



May is Mental Health Awareness Month!

"PASSAGES" IS A PUBLICATION OF
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OUR MISSION

PIKE AUTISM SUPPORT SERVICES (PASS) IS A 501(C)(3) NONPROFIT WITH A MISSION TO PROVIDE INDIVIDUALS WITH AUTISM AND RELATED INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES (IDD) WITH SOCIAL, RECREATIONAL, EDUCATIONAL, HOUSING AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES.

OUR VISION

WE ENVISION A DAY WHEN INDIVIDUALS WITH AUTISM AND IDD ENJOY FULFILLING AND INDEPENDENT LIVES, EMBRACING EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING, INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS, SOCIAL INCLUSION, PERSONAL GROWTH, SELF-DETERMINATION, AND INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS.

Opening Doors



to Independence



May was established as mental health awareness month in 1949 with the goal of increasing awareness of the importance of mental health care and wellness throughout our lives. One of the biggest goals of Mental Health Awareness month is to end the stigma surrounding mental health treatment and to spread awareness of resources available to aid those experiencing symptoms of poor mental health. As of 2022, over 60 million Americans reported experiencing symptoms of one or more mental illnesses, a number which continues to grow as the stigma surrounding mental health treatment continues to diminish and more individuals seek out treatment for the symptoms that they experience.

According to the autism research charity Autistica, seven out of ten people who have Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) have a mental health condition such as anxiety, depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD); meaning that 70-80% of children and adults living with ASD experience or have experienced symptoms of other mental illnesses throughout their lifetime.

As parents, caregivers, professionals, families, loved ones, and allies of those with Autism Spectrum Disorder, it is imperative that we educate ourselves on the importance of adapting habits that encourage overall wellbeing and positive mental health in addition to encouraging those in our lives, both with and without ASD, to seek out mental health treatment when necessary.

Some ways that you can incorporate promoting mental health within your everyday life include fostering positive communication; encouraging those around you to discuss their thoughts/feelings/emotions with others, discussing the importance of mental health care with those around you; ending the stigma surrounding receiving mental health treatment by having open conversations with your loved ones, checking in with your loved ones; connecting with the people who are important to us and asking them about their mental health, checking in to see how they are doing and reminding them that you support them, connecting with your community; engaging in community events, joining clubs, attending support groups, joining a sports team or group, volunteering, etc., taking care of your physical health; eating a healthy, balanced diet, exercising regularly, and getting enough sleep. Practicing mindfulness; paying attention to the present moment, engaging in deep breathing exercises, exploring nature, trying something new; stepping outside of your comfort zone, trying something creative, and practicing self care; taking time for yourself and prioritizing your needs.



Adopting habits that promote positive mental health are not only important for threatening those who are living with a mental illness, but are important for everyone, as mental health and physical health are equally important components of overall health. Mental health and physical health work hand in hand, and often impact each other significantly. The presence of depression increases the risk for many types of physical health problems, particularly long-lasting conditions like diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. Similarly, the presence of chronic conditions can increase the risk for mental illness.

If you are experiencing symptoms of poor mental health or believe you may have a mental illness, know that you are not alone. Mental illnesses are among the most common health conditions in the United States. More than 1 in 5 US adults and children live with a mental illness.

Follow this link, <https://screening.mhanational.org/screening-tools/>, to take a screening test to help determine when to seek help for various mental health conditions/symptoms.

Did you know?

- Mental health can change over time
- Mental health conditions can cause difficulties in all aspects of life, including relationships with family, friends and community, which are all things that those with ASD often struggle with.
- Mental health conditions involve significant disturbances in thinking, emotional regulation, or behavior
- Treatment for mental health conditions does not only consist of prescribed or over the counter medications
- Suicide accounts for over 800,000 deaths globally each year, with over 41,000 in the U.S. alone
- Therapy is not just for those with an existing mental health condition, everyone deserves someone to talk to and can benefit from therapy!

Resources for those experiencing symptoms of a mental health condition:

- Pennsylvania Crisis Intervention Hotline, (570) 992-0879
- Hotline to assist in locating care, 1-800-662-HELP (4357)
- Crisis Text Line:, Text PA to 741741
- Suicide Hotline, 988
- General Resource Hotline, 211

Contact Hailey Carroll at HCarroll@passnepa.org or (570) 491-7155 for more information on case specific resources including but not limited to therapy, domestic violence, LGBT issues, utility assistance, housing assistance, food assistance, child care assistance, advocacy, legal assistance, mental health care, and more

My Mental Health: Do I Need Help?

First, determine how much your symptoms interfere with your daily life.



Do I have mild symptoms that have lasted for less than 2 weeks?

- Feeling a little down
- Feeling down, but still able to do job, schoolwork, or housework
- Some trouble sleeping
- Feeling down, but still able to take care of yourself or take care of others



If so, here are some self-care activities that can help:

- Exercising (e.g., aerobics, yoga)
- Engaging in social contact (virtual or in person)
- Getting adequate sleep on a regular schedule
- Eating healthy
- Talking to a trusted friend or family member
- Practicing meditation, relaxation, and mindfulness

If the symptoms above do not improve or seem to be worsening despite self-care efforts, talk to your health care provider.



Do I have severe symptoms that have lasted 2 weeks or more?

- Difficulty sleeping
- Appetite changes that result in unwanted weight changes
- Struggling to get out of bed in the morning because of mood
- Difficulty concentrating
- Loss of interest in things you usually find enjoyable
- Unable to perform usual daily functions and responsibilities
- Thoughts of death or self-harm



Seek professional help:

- Psychotherapy (talk therapy)—virtual or in person; individual, group, or family
- Medications
- Brain stimulation therapies

For help finding treatment, visit nimh.nih.gov/findhelp.

