

*“When I was younger I remember thinking that all adults were angry because of the way they used to look at me.”*

Hello everyone. I'm Lucas and I'm 13.

My nose is wider and flatter than most people's. It's something I was born with and the long name for it is frontal-nasal craniofacial dysplasia. I use this name when I want to confuse people!

The first time I realised I had any kind of condition was when I was four, and I went to my local village primary school for the first time.

The other children stared and asked questions like, 'What's wrong with you?' or 'What happened to you?' They didn't understand, and neither did I.

It was confusing and scary hearing them say those things, because I didn't understand I looked different. It was shocking to realise I wasn't the same as everyone else.

After that, I was bullied for most of my time at primary school. Boys would punch me and try to wrestle me to the ground and the girls called me cruel names like 'pig nose' or 'elephant man'.

The physical bullying was the worst and most of the time I was in tears and too scared to go into the playground. They were so out of touch in my primary school that the teachers kept me inside until I felt better and told the children to stay away from me, so I ended up on my own. They suggested I see an educational psychologist when it affected my school work. They were thinking I had learning difficulties, but when the report came back from him it showed I was actually very able, but in an oppressive environment.

One day when I was nine years old I'd had enough, so I just got up and went home.

That caused a quite a stir,.....and it was soon after that, my parents got in touch with 'Changing Faces' for help and advice.

Someone from the charity came to the school to help the teachers and thankfully things got much better from there on.

My next school got it right from the start. They had a meeting with people from Changing Faces and my Mum. They know that looking different is like having something extra to deal with and that it is support that I need to cope with other children's behaviour and reactions. Curiosity about my appearance is now treated appropriate to the manner in which it is asked and I'm pretty happy there.

But it's not just children who react to my appearance in a negative way. Adults do too and as I've grown older I have had to learn how to handle people's reactions so that I can feel good about

To anyone who looked at me and thought I'd never achieve anything look at me now

Changing faces  
the way you face  
disfigurement

See why Lucas chose to star in our face equality campaign at [www.changingfaces.org.uk](http://www.changingfaces.org.uk)

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myself. When I was younger I remember thinking that all adults were angry because of the way they used to look at me. Now, if someone stares too long, or keeps looking back, I often smile and mouth the word 'Hello'.

Strangers tend to have low expectations of me; they assume that because I look different I must have learning difficulties. I still get asked if I

need the help sheet by new or supply teachers and some strangers give me nervous sideways glances and speak to me in a way that suggests I might not understand them. Now if I see someone wondering about my IQ, well, generally using an enhanced vocabulary sorts that out for them.

People sometimes ask me when I will have plastic surgery 'to put it right'. It doesn't seem to enter their heads that I might not want any more surgery or that I might be happy with the way I look. There is more to a person's 'image' than just their physical appearance and surgery is not a solution to other people's attitudes.

But to grow up, constantly being thought of as abnormal when I just simply have an unusual face, does have an effect. I became lonely, self conscious and felt I was worth less than normal looking people, I stopped doing anything at school and was so very sad, I would come home and pretend to my parents that everything was fine and go to my bedroom and cry. Changing faces showed me, my family and teachers how to deal with this long term negative pressure and that's why I got involved with the Changing Faces children's campaign for 'Face Equality' because I want to help other children like me by changing people's beliefs about disfigurement.

It's been a lot of fun so far. The BBC filmed us all at home for a documentary of our involvement but the most exciting bit was when the posters were up in the London Underground and we went on a 'search' to see who's poster was in which station. It was also really interesting working with the advertising agency because that's what I want to do when I'm older.

The really impressive part of that days filming, for all of us, was when we came out of one station, just as it was getting dark, and we saw ourselves on this giant illuminated display, it was bigger than a double decker bus.

I never dreamt I would see myself up in lights in the middle of London.

We all felt like film stars!

It's exactly that sort of confidence and pride I would like other young people with disfigurements to be able to feel, more of the time.

But it's not always easy to feel like this given people's assumptions about us. So, if you're looking at me tonight and thinking that I've got a bit of a sad life, I'm not likely to achieve much at school or that I don't have the confidence to make friends, you need to think again.

