



**Volume 11**

**Edition 4**





# FROM THE EDITORS DESK

Welcome to Edition 4 of the Autistics Aloud LifeSpans series. The topic for this edition is Education.

5 years ago when I was offered this job, I decided to take it from a newsletter to a magazine format. I had a hunch that my neurosiblings had a lot to say but just needed a space to express themselves. Now with the publishing of this edition, Autistics Aloud has given **33** Autistic Canadians the space to do just that. This edition also marks **50** submissions in total! WOW! And while we're on numbers – **10** of the **14** contributors in this edition are new to the magazine!

We truly believe in the disability rights mantra, **Nothing About Us Without Us**. It's our guiding value.

This edition will take you on a journey through the education system as experienced by 14 Autistic people of a wide variety of ages and grade levels. Some of their stories may be hard to read because of the bullying they received. Some articles will be instructional, some are poetry that will deeply move you. Every single one has something teachers and those who are part of our time in school can learn from. I don't think we've had an edition this dynamic before. I truly believe you, the reader, are going to get so much from the pages ahead.

To the 14 Autistic contributors – it's been my honour and privilege to work with you and to have your trust and patience throughout the process of getting this edition published. I want you to know how seriously I take this job and how much your words move me. Thank you so much.

I have someone else to thank who has been instrumental in supporting me and the magazine for going on 2 years now – my Supervisor and the Managing Editor Holly MacLellan. This is Holly's last edition with the magazine, and I am going to miss her so very much. Under her direction I have grown so much and so has the magazine. I can't thank you enough, Holly. Wela'lin Nitap. You will always be a part of the Autistics Aloud family.



Alice



Chloe

On May 18th while editing this edition, I said goodbye to my 2 best friends.



Alice 14.5 yrs & Chloe 13.4 yrs.  
I love you forever, my girls.

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# How I Learned to Love Being Different

Marie-Eve Brownell

My earliest memories of being different from other kids comes from my second day of school. I was five years old, and distinctly remember the full-blown panic I was thrown into - because the room we now ate lunch in had changed from the previous day's.



Nobody else seemed so upset, and it baffled me. That disconnect between my peers and myself would last almost the next ten years - I was officially diagnosed as autistic shortly after I turned thirteen.

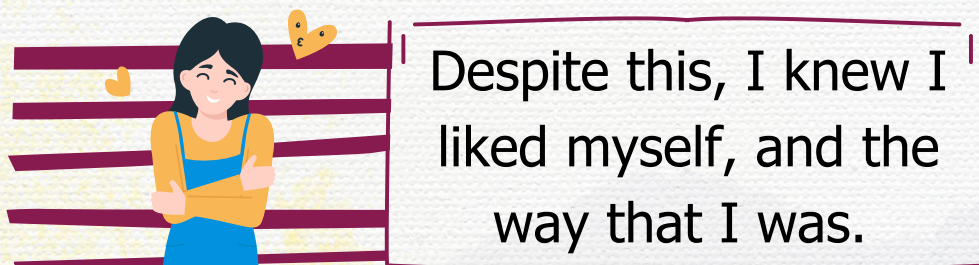


I don't remember anyone in school ever mentioning the word 'autism' in a positive light. What little information we were given about autism was that it was some sort of dreadful, debilitating disorder that made its victims completely unable to form bonds, empathize, or have a so-called 'normal' life. Autistic kids screamed instead of speaking and were to be pitied instead of accepted.



That certainly didn't fit with how I saw myself, even though I knew I was 'different'. Other kids saw it, too. Students took great pleasure in teasing or chasing me until I was an over-stimulated, sobbing mess. Because I didn't have a diagnosis and nobody - including myself - had a good understanding of the autism spectrum, this was treated as merely 'kids being kids', and even if the bullying occasionally stopped, me being labelled as a 'weird' kid did not.

When I finally found out I was autistic, it seemed to explain so many things about myself - the way I didn't like to be touched, my difficulty making friends, and my hyperfixations on certain topics. Still, my experiences throughout elementary and middle school had told me that being autistic - or being disabled at all - was a disadvantage. My immediate feeling was that I should try and pretend to be neurotypical as much as possible; after all, isn't that what all autistic people aspired to be?



I recall in eighth grade a fellow classmate giving a presentation to the school – a presentation that I knew had been approved by our teacher – about her desire to grow up and find a “cure” for autism. I didn't want to be cured; I just wanted to be accepted and understood.

I felt like there was a strange binary that I had to fit in at school - either fitting the 'autistic kid' stereotype we had all been taught, or masking my autistic traits in



favour of pretending to be 'normal'. Adding to my anxiety was my parents' well-meaning warning: to not tell anyone I was autistic, lest it becomes something new for kids to tease me about. This, coupled with the lack of any sort of awareness or acceptance in any of my classrooms other than a very limited, traditionally ableist view, made me feel that being autistic was something to hide and be ashamed of.





I went through public school without much desire to learn how to embrace or even like my autistic characteristics, since I was more concerned with learning to mask them.

This often put me in situations where I felt overwhelmed - like the times I forced myself to go to large gatherings without stimming or taking a break from the crowd, since I was so obsessed with making sure I didn't seem autistic.

It wasn't until I was done with my bachelor's degree that I actually began to look into the autistic community and learn all about the history of autism, and the way autistics now celebrated their neurodiversity.

I took the time to dig deeper into my identity as an autistic person, and the traits and quirks I had tried so hard to ignore or wish away.



Instead of being ashamed of them, I slowly learned to accept and appreciate them. For instance, instead of feeling embarrassed over my special interest in anime and manga, I joined communities online of people that loved it just as much, which, in turn, helped me form strong friendships and identify other common interests. This felt much more comfortable and effective than trying to fit in by pretending to be someone I wasn't!

Looking back on my years in school, I wish my teachers had taken the time to speak to us about disability in an empowering, positive manner, instead of one that portrayed autistic people as worlds away from the neurotypical.



I remember in third grade, a student gave the class a presentation on her peanut allergy, she talked about why allergies happened, her EpiPen, and the MedicAlert bracelet she had on her wrist. Everyone around her now knew what to do if she got sick, and how to keep her safe. Nobody ever questioned it or made fun of her for it; it was just something that was part of her. There was never any sort of discussion like that for any other medical conditions - autism included.

