

Supporting ADD-Autism Spectrum Individuals Finding Their Place in This World

I would like to address the very important topic of how these different knowers and learners can function in our world. Using the phrase ‘ADD-autism spectrum’, I am referring to the older, I feel more accurately descriptive groupings of individuals that have ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder), ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder), dyslexia, Asperger’s Syndrome, and autism.

Many ‘high functioning’ spectrum learners, accommodating for their more difficult differences through school (or bailing out of school), and moving out and forward in society, can follow an interest or an ability and find a good job in some aspect of our culture. This can be either mainstream, like many successful entrepreneurs and others, or in some off-the-beaten-path *unique fit* to their insights, interests and abilities found somewhere else out there.

A specific example of a very unique fit, autistics are more and more being employed in jobs needing scrutiny for anomalies or small differentiations. Often thinking in pictures, autistics can see the finer details, spot a pattern in a distracting environment, detect visual structures, and can mentally manipulate complex three-dimensional shapes, as supported in an article by Laurent Morttron.¹ The Israeli Army², US Army³ and many businesses in various fields, particularly in Silicon Valley, are employing autistics to heighten accuracy or help find broader applicability and opportunity aided by their heightened perceptive skills.

And to note, these autistics do not feel overburdened with this work as a ‘neurotypical’ individual would, for their brain is designed to see these things easily, and these autistics do not mind, but rather thrive on repetitious work. This is a little different than what I have written about other autistics such as Temple Grandin needing challenges, but there are differences among differences, and most autistics and spectrum individuals are highly motivated, and thus ‘challenged’ by *any work* that they feel helps others or is for some bigger goal.

Many other individuals with differences, and ‘high functioning’ enough within that general definition in our traditional schools, will make it through our current school system with the help of tutors or special support classes. Many get a General Equivalency Diploma (GED) in order to graduate high school, perhaps going to a junior/community college, maybe then motivated and focused enough to pursue even higher education. At whatever point, they can eventually find their place within a broad ability range of jobs such as computer work, chef, builder,

musician or artist, bakery or pet store worker/owner, or wherever their connective intelligence may take them with their ability and interests/passion, large or small.

And then, many of these individuals are here to strongly underscore that which all these learners know at some deep level: that we are to return to connection and kinder, gentler times. A friend of mine mentioned that many individuals with more marked learning differences that he knew were primarily interested in animals, children or older people. This is because the simplicity and depth of connective heart interaction with these other beings matches who they, and all spectrum learners, are inside.

Often helping these last mentioned individuals heighten and build upon these interest-based experiences and interactions can bring greater interactive and performance skills, which feeds further confidence and ability and— continuing development. The brain's abilities are fueled by interests, passions, nurturing, belonging and success. (See “The Inside Out of Autism” at my website HeartCenteredMinds.com.)

Some of these last knower/learners may need more support to make their way from home and school to the world outside. And this ‘world-fit’ challenge is about spectrum learners but also others such as those with down syndrome or cerebral palsy. It is very often true with some autistics, when not reacting strongly to our ‘noisy’ sensory and/or toxic world around them, and of those with down syndrome, cerebral palsy, and others, that we see last knower/learners may need more support to make their way from home and school to the world outside. And this ‘world-fit’ challenge is about spectrum learners but also others such as those with down syndrome or cerebral palsy.. Lamenting the lack of understanding by others of her autistic son's differences, mother/author, Laura Shumaker, writing in her book, *A Regular Guy*, protests: “...they can't accept Matthew as he is. Can't they appreciate his honesty, his humor, and the pureness of his soul?”⁴

And Lexi's mom, from an HBO documentary called *Autism, the Musical*, at first stressed, confused and depressed by the huge challenges of Lexi's autism, became a highly accepting and supportive parent, joyous and grateful for Lexi's wonderful nature. She entreats:

Autism is considered a disease...and nothing will happen that is positive, until these humans are valued by others for the beautiful people they are and the gifts they have. I cannot make others respect Lexi and love her, but living with Lexi has had a strong effect on who I have become.⁵

It is up to us to make that place for those who need a big transition to our world or to live apart from it. This can be in communities like Camphill Communities⁶ where many join together in a living environment with counselors/teachers as part of the community, supporting the shared life skills of all the residents, many of which include interests such as cooking, landscaping, gardening, farm machinery operations, etc. Here there is acceptance, respect and value seen in differences which creates a place for comfort, meaningful contribution, belonging and joy.

