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The Communicator

A publication of the Autism National Committee

Introduction

This issue of our newsletter is chock full of information. There are three poems, two articles relating to neurodiversity, and one article reminding us that we can learn new ways of interacting with and understanding people from anyone – even a giant Blue Bear! There is a letter from our President, an opinion piece regarding the autism diagnostic category in DSM-5, and more. We are looking forward to an exciting and productive 2023!

In This Issue

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https://www.facebook.com/autcom

No Divisions
By Maxfield Sparrow

In 2013, the DSM-5 put many different labels together into one category: autism. Since then, I've been seeing a lot of people talking about wanting to break that diagnostic category back into pieces again. The most common suggestion I see people getting behind is creating a category proponents want to call "severe autism".

From what I'm able to understand, the parents who support creating a "severe autism" category argue that they need a special diagnosis so that people can understand how much harder their lives and the lives of their autistic children are. These folks, if I'm following their logic correctly, believe that they are getting short-changed when it comes to funding and research because people with so-called "mild autism" (that is, people with a different set of support needs from their children) are taking these things away from their children.

I believe the people who want to re-fracture the diagnostic categories are making a huge mistake. If they want more funding and research for their children, they should join forces with other parents who do not want to divide the community, as well as join with autistic people ourselves. Embracing the great diversity within autism and working together to push for research and funding for everyone is more likely to benefit the children whose parents want them to have the label "severe autism". Creating a way to further segregate their children into a smaller demographic with its own niche label based on loose definitions that tend to revolve around issues of speech and types of support needs is more likely to reduce the funding and support available to them.

Why is this my belief? I have learned from observing other movements. Whenever a community starts fragmenting, everyone's needs and causes get held back. Movements do not benefit from segregating and shrinking the number of people fighting for rights and recognition. It is through joining forces that people organize enough people to get heard by those who hold the power and the purse strings.

For one example, look at what the Blind community was able to achieve by joining forces.

Instead of segregating into different communities such as the totally Blind community, the low vision community, and so on, the entire community joined forces and demanded needed support as a unified force. It would have been easy for the Blind community to argue that totally Blind people were "more severely Blind" and should separate out because their needs were different. It would have been easy for people to fear that Blind people who could read text with the assistance of bright light and magnification would use up all the resources that the totally Blind people needed more. Or vice versa, for that matter. Fear and internal competition of any kind diminish a group's power in the world.

But the Blind community recognized that there is strength in numbers and fought together for needed support. As a result, people can bring service dogs into public buildings. Many street corners have speaking traffic signals and textured curbs to help people find their way. The post office accepts books on tape for blind people and ships them for free. Blind people who receive social security benefits get extra money and have more lenient rules governing their benefits compared to other disabled people. The Blind community won many victories for support and accommodations for everyone because they joined together across their differences and advocated for the needs of everyone.

Just imagine how much more we could accomplish in the autism community if we all joined together: Autistic people and parents; speaking people, non-speaking people, typing people, picture pointing people, sign language communicating people; people with full-time support needs and those who love and serve them; people with employment support needs and people who don't work jobs; people who test at all IQ ranges and people who are unable to be measured with IQ tests . . . all of the spectrum of autism together in one big group. What a force to be reckoned with! How much power our community would have if we all worked together for everyone's needs instead of dividing out into ideological silos built from the fear that someone else getting what they need means that support has been stolen from someone else who will not get what they need.

Autism advocacy and activism do not need to be a zero-sum game. We really can join together and demand a better world for ALL autistic people/people with autism/folks on the spectrum and our families. If we can move beyond the isolating fear and anger and work together for the good of all, our community can enjoy the kinds of increased support and funding other communities have secured through solidarity across differences. At the end of the day, what we all want is human rights and needed accommodations and support. There is enough to go around but we will never know that until we can truly join forces and work together for a better tomorrow for everyone.