What would it have been like if our class had done the same for students with autism, or other invisible disabilities? Taking a moment to educate a class about why certain students stim, rock, or don't look others in the eye - rather than forcing those students to maintain a facade of 'normalcy', or teaching that disability was some sort of awful life sentence - might just do wonders to helping children accept that being different does not equate with being unworthy of respect and acceptance.



# DEAR TEACHERS



Jake  
Lewis

Teachers. An integral part of our society's backbone. Without them, there would be a lot less good in the world. It is a proven fact that teachers have a massive impact on students and are responsible for teaching us how our society works, and how to live in it. It is partially through them we gain our view of the world. Suffice to say, they're pretty important. Teaching is not an easy profession to be in. I know I couldn't really do what they do. I know I wouldn't be where I am if it weren't for the guiding hand, or a firm grasp on the back of my shirt collar, that my teachers and EA's over the years gave me.



I don't really have an answer to that, unfortunately.

No one is perfect, everyone is human, and is flawed in some manner or another. With me being me, I was at times difficult to deal with at school. There were several reasons for that, granted I was responsible for at least half of those reasons, but I can still give my ideas and advice to those who want it. The following are my ideas for how one can be a good teacher to someone with Autism.



# DEAR TEACHERS

Jake  
Lewis



Firstly, understanding. This is required to teach someone with autism. Every single person is different, that same logic applies to autistic people. If you have an autistic student who has a fear of crocodiles, I advise you to not get rid of any books you may have that pertain to crocodiles but merely put them away where they aren't easily visible. We can be triggered easily by seemingly ordinary things, from random smells to certain sounds.

Being understanding when a student is having a hard time is also incredibly important. Granted, these sorts of things can cause difficulties and cause things to become frustrating for the teacher.



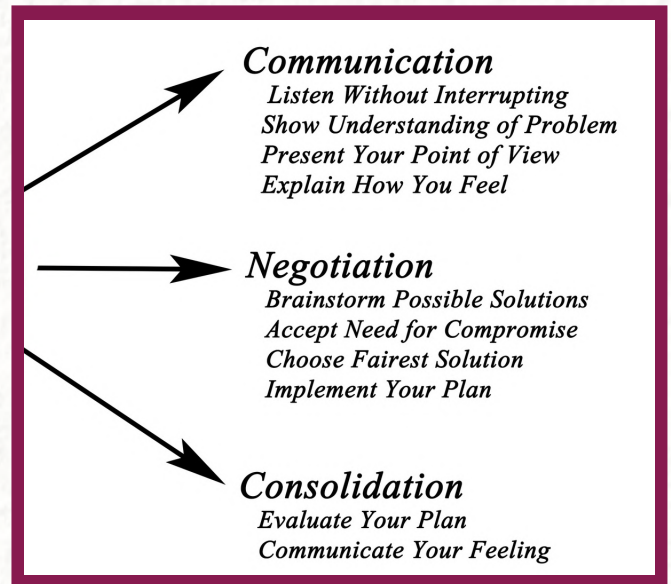
Instead of being loud and angry with the student, I recommend approaching the situation with empathy, if they are high functioning, try affirming the student's value and communicating their removal as a recovery rather than punishment. This maintains the student's dignity while also maintaining order and safety in the classroom.

Not only that but acknowledging and defusing the student's heightened emotional state, actually makes them more capable of thinking critically about their own behaviour and what they might do differently in the future.

# DEAR TEACHERS

Jake  
Lewis

If you remove a student in a way that only makes them feel angrier and more humiliated, then that's what they'll remember—their own anger and sense of feeling wronged. But if you do it in a way that defuses the anger, they'll be able to reflect on what just happened in a more clear-headed way and truly recover. What I find good about this idea is that it can also apply to non-autistic students as well.



Second, is flexibility. The student probably already has adaptations in some manner or another, but some extra flexibility on your part. I remember speaking with one of my school's VPs, and he told me about a student with autism that he had taught a long time ago. That student would take months to get work handed in, but then he said that when that student handed in the work, it would be of spectacular quality.



Now, I am not saying that you need to give your autistic students that much slack on deadlines, but the point is that giving that student an extra week could be the difference between the student giving you a half-finished assignment and/or losing points for turning it in late, or the student giving you a good piece of work.

# DEAR TEACHERS

Jake  
Lewis

Next, is kindness. Autistic or not, a bit of kindness can go a really long way for someone. I consider this the easiest and most important part of this piece to accomplish out of all of them because of how important and easy it is to do. There are dozens of ways you can show kindness: you could lend your classroom during lunch if the student needs a quiet spot to be for a bit. Or maybe giving them just another five or ten minutes to finish writing that quiz. You can probably see how it ties into the previous two tips.



This is why I think kindness is the most important aspect, it's an integral part. You need to be able to be kind when teaching someone with autism, or else they may not reach their full potential in your class.

Lastly, I'd like to mention that doing these things and being accommodating to the student will not just benefit them, but also the other students. Let's say for example that you arranged to have an autistic student go to a designated quiet spot for them to go do work and/or when they're feeling stressed. That stops them from possibly having an outburst, scaring the other students, and interrupting their learning.



Or whenever you have group projects, ask a few students if they would be all right with consistently being partners with the student. That helps with socializing and making the class maybe feel less odd around that student with autism and possibly gain them new friends. Following these ideas I've shared benefits not just you as a teacher with a student with autism, it can also help the rest of the class. It goes to show that kindness really does help everyone.

# How to help autistic learners

**HAYLEE MILNE**

## 1. Allow us to move or even better...



schedule  
movement breaks  
into your already  
made lesson plan

## 2. include visuals

Adding visuals to lesson plans supports ALL Learners. It helps with engaging multiple sense which supports multiple brain connections

### SELF-CARE CHECKLIST

- ☐ Good sleep 
- ☐ Meditate 
- ☐ Exercise 
- ☐ Read book 
- ☐ Eat healthy 
- ☐ Drink more water 

### 3. Allow the use of headphones

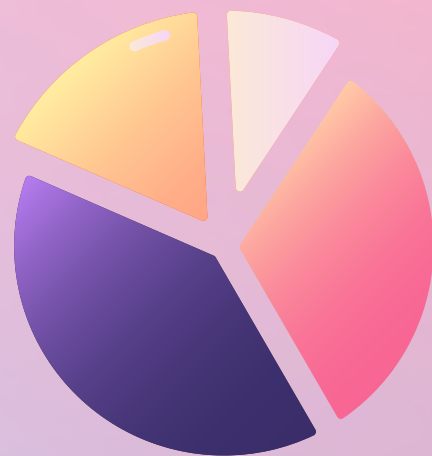


### 4. Break large overwhelming assignments into smaller mini assignments

Break down larger assignments.

