

GETTING AUTISTICS/ASPIES JOBS AND OFF PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

(ABRIDGED)

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THE NECESSITY FOR EFFECTIVE SYSTEMS IN ENABLING MUTUAL COOPERATION

Many Autistics/Aspies have a deep hostility towards the “system,” “status quo,” “proper protocols,” etc. due to their extreme difficulty fitting in. However, “systems” are not inherently bad, the problem is that many of them lack the proper balance between firmness and flexibility. If a system is not firm enough, it does not enable individuals with inherently incompatible needs and wants to cooperate with each other, so everyone can have their needs and wants met.

However, if it is not flexible enough, it will undermine the abilities of individuals to function in the manner most effective for them. Such individuals will be doomed to fail in areas they would otherwise succeed in if they were able to do things the way that works for them.

The system that is set up to meet the social service needs of the United States has openings that allow private organizations to be part of the system. The Autistic community needs to recognize that these openings do exist so we can create our own sub-system, within the greater system, that will be more effective in meeting our needs.

THE 6 LEVELS OF PREPARATION NEEDED FOR AUTISTIC EMPLOYABILITY

- 1) **None:** Some Autistics/Aspies have been fortunate enough to find the right job/ vocation that they can hold indefinitely. Most of them were able to find the right career path out of high school, although some have been able to figure it out later in life.
- 2) **An Unabridged Understanding of Autism:** Some Autistics may only need a complete understanding of Autism/ Asperger’s, and how it plays out for them, to find the right job/vocation. This means they need more than just an itemized list of all of their struggles, but also recognition of their inherent strengths as well.
- 3) **Restoration of the Autistic’s shattered self-confidence, resulting from them believing there is no hope that they can obtain the self-improvement necessary for employment:** This starts with them witnessing Autistics/ Aspies in level 2, progress to level 1. Only then might some of them open up their minds to the possibility that they can achieve more than society thinks they can.
- 4) **Extra support because the extent of their disabilities will be more limiting in their employment options:** Autistic/Aspie after Autistic/Aspie has come to the same conclusion about the “vocational training options” in Phoenix, AZ, USA; all of the organizations who provide them only provide training for no higher than this level. It is as if none of these Autism/Asperger’s “experts” realize that we are capable of anything else.
- 5) **So severely disabled that they are unemployable.**
- 6) **Choosing to live off the system, refusing to consider the possibility that they might be able to improve their quality of life through personal self-improvement efforts:** A major problem that many Autistics/ Aspies, who are forced on to public assistance against their will, is that many people will be quick to assume that we belong in this category. It is not my intention to go “goose stepping” through the Autism/Asperger’s community; passing judgement on whose struggles are real and who is faking it. I just want to make it clear that many Autistics/Aspies were indeed forced on to public assistance against their will. It was either enduring the humiliation of becoming dependent on others or living on the street. The application process of getting on SSDI was so degrading to me that I considered taking my own life.

LIBERATING AUTISTICS/ASPIES FROM PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

The Autistics/Aspies that my plan targets are those who not only can get off public assistance, but also want to obtain complete financial independence. My plan doesn't require money, but for Autistics/Aspies to be allowed to have a say in what potential employers are told about them. What it does require is for those who have succeeded, without a diagnosis and/or special accommodations, to be given the stage so they can explain to those who are at a similar level of functionality how they did it. Once those individuals who can be liberated from public assistance and/or special accommodations are liberated, the money that's being spent on them for those purposes can be diverted to those who are more severely affected.

\$20,000 in public assistance per year **X 10,000** individuals who can & WANT to be liberated from public assistance = **\$200 million** in taxpayer savings.

CONCEPTS THE AUTISTIC COMMUNITY NEEDS TO BORROW FROM THE REFUGEE COMMUNITY

1) We need integration, not segregation or assimilation:

- a. **Segregation:** Alienating from those who are different than you because it's easier than trying to fit in.
- b. **Assimilation:** Trying to fit into the status quo by having everything unique about you, and your personality, purged.
- c. **Integration:** Developing the skills necessary to succeed in society, while maintaining your individuality. This enables you to improve yourselves while preserving your personal dignity so you do not develop inferiority complex, which will inevitably develop in anyone who believes are inherently inferior to those around them.

2) We need to believe in ourselves: This is extremely difficult for a group of individuals, like Autistics/Aspies, who have been given every reason to not believe in themselves by the very "experts" to whom they are supposed to look to for help and understanding.