Maxfield Sparrow is an Autistic self-advocate, peer support group facilitator, author of The ABCS of Autism Acceptance and editor of Spectrums: Autistic Transgender People in Their Own Words. https://maxfieldsparrow.com

Resources

Books

Different, Not Less: A neurodivergent's guide to embracing your true self and finding your happily ever after By Chloé Hayden. “Listen to yourself, listen to your mind, listen to your body. What do you need? What do you need to stay away from? You’re the expert on yourself, and it’s important to surround yourself with things that will benefit you.”
https://www.chloehayden.com.au/shop/p/different-not-less-book

May Tomorrow Be Awake: On Poetry, Autism, and Our Neurodiverse Future by Chris Martin. (2022) “Chris Martin, an award-winning poet and celebrated educator, works with non-verbal children and adults on the spectrum, teaching them to write poetry. . . . Martin introduces the techniques he uses in the classroom and celebrates an inspiring group of young autistic thinkers—Mark, Christophe, Zach, and Wallace—and their electric verse, which is as artistically dazzling as it is stereotype-shattering.
https://www.chrismartinpoet.com/work/maytomorrowbeawake

What I Mean When I Say I'm Autistic: Unpuzzling a Life on the Autism Spectrum by Annie Kotowicz. “I hope this book will give insight and encouragement to every person who wants to understand autism better. It’s an analysis of my autistic thinking, a guide to autistic thriving, and a celebration of autistic brains.”
https://neurobeautiful.com/book/

Articles

Sydney Edmond: Autism Moving Forward. “Not being able to communicate stops dreams from coming true / Lacking a voice locks a cage around your life. / Now, having that long longed-for means of communication / Life is open to great joy…”
https://www.autismmovingforward.com/post/autism-moving-forward

Results and Analysis of the Autistic Not Weird 2021 Survey: Presenting the Attitudes and experiences of 11,212 respondents (7,491 of whom were autistic) by Chris Bonnello. (Updated version of Bonnello’s 2018 survey.) The author notes that this not an academic paper, but is an analysis and interpretation of the data he was given by respondents. Free online access.
https://autisticnotweird.com/autismsurvey/

“Adam Wolfond says that poetry is part of his body. ‘It is nature to me,’ he says through a speech-generating device. ‘And I think that non-speakers like me dance with language.’ For neurodivergent, non-speaking poets, collaboration is the basis of language. April 29, 2022. NPR.
https://www.npr.org/2022/04/29/1095206261/for-neurodivergent-non-speaking-poets-collaboration-is-the-basis-of-language

Chris Martin on Poetry, Autism, and the Joy of Working With Neurodiverse Writers
https://lithub.com/chris-martin-on-poetry-autism-and-the-joy-of-working-with-neurodiverse-writers

Video, Film, Documentaries

Short documentary from 2021: The Beautiful Colors of Jeremy Sicile-Kira (captioned; 9:55) “I do my art to help people understand the beauty around them…. I communicate through my nice paintings. . . . Green, the calm grounded feeling my wonderful career as an artist gives me.” – Jeremy. A version of this documentary was shown on PBS on 1/9/2023; the artist prefers this longer, fine cut.
https://www.pbs.org/video/beautiful-colors-of-jeremysicile-kira

Other Media

Beyond Disability Awareness: An Educator’s Guide by Diana Pastora Carson, educator, speaker, podcaster, inclusionist. Covers many Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI) topics, including “What We've Always Done and Why it Doesn't Work” and “What Exactly Should We Talk About (ableism; access; assistive technology; disability history & disability rights; disability justice; diversity, equity, and inclusion; multiply marginalized individuals; respectful language; words and phrases to avoid)
https://www.dianapastoracarson.com/general-9

New and Exciting

Picture Book: *A Day with No Words by Tiffany Hammond, an autistic mother of two autistic sons and the creator behind the popular @Fidgets.and.Fries social media platform and illustrated by Kate Cosgrove.*
https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/A-Day-With-No-Words/Tiffany-Hammond/9781736949795

