

# AFRIAUTISM

SPECIALTY PUBLICATION THAT HIGHLIGHTS INFORMATION ON AUTISM IN AFRICA

**AUTUMN  
ISSUE**

**BRONWYN  
RILEY**

**HAVING AUTISTIC  
KIDS MAY  
NEGATIVELY AFFECT  
THE QUALITY OF  
YOUR MARRIAGE**

**Inam  
Autism  
Awareness**

**VEZI SILWANYANA**

*Grace Siller on*  
**AUTISM  
AND  
AGING**

**Monde  
Nomdzinwa**

**THE STRUGGLES OF A LATE-DIAGNOSED  
AUTISTIC ADULT IN SOUTH AFRICA**

APRIL IS AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH



# AFRIAUTISM

MAGAZINE

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On the *Cover*.  
Monde Nomdzinwa

# AUTUMN

ISSUE 2024



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Bronwyn Riley gets deep and personal about the reality of parenting autistic children and how autism can negatively affect the quality of marriage.



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Atlanta-based Grace Siller shares insight on available opportunities for autistic adults.

**W**elcome to a brand new year and the very first issue of 2024 here at Afriautism Magazine. As we turn the

page to a fresh chapter, we are thrilled to extend our warmest greetings to each of you, our valued readers from all around the world.

This year, we embark on our journey with renewed vigour and the promise to bring you content that not only informs and educates but also resonates deeply with your experiences and aspirations. I believe that within these pages lies an article that will touch every heart, spark every mind, and inspire every soul.

As we continue to advocate for autism awareness and support this April, we are reminded of the diverse tapestry of stories that unite us. It is with great pride that we present a collection of narratives, research, and insights that reflect the collective spirit of our community.

In this Issue, Monde Nomdzinwa lets us in on his journey as a late-diagnosed autistic adult on page 11. We also have two articles contributed by Grace Siller, shedding light on employment opportunities for autistic adults (Page 28) as well as the dreary reality of ageing autistic adults (Page 17).



Image by: Ta Iso Q Photography  
Hairstyle :by Benni's Elites



On behalf of Afriautism Magazine - a specialty publication that highlights information in Africa, I thank you for joining us on this incredible voyage of discovery and empowerment. Here's to a year of growth, understanding, and meaningful connections. Ke a leboga!

*Lerato Mosedame*

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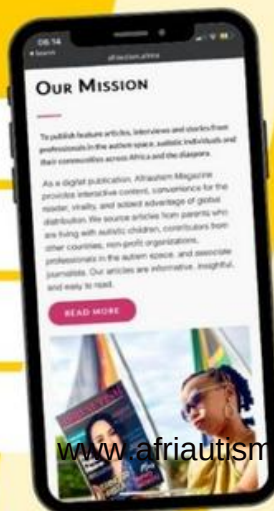
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Autumn Issue 2024

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# THE INAM **AUTISM** AWARENESS GROUP

In conversation with IAAG's Co-Founder, Mrs Vezi Silwanyana

Interviewed by Lerato Mosedame



**A**

friautism Magazine reached out to Mrs. Vezi Silwanyana who is the Director at HPO Healthcare Consulting and the Co-founder of the Inam Autism

Advocacy Group. Vezi is a wife and a mother of four children. One of her children is on the autism spectrum.

**Can you tell us briefly about yourself and what you do?**

Hi Lerato, we are honoured to be featured in the magazine. My name is Vezi Silwanyana, I live in Johannesburg, South Africa. I'm a mother to four children aged 21, 20, 11 and 9. Professionally I am a Director at HPO Healthcare Consulting and the Co-founder of the Inam Autism Advocacy Group.

**Please share with our readers, the story behind the inception of INAM Autism Advocacy Group and what inspired you and your Co-founder to start this foundation?**

IAAG (The Inam Autism Advocacy Group) is a non-profit organisation that was established to advocate for autistic people in South Africa with a focus on children and young adults,

particularly those in under resourced areas i.e. townships and rural areas. The organisation was founded in 2018, named after Inam our 11 year daughter who is autistic. Inam was the inspiration behind the inception of the foundation, having experienced challenges in access to affordable education, therapy interventions and experiencing misconceptions from our community on the way she behaved in relation to other children. This made us, as Inam's parents realise the need to educate society on the existence and prevalence of Autism.