For example, an essay could be broken down like...

1. Pick topic
2. Do your introduction paragraph, set aside 30-minute blocks of time to write, then take a 15 minute break before returning to the essay
3. Edit/ revise the essay



**HAYLEE MILNE**

# THE TOP

urine cascades

a waterfall released by me

would I cascade if I followed  
it?

would I fall off the edge like  
those incriminating golden  
drops are doing?

I AM TERRIFIED.

WILL I DIE?

WILL I SHATTER?

I AM SCARED.

PLEASE NOTICE.

PLEASE HELP ME.

tears cascade

a waterfall erupts from my  
eyes, my nose

such a

l

o

n

g

D

R

O

P

between

"She's done it again."

"Someone get the bleach  
and bucket!"

"It's clean now. Let the  
others have a turn."

"what is wrong with her?"

"she will do anything"  
"she's attention seeking"

"intake said she's smart - ha!"

"It's selfish to get to the slide  
first every day and ruin  
things every day for the  
other students. You are not  
allowed to go to the slide  
anymore. This is getting  
ridiculous. You are not  
setting a good example."

"EVERYONE! No more slide  
for Kim."

# THE BOTTOM

A  
Kindergarten  
Education



Kim  
Endell

# Carson Way

How I think of school.

S - Six

C - Cruel

H - Hours

O - Of

O - Our

L - Lives



Editors Note: This style of poetry is known as an acrostic poem. It's when the first letter of each line spells out a word, name, or phrase when read vertically.

# Autism Spectrum Disorder in School-Aged Children

By: **Cormac Smith**

Autism Spectrum Disorder is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by abnormalities in social cognition, repetitive behaviours, and restricted interests. Children with Autism often have symptoms including sensory overload, problems with social communication and reciprocity, and intense interests, but these impact children in varying degrees - hence the spectrum aspect of the disorder. Most children with autism tend to prefer the company of themselves or a few selected individuals rather than being part of the larger group, and this often results in bullying due to misunderstanding. In terms of repetitive and restrictive behaviours, these could include self-stimulating actions like flapping arms and constant face touching, struggling to regulate emotions, and obsessing over things. In a school-based environment, these behaviours can cause challenges for all parties involved, but understanding, acceptance and patience can avoid some of the trauma that might otherwise be experienced by autistic children.

Children with ASD often struggle with communicating their feelings, thoughts, and needs, but when children's needs are not met, it can lead to disruptions in the classroom, poor grades, and poor teacher-student relationships. Teachers are typically unaware of the causes of problem behaviour and how to deal with it, and sometimes this causes the child to be punished rather than having a supportive intervention to help try to prevent future episodes. A key element in the cooperation of the school, parents, and child can be the addition of a school psychologist. A school psychologist helps tie everything together from techniques to prevent future episodes, clarity to both the school and parents, and guidance to help the student towards their desired goals.

As a university student, I had an opportunity this year to conduct a literature review of journal articles that explored the theme of autism spectrum disorder in an education context, and I wanted to write a short article that summarized some of the key findings in plain language.

One important finding was that school psychologists not only provide psychological services within school-based environments, but can also help bridge the gap between school, parents, child, and the health care system, which can improve access to services and lead to improved outcomes. According to one study, 65% of school psychologists said they collaborated with outside of school professionals, such as behaviour and speech pathologists (Brunson-McLain, 2020). A key factor in determining the level of collaboration was the years of experience of the psychologist, with more experienced school psychologists demonstrating higher rates of collaboration.

According to research, there are many reasons why school psychologists struggle to collaborate with outside professionals and families. When it came to families the number one reason (41%) was the lack of awareness of services the school and clinicians provide (Brunson-McLain, 2020). By contrast, school psychologists struggled with collaboration with outside professions due to these professionals prescribing treatments without consulting school staff, encountering legal or privacy issues (39%) and a lack of knowledge (30%) (Brunson-McLain, 2020).

If collaboration and communication between school psychologists and parents or other professionals can be challenging, it is also true that they can be challenging between parents and classroom teachers. Research shows that instances of parent-teacher disagreement regarding children's behaviour tends to be higher for autistic children, and this discord

carries risk (Levison et al., 2020). The two types of adults a child has contact with are their parents and their teachers and having these two connected in a harmonious way helps smooth out the process of finding treatment and implementing the treatment into a school scenario. Due to heightened senses and emotions, children on the autism spectrum may act out differently in school settings than at home, which adds to the disagreement over behaviour (Levison et al., 2020).

According to the article, if parents have two children and one is on the spectrum and the other is not, there is a statistically significant difference between the level of agreement between parents and teachers regarding the behaviours of autistic children compared to the behaviours of non-autistic siblings (Levinson, et al., 2020). Reasons for disagreement could be situational perception (home vs classroom), children's internalizing versus externalizing behaviours, or and parents and teachers' misperceptions (thinking the child is either normal when they are not or that they are abnormal when they are not). Regardless of the underlying reason for such disagreements, they present a barrier to getting everyone on the same page, with the shared goal of helping the autistic child achieve their potential.

Where parents, teachers, school psychologists and community health professionals all work collaboratively to support the child, it sets the stage for success. Matching the child with effective treatment and supports and providing access to appropriate activities can help reduce disruptive behaviours and help the child feel safe. One approach that has proven effective is the adoption of an integrated approach to play therapy in school-based environments.

Play therapy uses toys and stories to express emotions that are otherwise hidden or hard to communicate. This therapy offers a means to start allowing children to begin to progress towards the same social level as their peers in an unintrusive way, since most psychologists believe that play therapy is most effective when directed by a child (Müller, 2019). Through collaboration of the school, school psychologist, home, and clinic the knowledge of all fields combines and allows the teachers to better understand and support the autistic child.

The study set out to measure the impact of a school-based, interactive play therapy using a mixed-methods approach that included psychometric measurement (Müller, 2019). The research questions included whether play therapy had a positive impact on children's Autism Social Skills Profile, whether children's social and emotional awareness was generalized to students' classrooms, and how play therapists' post-session debriefings impacted students' classroom instructional staff (Müller, 2019).

In Müller's study of six autistic children who were offered play therapy, after the therapy was introduced into the classroom not only did the children improve but the teacher was better able to understand and deal with troublesome situations due to the improved relationship between the child and teacher, as well as knowledge gained from the experience (Müller, 2019).