Book: *I Will Die On This Hill: Autistic Adults, Autism Parents, and the Children Who Deserve a Better World*. Authors: Meghan Ashburn and Jules Edwards; Illustrator: Nathan McConnell; Foreword by Morénike Giwa Onaiwu. Autistic advocate and parent Jules Edwards runs the page, Autistic, Typing. Allistic ally and parent Meghan Ashburn runs the page, Not An Autism Mom. (Release date: Jan. 19, 2023)
https://www.amazon.com/Will-Die-This-Hill-Autistic/dp/1839971681

Book: *Swoon* – Poems by DJ Savarese
https://www.amazon.com/Swoon-D-J-Savarese/dp/1737788098

Short film on YouTube: "A Window Into A World Without Speech - Whose Voice Is It Anyway" by Kate Caryer, MA from University of Leeds, writer, director, and communication device user. (captioned; 4:57). "A darkly funny mockumentary about two identically 'disabled' forty-year-old women: Lottie and Charlie, who have athetoid cerebral palsy. Both celebrate their 40th birthday with family and friends, yet one is given the choice and the ability to communicate, and one is not." Although the film's characters are not autistic, the two lives in sharp contrast could have been two autistics with different life opportunities around access to communication. Caryer's approach to making the viewer recognize the importance of never giving up on providing better communication access for all is blunt and on target.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MooE4eUDbsg

Coming soon . . . SPELLERS (the movie): "Inspired by the book *Underestimated*, the new full-length documentary SPELLERS challenges conventional wisdom regarding a group relegated to society's margins: nonspeakers with autism, who most 'experts' believe are cognitively disabled." SPELLERS will be screened at film festivals across the country. See the website for updates on when and where to watch it.
https://spellersthemovie.com/

Happy Valentine's Day!
By Anthony Brown

Great feeling of joy coming over me
Dotting the sky with starlight
Kind endeavor, hoping fearlessly
Dearest gifts establishing trust
Open Hearts under starlit skies
Surrendering to keenest view
Light surrounds each human being
Luminous, kind, shimmering hue
Treasures sparkle, ascending waves
Going inward, to dearest home

Biography

I am a nonverbal man. I am thirty-two years old. My poems were written using supported typing. Some of the time, I had support. Other times I typed as my partner held the keyboard. My interest is in educating others about partnered communication.

A Word from the President
Finding Friendship in a Neurotypical World

Lisa Keller

I am surrounded by neurodiversity. I work with autistics six days a week, and I embrace their quirks and “behaviors,” because the end result makes my own life better. Is it any surprise that, in this time of Covid, conspiracy theories and social media, real friendship is hard to come by? And that’s just for the neurotypicals. Pile on an autism label, as well as the anxiety that accompanies that, and imagine trying to make friends.

Tonight, I spoke with a mom whose adult son has no communication issues per se, but who isolates himself due to his autism. He is supremely lonely yet has a deep desire for friends. The autistics with whom I work (most of whom are minimally speaking or nonspeaking) have spent their lives being misunderstood. Their “behaviors” are off-putting to most NTs, who make incorrect assumptions about the person’s intelligence.

Last weekend, however, was a refreshing reminder of the importance of friendship. Several of my client’s people met for a Skillbuilder’s group, which I hosted. These people range in age from 14-48, and have learned to type their very complex thoughts and opinions more or less independently. The group was initially established years ago to help hone their skills. Most have not seen each other since the beginning of the pandemic. They were all so excited to see each other again, and be able to share, vent, laugh and commiserate. One (new) participant was in Italy (he joined virtually) and his words were translated by his Communication Partner. In all, it was an experience that each one craved: meeting others who know what it’s like to be autistic, and who are completely nonjudgmental. In this time of polarization, that is a rare thing.