3) We need to have Autistics/Aspies working inside the system: Many of the case workers of the primary organizations the refugees depend upon were themselves refugees who had to learn how to integrate into American society. This gives them insight into the needs of newly arriving refugees that someone born and raised in America would never have. I am not aware of any Autism organization that hires Autistics/Aspies to serve such purposes.

4) Volunteers: Although there are many good-hearted professional individuals who want to help their clients, the "assembly line" approach to how social services are run makes it impossible to do as much as they wish they could. However, for every good-hearted caseworker, there seems to be 10 that are there just to collect a paycheck and/or pad their resume until they get the job they really want. Volunteers, on the other hand, are driven by a passion to do whatever they can do to help. This will result in them going above and beyond what the professionals can, and/or are willing, to do.

5) Volunteerism: Volunteerism by any struggling individual helps them by...

- a. ...building their self-esteem. By volunteering for something that you're good at doing, it gives you the opportunity to prove to yourself that you are able to succeed at something.

- b. ...giving them the opportunity to develop relationships with those who respect them. Not only will they be shown respect and friendship by their fellow volunteers, but also by those who they are helping.
 - c. ...allowing them to try tasks that they normally would not be given the opportunity to. This can often lead to the discovery of previously undiscovered skills that could be used in an employment setting.
 - d. ...allowing them to take safe risks.
 - e. ...helping them overcome self-pity. Not only Autistics/Aspies need to realize that they are not the only ones who have suffered, a lot of people in all walks of life need to realize that others have suffer as well. Nevertheless, many of these sufferers, include those who have suffered far worse, have chosen not to spend the rest of their lives being victims. This allows them to live a higher quality of life than they ever could have lived while being consumed by self-pity.
- 6) **We need to have our own officially recognized organizations, that are run by us and for us, that specializes in helping us in the areas we want help in.**

MY 3-TIER MODEL FOR MORE EFFECTIVE SOCIAL SERVICES

Although my 3-tier system is unheard of when it comes to any government agency doing anything, it in fact bears resemblance to the administrative model of many churches. If a church governed itself after a government bureaucracy, the clergy would carry 100% of the burden of getting things done. Anything that they do not have the time or means to take care of goes undone.

The bureaucratic equivalent to the clergy are the case workers who are required to at least have a bachelor's degree and be on their way to a master's. The salary demands of individual with such high academic credentials is beyond what the state can afford. This results in the high turnover rate I addressed when assessing my experience with Voc-Rehab. Although such constant upheaval can make it difficult for anyone to proceed with any long-term goals, it is even harder on us Autistics due to our "executive functioning" issues that will be discussed in Part 3.

The following is my first draft of my 3-tiered system, which may require revisions as adapting a concept that works in its original environment may not fully translate into a completely different one. I eagerly desire the kind of open dialog with those who have different viewpoints that would lead to the perfecting this model.

Caseworker Advisors: This would be the only non-administrative employee that would require have a master's degree, which means that the state could afford to pay them a higher salary to retain them. Their job would be to provide training and consultation to the caseworkers, so they can provide better service to the client.

Caseworkers: If I must choose between someone with lofty academic credentials, or someone who will stick around long enough to understanding the unique individual that I am, its no contest for me. I have no use for anyone who thinks that they can learn everything they need to know about me by reading a book written by someone, who not only never met me, but has no idea what it is like walking in my shoes. What I do need is someone who is going to stick around to the end. I want someone who thinks that a salary that is even smaller then what those with a master's degree considers too small to be great. There are two groups of people who I believe would be perfect:

- 1) Volunteers – Those who are willing to do the job for free would view being paid a fraction of what those who have a master’s degree would consider acceptable to do such a job as a bonus.
- 2) Those who identify with the clients – As I said in the previous section, refugees who have successfully adjusted to life here in America are very effective in helping other who are now going through the same challenges. If this should not come surprise anyone with an ounce of common sense, then why is this concept applied to providing social services to those born and raise in the US?

Mutual Support, Networking and Accountability Groups: So, you sat down with your case work and hammered out a course of action to be done by your next appointment, but it all unravels because nothing goes as planned. Can your case worker immediately squeeze in enough time for you to figure out how to get things back on track? This was not my experience, and it became the final nail in my Voc-Rehab coffin back in 2015.

Back in the early ‘90s, when I was in my 20s, I attended a general purpose 12 Step program* which enable me to address issues pertaining to codependency. The meeting format, which centered around discussing what happened during the previous week, enabled use to figure out how to deal with the issue that we were struggling with. Not only did the members of the group suggest solutions, but we also knew that we would be held accountable any commitments that we may have made to do specific things that would help us self-improve.