**How does INAM Autism Advocacy Group work towards creating a more inclusive society for individuals with autism?**

IAAG has four mission objectives underpinned by the desire to create an inclusive society for autistic children. Our main area of focus is creating autism awareness through workshops with parents and educators with the hope that the more people know and understand autism, the more likely it will be for society to embrace and accept children and adults on the autism spectrum.

**Could you tell us about a particular moment or event that reinforced the importance of autism awareness in your life?**

There are a number of personal experiences that have reinforced the importance of autism awareness however the one that stands out vividly is when a fellow patron at a restaurant requested that our family leave the establishment when Inam started vocal stimming (screaming) as a way to regulate her emotions.



**What are some common misconceptions about autism that you encounter, and how does INAM Autism Advocacy Group address them?**

Common misconceptions are:: All autistic individuals are extremely intellectually gifted, autistic individuals don't "look" autistic - physical appearance and that Autism can be cured. As IAAG, we address these misconceptions in our workshops and also on our social media platforms.

**Can you discuss any upcoming projects or initiatives that INAM is excited about for April (autism awareness month)?**

It is encouraging to see the number of organisations, existing and new that contribute in various ways on the mission of autism awareness and acceptance, particularly during World Autism Awareness month. Our goal for 2024 is create platforms where parents can engage and share their stories in a safe and non-judgmental environment.

**In what way can people get involved and support the cause of IAAG?**

People can support IAAG by following our social media pages for updates on our various engagements and topics, purchase merchandise which we use to raise awareness and funds and join in on the conversation. Most importantly we ask for Autism Acceptance, Autism Support and Autism Awareness.

On behalf of Afriautism Magazine, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to Vesi for her gracious participation in our autumn issue. Inam Autism Awareness Group's contribution is not just a feature in our magazine; it's a beacon of inspiration and awareness that will undoubtedly resonate with our readers and beyond.



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## Keitu's Books



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# The struggles of a late-diagnosed Autistic Adult

*Written By Monde Nomdzinwa*

*“One of my favourite quotes attributed to Winston Churchill says,*

*If you want me to speak for two minutes, it will take me three weeks of preparation, If you want me to speak for thirty minutes, it will take me a week to prepare. If you want me to speak for an hour. I am ready now”.*

I have struggled with writing this article for a while just like with every major piece of work I've had to write. Not because I lacked the words or the narrative. My inherent tendency is to waffle and info dump, both in speech and in writing but more a paralysis of the many directions and the message I want to communicate to the reader. Hopefully, the many hours spent contemplating how best to approach my first article speaks to that reality.

When I first approached Afriautism Magazine to share my story, it was to be in the form of an interview. I didn't mind the format or the questions, the thing is I like crafting narratives in my head and prefer stories in that manner. I think it's an egotistical thing as it allows me to share the vast stores of references that my mind inherently likes accumulating.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle first introduced what he called the three fundamental concepts of Ethos, Logos and Pathos in rhetoric, which is the art of persuasion and effective communication. This will be my guiding

principle while answering the questions that we originally presented to me. I believe that complete unadulterated transparency is the only weapon against shame and stigma, so I share my struggles and adversities openly and willingly so that it may resonate with those like me. I will use my intimate knowledge of failure, shame, embarrassment, anxiety and depression to reach out to those who might be suffering in silence and isolation. I hope it helps even one person suffering alone.



I am Monde Nomdzinwa, a 33-year-old black male who received a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Level 1 or low support ASD at the age of 32. I'm of Xhosa and Sotho descent originally from Bloemfontein in the Free State, with a twin sister and an older half-sister. I come from what I would consider a typical family and background, nothing out of the ordinary. I would like to say I remember specific behaviours from my childhood that indicated that there was something different about me, but I would be lying and most of what stands out now is viewed in retrospect. I presented to everyone including myself as "typical", with my idiosyncrasies as everyone else.