What a Dolphin Trainer Taught Me About Positive Supports (It is not what you think)

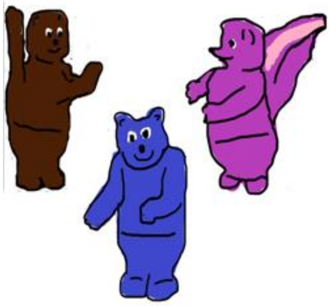
By Alan Kurtz

My friend Gigi was the trainer in the dolphin show at the large amusement park where I worked when I was in college. Calling Gigi an extrovert is probably an understatement. She was as outgoing as anyone I have ever known. She was certainly great at her job and could get the dolphins to do amazing tricks by rewarding them with fish. What she taught me about positive supports, however, had nothing to do with using edibles to shape behavior.

My summer job involved dressing as a purple skunk and riding around the park in a multi-colored golf cart with two other costumed characters. We greeted people, shook hands, and performed skits throughout the park. It really was a great job, and we got to rest every half hour to prevent overheating. The breaks also gave us a chance to complain about the horrible behavior of some customers – notably that of boys of about 11 or 12 years of age.

I could tell by the look in the boys' eyes that they were going to try to squeeze my hand when they shook it. Others were even more aggressive, often approaching me and shouting "You are not real", before smacking me in the head. It really did not hurt, but the echoing inside my giant skunk head was annoying. I suffered the most, because of the six-foot tail that was attached to me with a backpack frame and Velcro. For pre-adolescent boys, pulling my tail was apparently irresistible. My Chipmunk and Blue Bear colleagues were also victims of aggression, but to a lesser extent. Hot weekend days were the worst, when the park was packed, and people were weary of waiting in long lines.

We usually attributed the bad behavior either to the boys just being "bad kids" or to poor parenting. (The bad parenting argument, unfortunately, was one I would later hear echoed in teachers' lounges.) We did not think anything could be done about it other than providing us more protection. The Disney characters went on strike that summer because they felt they were not being adequately protected from similar treatment.



Eventually I became the supervisor of the costumed characters. I was surprised when Gigi approached me to me to ask if she could go out as the Blue Bear. I warned her that it could be "rough out there." It was a hot day after all, with a big crowd. She ignored my concerns, put on the costume, and entered the park with me accompanying her for protection.

Gigi spent 90 minutes in costume in the park instead of the normal 30 minutes. Amazingly, no one hit her or tried to squeeze her hand! No one questioned whether she was real! I was stunned!

I started watching Gigi carefully. On one level, she was not giving people the chance to be aggressive. She did not wait for people to initiate interaction with her and then react. Gigi initiated positive interaction with them before aggression could occur. But there was more to it than that. There was something about the way she moved – at times like a whirling dervish – that, I think, made it more fun to interact with her in a positive way than to aggravate her. Gigi seemed to be conveying through endless energy that she liked people and that interacting with her was going to be fun. Even without a voice and with a static, painted facial expression, Gigi was able to connect with people in ways that I had not previously observed.

I decided that the next time I went out in costume I was going to act like Gigi. The first thing I did was run up to two women posing for a picture. I stepped between them, put my arms around their shoulders, and lifted my feet in the air. They thought it was hysterical. From then on, I decided to act like Gigi whenever I was in costume. It worked!! People stopped hitting me or trying squeeze my hand. And it was so much more fun.

So where had all those horrible boys gone? They were still there but we changed the circumstances. I realized that when we were not shaking hands or performing skits, we acted very passively. We had been affording young boys the perfect opportunity to demonstrate that they were transitioning to adolescence and were contemptuous of anything childish. I suspect that things changed for me because, with my new-found enthusiasm, boys quickly assessed the situation and realized that it was going to be more fun interacting with me than antagonizing me.

So, what did this teach me about positive supports?

1. If we wait passively for something bad to happen it probably will. It makes far more sense to initiate positive and fun interaction than to wait for someone to misbehave and then react.

2. Behavior always occurs in a context. Before focusing on changing the behavior we need to look at the context. We need to ask how we can change the environment so that the behavior we view as problematic becomes unnecessary. This is exactly what Gigi did.

3. Behavior is not something that resides in an individual just waiting for the right moment to come out. Instead, it is something that emerges within contexts. Problematic behavior such as aggression never occurs in a vacuum.