In a neurotypical child there are many factors that cause confusion between the school system and the family, however children with disabilities - especially autism - struggle with it more than others. Teachers may not have specialized training to manage and care for students with ASD, sometimes leading to inappropriate and ineffective

punitive approaches. The ability of teachers, parents, and healthcare professionals to effectively collaborate and communicate makes the process of helping the child much faster and less stressful for everyone involved.

Healthcare, home care, and the school system can come together harmoniously through play therapy. Play therapy allows for children on the spectrum to learn to better express themselves and learn to cope with stressful situations. Significantly, teachers also benefited through a better relationship with the child which allowed for more mutual understanding.

Ultimately, the best way to support children with autism spectrum disorder in the education system is to foster collaboration between the adults who care for them, both within that system and beyond it. By taking a child-centered approach that promotes such collaboration, children have the best chance of not only experiencing better academic outcomes, but also of being happier and healthier in the process.

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## Lachlan Innes

"I felt as though starting with a photo was very helpful to narrow down ideas for a poem. I have a hard time with vague or broad assignments because I always have so many ideas in my brain and can't make a decision. When that happens I end up not getting the work done."



### Photo Description

You've never been here before and neither have I, but this exact feeling resonates in everybody. It's dingy, the dirty floors looming with bacteria, occasional bandages float in the water. It's long left alone not being open even when you were born, yet a familiar dream-like sensation looms in the air in this place. You haven't been here, yet you have, only in your dreams

# Only in your dreams

This place long forgotten has lived on in many.

Not in the form of a place or a memory,

But, wandering around in a dream-like facade,

That is where this place lives on.

The dirty floors and uncleansed water.

The dusty pool toys left unbothered.

This place is familiar and yet,

You've never been here before.

Only in your dreams.



Lachlan Innes



Ayden

# Helpful and Unhelpful School Experiences

Jake Anthony  
Content Collaborator  
Autism BC

Janette T. Bundic  
Content Collaborator  
Autism BC

Editors note: This submission has been edited as a hybrid taken from Jake and Janette's YouTube Interview with Autism BC which can be found at: <https://youtu.be/0NeQ54KS0DQ> and at Autism BC's weblog: <https://www.autismbc.ca/blog/school-experiences/>



**Jake** - One thing that was unhelpful was when people would refuse to walk a mile in my shoes. I just really wish that more teachers and students have really taken the time to get to know me before they judge me.

My grade six teacher I remember was just 100% convinced that all of my autistic traits and behaviours and challenges that I had were basically just there to derail her class and to agitate her.

I was bullied badly not only by her, but I mean at one point a student actually slammed me into a wooden cabinet. At that point she just said to the principal, well he's annoying he deserved it. If I had done that, I would have been suspended. Because this teacher defended the student's actions, the student was simply warned not to do it again. Even at that age, it was pretty upsetting.

**Janette** - When I was 11-years-old at acting camp, my teacher pinched me because I had a hard time standing in a 'neutral position.' It literally traumatized me to the point where I didn't like my autistic traits anymore. I used to sway and slouch whenever I stood and those were my autistic traits. From then on, I was scared if a teacher caught me out of 'neutral position.' That experience conditioned me to dislike the little quirks I used to have. Now, I stand perfectly straight and shoulder-width apart pretty much all the time.

**Jake** - In grade eleven, I was moved into integrated English with neurotypical students. Right from the start, the teacher complained that it was “unfair to integrate me into the class because of the extra work [it would] create.” She also said she was worried that I would “hold the rest of the class back.” She clearly saw me as a burden, an inconvenience, and a totally incapable person. Let me tell you, she made no effort to hide her misguided judgment nor her resentment towards me for half of that school year!

Finally, my mother, who was also my greatest advocate, was done with me coming home from school in tears each week after her classes. My mother arranged for me to be moved into another teacher’s integrated English class. This teacher was much more welcoming, kind, and supportive. It never should have gotten to that point. Unfortunately, because of an unfair, snap judgment by a teacher my diverse abilities were a struggle.

**Janette** - When I was in grade twelve I was in dance class when my jazz dance teacher called me stupid. It was unhelpful and upsetting. When I didn’t do what she asked or simply couldn’t get the move she would say “what are you, are you stupid?”

By saying that, she singled me out and made me cry. Her demeanour changed, and she flipped from one extreme to the other and then said, “do you want me to come with you to get some water, bud? Are you ok?”

She seemed sincere but now that I think about it, I don’t think she was. I even told her at the beginning of the year that I have a learning disability and that sometimes I won’t get the moves the first time and she seemed like she understood.

I wish I knew about my autism back then because then I would have told her that too. I found out about my autism a year later, when I turned 18.

**Jake** - My mother and my behavioural consultant offered my teachers basic, plain language reading materials and at that time VHS videocassettes about autism so that the teacher and class could gain a better understanding of me as a person. My mother offered to pay to send the teacher to a professional development seminar around autism and gave the materials so that she could explain to the other kids in the class what autism was and to be able to understand me. Unfortunately, most of the time these resources were just shoved into the teacher's desk drawer and forgotten. The result was me continuing to be misunderstood, and in some cases, mistreated by others in the school. It was really frustrating, because if the teachers had made the effort to educate the other students in the class about autism, maybe I wouldn't have had these problems.

**Janette** - Students have IEPs for a reason, but it's not useful nor helpful if it isn't followed. In grade eleven, my teacher screamed at me and accused me of plagiarizing. As she started screaming at me in front of everyone in the hallway, I shut down and began to tear up. Then, she started yelling at me for crying and said I could get cancer for simply crying over something that didn't even matter. Eventually, I woke up from the trance I was in (I felt I couldn't talk because I froze), and I stood up for myself and reminded her that she allowed me to copy the textbook word for word because as part of my IEP (Individual Educational Plan), I was allowed to do that for school purposes only. After I stood up for myself, she then apologized, and her demeanour changed.

**Jake** - what's unhelpful is not allowing me to talk to or letting anybody on the spectrum to talk to a teacher or somebody else in the classroom directly. And I found it really upsetting and really insulting when I would be in a class and I would put my hand up to ask questions or to speak and I would be more or less told that you need to ask your question through your educational assistant. That was basically saying that number one you're not capable of asking an intelligent question and number two the same really that what you have to say isn't really important enough for me to listen to. (continued on next page)

**Jake** - It really makes you feel unwelcomed and not valued and the student doesn't want to get involved and participate in the discussion or to ask a question because they feel that they're less or that that was really what that felt like for me. If a person regardless of their diverse ability has a question or wants to speak in class give them the same opportunity and that same respect that you would give every other student.



