

UHLS Youth Services Advisory Council
In conjunction with Adult Services Advisory Council

March 25, 2025

1:00 - 2:30 pm, at [Bring on the Spectrum](#), Albany, NY

Attendance (14): Mary Fellows (UHLS), Amy Jeansonne (UHLS), Judith Wines (UHLS), Ian Houck (EGRN), Joelle Adler Hoagland (EGRN), Liz Kurz (EGRN), Amy McCarthy (EGRN), Julie Weston (VAFL), Alison Wells (APL), Meg Kelly (APL), Sarah Clark (VOOR), Tracey Pause (VOOR), Sarah Bailey (TROY), Ann-Marie Helldorfer (COLN)

Mary shared statistics about Autism

- It's estimated that 1:36 children and 1:45 adults have an autism diagnosis
- Many factors contribute to the diagnosis itself as well as outcomes for graduation and employment for individuals in the autistic community
- <https://www.autismspeaks.org/autism-statistics-asd>

Tour of Bring on the Spectrum (BOTS) Facility with founder Lisa Audi & volunteer Gwen Rudnick, OTR/L

- Facility includes community room, fitness center, meeting room, and sensory gym with quiet sensory room
- Activities include open gym time, Music Speaks program, fitness with personal trainers, birthday parties, and a variety of events and club meetups (Lego, cooking, etc.)
- The facility welcomes all ages, from toddler to adult, with most of their programming serving the Middle School and High School population.
- Both neurodiverse and neurotypical participants are welcome. They host field trips from a wide variety of schools.
- Participants pay a fee for gym time and classes. BOTS tries to keep fees low.
- They chose the location because it is on a bus line and equidistant between downtown Albany and Schenectady.

Lisa presented on autism characteristics, BOTS' approach, and how they'd like to connect with libraries

- While they largely focus on Autism, she clarified that their spectrum includes support for a wide range of disabilities
- Challenges for autistic individuals
 - Communication, social interactions, developing and maintaining relationships

- Individuals with autism often use restricted or repetitive behaviors (stimming), can be over or under-sensitive to various stimuli, and often benefit from a clear routine
 - She also shared with us the thought that, “If you’ve met a person with autism, you’ve met one person with autism.” Everyone is unique.
- Strategies that are helpful for neurodiverse individuals
 - If you need to repeat directions, don’t rephrase, repeat them the same way as it allows more time for processing.
 - Provide information up front, “First... Next...”. This can help individuals know what to expect.
 - Using visuals for planning, instructions, and making choices.
 - Allow time for check-ins. Pausing to make sure everyone is following along can give space for asking questions.
 - Asking yes or no questions can often lead to more of a response. Open-ended questions require more processing.
 - Having patience is key
 - It takes a lot of energy just to get through the regular school day, so they may need extra processing time during activities.
- How BOTS is interested in working with libraries
 - Their board just approved a measure to support putting sensory spaces in libraries. This includes both the financial support and identifying the types of items needed to furnish it.
 - They will have an application available very soon.
 - They’re looking into different ideas for the needs of different size libraries
 - [Linked here](#) is a resource sheet they put together for us.
 - BOTS ADAPT initiative is a program to help neurotypical peers learn about neurodivergence, rather than just having neurodivergent kids learn “the rules”.
 - This is a 75 minute program for grades 8 and up.
 - There is no charge.
 - They’ve already partnered with unified sports groups and youth groups, and they think the library could be a great place to host this program.

Discussion Highlights

People to consider when we’re thinking about inclusive services

- Children, tweens, teens, adults on the autism spectrum
- Parents/grandparents, caregivers, and teachers of individuals on the autism spectrum

Programming

- Sensory objects can support inclusion in programs we already have.
- Marketing
 - Many parents of neurodiverse kids assume you're not prepared to include them.
 - Provide welcome by adding language to flyers, such as "sensory room open during storytime for those who would like to use it".
 - "Interactive Storytime in a sensory friendly environment" is a welcoming title and includes all kids
- Examples of things we're already doing
 - Ann-Marie at COLN shared she puts some items related to the storytime theme in the sensory room. In addition to having that room open, they put out a basket of headphones, fidgets, and weighted stuffies that can be grabbed as folks enter storytime.
 - At APL, Alison has changed the name "Sensory Storytime" to "All-together Tales" which has a sign-up limit of 10 (or smaller depending on space).
 - Inclusive of all kids rather than feeling it's just for neurodiverse kids
 - What's different?
 - Generally—More interaction, colorful, and ready to adjust on the fly, even if that means just reading the same book over and over
 - Specifically—Scarves are used instead of egg shakers, Alison removes her lanyard and other distractions, and shares with caretakers at the beginning that there is no expectation to sit

Where to start, especially with a small space?