4. Relationships are fundamental. Gigi made aggression unnecessary in her relationship with customers, as she established an almost instant relationship with those with whom she interacted.

5. We need to understand how behavior that we find problematic can actually meet peoples' needs. In the example above, we should have considered the need for pre-adolescent boys to demonstrate that they are no longer young children. Rather, we needed to figure out how to interact with them in a way that made them less likely to feel childish.

I am not so naïve, however, as to think that seriously dangerous and ingrained behavior can be eliminated with sheer enthusiasm. It is not easy to simply eliminate behavior that individuals have been using for years to adapt, as best they can, to a world that is not always designed to meet their needs.

In all cases, though, I believe it is vital to look carefully at the context in which the behavior occurs, to consider what needs are being met or not met. We also need to recognize that behavior does not reside solely within the individual but, instead, emerges as the person interacts with others. From this perspective, it usually makes more sense to explore and analyze the broader social interaction itself, rather than the behavior of a single contributor to that interaction. Gigi being Gigi as the Blue Bear—and me "being Gigi" as the Purple Skunk—taught me that context and relationships are fundamental, and the starting point for understanding.

We applaud . . .

Progress by advocates and Congress in the fight to end the use of electric skin shock. For several decades, advocates and organizations have worked to oppose and to end the use of electric skin shock, which is currently still an approved procedure at the Judge Rotenberg Center (JRC) in Massachusetts. The Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN) reports that “Congress has Supported the FDA’s Right to #StopTheShock.” Check the ASAN website (link below) for ASAN’s entire statement, which includes a detailed explanation and update on this new development.

Despite the ongoing, relentless efforts of many individuals and organizations, including ASAN and AutCom, to end the use of electric skin shock for behavior modification or control, it has remained in use. It is widely recognized as an inhumane, harmful, traumatizing procedure which has no place in the world. The 2023 omnibus bill that Congress passed in late December includes a provision giving the FDA the right to ban contingent electric shocks used for behavior modification. Now we need the FDA to take the next step and to act quickly on this newly confirmed authority to end the shocks.

ASAN’s closing comments in their statement are powerful, and we strongly support and wish to emphasize them here: “This fight is not over until the JRC is shut down, all institutions are closed, and all people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are receiving the services we need to thrive in our own homes and communities. This is not over until restraint and seclusion are banned in every state, until violence against people with disabilities is recognized as violence, not written off as ‘for our own good.’ ASAN will continue to fight for freedom from abuse, torture, segregation, and oppression for all people with IDD and other disabilities.” AutCom shares these goals and encourages all our members and readers to join these efforts.

Thanks to the Autistic Self Advocacy Network and to Nancy Weiss of the National Leadership Consortium on Developmental Disabilities for continuing to provide updates on the progress in this fight. We applaud the work of advocates like Nancy Weiss, Jan Nisbet (author of Pain and Shock in America), ASAN (Autistic Self Advocacy Network), AASR (Alliance Against Seclusion and Restraint), TASH, AutCom members, and many others to bring an end to these harmful and traumatizing measures.

https://autisticadvocacy.org/2022/12/congress-has-supported-the-fdas-right-to-stoptheshock/

Very Few People Understand

By Meaghan Buckley

Meaghan: Very few people understand what autism is all about. It is not a verbal disorder. It is a sensory motor disorder. What I mean by this is that you become a slave to your body. Anything you want to do you have to think really hard about and even then your body can screw it up.

Question: Do you lack sensation in all parts of your body, Meg, or just some?

Meaghan: All parts.

Question: What about facial expressions? I know that whenever you are asked to smile you say "cheese." Is it because you cannot feel your mouth?

Meaghan: Yes. I cannot stretch my mouth into a smile voluntarily.

Question: Is this lack of sensation of your mouth why you chew on things?

Meaghan: Yes. I chew to feel my lips. I get really good sensation back from my mouth.

Question: So when you hit yourself?