**Janette** - What was helpful was when my resource teacher respected me when I started [stated] my boundary respectfully. Sometimes if I were to write a test in the resource centre the resource teacher wouldn't let me leave the testing room until I finished my test and that would cause me problems for my next class because I would skip the next class and then I would get in trouble. So I told that to my principal and my principal said I have full permission to use her name to the resource teacher so I can finish my test after school. So then the very next time I have a test I told the resource teacher respectfully, I said the principal allows me to change the test after school so I can go to my next class now. The resource teacher respected that boundary and then I was able to finish my test after school.

**Jake** - what's helpful is don't assume and do nothing, ask, and provide support. I remember when I was halfway through high school I finally had a homeroom teacher who asked me the question that I wish every teacher had asked me, she said I really want to learn from you and I really would like to learn how I can support you and how you see the world and when you're feeling anxious or upset how I can make that a bit easier for you.

To have a teacher really invest that much time in me and to really appreciate that I had a lot to offer and a lot that I could teach her it meant a lot to me and I'm still friends with that teacher to this day.

**Janette** - In grade eight, I was badly bullied. People constantly taunted and harassed me. Some people treated me like a frenemy and pretended to be my friend and then the next minute, treated me like chopped liver. For example, I was at my dance class when one of my peers arrived to pick up their sibling and saw me dancing. The next day, they held up their cellphone at school and sarcastically said “dance for us Janette. Come on dance for us.” Then they began to laugh at me as I walked away and said, “no, not today”. When I told my vice principal about what happened, he took action and told me that he was going to take care of it. The next day, those peers were nothing but respectful towards me. It was very helpful.

I just wanted to say that I really am grateful that I had that principal and also my vice principal they were truly caring people and they always gave me all the supports that I needed in order to succeed in school.

**Jake** - What's really helpful is group work, so getting to work with as many students in class as possible. I remember I loved during home economics class, or drama class, or other classes where we do interactive group work, when I would get to rotate around and work with different groups on different assignments because that way all the different students would get to know me better and really get a better understanding of me. But also, I'd learned how to relate to them and to learn about who they were as well. I really found that if I could rotate around the class for each assignment that by the end of the year I would have been able to make a connection with every student that maybe we would be able to have a friendship or there would be much smoother classroom dynamic because of the fact that we'd have a better understanding of each other. If you know that you have a group of students with diverse abilities don't say okay, you're in the same group every time. It's really important to have people with autism or other diverse abilities integrated and working with learning alongside other students.

**Jake** - When I was halfway through high school, I finally had a homeroom teacher who asked me the question I had been waiting for since I started in the school system. She said "I don't know a lot about people with autism. Will you teach me about you, how your mind works, and let me know when you're struggling so I can support you better?" I was so moved because I had never had a teacher who cared enough and took the time to ask that question! Up until then, if teachers didn't understand me or my autism, they would just leave it up to educational assistants to support me. I was so lucky to have this same homeroom teacher from grade ten until I graduated from high school. So even though it came late in my journey through the school system, at least I had finally found a teacher who was truly there for me!

**Janette** - One last thing that was helpful was the school gave me supports that I needed to succeed. A big support was that the principal granted me was unlimited time on tests which is really helpful to me as I'm more verbal and if I were to actually write my test it would take me four times as long as the average person. So then my principal ensured that I got a reader and a scribe so I could finish tests faster. That was also really helpful for me because sometimes I misunderstand directions so the reader will paraphrase and reread the direction so I would understand it.

**Jake** - Many autistic individuals prefer the word supports instead of the word accommodations because accommodations really suggest societies doing us a favour by providing supports when those supports are our right, they're not a privilege. It's important to remember that we have a right to be able to participate in our learning just as much as anybody else. I really believe looking at how educators can support students with the versatility rather than accommodating them. Inclusion in the classroom means making sure that every student is empowered to have a positive equal and inclusive learning experience regardless whether they have an autism or any kind of diverse ability or regardless of any ability really. We don't have to reinvent the wheel to identify where people need support and to provide that support.



## In Conclusion



It's really about being open to learning from other people and their experiences and to accept that even if you have a higher education and even if you are an educator, you can learn a lot from your students. Especially students who see the world in a way that's much different than neurotypical students and teachers.

Give us the supports, not the accommodations, to thrive and succeed.

Take the time to learn who we are and how we think before judging us.  
Try to “walk a mile in [our] shoes.”

Don't assume and do nothing. Ask and provide support.

Understanding and acceptance can't happen without education.

My IEP is a form of support. Not following what is outlined in it is  
unhelpful.

Group work and getting to work with as many students in the class as  
possible are very helpful.

Respect us when we assert our boundaries.

Allow me to talk to you directly, not through another person.

Don't insult me and think it won't impact me or that I don't understand,  
I do.



**Janette T. Bundic**



**Jake Anthony**

# I Am Smart and Capable.



Julius, 14 yrs old,  
biographical  
statement:  
I am happy and  
I am loving and  
smart and capable.

**Julius**

➡ My story is about school and learning. I would like to be interviewed. My story is about school and learning which I like from watching the world, not from teaching formally. If you forget to ask me questions about important things, I will tell you.

**Mama Kim**

➡ Will you tell me if I am missing important things entirely?

**Julius**

➡ Yes, you think of questions and I will help you.

**Mama Kim**

➡ Do you have favourite things to learn?

**Julius**

➡ No. I like to learn everything about all things because I am curious and want to really understand all I can try to understand.

**Mama Kim**

➡ How do you learn best or what is your favourite method of learning?

**Julius**

➡ I like to learn by watching and observing.

**Mama Kim**

➡ Do you like going to school?

**Julius**

➡ Yes, because I like the bus ride and I like the students and the teachers and the routine and all the vocational observations of me. I like observing the students who need pestering to do their work in the normal kid classes. I like observing the whole experience.

**Mama Kim** ➡ Do you learn reading and math and science at school?

**Julius** ➡ No.

**Mama Kim** ➡ But you know how to read and do math and know lots of scientific concepts. How have you learned those things?