After matric, I enrolled at the University of Pretoria to study chemical engineering through the extended programme. I was unsuccessful in completing the degree after 5 years of study. Those who knew me in my first year would say I was a quiet and reserved individual at first, but I attributed this to being in a new place and the difficulties of the language barrier. The first two years were challenging

from different academic and social aspects, but I adapted and began to thrive in my second year. The 3rd year was when I started experiencing difficulties of fatigue and anxiety, but this was when the extended programme students merged with the regular programme. I assumed it was the difficulty of adapting to an increased workload. This was what I now know to have been my first experience with autistic burnout, but I had no idea. The 2 years were filled with more academic hardships and shame

from constantly failing modules regardless of trying different approaches. I recognised then that the anxiety and the PTSD of having failed would be on my mind even as I set for a module a respective second and third time. This would lead me to stay away from exams and tests due to the intense anxiety associated with being examined. My transcript has a couple of instances of "did not show up to the exam".

The academic outcomes seemed to get worse with every passing year and I was eventually finally academically excluded after 5 years of trying. Towards the end, I was starting to make gradual improvements academically, but it felt like the institution gave up on me. I appealed my exclusion to the Registrar's office to no avail. I was crushed, my confidence was completely obliterated. I had sought out psychological intervention from



Student services before my final exclusion and received a psychometric evaluation. It flagged a below-average reading comprehension and a highly superior range of vocabulary and verbal reasoning skills.

But my stubbornness, hard-headedness and sheer perseverance made me enroll at Tshwane University of Technology for a diploma in Industrial engineering at the beginning of 2014 even to my father's disapproval, which caused a strain in our relationship resulting in us not talking for multiple years. I didn't want to return home a failure, but with the moral support of my mother and sister, I continued.

The first year at TUT went exceptionally well, but again within the second year, a sharp drop off academically which brought back intense feelings of fatigue, anxiety, and depression. There were times, I couldn't get out of bed for a week, and I would subsist on 2L of traditional South African drink made from fermented maize for the entire week. From 2014 till 2019 with a year and a half being academically excluded again. It had taken me a complete 10 years to make any headway into tertiary education, I was mentally scarred, and anxiety and depression were a constant presence at this point but I kept silent. The embarrassment and shame I felt led me to isolate myself from everybody, family, friends and former and current peers alike. I was known for disappearing for months on end without contacting anyone.

I don't remember where or how I came across the term ASD/ Aspergers but I recently discovered a screenshot on my phone, one of 1225. The screenshot was



from a Healthline web article, stating the emotional and behavioural traits of Autistic persons. It described: Repetitive behaviours; an inability to understand emotional issues; first-person focus and exaggerated emotional responses (Meltdowns). These traits resonated with me and already in early 2019, I sought out psychological assessment by a clinical psychologist referred to me. My clinical psychologist at the time told me that they didn't think I exhibited the traits of someone who is on the spectrum, with my extensive vocabulary being used as an indication of why the diagnosis of ASD was not appropriate. So I resumed talk therapy for the treatment of my anxiety condition which was a constant presence at this time in my life.

I've focused mainly on my academic struggles thus far, but these were not my only struggles. On the romantic front, my relationships on average wouldn't last more than three months, except two that lasted more than a year. I'd always struggled to notice subtle cues, in speech, tone, facial or body

language. I would always depend on close friends' remarks and indications of; that lady kind has a thing for you or is showing interest in you. I just thought it was nature's way of keeping an individual humble or unconceited. Of the short-lived relationships or talking stages, it was always frustrating and confusing as to what actions or behaviours on my part led to their quick end. This led me to internalise the blame for most of those failed relationships. I would describe myself as a difficult person or personality who seemed to rub some people up, the wrong way. But I couldn't determine from introspection what character traits were so problematic about me.