Although it was originally designed to help addict stay sober, the group’s “let’s talk about what you are actually dealing with right now” format enable me in all areas of my development. I believe in the methodology and highly advocate its use for any group who once to improve in all areas of their personal lives.

I firmly believe having the social services agencies develop cooperative relationships with independent support groups would enhance the effectiveness and cost efficiency of the agencies. The groups would remain autonomous in order that they can address issues outside the scope of the agencies, but would still be supportive of whatever tasks the agencies provided the group member/agency client to perform. These would could be even more effective if the group leaders to be given a basic understanding of who the various programs work. I believe this concept of being an ally of the refugee sponsoring agencies, rather than a subordinate, enable me to be more effective when assisting the refugee whom we had a common interest in back when I was able to help them.

9 STEPS TO CREATING OUR OWN “SUB-SYSTEM”

- 1) **Have those who are committed to change organize themselves**
- 2) **Figuring Out How the System Currently Works:** Many people have an inaccurate understand of how the system works due to...:
 - a. ...out dated information.
 - b. ...only having an abridged understanding of how it works.
 - c. ...them having different expectations of their and/or their loved one’s potential.
 - d. ...they listen to those who are just making stuff up.

* New Wine, Word of Grace Church, Mesa, AZ

- 3) Draw up plans for various projects and programs that will help meet the unmet needs of the Autism community.
- 4) Organize those who are committed to the cause to carrying out volunteer activities that will put our plans in to action.
- 5) Having evidence of how well our plans work so far, we sell it to those who have the desire and expertise necessary to take them to “the next level.”
- 6) Create a non-profit organization that will enable us to expand our operations to be a large as necessary to meet the needs of the Autism community.
- 7) Begin seeking the financial support necessary for success to fund all of our projects.
- 8) Replicate our programs anywhere people are willing to run them.

We do not necessary have to wait until step 8 before replicating our ideas elsewhere. It is possible that we obtain so much success as volunteers that volunteers from other communities might ask us to advise them while we are still working on step 5.

- 9) Reexamine the effectiveness of our programs and ideology at least yearly

**COMMON DENOMINATORS OF VOCATIONS, AND OTHER PROJECTS,
THAT AUTISTICS/ASPIES HAVE BEEN MOST SUCCESSFUL AT**

To be clear, I am not saying that no Autistic/Aspie can succeed in vocations that don't have these attributes, but they are the most common amongst jobs that Autistics/Aspies have had the greatest success.

- ❖ **Requires the brain to be fully engaged on the task:** Mundane labor will cause anyone to lose focus, those who have any ADD/ADHD, which is common amongst Autistics/Aspies will have even a harder time.
- ❖ **Absent of the specific sensory stimuli(s) that the individual has difficulties managing:** Yes, the ADA gives employee the right to ask for reasonable accommodations that can help nullify issues like these. What about Autistics/Aspies pursuing vocations/jobs in which these problems don't exist?
- ❖ **Ties into their cognitive strengths:** This will vary from Autistic/Aspie to Autistic/Aspie, but if you take the time to figure out how to match up those strengths with jobs that they are perfectly suited for, then there would be less need for special accommodations.
- ❖ **Analyzation almost always plays a major role:** Some are better at annualizing math, drawing/schematics/blue prints, statistics, data, etc., while struggling at annualizing others on the previously mentioned list.
- ❖ **Well established fundamental principles:** There may be some variation in how these principles are applied, but you don't need to go to college to get a new 4-year degree every time you change employers and/or get a new boss. Although not all the vocations that Autistics/Aspies have been most successful at require a college degree, they do have basic fundamental principle that don't change every time you get a new boss.
- ❖ **Fully trained by fully qualified instructors prior to employment:** Most menial labor jobs will have someone with higher seniority train the new hires. The problems I've seen, especially with overnight shifts, are:
 - Not everyone has the natural ability and/or patience to teach others.

- Many will teach their way of doing things, even though it contradicts the employee manual. Some because the manual was written by corporate bosses that are completely disconnected from the realities of the job, other because they're too lazy to do the job right.
- Some are burnout and will spend more time talking about their dissatisfaction, rather than how things should be done and why.
- ❖ **Many have the right balance of structure and flexibility:** Yes, having well defined job description makes job a whole lot easier on everyone, especially Autistics/Aspies. However, many vocations give workers the flexibility to do accomplish the tasks in a manner that works best for them.
- ❖ **Well defined chain of command:** A few industries have the minimal organizational structure necessary to fulfill the terms of their contracts. This is especially prevalent when working overnight positions, and/or absentee supervisors whose random check-in and/or only coming when they're advised of a problem. The result can be some employees assuming authority that they don't actually have, doing their job however they feel like it and/or reject correction from someone who is telling them what the company guidelines/post order stipulate.