**Julius** ➡ They're just obvious.

**Mama Kim** ➡ How are they obvious?

**Julius** ➡ It just is obvious if I pay attention to how things happen. I notice and think and process and ask questions to myself and then seek answers from observing and paying attention to my world. It's like the scientific process; it works for everything.

**Mama Kim** ➡ Some people say that autistic people/people with autism are locked in their own worlds and cannot connect with other people. What do you think of that?

**Julius** ➡ I think they don't know how to connect to us and they want easy answers so they say we have no way of knowing or connecting because that's easier than spending time to observe and notice. They don't have enough scientific process.

**Mama Kim** ➡ Do you think that impacts formal education?

**Julius** ➡ Yes, because teachers want us to learn the way other kids do but everyone learns differently so I think no students have learning happen at school. They just go because they have to and some of them are good at tests and assessments but they don't remember, they don't learn, they just know what teachers want from them but that is not education or learning.

**Mama Kim**

➡ What do education and learning mean to you?

**Julius**

➡ Getting to participate in intellectual discourse about whatever I want to learn.

**Mama Kim**

➡ Do you feel like you get to do that school or anywhere else?

**Julius**

➡ No, because people think that because I can't talk that means I am not intellectually able. They don't understand that I am aware my oral muscle tone makes speaking impossible. It's silly because they type and read which I can do but my mouth can't make words in the languages I know so they think I'm dumb and they say I'm dumb when I'm there, so they think I am too dumb to understand them.

**Mama Kim**

➡ How does that make you feel?

**Julius**

➡ Frustrated and sad. I am frustrated that they think their inability to connect with me means I am not smart and capable. It makes me sad that they don't know how to learn so they miss too many opportunities to gain knowledge and that's really sad for them and for me. I want everyone to be able to learn to their best ability, not just me. That would help our earth and all the people on it.

**Mama Kim**

➡ What do you think an ideal learning environment would look like?

**Julius**

➡ I would like to answer that question later.

**LATER**

**Julius**

➡ Please can you ask me about learning environments?

**Mama Kim**

➡ Yes, what do you think an ideal learning environment would look like?

**Julius**

➡ I needed to think about that because if you mean for me, it is being able to observe and move all the time because when my body is still, I am uncomfortable and discomfort distracts me. So if I can move and stim while I observe visually and by listening and I have time to think about my observations and ask myself questions with people not being noisy or emotional around me, then I can learn my best. But it doesn't look like anything. It is just the world so it could look like our house or like the school bus or like the library or like the playground or like a warehouse or like any place because all places have things I can learn. So my ideal learning environment is being able to go to lots of places and also have lots of silence and not too much feeling.

**Mama Kim**

➡ You have mentioned quiet and too much feeling. Why are they things that don't help you learn?

**Julius**

➡ Noise makes me pay attention to the noise and when it's just noise and not something to learn, I just can't do thinking because I don't know why. Also, you know loud sounds give me headaches and thinking with headaches is not possible when it's my migraine headaches.

**Mama Kim**

➡ What about feelings and emotions?

**Julius**

➡ Feelings and emotions are part of existing and healthy and good. I get a little bit distracted by thinking about that but I get more distracted when people have negative emotions because I don't want them to feel horrible but I don't know how to help and I have done lots of observing and I love people and I think maybe they don't know because I don't type to them and I want to help.

**(answer continued on next page)**

**Julius**

➡ When people are sad, I feel their sadness in me and also in them and I want it to go away for both of us because it's not a nice feeling. You worry too much about too many things and then I can't think because I want to make your worry go away but you don't pay attention when I tell you to stop worrying so much because everything will be okay and also then I worry too. When people feel angry and cruel, I feel sad and scared. Feelings are important and I can't be feeling at the same time as thinking because they are both big things and important things.

**Mama Kim**

➡ Is there anything else you want to express about learning and education that I haven't asked about?

**Julius**

➡ Yes. I think people underestimate themselves and other people. I think school and learning and education are all different things and I think school is a place to go for routines and education is passing tests and assignments and getting assessed and getting diplomas and degrees when assessments are successful and I think learning is asking questions and thinking about things over and over and observing until things make sense and that should happen all the time. I am thinking and asking questions all the time and sometimes I am yodelling when I am doing that and you say, *"be quiet, you're too loud and it's hurting my head,"* and that doesn't help me learn what I want to learn.

**Mama Kim**

➡ I'm sorry, Julius. I have trouble thinking when there is noise too.

**Julius**

➡ MamaKim, the things you didn't ask me that I think are important are that I am scared I will never get to do the work I want to do because I won't have education and think education should stop being about tests and assessments and I think you should observe that when I am yodelling I am thinking and you should just go somewhere where you can't hear me so you can think and I can think and then we can both think.

**Julius**

➡ I am worried that there are lots of autistic kids like me and Indigenous kids and lots of other kids who will never get to have learning opportunities they want because people just don't understand enough or care enough.

And I think that's not okay. And I think school is good but it's not for learning and I like school but I like learning and I want to help other people learn but I am scared and sad that I won't ever get to do that. And you are nice and you want to help me be able to have learning but you worry too much about me and that makes me worry about you because we will be okay. We won't get what we want because we are autistic and people think we're not smart or capable, but we are and lots of kids are, kids who can make differences if they could be understood.

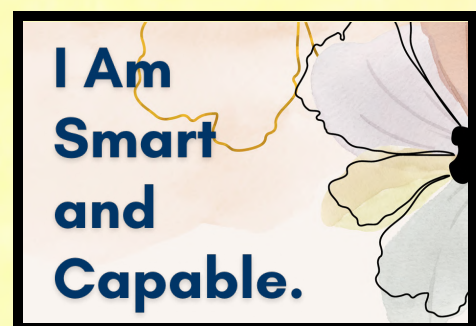
**Mama Kim**

➡ I'm pretty overwhelmed by all your insightful thoughts and I feel honoured that you typed them with me. I think you are smart and capable and I will tell everyone that you are.

**Julius**

➡ MamaKim, you say systemic a lot and I think it's systemic that people think I am not smart and capable. But I also think that in Nova Scotia, my teachers think I am smart and capable, and everyone thinks that about me and I think it is good to live in Nova Scotia because everyone is nice to me. I want them to know I am smart and capable and there is no such thing as being locked in my own world. I love my new friends and I miss my friends from before we moved here but Nova Scotia makes me happy. Tell people that I am smart and capable and the kids who need pestering to do their work are smart and capable too. I think you are nice for letting me type so people can know that I am smart and capable.