If you are in crisis, call or text the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at 988 or chat at 988lifeline.org, or text the Crisis Text Line (text HELLO to 741741).



nimh.nih.gov/findhelp



Increasing independence for those with autism spectrum disorders

By Siasia Bean - DVHS Autism Awareness Essay Contest Winner 2024

Throughout the course of my teenage life, I've found that students tend to place neurodivergent people such as myself into one of two neatly defined boxes, neither of which encompass the true variance of the autism spectrum. If someone heard about you being autistic, you were presumed to be either a genius with an extraordinary talent, or a nonverbal kid that displays flagrant behaviors and makes unintelligible sounds. These portrayals illustrate the widespread ignorance that exists surrounding the fundamentals of what autism really is, as well as undermines the fact that people on all parts of the spectrum have the capacity to provide amazing insights and show profound intelligence. It's hard to blame those who only see autism in these miniscule slivers of life, but it doesn't make it any less harmful to the people who go through it. These misconceptions often make those on the spectrum that are capable of masking who they truly are choose to do so, further limiting what is an already limited view of the autistic world and leaving behind the obvious extremes.

It is worth mentioning these misconceptions not just for being harmful to one's mental health and self perception, but for the way they hinder opportunities for autistic people and by extension, their livelihoods and independence. In this society, getting a job is a big step towards independence and a rite of passage that autistic people are, unfortunately, often denied. Despite this country touting equal employment opportunity, up to 85% of adults with autism spectrum disorders remain unemployed. [1] There are various reasons for this discrepancy: hiring practices requiring those considered to have ample social and soft skills for effective execution, misconceptions that autistic individuals are more costly or provide less value to the workplace, and the lack of accommodation or understanding for autistic employees. Increasing independence for those with autism spectrum disorders The question then remains – how do we open the door for individuals with autism to find employment, housing, and independence overall? The answer lies in building an approach which encourages better hiring practices, education, and accommodations.

Many autistic people, including nonverbal autistics are able to not only provide a unique perspective to the workplace, but add additional value through distinctive skills they may possess. Autistic people often notice things neurotypical people don't, which has the potential to save time and money. In terms of cost, providing care for autistic people was actually found to be less costly than standard workplace care according to a study involving 8 datasets. [4] By encouraging better education and the use of content which frames autism as advantageous rather than detrimental, employers may consider autistic people an asset rather than a liability.

People tend to ignore issues that don't directly affect them, so an effective way to encourage change is to link the issues related to autistic independence to topics people already find important. By presenting autistic issues in this way, misconceptions can be combated and employment can be increased. This can be done in various ways, but one powerful method could be using cognitive biases as a catalyst. Many people are affected by FOMO, or fear of missing out, and if autism is framed as advantageous to work environments, employers may be increasingly willing to work with autistic individuals.



In addition, groups that advocate for autistic support could collaborate with employers to build accommodations and provide education necessary to support autistic staff, making for a safe and constructive environment crucial for comfort and growth. A major leverage towards support could also involve the reminder that many of history's famous minds were likely autistic— and what employer would want to miss out on the next Albert Einstein? [7] It is important however, to acknowledge the brilliance of all parts of the autism spectrum, and that despite social awkwardness or other social limitations, many autistic people are just as capable as the average. Increasing independence for those with autism spectrum disorders person, if not more. Instead of just leveraging the benefits, however, it is crucial to highlight less obvious ways that autism presents as a whole. While workplace support is a step in the right direction, another battle needs to be fought—the use of misconceptions as excuses not to hire or engage with autistic individuals. While many believe that autistic people possess less intelligence, studies have shown that this is in fact a myth.

According to the Kennedy-Krieger institute, almost half of children with autism display average or above average intelligence on the IQ scale. [2] Fortunately, there are plenty of easily digestible statistics that can help dispel myths through posters and infographics. Action towards normalizing autism could also include simply speaking openly about it and correcting misconceptions when heard. Being autistic is often not the only struggle for those with a spectrum disorder, however, as loneliness, anxiety, and depression often follow. [5] This is typically due to societal isolation and the aforementioned misconceptions. Accommodating these things may cost an employer money, deterring them from taking autism into consideration. Employment is of course far from the only factor of independent living.

Another struggle for those with autism is finding adequate housing. According to a study by the Special Needs and Autism Project (SNAP), by age 23 only 5% of autistic individuals were living independently. [3] Another study suggests that while autism occurs 1-2% of the time in the overall population, this number rises to a shocking 12-18% in homeless populations. [6] This relates directly to the lack of societal and workplace accommodation in modern society.

The majority of people with autism spectrum disorder are capable of performing workplace tasks and making societal contributions, but it's up to society to allow them that opportunity. By increasing education about autism and working to build more accommodating workplace environments, contributions can be made towards independence for autistic individuals as well as a more accepting world.

<https://www.kennedykrieger.org/stories/interactive-autism-network-ian/measuring-iq-autism#:~:text=But%20years%20later%2C%20in%202014,range%22%20from%2071%20to%2085.>

By Siasia Bean - DVHS Autism Awareness Essay Contest Winner 2024



Programs, Events and News ...

- Thank you to all the DV students and Teachers who participated in the “Opening Doors to Independence” poster and essay contests!
- Monday June 11th 2024 - Artist Joe Ryan is teaching “Creating a Comic Strip” Class
- Bowling at Memory lanes in Port Jervis, NY : Summer Hours - Fridays at 5pm
- Look for all Social Skills Board Game Groups to resume after a short break - Watch for announcements
- Challenger Baseball - 50+ Players for the 2024 season!
- Costas Family Fun Day - Tuesday June 25th 2024, 3:30pm - 7pm

Keep us in your thoughts as we continue our search for land for “Independence Village”.

Warmest Regards,

Jeannemarie Passaro
Executive Director