This impairment in navigating interpersonal relationships, other than with close friends or family presented problems within the work environment. By 2020 I had done enough reading on ASD that I was convinced that this diagnosis fit the issues I experienced, academically and otherwise. I discovered that people on the spectrum could exhibit some degree of difficulty

with social interactions and communication. Also, other behaviours, such as difficulty with transition from one activity to another, a focus on details, unusual reactions to sensations, depression, anxiety, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and difficulty sleeping. All of which I presented with. I had taken a few online RAAD-R self-assessments, and the outcome was always highly likely that I was on the spectrum. I was starting to be more confident in identifying internally, as being on the spectrum however, I wouldn't dare share this with others for fear of it being rejected or dismissed as a convenient excuse for my failures. I would often remind myself that self-assessment isn't a conclusive diagnosis.

My experiences in the work environment would be the same between the two companies I worked for between 2020 and 2022. I would start very well. Excelling and being rewarded with pay raises, even without advocating for them. It would be supervisors, managers and directors offering these incentives for exceptional performance. But after a year, I started to experience problems. There were days I would miss work, either because I had struggled to fall asleep the night before, experiencing some gastrointestinal problems, or couldn't get out of bed because of fatigue or feeling depressed. I panicked; these were the same issues that gave me issues in university. I approached my GP to explain my struggles with fatigue, sleep and depression and I mentioned my suspicion of being on the spectrum, he also dismissed that based on my ability to express in detail my symptoms and

placed me on antidepressants. At work, I was perceived as combative and had a problem with authority, especially after a year of being in a company. More output would be required and expected of me because previously I had shown to be highly adaptive and exceptionally productive. I would always ask too many clarifying questions for instructions given and this was viewed as insubordination. I would be quickly labeled a problematic employee. I struggled to carry out instructions that seemed irrational because I couldn't play the game of internal work politics. I found myself in conflict with different people or departments throughout the business at varying times. I attributed it to being a headstrong personality, and other people being overly emotionally invested, in technical or professional disagreements. This unfortunately led me to be retrenched once before during COVID-19, even while we were negotiating to make my acting lower managerial role permanent.

November 2022 was when I finally reached my breaking point after number 5 of another failed romantic interaction within that year. I could recognise a pattern in the way these interactions would end. It infuriated me because I couldn't see the perspective of the respective ladies' frustrations with me, were coming from and I couldn't understand when they'd verbalise them. Over and above, I noticed this boom-and-bust cycle spanning from my first year in varsity. Performing exceptionally then, a year later, a sharp and sudden decline. I knew this wasn't normal and couldn't be a coincidence. I managed to locate a GP, who specialised in ASD and had done research abroad within Joburg.

After assessing me he concluded from his experience I was on the spectrum. This was the first medical professional who had believed my assertions. I was relieved it meant I could now decisively receive the right treatment to deal with the symptoms. His approach was from a biomedical approach to treatment, and he placed me on nootropic supplements and a revised diet to deal with the more physical symptoms.

I disclosed my confirmed diagnosis to a selective group of family and friends, and the response was not one I anticipated. Most were dismissive or just not convinced, this wasn't in a negative way, but most thought that I was too intelligent, functional and independent to be Autistic. This put doubt in my mind of maybe having a confirmation bias for seeking a diagnosis.



The struggle and cost of seeking out a medical professional with experience treating adults was already difficult. I understand the frustration and struggle of parents of autistic children. After having gone through such an odyssey for your children to receive a confirmatory diagnosis, you'd think that now we can receive the help and support that we require. But unfortunately, this is the start of another difficult journey of fighting for acceptance and material support. Constantly having to explain and advocate for my diagnosis to others could be frustrating at times.

