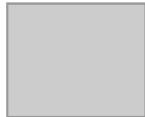




‘My son inspired me to make comic cons inclusive’

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‘My son inspired me to make comic cons inclusive’

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A mum has launched inclusive comic conventions across the country for people with disabilities after being inspired by her son who is autistic.

Zoe Crofts, from Milton Keynes, founded Bolt Events and hosted her first inclusive convention in Northampton in 2022 after she felt other events were not accessible for children with hidden disabilities.

“I have a son who is autistic and I have always found as a parent we couldn’t always do the things we wanted to do,” the 48-year-old said.

To make her events more accessible, they were hosted in smaller locations outside of London and designed to be held in less busy environments where individuals can enter early to adjust to their surroundings.

“We would rather take less vendors and have bigger aisles so people in wheelchairs can come through,” she explained.

“And, if you just need a time out, we will always find a room for you.”

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In September, Nicola Nenadovic attended one of the events in Bedford with her son, daughter and two nephews.

Her 10-year-old nephew, Jack, has the rare genetic disorder KPTN syndrome, along with autism and ADHD.

Ms Nenadovic said: “Jack finds crowded situations very scary, but he desperately wants to enjoy these things. He just struggles to understand them.

“He was always really scared of people dressed up.”

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To help him feel more comfortable at the event, Ms Crofts explained to Jack that he had the power to control Spider-Man, Iron Man and other characters who were at the event in costume.

She told all the characters to turn around and they were not allowed to look at him until he gave permission. He then walked around with his camera and took photos of all the characters until he was comfortable.

Ms Nenadovic said: “Zoe worked to help him feel comfortable, it was real lovely and he really enjoyed it – it was a job to get him out of there.

“2024 was the first year he wanted to meet Santa and have a photo with him. This had a lot to do with the comic con event and conquering his fears there.

“He keeps asking when can he see Spider-Man again.”

The events featured a retro gaming zone, cosplayers, cars from films, workshops, and more than 100 exhibitor tables full of geeky memorabilia and handmade crafts.

This year, Ms Crofts was scheduled to run 31 events across the country and will visit Daventry, Luton, Ipswich and Walsall.

Ms Crofts hoped her family-run events could set an example that showed conventions could be safe spaces for everybody.

She said: “It’s not just for the child; it’s for the parents and the stress it causes the parents.

“They know someone has their back – if the child has an autistic meltdown, we are there to support them.

“I want to help, I want to make it accessible for others, and I want them to have a bit of fun.”

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