Supporting a Spectrum of Users: Serving Individuals on the Autism Spectrum

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SUPPORTING A SPECTRUM OF USERS: SERVING INDIVIDUALS ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM
AUTISM PREVALENCE

- Autism: disability that librarians were most frequently asked to accommodate (Adkins & Bushman, 2015)
- 1 in 68 children are diagnosed with ASD (2010 Census)
- According to a NCHS survey, prevalence has risen to 1 in 45 children
- Need greater awareness of this population so that we can educate library employees and be prepared to help people who learn & communicate differently

Figure 2. Prevalence of children aged 3–17 years ever diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, by sex, age, and race and ethnicity: United States, 2014–2016

CDC NCHS Data Brief No. 291, November 2017
• My professional interests in serving IWDs originated when my son was diagnosed at 3

• Early intervention is key

• Need to educate others and raise awareness and inclusion.

• Advocate for rights and equitable treatment.
The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
  • Civil Rights law affecting more Americans than any other

Providing equitable access for IWDs to library facilities and services is required by:
  ▪ Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973,
  ▪ Applicable state and local statutes,
  ▪ Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

18.7% of the population have reported a disability
ALA: CODE OF ETHICS

- ALA’s Code of Ethics (2008): librarians play a vital role in providing the “highest level of service to ALL library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable service policies; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests.”

- Disabilities cause many personal challenges. In addition, many people with disabilities face “economic inequity, illiteracy, cultural isolation, and discrimination in education, employment and the broad range of societal activities” (ALA, 2015).

- ALA is “dedicated to eradicating inequities and improving attitudes toward and services and opportunities for people with disabilities.”
AUTISM: COMMON CHARACTERISTICS
SYMPTOMS FALL ON A CONTINUUM (MILD TO SEVERE)

- Communication deficits:
  - Responding inappropriately in conversations,
  - Misreading nonverbal interactions/social cues,
  - Having difficulty building friendships.

- Often Rigid & Inflexible:
  - Overly dependent on routines,
  - Highly sensitive to changes in environment,
  - Intensely focused on inappropriate items.

- Weak Central Coherence

- Sensory Overload: noise, lighting, etc.
  - Need to produce output to cope with the input
  - Stimming Behaviors act as self-coping mechanisms

- Stimming behaviors (self-stimulatory)
  - Hand flapping
  - Body Spinning or Rocking
  - Lining Up or Spinning Objects
  - Perseveration
  - Scripting

- “If you know one person with autism, you know one person with autism”

#1 thing those with ASD want:
Staff Sensitivity & Understanding
EMPLOYEE EDUCATION

• Provide **all** staff members with information and training for working with IWDs
  • Awareness & Sensitivity
  • Speak Directly
  • Listen Attentively/Ask for clarification when needed
  • Respect
  • People First Language
  • Don’t intrude personal space

• IWDs have the same rights to use library services & facilities as a person without a disability.
EMPLOYEE EDUCATION

- Do not expect individuals with ASD to comply with social norms, such as:
  - Eye Contact
  - Shaking hands
  - Waiting turn to speak
  - Standing still or sitting still
- Be mindful, patient, and attentive
- Suspend Judgement
- Ignore Stimming Behaviors (Self-Stimulatory Behaviors)
- ASDs may not speak but may use assistive communication devices
**BARRIERS: SERVICES & RESOURCES**

- **Library website:** is it compliant with ADA website requirements to provide equal access?
  - Can users with Weak Central Coherence easily navigate the site?

- **Information Literacy:** Are there initiatives to address the unique needs of those with ASD?
  - Are resources/training provided for teaching those with different abilities & different learning styles?

- **Reference:** How are consults conducted?
  - Email or Chat
  - Phone Calls
  - Quiet/private room

- **Programming:**
  - Public Libraries offer Sensory Story times for children with SPD, ASD, etc.
  - What can Academic Libraries offer? Partnerships with DRC, Student Orgs, State Advocacy groups, etc.
Most individuals with ASD do not participate in post-secondary education, making it difficult for them to achieve their career and life goals (Briel & Getziel, 2009).

Transition to college: incredibly hard because they have difficulty accessing the social networks that other students rely on for support. Even those who have good academic skills may need to request various accommodations and supports (VanBergeijk, Klin, & Volkmar, 2008).