Meaghan: I am frustrated at not being able to communicate. And also it helps me to feel my body.

Question: What about your repeating?

Meaghan: I repeat to escape myself. Believe it or not, it creates a calm sensation when I am feeling over-stimulated or anxious, which is pretty much all the time. I don't have good system control. Each time I am not real wild I am trying really hard to control myself. Typing helps, it gives me peace. The more intricate the neural processing task, the more ways my brain finds to screw it up. My mind just can't get coherent messages through to my mouth. Not just speech. I can tell myself to smile or stick my tongue out until I am blue in the face but my mouth won't respond.

(excerpt from The Meaghan Report)

https://www.plrocontnentsource.com/meagjhan-report

Meaghan Buckley is a 37 year-old autistic writer and an AutCom Board Member. She is the role model for the character Anna in her upcoming book, Who Is Anna, which she co-wrote with her mother, Gail. Meaghan's family did not discover her remarkable intelligence and ability to express her thoughts through typing until she was 29 years old. She has given presentations at several local colleges, Boston University and Leslie College and at the 2019 AutCom Conference. Meaghan lived at home, attending Boston Higashi School, until she turned 21. She now lives in a home with four other autistics.

The Real Triad in Autism

By Robert Cutler

I have stress just for being autistic. Your world depends on time. My world depends on sequence of events with no timeline. There is no timeline.

People with autism feel alienated because sometimes we want to be alone. They say “We are going into our world”, but really, we just need a break from life’s challenges.

Everyone needs daily support in their life. Look at the person who craves caffeine in the morning. They are grumpy until they get their coffee.

Movement and sensory issues need to be looked at. I wonder why lives are more like a 78-speed record which was intended for 33-speed.

We cannot always control the way our bodies move (and a helping hand is better than not having the opportunity to speak). I have a body that tremors but a mind that is sharp. My hands are my voice.

Positioning is touch and go. Look at lighting and the sounds of the lights. Also soft background music helps. The area surrounding the person needs to be plain. No stimulus.

I have a body that tremors. I hope that my tremors are from stress and not seizures. Mystery is only a new challenge. I voice the need to move more fluently.

Relax, read, restful time when I am with Teresa. She clears my mind by touching my body. No one has made my mind clearer with any drug.

It is hard for me to talk. I feel pain in my head when I am asked to talk a lot. Is asking that our lives be orderly and predictable any less than normal people want or any different. Work on acceptance and understanding about us individually.

We want freedom to go at our own speed, not the speed behaviorists decide. We want low stimuli rooms with natural lights from the sun.

We need to make sure our lives have meaning. We hate living just to exist. But the most important thing, the right to be listened to.

I want you to hear me – close institutions down. Give my friends something you take for granted—freedom to choose where I live and the rights to communicate.

FC has opened up a whole new world to me. Access to FC should be top priority in advancing our acceptance.

Thank you for listening and learning.

Robert Cutler was the President of AutCom with autism (1999-2002). Since he began to communicate through FC in 1997, he has presented at numerous regional and regional conferences, universities, and organizations, including AutCom, TASH, UNH, Syracuse University, and others. He has published in TASH Connections, the AutCom Communicator, and Sharing Our Wisdom, addressing issues of communication, movement disorder, various health issues in autism, post-traumatic stress disorder, spirituality, institutionalization, community services, and the case against aversives. For the past several years he has been mentoring/counseling hundreds of young people in recovery from addiction and social difficulties. He is a strong advocate for social justice and is politically active.

To my niece

By Yasmin Arshad

Beauty is the snow when the sun shines on it.

So is my heart when you smile at me.

But sunshine melts snow,

Will you melt the ice that surrounds me

In the perpetual isolation of those

Who cannot raise their voices

To speak the words I love you?