For Autistics/Aspies who tend to be more dependent on structure, and possess a strong work ethic, this can lead to a lot of conflict with their coworkers. They, as well as everyone else for that matter, would therefore be better off working for employers in which everyone knows who's in charge.
- ❖ **Little to no micro-management, especially from absentee managers:** Structure does not mean suffocating, especially by those who are rarely present to see whether or not their brilliant ideas are as brilliant as they think they are.
- ❖ **The ability to work in smaller groups:** Although the traditional school teacher may have classes as large as 3 dozen children, special ed. classes offer the ability to work 1-on-1, as does all of the other vocations that Autistics/Aspies have had the most success in.
- ❖ **Some are not profit driven:** Although banking and insurance are obviously driven solely by the pursuit of profit, teaching and the military are not.

TYPES OF JOBS AT WHICH UNDIAGNOSED AUTISTICS/ASPIES HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL

Professional and Volunteer Jobs that I Had Pre-Diagnosis Success:

- ❖ Working with Children with Disabilities
 - My Little sister, Kelly, Has Downs Syndrome (volunteer)
 - Wyoming Special Olympics (volunteered at 3 events)
 - Parkway Elementary (Volunteered 1½ hours per day during my last 1½ years of high school)
 - Caregiver*
 - Refugee Community (volunteer)
 - An Ethiopian boy who was born with cerebral palsy
 - A Sudanese girl who was probably a "lower functioning" Autistic
- ❖ Children's Ministries of various Churches (mostly volunteer, but sometimes paid)

* Success Limited

- ❖ Puppeteer & Ventriloquist (volunteer)
- ❖ Writer of Skits & Plays (both puppet & drama), some of which were made to order to illustrate the main lesson of the requesting teacher. (volunteer)
- ❖ Pizza Delivery Driver*
- ❖ Taxi Driver*
- ❖ Bread Truck Assistant*
- ❖ English Teacher (Volunteer)
- ❖ Refugee Caseworker (Volunteer)
- ❖ Refugee Consultant (Volunteer)

I know Autistics/Aspies who have had pre-diagnosis Succeeded at these Jobs:

- ❖ Occupational Therapist
- ❖ School Teacher[↓]
- ❖ Air Force Aircraft Mechanic (It is my understanding that an Autism diagnosis in now automatic grounds for rejection of enlistment or medical discharge for those who did not get their diagnosis until after they enlisted.)[↓]
- ❖ Accountant for a non-Profit Organization.
- ❖ Tax Preparer
- ❖ Rout driver who sets up store displays[↓]
- ❖ Bank Teller, then Loan Officer (Made the mistake of accepting a promotion to Branch Manager)[↓]
- ❖ Medical Insurance Claims Adjuster[≠]
- ❖ Computers (If they have the aptitude)
- ❖ Engineering (If they have the aptitude)

JOBS THAT I KNOW AUTISTICS/ASPIES HAVE HAD SUCCESS AT SINCE BEING DIAGNOSED

- ❖ Speech Language Pathology Assistant
- ❖ Department Store Stocker*
- ❖ Autistic/Aspie Youth Mentors (Volunteer)[†]

[↓] Can't prove these individuals exist because social stigmas associated with Autism have resulted in them being so ashamed of themselves that they won't "come out of the closet" to confirm they share my grievances & support my solutions.

[≠] Can't prove that this individual exists because they are filled with so much self-hatred that has resulted from them internalizing what the bullies said about them and only accepting those concepts about Autism that validate their self-hatred. This individual has denounced being seen as a quack for claiming that the strengths that they have demonstrate actually matter because they are not officially recognized by the "Autism experts."

* Success Limited

† Success limited

- ❖ Librarians (Mostly Volunteer, but 1 or 2 have obtained PT employment)
- ❖ Autism Advocates/Consultants (Mostly by professionals, but also by some volunteers)*
- ❖ “Bookstore” Employee*
- ❖ Dishwasher*
- ❖ Citizenship Teacher (Volunteer)

SHORT TERM EMPLOYMENT SOLUTIONS IF THE CIRCUMSTANCES ARE RIGHT

- ❖ Caregiver (If they have a car, can survive on about 20 hours per week, the client [& or their legal guardian] is not problematic & the economy has not crashed.)*
- ❖ Contracted Security (If they have a car & the economy has not crashed)