Those with more skills can live in group homes, where contact with counselors is by call or text, and residents with ‘differences’ work together using independent living skills, with schedule check-in’s with counselors, and school and/or jobs as part of growing into an adult life.

One very developed and supportive site for those able and wanting to find their way forward more solidly in mainstream society is Aspen Network in Northern California. Part of the website description:

Aspen Network offers four integrated, year-round programs for teens and young adults with social concerns, anxiety disorders and social differences, including spectrum behaviors...the programs, both residential and nonresidential, allow young people to learn and grow in a welcoming environment with peers of their own and a sensitively trained staff that includes neurotypical young adults...Developing a housing community with people of blended diagnoses means that residents can use their strengths to assist others in their areas of growth.⁷

This type of inspired and comprehensive support for spectrum individuals is so very needed for so very many. The programs I have found at this time are paid for by parents or other support people. In the best situation, this would be paid for in a way similar to Medicare perhaps, for initial and ongoing cost for families is very high. Who will pay when parents are no longer here?

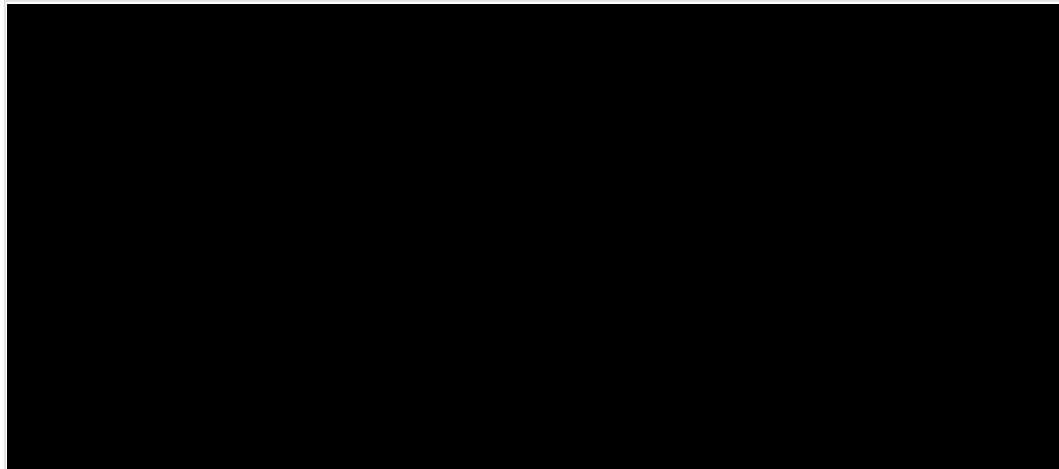
There is more developing daily in regards to moderate or more independent living for individuals on the ADD-autism spectrum. The success of this will depend fundamentally on our ability to understand who they are, that being how they perceive, know, learn and act and the roles they can play to enrich our world.

Notes

¹Laurent Mottron, “The Power of Autism,” *Nature* 479, 3 November 2011, doi:10.1038/479033a, 33-34, accessed 20 September 2018.

²Shira Rubin, “The Israeli Army Unit That Recruits Teens With Autism,” *The Atlantic*, 6 January 2016, accessed 20 September 2018. (Could not download other than below).

[The Israeli Army Unit That Recruits Teens With Autism](#)



The Israeli Army Unit That Recruits Teens With Autism

Shira Rubin

Many autistic soldiers who would otherwise be exempt from military service have found a place in Unit 9900, a se...

³By The Autism Site, “The Military is Seeking Out People with Autism —Here’s Why,” TheAutismSite.com Blog, accessed 21 September 2018.

⁴Laura Shumaker, *A Regular Guy, Growing Up with Autism*, (Lafayette, California: Landscape Press, 2008), 235.

⁵“Autism, the Musical,” HBO Documentary Films, 21 March 2008, accessed 19 October 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U35Uc8eg7fo>.

⁶Camphill Communities, www.camphill.org

⁷Aspen Network, <https://aspennetwork.net>