

## AUTISM AMBASSADORS CORPS

### EXPOSITORY OF THE AAC MISSION STATEMENT

*The Autism Ambassadors Corps is a coalition of autistics and neurotypicals<sup>1</sup> who seek to bring the entire autism community<sup>2</sup> together in constructive dialog in order that all side can obtain mutual understanding and admiration for each other.*

The autism community is extremely fragmented for numerous reasons that I explain in “POINTS OF CONTENTION IN THE AUTISM COMMUNITY.” One of the causes of these contentions is that autistics and neurotypicals typically attend separate support groups. I do not care issues are being discussed, anytime that you have a group that is formed to talk about “that other group,” all that is going to be discussed are all of the preconceived notions that the group has about “that other group.” If your group theme is political, religious, social ideology, gender differences, etc.; then I do not care what PR spin you give your group. If your group is dedicated to talking about another group as if they are some alien life form, then you will never bring between your group and theirs.

Because I am an autistic, I will start off with the problems that segregation has created in the autistic support groups. Many of us autistics, especially of my generation and older, have had a lot of painful experiences. I am what you might call a DSM 3 Autistics. The DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual) provides the psychiatric community with diagnostic criteria for all of the issues that they deal with, including autism. I was raised under the criteria of version 3 of the DSM.

The DSM 3 only recognized what we now refer to as “low functioning” autism, but not Asperger’s/“high functioning” autism. We were simply a bunch a weird and underachieving kids who must have like the “negative attention” (nice way of saying “bullying”) that we got from our peers. After all, if we did not like it, we would simply stop doing what was provoking our bullying. Our parents, teachers and playground monitors had no idea that we had no idea that there was significant differences in how we socialized compared to our peers that we thought we were emulating.

Although the term Asperger’s syndrome was coined by Lorna Wing in 1981 (when I was 12 years old), it did not appear in the DSM until version 4 in 1993 (5 years after I graduated from high school). This has defiantly led to an improvement in the understanding of Autism and Autistic, but not nearly as much as you might think. Many, include some teachers, reject the legitimacy of Asperger’s/“high functioning” autism. Others simply do not have an accurate understanding of autism. Because of this, many Aspies/“high functioning” autistics continue to suffer intolerance.

The biggest challenge that I face in dealing with these issues with my fellow autistics, especially those who are of my generation and older, in convincing them that our parents and teachers meant well and did the best they could with the knowledge that was available to them. It is a concept that many refuse to accept. Such autistic could benefit greatly by sitting in the same groups as parents so they can hear firsthand the genuine love and compassion that parents have for their children. The hardest part is getting them to sit with parents in the same group. Ending conferences that I host with discussion groups is one why that I try to get such autistics some positive interaction with parents.

The biggest thing that has frustrated me with the neurotypical community is when they believe that their “outsiders” point of view tells them everything that they need to know about me. Please note that I am not referring to them as “outsides” because they do not share my neurological configuration, but because they do not have the ability to actually get inside my brain and know what I am actually thinking; nor do my fellow autistics. When it comes to what is actually happening inside my brain, I and I alone am THE one and only “insiders.” This is a fact that ALL human beings, no matter what their neurological configuration is, can say about themselves.

I realize that many autistics, myself included, are delayed in their development of a means of self-expression. I also realize that some autistics, unlike myself, may never develop any such means. Some of the parents of such children refuse to believe that autistics that have the ability of self-expression can provide any insights into their children. I have such parents become incensed with me on Facebook when I try to provide viewpoint of autism that differs theirs, especially if they believe that their child is condemned to a life of suffering and that their only hope is a cure. All attempts to reason with such parents have proven futile.

Nevertheless, most parents are not that hostile to the notion that they can learn valuable insights about autism for autistics. In fact, most would consider it common sense that you can learn valuable insights by listening to another person’s personal experiences. Yet, it so rare that autistics are given the opportunity to provide such personal insights to neurotypicals. I am not saying it never happens, but I do not know of any support group that meets on a weekly or monthly basis in which autistics an neurotypicals come together to learn from each other’s own unique prospective.

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<sup>1</sup> Autistics have atypical neurology. Therefore, non-Autistics who have typical-neurology are referred to as “neurotypicals.”

<sup>2</sup> The autism community refers not only to autistics themselves, but to all those who are effected by their autism. This would include parents, siblings, educator, psychologists/counselors, etc.