.

In an ideal world, everyone would have places where they feel safe, accepted and able to be themselves. The reality is that many people are still searching for that.

If we can create environments where people feel safe and included, we offer something truly meaningful. Sometimes small acts of understanding and kindness can make a lasting difference, can be a lifeline and a spark that helps someone look within and discover they've always belonged.

I am grateful for the people and places that have helped me feel that sense of belonging, and I hope to offer the same sense of safety and understanding to others. Above all, I hope I can support people to foster that sense of belonging within themselves during the times they are struggling to find their place in the world.

Because everyone deserves at least one place where they can truly be themselves.