



Neurodiversity in Community

How to Make Communities
More Inclusive



Overview

- Introductions
- Definition of neurodiversity
- Examples of living in community
- Recommendations for communities
- Q&A

Intros

Erin Roundy

- Autistic disabled white queer non-binary
- Nomad in search of community living
- Work-trade experience in communities
- Neurodivergent disability advocate
- Founder of startup project Autistic Nature



Crystal Byrd Farmer

- Autistic disabled Black woman
- Board member of FIC
- Runs Gastonia Freedom School for disabled children
- Diversity consultant for intentional communities



Definition of Neurodiversity

- “Neurodiversity refers to variation in the human brain regarding sociability, learning, attention, mood and other mental functions in a non-pathological sense.”
- Neurodiversity encompasses every type of human
 - Neurotypical = normative people
 - Neurodivergent examples:
 - Autism
 - ADHD
 - Dyslexia
 - Tourette’s
 - Schizophrenia
 - May include mental illnesses such as anxiety, depression, bipolar
- Neurodiversity is a neurological difference, not an illness to be cured
 - Social model of disability: societal attitudes makes neurodivergence disabling
 - Accommodations help people participate fully
- Identity first vs person first language
 - Identity first centers the disability as a core part of the person
 - Using person first language distances the condition like an added weight
 - Disabled people prefer direct language instead of euphemisms (“special needs”)

Neurodiversity in Community (Examples)

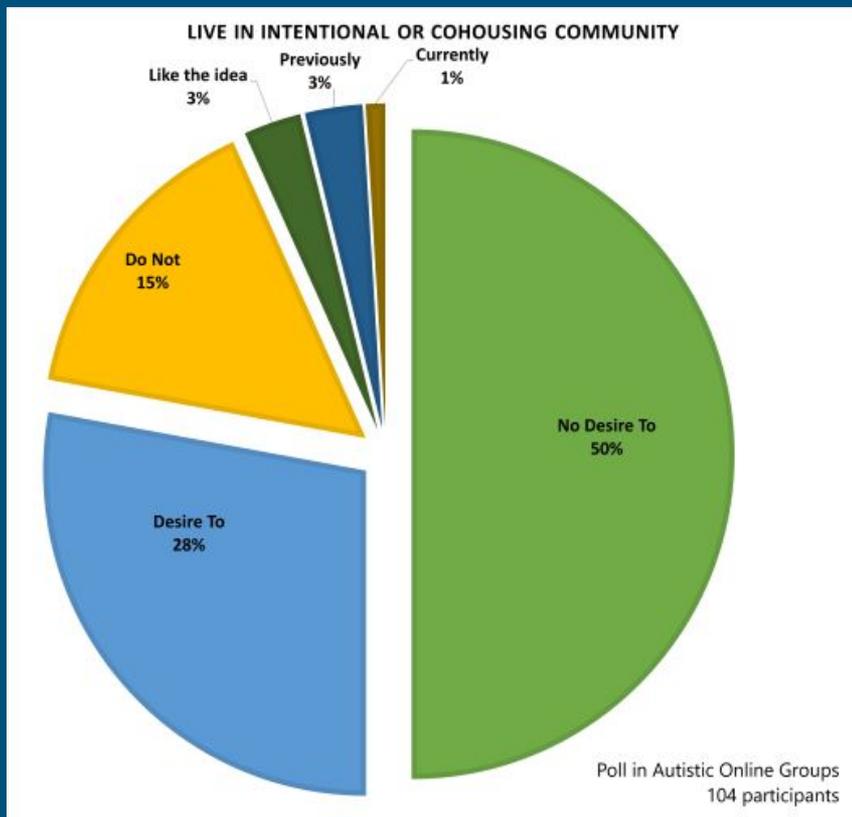
- Group meetings
 - Some people cannot follow verbal conversations and may need notes or follow up
 - Many people find captions on videos and Zoom calls useful
- Labor requirements
 - Common knowledge is not common for everyone
 - Some people need help visualizing steps to complete a task
- Socialization
 - Spoons theory--different people have different levels of energy based on their internal state
 - Many people have not lived in community and are unaware of social expectations
- Communication
 - Bluntness and lack of small talk
 - Idiom usage
 - Guess vs Ask Culture
 - <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2010/05/askers-vs-guessers/340891/>

Community Examples cont'd



- Possible benefits
 - Thinking outside the box
 - Creativity with problem solving
 - Logic and a desire for order
 - Moral clarity
 - Ability to focus
 - Direct communication
 - Attention to detail
 - Capacity to remember facts
- Remember that every person is different and brings different things to a community

Survey of Autistic People & Interest in Community



*sample of people on Facebook

Would live in Community IF:

- Fully inclusive of all diverse identities
- Community run by ND / not run by NT
- Equitable & accessible options to contribute
- Separate/private living space from others
- Financial means were not an obstacle

Would NOT live in Community because:

- Fear of Ableism, Tokenism, & Infantilization
- Lack of disability accommodations
- Value personal space, not a "people person"
- Only want to live with family or close friends
- Incompatible living styles
- Trauma from forced living experiences
- A few believe communities are societal segregation

Community Recommendations

- Take time to ask people what accommodations they need when entering the community
 - Continue the conversation once they move in and recognize new needs
- Understand the difference between equity and equality
 - Be realistic about what supports you can provide
- Use inclusive decision making processes
 - Train people in consensus/sociocracy
 - Provide step by step guides
- Nothing About Us Without Us
 - Include disabled people in decisions that affect them
- Presume competence
- Protect people's privacy
- Help others understand a person's disability
- Review community expectations & revamp if they leave anyone out.
- Consultation & training from educators & advocates who are neurodivergent & disabled

Resources

BOOKS

The Token: Common Sense Ideas for Increasing Diversity in Your Organization by Crystal Byrd Farmer

Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha

We're Not Broken by Eric Garcia

PATHFINDERS: People with Developmental Disabilities and Their Allies Building Communities That Work For Everybody by John O'Brien & Beth Mount

Neurotribes by Steve Silberman

ORGANIZATIONS

[Autistic Self Advocacy Network](#)

[Autistic Women & Non-Binary Network](#)

[Autism and Race](#)

[NeuroClastic, Inc.](#)

[Neurodiversity Network](#)

CONSULTANTS

[AsiatuCoach.com](#)

[NeurodivergentConsulting.org](#)

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Brief History

- Jim Sinclair wrote “Don’t Mourn For Us” in 1993 which is seen as a turning point for disability advocates
- Sociologist Judy Singer introduced the term neurodivergent in 1999
- Autistic advocates led the movement to encourage the view that autism is a brain difference that requires social supports
- The term is being applied to an increasing number of neurological disabilities



“You didn’t lose a child to autism. You lost a child because the child you waited for never came into existence. That isn’t the fault of the autistic child who does exist, and it shouldn’t be our burden.”

-Jim Sinclair, “Don’t Mourn for Us”

History Continued

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autism_rights_movement

- Institutionalization was common in the past
- Even now disabled people are often sent to group homes or assisted living instead of being able to choose where to live
- Autistic children are often asked to do 20-40 hours of behavioral therapy a week
- Rise of the internet makes way for Neurodivergent people to easily find & connect with each other
 - The forum Wrong Planet began in 2004
 - There are now Facebook, Discord, and many other online groups
 - Growth of Neurodiversity advocates to an online audience
- Neurotypical led advocacy organizations are often criticized by neurodivergent advocates for focusing on cures and treatment
 - For example, Austim Speaks funds research into genetics and cures
 - Many parent groups promote harmful therapies such as Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA)