

Case study: Justin Fletcher (aka Mr Tumble)

Actor Justin Fletcher is the star of the BBC TV programme *Something Special* and plays the character Mr Tumble. In each show, he goes out and about using Makaton signs and symbols, to help children learn about the world around them. Topics covered include pets, toys, weather, clothes, shops, food, all about me, where I live and colours. Mr Tumble always dresses up, wearing brightly-coloured clothes and even gigantic shoes!



Justin works hard with the *Something Special* team and The Makaton Charity to ensure that his communication skills and the use of Makaton are appropriate and accurate, as well as entertaining. All the children involved in making the programmes, as well as those who watch at home, join in with his use of Makaton signing and symbols to extend their ability to communicate.

He received the Outstanding Achievement Award from Pearson Assessment, and was also highly commended in the 'Communication Champion' category because he has such a wide reach via his television programme and is so popular with children. By using signs and symbols, the programme allows all children to get involved and it is very popular with children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) and their families.

One parent commented: "I have a son of two who has learning difficulties and finds communication quite difficult. Since the introduction of *Something Special* and especially Mr Tumble, he now finds many ways to communicate and continues to learn more and more each and every day, making his life less frustrating. I cannot tell you the amount of positivity this has given our family."

Thanks to *Something Special*, Justin and Mr Tumble, there is a greater awareness of SLCN, particularly in early years' settings, but also in primary schools and among teenagers and young adults. *Something Special* is often a starting point for parents exploring alternative forms of communication.

In 2008 Justin was awarded an MBE in recognition of his services to children's entertainment after a massive public petition. Fans both young and older continue to adore him because he makes such a difference to the lives of children who need alternative methods of communication.

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