

## OPTIMA PPI panel - biographies

### Panel Co-Chairs:

#### **Chloe**

Chloe is one of the three co-chairs of the panel and a parent representative on the OPTIMA PPI panel, having joined in May 2021. She completed a BA degree in Fashion Textiles and Business Studies at the University of Brighton, and then worked in the fashion industry. She has also provided art therapy in a dementia care home setting, and now more recently runs her own small textiles business. She is a mother of two young boys and part of a large diverse family. Chloe is passionate about the support the OPTIMA project will bring to struggling families, having recently experienced the process of navigating the pathway of gaining a diagnosis for her eldest child.

#### **Claire G.**



Claire joined the PPI panel in October 2022 and became a co-chair in September 2024. She has a BA in History and English Literature and has worked in PR and Communications for more than 20 years, across various sectors, including SEND. As a mum of three Primary School age children, she is also very involved with the school and has held the role of the PTA chair for the last three years. Her eldest son (10) is neurospicy, with several neurodivergent diagnoses, and her two younger children are currently undiagnosed.

Having sat on the waiting list for CAMHS for 3 and a half years, she sought private diagnoses for her eldest and has also had to seek private professional reports due to local council failings. "As a parent who has repeatedly been made to feel that I am failing my child, I know it's a very lonely path to walk before you get that validation of diagnosis. I believe that a programme like OPTIMA STEPS, which provides peer support and reassurance along that journey, will be invaluable to parents struggling, like we were, with the lack of information and help available without a diagnosis".

#### **Natalie**



Natalie is one of the panel co-chairs and initially joined the OPTIMA PPI group at the start of the project as a parent representative. Natalie completed a law degree at university and then went on to become a secondary school teacher in South London.

She lives with her husband, Rosie the dog and three children. Her two eldest sons are neurodiverse, and she navigated the very slow NHS system before gaining a private diagnosis and subsequently being accepted by CAMHS. She believes the OPTIMA project will help families on the diagnosis pathway and will bring support that is currently lacking.

## Panel members:

### **Dominic**



Dom joined the PPI panel in September 2022, recognising how important the STEPS app could be for parents waiting for their child's CAMHS assessment. He has a passionate interest in neurodiversity, his middle child diagnosed as autistic at the age of eight – with an additional diagnosis of ADHD less than a year later – and his first-born diagnosed as ADHD shortly before his 18th birthday. In addition, Dom worked with SEN children in primary school settings for several years, having left a 20-year career as an editorial designer and art director.

He now co-delivers supportive parenting programmes for the NHS in South London, where his lived experiences as a father are now further complemented by his very own ADHD diagnosis in 2023. When he is not immersed in a world of divergence, he can be found cooking in the kitchen, supporting his two local football teams, or escorting people into old tunnels of The Underground for Hidden London.

### **Laura**



I'm a mum of two loving, bright, energetic young boys. When I first heard about OPTIMA/STEPS I was curious about whether some of my children's behaviours might indicate ADHD. For various reasons I was not ready to pursue assessment and diagnosis but was keen to learn if there was anything I could try to help manage difficult behaviours and make our family life a bit happier and easier. I bring to the PPI panel my lived experience of parenting. I've also experienced being a participant in parenting skills programmes run by my children's school (both in-person and online).

Coincidentally, I also bring relevant some professional experience. I'm a Health Psychologist and my job involves research. I develop and evaluate online tools (like websites and apps) to help people manage their health problems.

I can relate to both the parent and the researcher perspective and try to give any input I can to make the research a success for the families involved and for the research team. I've loved meeting a friendly group of parents in similar positions and having lively, open discussions about our experiences and viewpoints. It's an uplifting experience to join the meetings and the research team devote lots of time to listening and responding effectively to our suggestions.

## Lucinda



Lucinda joined the panel in the summer of 2022 and was Chair until September 2024. She has a degree in Philosophy and Psychology, is a qualified teacher and has an MA in Special and Inclusive Education. She is currently teaching Psychology at a school in Abingdon, Oxfordshire as well as doing a bit of independent consultancy on wellbeing in schools.