**Julius**



# *Autistic Acceptance is a Complete Sentence.*

I have a friend  
with a neurotypical brain.  
Their brain is called normal  
but we are not the same.  
Mine is neurodivergent,  
'that's not normal'  
the running theme.  
Well normal is just a setting  
on a washing machine.

But somehow this notion,  
A human mind must be normal,  
became the gold standard for brains.  
Eugenics, its aim.  
Neurodivergent minds erased.

## II

### The Normals.

Taken with things like sports,  
and appearances.  
They gossip about 'those people' in solidarity  
but turn on each other in mere seconds.



PATRICIA  
GEORGE-  
ZWICKER




Buzz words avoid real conversations.  
They laugh when things aren't funny.  
They say, "I'm fine, what's new?" when asked  
"How are you?",  
but are they, fine? Really?  
Because I spy with my not-normal eye,  
a lie.

### III

I can taste joy.

Taste joy?  
Oh, that's not normal, at all.  
It is weird and oh my god,  
they exclaim in exasperation,  
"Why can't you be more, normal?"  
Why can't you be less, normal?

Because my flapping hands  
invite and dance with joyous  
celebration  
Stimmy wiggling toes a conduit for an  
explosion of exultation.  
I might want to be normal, you know,  
but everything I have seen  
seems like an empty life to me.  
So much of it lacks true empathy.  
Inclusion is an illusion.



PATRICIA  
GEORGE-  
ZWICKER

## IV

Autism warriors.


They mourn alive people.  
In front of us, they cry and ask  
why them?  
Why us?  
Can they be fixed?  
Turned back to normal?  
Will they ever have friends?  
Or get asked to the formal?

Can they feel or give love?  
They seem trapped in a world  
What I would not give for just one word  
But autism stole them  
I am totally alone.

## V

I do not want your normal life  
and it does not want me.  
It lacks humanity.

Love does not grow in those conditions.  
You pour sour soil with your words  
and your expectations  
then cry foul when people do not grow  
in accordance with your machinations.



PATRICIA  
GEORGE-  
ZWICKER

You must make renovations,  
extend grace,  
expand the idea of space,  
share the keys to the place.

VI

What a miserable existence,  
it must be.  
I pity the Normals,  
they will never be like me  
and that is a travesty.

Autistic minds are profound.  
It takes all types of minds  
to make this world  
go round.

Thanks for your attendance  
while I have your attention,  
Autistic acceptance is  
a complete  
sentence.

- Patricia



# PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

When I thought of the theme of this magazine edition I wanted to use the perspective of what I could teach myself and others, if I had any advice to give from my life experience. Hopefully, it resonates with some folks.

**Andrew  
Armstrong**

**PAST:** I was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder at a very young age. Thankfully, I had so much support in my life from family and family-friends that made me feel like just another kid.



Like many kids growing up in the '90s, I loved Saturday morning cartoons, video games, superheroes and all that fun stuff.

It wasn't until grade school that I started noticing differences from other kids in my classes. Certain subjects were difficult for me such as math, don't get me started on multiplication.

$$\begin{array}{r} 63 \\ \times 13 \\ \hline \end{array}$$



Reading was something I really enjoyed. So much so one of my teachers bought me a bunch of scholastic Animorphs series books as a gift when I was moving on from my program to another educational program at a public high school.

Like many people on the spectrum and not can probably relate, my high school experience was far from wonderful. Even though my peers had similar or different difficulties, I was teased and bullied so severely that in grade ten my family made the decision to pull me out of high school. Which I'm grateful for, the amount of stress, anxiety and depression certainly took its toll.

**PRESENT:** For many years through my teens into my early twenties, I felt very aimless. Sure I had similar interests to when I was a kid. Comics, video games, sports teams. I didn't feel like I really connected with anything though and never felt I had hobbies.

I had moved from two major cities and it wasn't till I moved to Nova Scotia that a family friend of mine suggested blogging. She thought it would be something I would be good at. Typical me I just brushed it off with a "yeah sure" type of attitude, but then I took their advice and checked out options like Instagram.



Initially, I wanted to do food blog reviews but realized quickly how impractical it was. Both because I couldn't drive and the financial aspect wasn't viable. I started trying craft beer more when I moved since a local brewery, Garrison Brewing, was within walking distance.



This in many ways was the starting point to my passion and love of a hobby that means the world to me. I started reviewing local craft beers and others from different parts of Canada.

Craft beer in many ways can be compared to the diversity of the autism spectrum. Each beer and style is uniquely different and generally, no two are exactly the same despite having potential similarities. Likewise, the brewers that make them all have different life experiences and backgrounds.

Another aspect I love are the social connections I've made with people whom I would normally never engage with due to my anxiety and other difficulties. I've made friends on Instagram in Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and even where I consider home, British Columbia.



I've also seen so much positivity and kindness from breweries who have given me coasters and even sent non-alcoholic craft beer when I had to take a two-month break. I'm beyond grateful for the people and experiences I've had in this hobby that's become a passion for me.

**FUTURE:** The future is full of unknowns, which for many on the spectrum can be scary, since for me I like being able to plan stuff and have a sense of where I'm going. Well, I can't predict where my life will take me, I hope it always involves what interests me which is the craft beer industry.

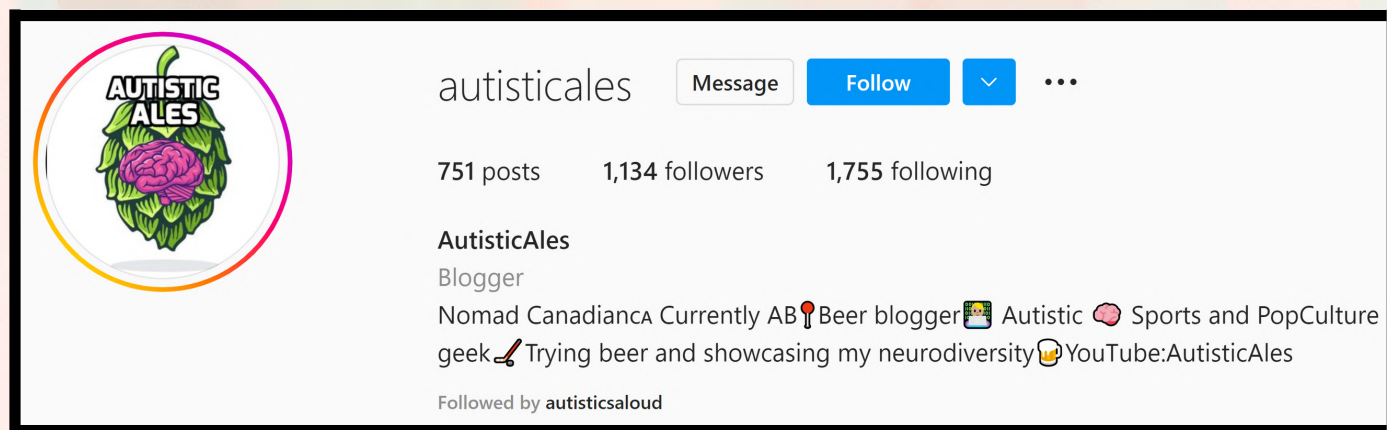
Maybe one day I'll try home brewing with beer brewing kits.