have. I eventually sought psychological help and another clarifying diagnosis this time from a clinical psychologist based in Randburg. He had extensive experience treating adults on the spectrum, especially those with lower support needs like myself. He confirmed the ASD diagnosis and put me on leave for burnout. I started attending therapy sessions once every two weeks, where he would explain and advise the perspective of neurotypical people like himself and how my mind saw the world differently from theirs. There wasn't a right or a wrong way, just different perspectives, and methodologies that my mind inherently experienced the world. There was never anything wrong, I had just spent a lifetime trying to force my mind to work in an antithetical manner to fit what was deemed "normal", leading to frustration and eventually mental fatigue. Through talk therapy, I received relief for the first time,

and the feeling of continuous anxiety in the background dissipated for the first time in years. My psychologist drafted a report that I could present to my employer as part of my request for reasonable accommodations as someone on the spectrum. I requested to be allowed to work from home for the majority of the week, as a way to decrease being overstimulated within the office space, which would fatigue mentally and emotionally. Since I worked in the Software professional services industry, I anticipated this wouldn't be an issue.

At first, this was met with skepticism and pushback, but eventually, through the mediation of the HR Manager, the director graciously agreed to try it out. I know that much larger organisations would have not agreed, from the examples I've heard from my psychologist. I was allowed to schedule when I would be in the office based on need and allowed to use noise-canceling headphones on days I was in the office. Even though I still contend with symptoms of my ASD daily, there has been quite a huge improvement in the quality of life I now lead. I experience fewer incidents of meltdowns and recover much quicker from burnout due to being around groups of people. There is so much in-depth, I would have liked to go into regarding my perspective on work, love, intimacy, and independence while living on the spectrum, but that would be a work of encyclopedic portions. Maybe I can share my musing again through another article. Thanks to Afriautism Magazine for giving me an opportunity and space.

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# Autism and Aging

— Written by Grace Siller

*Autism is a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition that affects individuals across their lifespan. While much attention has been given to children with autism, it is imperative to recognize the increasing number of autistic adults who are reaching older age. As the population of autistic adults grows, it becomes crucial to address their unique needs in the aging process.*



*Aging autistic adults are particularly vulnerable to mental health challenges, making it essential to prioritize their mental well-being. Mental health conditions, such as anxiety disorders, depression, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), can also impact aging autistic individuals.*

Highlighting the fact that autistic individuals are living longer is a significant starting point. According to recent studies, the life expectancy of autistic adults is catching up to that of the general population, leading to a growing population of older autistic individuals. This demographic shift necessitates a deeper understanding of how autism presents in adulthood and how to effectively support these individuals in their later years.

The distinct requirements of autistic adults encompass specific considerations and needs that are particularly relevant to aging individuals on the autism spectrum. When it comes to attending to the distinctive requirements of adults on the autism spectrum, it is crucial to acknowledge and address a range of specific concerns. These include gaining a comprehensive understanding of autism in adulthood, promoting mental health and overall well-being, exploring suitable residential options, providing comprehensive support services, and addressing the financial challenges that may arise.

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### **UNDERSTANDING AUTISM IN ADULTHOOD**

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a complex neurodevelopmental condition that affects individuals across their lifespan. Exploring autism in adults helps provide a more comprehensive understanding of this condition.

ASD is a lifelong condition characterized by differences in social communication and interaction, as well as restricted interests and repetitive behaviors. It is important to recognize that autism is a spectrum, meaning that individuals can experience a wide range of strengths and challenges. Autism is not a condition that individuals outgrow; rather, it is a lifelong journey of navigating the world with unique perspectives and abilities.



Autism presents differently in adulthood compared to childhood. While some characteristics may remain consistent, others may evolve or manifest differently. For example, social interaction difficulties in adulthood may be expressed through challenges in forming and maintaining relationships, navigating workplace dynamics, or participating in community activities.

### **MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING**

Aging autistic individuals may experience changes in their physical and mental health conditions, including the development or exacerbation of co-occurring conditions. These conditions can range from chronic physical ailments to mental health disorders that require specialized care and support.

Aging autistic adults are particularly vulnerable to mental health challenges, making it essential to prioritize their mental well-being. Mental health conditions, such as anxiety disorders, depression, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), can also impact aging autistic individuals. These conditions may become more pronounced or present new challenges as individuals age. Managing mental health can involve therapy, counseling, and medication.