Areas in which they might seek support include:

- Accommodations for Testing;
- Accommodations for Sensory Issues;
- Social Interaction and Support;
- Other Academic Accommodations;
- Organization and Scheduling;
- Anxiety & Counseling
• Library instruction should be designed & implemented after considering the vast learning needs and styles of individuals with disabilities.
  • Libraries must consider multiple methods of reference and instructional delivery.

• UDI calls for goals, materials, methods, & assessment that are appropriate for the maximum number of learners (Hoover, Nall, & Willis, 2013).

• UDI was developed to increase access for students with learning disabilities at the postsecondary level, providing a framework that librarians can apply to designing inclusive information literacy curricula.

• At Landmark College, a college for students with learning disabilities or AD/HD, they adapted the principles of UDI to develop an approach to library instruction called *Universal Design for Information Literacy (UDIL)*”(Chodock & Dolinger, 2009).
WHAT INDIVIDUALS WITH ASD MIGHT NEED FROM THEIR LIBRARIES

- Visual Schedules & Supports: manage transitions, explain behavior rules, visual timers.
- Library Tours / Open House
  - Orientation Sessions where we show them around, introduce them to librarians and encourage knowledge/understanding of services, collections, and spaces
- Controlled Environment
  - Private spaces: meet 1-on-1 with a librarian, free from noise/distractions
  - Adjustable lighting: Fluorescent Lighting can be incredibly distracting and even painful for ASDs
- Reference Consults or Info Lit Sessions:
  Provide handouts, outlines, or follow-up email correspondence summarizing what was discussed.

- Collections & Formats:
  - DVDs, streaming videos, picture books, online resources, print books: for visual learners
  - Audiobooks, CDs, streaming music, and text to speech: for auditory learners
  - Manipulatives like Sensory Kits, Puzzles, Craft Supplies, Makerspaces, Seed libraries: for kinesthetic learners

- Familiarity with Augmentative & Alternative Communication (AAC)
  - Voice Output Communication Aids: speech generating devices (mobile devices)
  - Picture Exchange: More likely for Public & School Libraries since most adults utilize alternative methods
WHAT INDIVIDUALS WITH ASD MIGHT NEED FROM US: **MOTOR-SENSORY AIDS**

- Hearing and listening aids (such as noise cancelling headphones): designed to help people gain more control over their hearing/auditory processing.

- Multi-sensory aids (such as multi-sensory environments), which make use of many different tools and devices at the same time.

- Positioning aids (such as therapy ball chairs): help people gain more control over balance & coordination.

- Tactile aids (such as weighted blankets): help people gain more control over tactile sensitivity.
WHAT INDIVIDUALS WITH ASD MIGHT NEED: COLLECTIONS

- **Be Intentional:** with selecting formats and topics that are representative of individuals with disabilities.
- **Be Responsive:** to the needs of your community. What do they need from the collection?
  - Materials with accurate, up-to-date info on ASD, disability issues, & services for people with ASD & their families.
  - Libraries may include related medical, health, & mental health information
  - Information on legal rights, accommodations, & employment opportunities.
  - Provide both fiction and nonfiction representing IWDs.
OUR RESPONSIBILITY

- **Advocate** for ALL patrons, especially neglected, underrepresented communities
- **Create** a safe haven for our patrons, free from barriers and judgment
- **Enhance** the library environment to make all patrons feel welcome
- **Communicate** our mission to everyone, in order to create a climate of inclusiveness
- **Assist** with finding quality information resources so individuals can educate themselves, become self-sufficient in navigating through their world, and help others with disabilities
- **Offer** services, facilities, collections and resources to all
- **Act** as information guidance counselors, public service detectives, literacy educators, and community coordinators.
- **Be** intentional with serving all patrons across all formats, collections, services, educational programs, and institutions.
WHAT THEY MAY OFFER

- Include IWD as contributors in:
  - planning,
  - implementing,
  - and evaluating of library services, programs, and facilities (ALA, 2015).

- Build Connections with other community organizations for collaboration and inclusion
  - Maintain relationships with special needs classrooms, high schools, organizations, Disability Resource Center and group homes

- Ask For Feedback
  - Have a comment box in accessible location
  - Have an obvious virtual comment box on the library website
  - Consider Surveys
Autism Resources Guide for Librarians & Educators
http://libguides.uky.edu/autismresources/websites

Autism Resources Guide for Parents & Caregivers
http://libguides.uky.edu/Information_Portal/Autism_Resources/

Sensitivity Training Video
Can be accessed on Autism Guide for Librarians or on YouTube at https://youtu.be/Fm-qob9auyU
REFERENCES


