THE INVISIBLE: SERVING INDIVIDUALS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

A SENSITIVITY TRAINING
DISABILITY STATS, 
ACCORDING TO 2010 US CENSUS

• 56.7 million Americans have a disability
• 18.7% of the population have reported a disability
• Number expected to rise
• We cannot ignore these statistics, nor this community
• IWDs have the same rights to use library services & facilities as a person without a disability.
INVISIBLE & VISIBLE DISABILITIES

• Diversity within Disabilities
  – Neurological
  – Orthopedic
  – Sensory
  – Communication/Social
  – Cognitive/Learning

• Invisible Disabilities may include:
  – Autism Spectrum Disorder
  – ADHD
  – Multiple Sclerosis
  – Sensory Processing Disorder
  – Physical Impairments
    • Permanent or Temporary

• What does this mean?
  – It’s not always obvious
  – Patrons: reluctant to self-identify a disability
    • Fear of discrimination,
    • Not wanting to draw attention to themselves,
    • Desire to be independent in their library use.
  – Be sensitive and respectful
  – Open-minded and inclusive
DISABILITY LAW & ALA’S STANCE

DISABILITY LAW

- The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
  - Civil Rights law affecting more Americans than any other Civil Rights Law
- Providing equitable access for persons with disabilities to library facilities and services is required by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, applicable state and local statutes, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

ALA’S STANCE

- 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” (2015).
- ALA is “dedicated to eradicating inequities and improving attitudes toward and services and opportunities for people with disabilities.”
**BARRIERS: FACILITIES & SERVICES**

**FACILITIES**

- Signage: including Braille and Large Font
- Reference & Service Desks: Accessible? Welcoming? Noticeable signage?
- Doors: low knobs, handles or automatic
- Adequate Parking and route from parking lot to entrance
- Routes wide enough for all users and free from obstacles?
  - Entrances
  - Restrooms
  - Elevators
- Arrangement of equipment, furniture, stacks:
  - Do these provide space for mobility objects and service animals?

**SERVICES**

- Is your library website compliant with ADA website requirements to provide equal access?
- Are there information literacy initiatives to target communities?
  - Do they provide resources/training for those with different abilities & different learning styles?
- How are reference interviews conducted?
  - Are there ways to effectively communicate flexible reference experience?
    - Email or Chat
    - Phone Calls
    - Quiet/private room to conduct the reference interview (cut down on distractions)
- While Public Libraries have a more neurodiverse audience, academic libraries need to consider potential needs for programming.
IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

IMPROVEMENTS

• Minimize the barriers in our facilities, services, & resources.
• Offer equal access to library resources through:
  – extended loan periods,
  – library cards for proxies,
  – book by mail,
  – reference services by email,
  – home delivery service,
  – remote access to electronic library resources,
  – volunteer readers and volunteer technology assistants in the library,
  – and ASL interpreters or real-time captioning at library programs.

STAFF TRAINING

• Provide all staff members with information and training for working with IWDs:
  – Awareness
  – Sensitivity
  – Eye Contact
  – Speak Directly
  – Identify Yourself
  – Listen Attentively/Ask for Instructions
  – Respect
  – People First Language
AUTISM: PREVALENCE & CHARACTERISTICS

- Autism is the fastest-growing developmental disability (CDC, 2008).
- Autism was the most prevalent disability that librarians were most frequently asked to accommodate (Adkins & Bushman, 2015)
- 1 in 68 children are diagnosed with ASD
- These children grow up to be adults
- We need to be aware of this growing population so that we can educate library employees and be prepared to help people who learn and communicate differently
- People with ASD tend to have communication deficits, such as responding inappropriately in conversations, misreading nonverbal interactions, or having difficulty building friendships appropriate to their age.
- People with ASD may be overly dependent on routines, highly sensitive to changes in their environment, or intensely focused on inappropriate items.
- Symptoms of people with ASD will fall on a continuum, with some individuals showing mild symptoms and others having much more severe symptoms.
- “If you know one person with autism, you know one person with autism”
- #1 thing they want: Staff Sensitivity & Understanding
EMPLOYEE EDUCATION: ASD

• Do not expect patrons to comply with social norms, such as:
  – Eye Contact
  – Shaking hands
  – Standing still or sitting still

• Be conscious, patient, and attentive

• Suspend Judgement

• Ignore Stimming Behaviors (Self-Stimulatory Behaviors)
  – ASDs may not speak but may use assistive communication devices
  – Students learn differently
UNIVERSAL DESIGN: INFORMATION LITERACY & LIBRARY INSTRUCTION

• Library instruction should be designed and implemented after considering the vast learning needs and styles of individuals with disabilities. Responding to these needs will require that libraries consider multiple methods of reference and instructional delivery.

• Universal Design for Instruction calls for goals, materials, methods, and assessment that are appropriate for the maximum number of learners (Hoover, Nall, & Willis, 2013, p.27).

• Universal Design for Instruction (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.

• The Research Services Librarians at Landmark College, a college for students with learning disabilities or AD/HD, have 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
• Library Tours / Open House
  – Orientation Sessions where we show them around, introduce them to librarians and encourage knowledge/understanding of services, collections, and spaces
  – Visual Supports: manage transitions, explain behavior rules, visual timers.
• 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
• Varying Formats: large print, DVDs, audiobooks, online resources, text to speech, etc.
• Collections that represent ASD: be intentional & responsive to their needs
• Familiarity with Assistive or Adaptive technology
• 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 THEIR LIBRARIES

COMPUTER ACCESS AIDS & EDUCATION AIDS

• Computer access aids include hardware (such as mobile devices) and software (such as apps) that enable people to access, interact with, and use computers.

• Education and learning aids (such as visual schedules) are designed to help people cope with educational tasks such as reasoning, decision making, problem solving, etc.

MOTOR-SENSORY AIDS

• Hearing and listening aids (such as noise cancelling headphones) which are designed to help people gain a better sense of, and more control over, their hearing and 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) which are designed to help people gain a better sense of, and more control over, their own balance and coordination.

• Tactile aids (such as weighted blankets) which are designed to help people gain a better sense of, and more control over, their own tactile sensitivity.
OUR RESPONSIBILITY

• **Advocate** for ALL patrons, especially the 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.
INVOLVE THEM

• 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
MY CONTACT INFO

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My Research Guide for Autism Resources
• http://libguides.uky.edu/autismresources/


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