Furthermore, sensory sensitivities and sensory processing challenges, which are common characteristics of autism, may become more pronounced or change in nature as individuals age affecting how individuals experience their environment. Executive function impairments, such as difficulties with organization, planning, and time management, can significantly impact daily living and independence in older age.

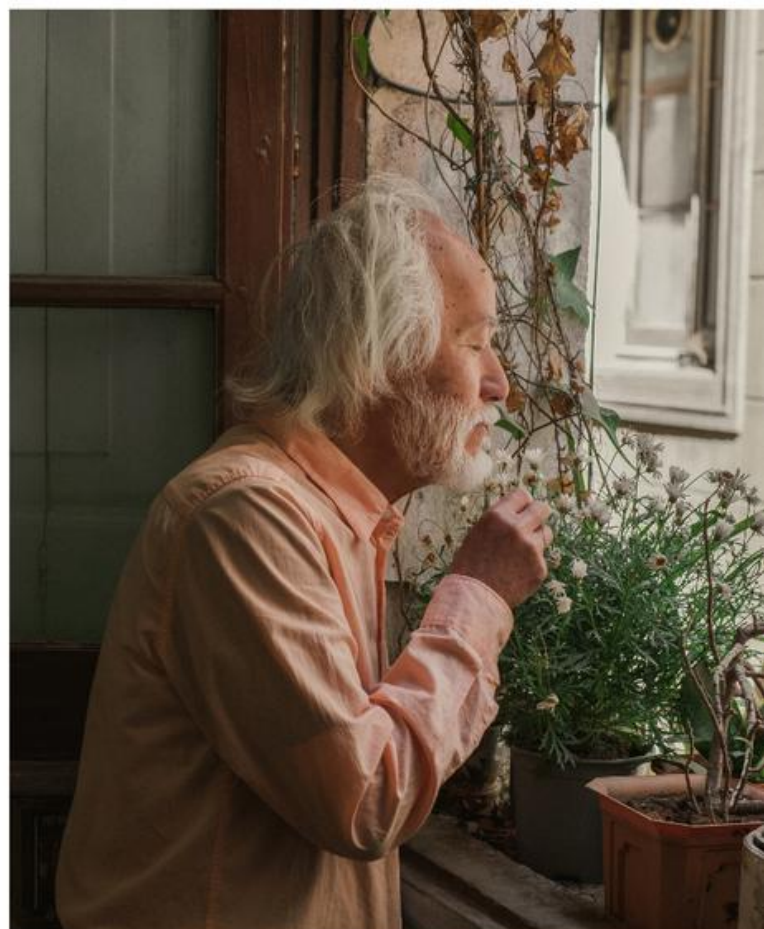
By recognizing their increased vulnerability, providing tailored mental health support and interventions, and implementing strategies to promote overall well-being, we can enhance the quality of life for older autistic individuals.

#### INDEPENDENT LIVING AND RESIDENTIAL OPTIONS

A range of independent living options exists for aging autistic adults, depending on their individual needs and preferences. These options include living in their own homes with appropriate support, shared living arrangements, supported housing, living with a family member, or specialized residential communities. Each option offers varying levels of assistance and accommodations, tailored to promote independence while ensuring safety and well-being.

Even though these living options exist, there is still a lack of appropriate and accessible housing options tailored to the specific needs of aging autistic adults. Many traditional housing options may not adequately accommodate their sensory sensitivities or provide the necessary support for their communication and social interaction requirements. Aging autistic adults often face financial challenges that limit their residential options to living with a family member due to a lack of available resources.

The demand for residential accommodations for adults is significant, particularly for adults with autism. In Frisco, Texas, Andi Lee, the President of Tranquil Living Tiny Home Community, is transforming her vision of a tiny home community for autistic adults into a reality.



Andi's firsthand experience of her friend Ryan's relentless fight for his autistic son brought about a profound shift. This deep understanding, combined with their mutual dedication to creating positive change, led them to make a life changing decision.