My name is Yasmin Arshad. I was born in Florence, Italy, and came to the US at age 7. I'm bilingual. My awesome mother found me the ideal workplace when I turned 22: a studio for artists with disabilities, Gateway Arts in Brookline, MA. I am a successful artist; my art sells at the Gateway store. I have exhibited at the Fuller Art Museum, Brockton, MA, the Outsider Art Fair in NYC, in London and in Tokyo. I write poetry, and enjoy traveling, walking, horseback riding, snow shoeing, and going to the symphony.

My Day at the Aquarium

Tiffany Joy Broskoskie

FISH EFFORTLESSLY MOVE BACK AND FORTH AND UP AND DOWN LIKE A YOGA MASTER BEAUTIFULLY AND SMOOTHLY TRANSITIONING FROM ONE PLACE TO ANOTHER. RAINBOW FISH FLOOD MY MIND LIKE WATERS RISING DURING A RECORD RAINFALL. EVERY SIZE AND SHAPE MAKE FOR A KALEIDOSCOPE IN MY BRAIN OF EVER MOVING COLORS AND FORMS THAT FLASHING IN FRONT OF ME AND DISAPPEAR GRACEFULLY. THICK GLASS STANDS BETWEEN ME AND THESE MAJESTICEFULLY CREATURES THAT TREAT THIS BARRIER AS IF IT DOES NOT EXIST AS THEY CALMLY SWIM PAST AND I REACH OUT.

SHARKS GLIDE THROUGHOUT THE WATER MAKING EYE CONTACT WITH THEIR MENACING GLARE. MOST IMPORTANT IN THE AQUARIUM THESE SHARKS DO NOT NEED WORDS FOR ME TO UNDERSTAND THEM.

A TRIP TO THE AQUARIUM MEANS A TRIP TO THE SEA, MY BODY AT EASE WITH THE GORGEOUS COLORS AND SHAPES I SEE ELEGANTLY SWIMMING PAST ME.

My name is Tiffany Broskoskie. I am 19 years old with Autism Spectrum Disorder. I live in Kenilworth, NJ, and I found my voice of writing through Rapid Prompt Method and my magical thoughts to my poems come through my ability to see things in a more beautiful, natural form of life. I love to write my words in a more creative way and to let my readers enjoy my poems from my words that come from my loving heart.

We mourn…

On March 1, 2023, the annual Disability Day of Mourning vigils were held. This is a sad but important remembrance, held every year since 2012, that commemorates the deaths of disabled people at the hands of family members or caregivers. On this date, the Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN) and other disability rights groups and individuals hold in-person and virtual vigils to remember the many who have lost their lives. Organizers and participants read the names of the individuals and may share photos and other information about these lives, which were tragically shortened in the previous year or in years preceding that. For 2023, the ASAN web page lists over 35 in-person and several virtual vigils that were organized in the District of Columbia and 19 states, and also in Canada and Ireland. As ASAN notes, “The criminal justice system has continued to give lighter sentences to parents and caregivers who murder disabled children. And we have seen the news media continue to portray these murders in a sympathetic light. We hold the Day of Mourning vigils to draw attention to these injustices, to commemorate the lives of victims, and demand justice and equal protection under the law for all people with disabilities.” If you missed participating this year, and would like to participate or even organize a vigil in your community in 2024, check the ASAN site late this year for information on the next one. For more information on the Disability Day of Mourning 2023, visit the ASAN website.
https://autisticadvocacy.org/2022/12/2023-vigil-sites

AutCom Presents:

FREE ONLINE WEBINAR:
LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD: AUTISTICS SHARE WHAT WORKED— AND DIDN'T WORK
SATURDAY. MARCH 11TH

Register Here
Registration in Advance is Required*

11:00am – 1:00pm ET | 10:00am – 12:00pm CT |
9:00am – 11:00am MT | 8:00am – 11:00am PT

Moderated by
Maxfield Sparrow,
Autistic self-advocate,
peer support group
facilitator, author

Jamie Burke
Ivanova Smith
Yasmin Arshad
Sujit Kurup
Gloria Mendoza
Jacob Pratt

Visit www.autcom.org to learn more about Autism National Committee

Webinar Registration

Facebook Twitter LinkedIn Microsoft (Outlook)

We are excited to announce our upcoming free zoom webinar, "Looking Back, Looking Forward: Autistics Share What Worked—And Didn't Work," where a panel of autistic people will share their experiences and insights related to growing up with autism.