Lucinda has a regular weekly podcast called 'Psychology in the Classroom'. She is a parent of 3 neurodiverse teenage boys and 2 crazy dogs! She understands the challenges faced by parents with neurodiverse children from a personal, professional and theoretical standpoint. She hopes that the OPTIMA project will be a much-needed support mechanism for parents embarking on what is a daunting journey.

## Tessa

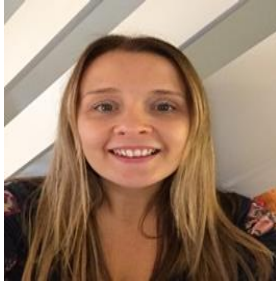


I heard about the OPTIMA PPI Panel through the Project Manager in 2021 and joined as a parent representative. The project seemed like a great opportunity to learn more as a parent to neurodiverse children and also to contribute by sharing our experience of the ADHD referral process.

I live in Essex with my husband, two children and two dogs. I studied Psychology at Essex University, and before children worked in various jobs including writing training manuals, support worker for children diagnosed with attachment disorder and as a learning mentor. Once I had children, I worked in roles that fit round them more easily- such as registered childminder and tutor. When they were both school age I began working in school again. However, due to my own children's struggles (related to ASD, ADHD, Selective Mutism and Dyslexia) I chose to give up work so I could support them better. Both children experienced school refusal and needed a lot of help. My eldest child returned to mainstream education with an EHCP and my youngest is home educated.

Helping with the OPTIMA study has given me something positive to focus on for myself and makes me feel that I am contributing to something important. The app will be so beneficial to parents and their children as there is currently very little accessible help or advice. Being part of the group has meant that I have met new people who share the same passion. It is interesting to hear others' viewpoints and experiences. It all feels very inclusive and I look forward to seeing how the project evolves.

## Claire C.



Claire joined the OPTIMA study in September 2022. She has worked on PPI panels on various studies around children's mental health since 2020 and is excited to join this exciting and vital project. Claire was proud to be named as a co-author on the Oxford University Co-Space study, *"Parenting in a Pandemic: a qualitative exploration of Parents' experiences supporting their children during the COVID-19 Pandemic"*. Claire worked in the travel industry for 15 years and spent her youth travelling around the world which she is very grateful for. She became a career changer when the travel industry crashed during COVID and decided to pursue a career in the mental health field. Claire started a Masters in Mental Health Nursing at Oxford Brookes University in 2021 and she supports her degree by working as a healthcare assistant at the CAMHS inpatient hospital in Oxford. During her work, she has seen the mental health consequences of a late diagnosis of ADHD. She is passionate about supporting parents pre and post-diagnosis to provide the environment their child needs to flourish. She hopes to build a career in the field after graduating, both as a clinician and a researcher.

At home, Claire is a single parent to a wonderful daughter diagnosed privately with ADHD in 2022 and Claire herself received her diagnosis of ADHD in February 2023. Understanding both of their brains has been life-changing and she believes that ADHD can be a wonderful blessing once you understand how to manage it. Claire lives in Oxfordshire and in her free time, you will find her in a rehearsal room rehearsing for her latest amateur dramatics show!

## Vicki



I am also a parent representative on the OPTIMA PPI panel who joined in 2021 after learning about the trial through Kasia. I live in Derbyshire with my ADHD/ASD husband, my 2 autistic & Dyspraxic children and my dog Effie who I think is the only one of us not neurodivergent! We first realised my son was Neurodivergent when he was 5 and since then it has been nearly a decade of learning, study, embracing and celebrating our idiosyncratic family. I have worked in schools and volunteered supporting children with neurodiversities, including ADHD. I helped to run a school support group for parents and set up a Facebook support group, as well as other activities and clubs to support families and children with SEN.

I am a strong advocate for the OPTIMA study and have huge confidence that the app will not only be a success but that it will be the start of a wave of future apps from the NHS to provide immediate support and information to families, children and adults with all the many forms of neurodiversity and also possibly mental health, whilst they are on the long waiting list for diagnosis. I love being a small part of such a revolutionary and important trial, not just in its field of study and potential outcome but in how it is run – Including and actually listening to parents who are in the thick of it.