Maybe I'll just keep doing what I'm doing. Forming connections, trying different breweries and sharing about them. Who knows.



What I would say from my experiences so far for teachers would be: listen to your students on the spectrum, encourage their interests and hobbies and try to help them where they might struggle. For others on the spectrum: life has its sad moments but so many happy ones. If you don't have an interest or hobby right away, that's ok! sometimes it might take years before you find something you love. I know it did for me. Keep trying new things and learning from your experiences.

You can follow my blogging ventures by checking out **AutisticAles** on Instagram



# Understanding

People confound me  
Much like calculating long arithmetic  
problems while in school, except  
People don't come with equations;  
There are no rules or formulas  
...Or maybe there are  
And no one has let me know

People confound me  
Some things are unable to be understood  
completely uncontained by the cage made up of  
rules and facts and logic.  
People are not logical  
People make rules, but are these  
rules the same?

Math rules change based on  
science, or new discovery;  
human rules are based on  
emotion, situation, context;  
unknown variables.

The unknown is difficult. Humans are difficult.



Heather  
Gillespie



## HOW TO CONTACT US



If you would like to have your work featured in the magazine, or if you have any questions, you can contact us using one of the methods listed below.

People under the age of 16 require parent/guardian consent to have their work featured in the magazine. Magazine contributors do not require an official diagnosis to have their work featured, those who self-identify are welcome!

 /AutisticsAloudLifespans

 /autisticsaloud

 /AutisticsAloud



**EMAIL:** [autisticsaloud@autismns.ca](mailto:autisticsaloud@autismns.ca)



**WEBSITE:** [www.autisticsaloud.ca](http://www.autisticsaloud.ca)



**Low Traffic Mailing List:**  
<https://goo.gl/oNzZ5b>

Some examples of things people have had featured in the magazine are:

- poems
- recipes
- photography
- interviews
- songs
- jokes
- comics
- essays
- artwork

These are just examples, if you have an idea for something you would like to have featured in the magazine, please contact us! We are always excited to hear new ideas and to feature new people in the magazine.



Autistics Aloud has been supported by Autism Nova Scotia since it began in 2005 as a quarterly published Newsletter. It was started by Danny Melvin, who saw a need for Autistic led perspectives. Danny ran the newsletter from 2005-2016 and published Volumes 1-9.

In April 2017, Disability Rights activist, poet/and creative, Patricia George-Zwicker, came on board as Editor. Patricia decided to take the newsletter to a magazine format - a big change after 11 years, but they kept the original values of the magazine, **Nothing About Us Without Us**.



On June 23, 2017 Autistics Aloud was published as a Magazine for the first time. It was 18 pages long. The Autumn edition that followed doubled to 36 pages. The Winter edition was a whopping 48 pages. Those first editions shared 31 unique first-person perspectives with content ranging from poetry, reviews, cartoons, original art, articles on topics like autism and addiction and autistic identity. We signal boosted organizations that promote autism-friendly events and gave space to anyone on the autism spectrum who has a business they'd like to promote.

Autistics Aloud Volume 10 made it into Question Period at the House of Commons on Parliament Hill in April 2018. Copies were personally presented to Members of Parliament, Senators & Leaders in various stakeholder Autism Communities all throughout Canada.



Autistics Aloud is currently in the process of publishing the LifeSpans Series which endeavours to share the first-person perspectives of Autistics in Canada by exploring a wide variety of topics. Edition 1, "What is Autism?" was recognised in the Nova Scotia Legislature in 2019 and in early 2020 was placed in the Isabel and Roy Jodrey Memorial Library in Hansport, Nova Scotia.

This edition on Education is the fourth in the evolving series. The other published editions of the LifeSpans Series can be found on our website ([www.autisticsaloud.ca](http://www.autisticsaloud.ca)).

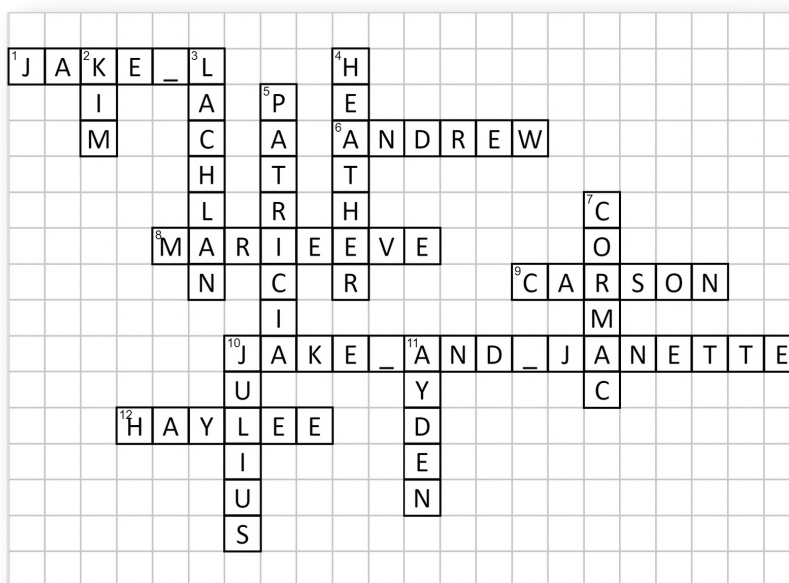
- Edition 1: What is Autism?
- Edition 2: Health
- Edition 3: Diagnosis



Autistics Aloud is a publication of Autism Nova Scotia that has been in circulation since 2005. Every year since, we have proudly provided a platform for Autistic voices to be heard across Canada.

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# Nothing About Us Without Us