This promises to be a valuable opportunity to learn from real-life experiences and gain new perspectives from a diverse group of people on the autism spectrum.

The event will take place on Saturday, March 11th, from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm Eastern Time. Please note that registration is required in advance and can be done by visiting https://tinyurl.com/AutComMarch2023Webinar. We encourage you to register early to secure your spot. The registration site has additional information on the program and presenters.

Our panelists include Jamie Burke, Ivanova Smith, Yasmin Arshad, Sujit Kurup, Gloria Mendoza, and Jacob Pratt. Each of them brings a unique perspective to the discussion, and we are grateful for their willingness to share their experiences with the AutCom community.

Maxfield Sparrow, a fellow autist, will serve as the moderator for the event, guiding the conversation and ensuring that all voices are heard.

We hope that you will join us for this valuable and informative event. Thank you for your continued support of AutCom.

Principles of the Autism National Committee

As a member of the Autism National Committee I endorse for all people with autism, pervasive developmental disorders, and related disabilities the development of high-quality community services, including education, residences, jobs/job training programs, and of individualized support services in all locations for both individuals and their family members; of state-of-the- art communication options for all individuals with unique communicative and social needs; of adequate supports to every family to assist them in maintaining their family member with a disability in their home at least throughout the childhood and adolescent years; and the dissemination of available knowledge of those aspects of the disability requiring special support and understanding; the promotion of research to provide parents and professionals with greater insight into the unique needs of individuals with autism and related disabilities; and the use, development, and promotion of positive, respectful approaches for teaching every aspect of life.

Moreover, I oppose the use of institutions to separate people from their communities, and deprive them of dignity, freedom and the level of independence they can achieve in supportive community living; the use of procedures involving pain, humiliation, deprivation, and dangerous drugs as a means to alter and control individuals' behavior; the increasing use of bizarre technology to control self-injurious and aggressive behavior; the widespread ignorance of the basic social and communicative needs of people with autism; and the widespread disregard for the individual's unique, basic and human needs. I object to programs which disregard the skills, preferences and basic human needs of the people they serve, and I believe that there is no longer need or any justification for using painful and abusive procedures.

Time to Renew or Join Today!

Annual membership begins in January

.

AutCom Annual Membership Form

Join any time. Renew each January (except for Lifetime Members).

Name ____

Address ____

City ________________________ State ____ Zipcode _____ Phone _____________

Email ______________________________________

Newsletter by email __ or in printed form when available__

I want to _____ Renew my membership _____ Become a member

I am a/an _____ Autistic person _____ Family member _____ Friend

_____ Student _____ Professional (field) _________________________

Enclosed is my membership fee of: _____ $10.00 (autistic person)

____ $30.00 (regular membership) _____ $10.00 (student membership)

_____ $75.00 (supporting membership) _____ $500.00 (lifetime membership)

Send this form or a copy and a check payable to Autism National Committee at

P.O. Box No. 82, 300 Cypress St., Liverpool, NY 13088-0082

AutCom Officers

Lisa Keller, President
Alan Kurtz, Vice President
Judy Bailey, Secretary
Sujit Kurup, Treasurer
Sandra McClennen, Past President

Autism National Committee
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Membership form on Page 17

The Communicator

The COMMUNICATOR is a publication of the Autism National Committee, Inc., a 501 (c)(3) charitable organization founded in 1990 to protect and advance the civil rights of people with Autism/Pervasive Developmental Disorder and related disorders of communication and behavior. Contributions of articles, information and letters are welcomed. The Communicator does not carry advertising or fund raising announcements, and we reserve the right to edit all submissions. Your comments are actively sought. Send them to communicator@autcom.org

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The COMMUNICATOR Committee
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