

The New York Times

LETTERS

More Paths for People With Autism

July 22, 2018

To the Editor:

Re “How to Meet Autistic People Halfway,” by Vikram K. Jaswal and Nameera Akhtar (Op-Ed, July 14):

There should be no question that autistic people need and value social connections. We all do. As the executive director of Felicity House, a community space for women on the autism spectrum, I see every day how much it means to these women to be a part of a community that is fun, social, supportive and affirming.

As autistic people have been advocating for decades, let’s create more environments where people are able to come together and allowed to be themselves, with opportunities for positive social and recreational experiences, behaviors related to autism notwithstanding. It should not be a radical idea that one can make a friend without making eye contact or have an engaging conversation while flapping one’s hands.

BETH FINKELSTEIN, NEW YORK

To the Editor:

Your Op-Ed article articulates a perspective that is sorely needed. My 28-year-old son enjoys social interaction and community integration, yet he lacks the communication skills necessary to initiate and participate in most conversations. As my daughter, then 5 years old — wise beyond her years and an advocate ahead of her time — pointed out long ago, “Just because Eric can’t ask for a birthday party doesn’t mean he doesn’t want one.”

WENDY L. RIBACK
WEST HEMPSTEAD, N.Y.

To the Editor:

As the father of a 38-year-old, speechless son with autism who takes him to stores, restaurants and family gatherings, I am all in favor of considering people with autism as social beings. Yet I think it is an intellectual mistake to view autism as some type of “locked-in” syndrome in which

there is a social-typical person merely masked by a few off-putting behaviors. This would torture parents and therapists who could not find the “key” to unlocking their child.

There is a quasi-Heisenberg uncertainty principle of autism research; the more one interviews highly verbal, articulate, introspective people with autism, the more one is not measuring the true extent of the autism spectrum.

CHARLES A. AMENTA III
FLOSSMOOR, ILL.

The writer, a doctor, is the author of “Russell’s World: A Story for Kids About Autism.”

To the Editor:

In addition to wanting to be sociable, people with autism want to and can lead productive lives. Over the next decade, more than 500,000 people on the autism spectrum will age into adulthood, yet there is a severe lack of services to prepare, train and integrate this population into the work force. In fact, people with autism face an unemployment/underemployment rate estimated to be as high as 90 percent.

As the head of a large employer of people with autism, I know from experience that they have the drive and desire to work, and they deserve the chance to find a paying job and a sense of purpose. Our goal as a nation should be that those with autism who are equipped to work are employed to their fullest potential.

There are complex challenges, but I would argue that a prospective employer must look at the strengths the group possesses. For example, those with autism tend to pay extreme attention to detail; have a high degree of accuracy in visual tasks; are loyal, honest and reliable; and can offer unique ways of looking at things, ideas and concepts.

In an integrated work environment, those who may be deemed antisocial by conventional standards actually blossom, reveling in the success of the organization as a whole and taking a huge amount of pride in being associated with a job well done.

PATRICK BARDSLEY
PORT WASHINGTON, N.Y.

The writer is a co-founder and the chief executive of Spectrum Designs Foundation, a nonprofit brand design and merchandise company.

A version of this article appears in print on July 23, 2018, on Page A18 of the New York edition with the headline: More Paths for People With Autism