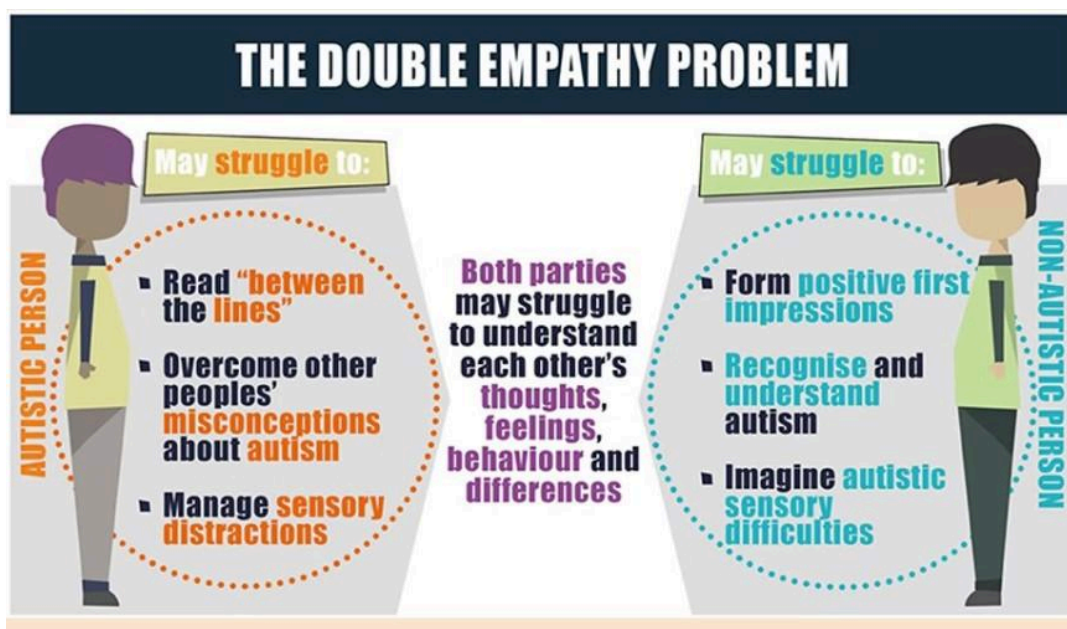
- There's a need to think about not only the items but how to store the items
 - Look for things that are portable, safe, and have no tech to maintain
 - [BOTS resource sheet](#)
- Whatever you're doing, how can you provide a little extra space?
 - Adjusting seating arrangement or limiting program size allows space for kids who may need to move or rock, want extra personal space, or can move away from a distraction, like someone's perfume
- Some libraries provide sensory hours, but there's concern this limits other patrons. Are there other things you could provide such as a quiet checkout desk?
- Is there an Occupational Therapist or other expert who could give you some feedback on programs or spaces and how to make them more inclusive?
- Lighting and flooring can make a big difference.
 - Ex-Providing carpet tiles improves comfort and creates a little boundary space.

Challenges/Ideas for older youth and adults

- Young adults can stay in high school through age 22. While schools may teach life skills, they don't often include job skills.
 - BOTS is hoping to connect with more local businesses
- Clifton Park Library provides a BINGO sheet for older kids, so they have some direction rather than sitting or pacing. It includes simple things to find or do in the library.

What should supervisors and coworkers think about for supporting neurodiverse peers?

- Mary shared some thoughts from a recent [Work Friend column](#)
 - Biggest takeaway–The need for “Double empathy”
 - Lisa provided this related visual:



- Consider that there is a spectrum of diversity
 - The typical hiring process is not friendly to neurodiverse individuals. How could we improve that?
 - Could identifying front facing and non-front facing roles help support more diversity?

Additional Resources:

- [The University of Washington's Autism-Ready Libraries Toolkit](#)
- [Milestones Autism Resources Toolkits](#)
- [ALSC-LSUCTC Toolkit](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [Autism Speaks](#)

- [Libraries and Autism](#) (old, but helpful resources for making social stories)
- [Libraries Are for Everyone! Except If You're Autistic](#) (employees)
- [Project Enable](#)

UHLS Updates

- Director Search
 - Search Committee recommendation going to UHLS Board on 4/9.
- Upcoming Workshops & Trainings
 - **SAIYL Training - [Welcoming LGBTQIA+ Youth in the Library](#)** (click to register)
 - Tuesday, April 22, 1:00 - 2:30 pm
 - Virtual presentation by Upper Hudson Planned Parenthood staff
 - **[Future-Ready Youth: Preparing Our Patrons to Navigate the Age of AI](#)** (click to register)
 - Friday, May 2, 10:00 - 11:00 am
 - Virtual presentation by Nick Tanzi, Assistant Director of South Huntington Public Library
- New Kits Available!
 - [Updated kit flyers](#) were sent to all the libraries
 - Find item descriptions and the borrowing calendar (in multiple formats) here:
 - <https://www.uhls.org/loanable-items/>

ARCs Available!

<http://reports.uhls.org/cgi-bin/staff/arc.pl>

(These ARCs cannot be added to your collection in any way.

By requesting ARCs, you are agreeing to give them to your kid, tween, or teen readers.)

Next Meeting: Tuesday, May 6, 1:00-3:00 pm

In person at UHLS - Featuring lots of new review books!

Find More Events, Trainings, & Resources

<https://www.uhls.org/youth-and-family-services/>

Upper Hudson Youth Services

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