In 2021, Andi and Ryan embarked on a unique venture – creating a tiny home community with a specific target audience in mind. Driven by a desire to address the challenges faced by families with autism, Andi and Ryan delved into extensive research. Their exploration revealed what they felt was a dire need for such communities and highlighted the substantial benefits that semi-independent living environments could offer to residents within the autism community.

“This shift in focus became a defining moment for us, shaping our vision and purpose in creating a haven that goes beyond just tiny homes – a community that genuinely supports and enhances the lives of those with special needs,” stated Andi.

As autistic adults age, exploring independent living options and creating supportive residential environments becomes paramount. By understanding the available options, emphasizing inclusive design, and implementing strategies to promote independence, self-care, and community integration, we can nurture the autonomy and well-being of aging autistic individuals.

#### SUPPORT SERVICES AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

The social needs and relationships of autistic adults may undergo shifts as they grow older. Maintaining social connections and combating social isolation become increasingly important.

Autistic adults may need support in navigating changes in social dynamics, finding opportunities for social engagement, and accessing peer support networks that understand and embrace their neurodiversity.



The Facebook group "Adults with Autism South Africa" is an online community primarily focused on connecting autistic adults. However, it also welcomes individuals who suspect they may be on the spectrum, providing a space for them to ask questions about autism and access relevant resources. By fostering a sense of community, understanding, empathy, and connection, this support group creates a supportive environment for all its members. Autistic adults commonly face challenges related to social interaction. Social interaction difficulties may lead to feelings of isolation and difficulty establishing and maintaining relationships.



Divergent Dungeons and Dragons is a virtual social interaction opportunity designed specifically for neurodiverse adults—an online group that gathers to play Dungeons and Dragons. It is an immersive game where participants assume the roles of characters in an imaginary world. This inclusive online group provides a platform for neurodiverse adults to come together, connect, and enjoy the collaborative and imaginative experience of playing Dungeons and Dragons.

Comprehensive support services and community resources are essential for addressing the diverse needs of aging autistic adults. These services encompass a range of areas, including healthcare coordination, mental health support, independent living skills training, vocational and educational assistance, and legal and financial guidance, to support

groups, advocacy groups, online communities and social engagement opportunities. A holistic approach to support can enhance the overall well-being and quality of life for individuals on the autism spectrum.

Caregivers and family members play an important role in supporting aging autistic adults. They provide emotional support, assist with navigating healthcare and support systems, advocate for their loved ones' needs, and contribute to creating inclusive and fulfilling environments. Caregivers can also benefit from support groups and respite services to address their own well-being and ensure they have the resources and knowledge to provide the best care possible.

### **FINANCIAL CHALLENGES**

Autistic adults encounter specific financial challenges that can impact their overall well-being. Globally, a significant financial challenge is the cost of healthcare and therapy services. Autistic individuals often require ongoing medical care and specialized therapies to effectively manage their conditions. However, the expenses associated with these services can be substantial, especially when they are not fully covered by insurance or other assistance programs.

Employment and retirement planning pose additional challenges for aging autistic individuals. Many face difficulties in securing and maintaining employment due to communication and social interaction barriers. This can result in sporadic work histories and limited access to employer-sponsored retirement plans. As a consequence, they may not have adequate retirement savings to

s.support themselves financially in their later years.

Guardianship and financial management also pose challenges for some autistic adults. Some may require assistance with decision-making and financial affairs. Establishing guardianship or power of attorney arrangements can help ensure proper management of their finances. However, the legal process and associated costs can be complex and burdensome for families to navigate.

Planning for the long-term financial security and care of an autistic individual after the primary caregiver or parent passes away is another critical consideration. Families must engage in estate planning, which may involve setting up a special needs trust, designating a guardian, and ensuring appropriate financial planning to support the individual's ongoing needs.

Isabel Camp, from Las Vegas, Nevada, has three children, including Logan, her middle school-aged autistic son. Isabel is not only focused on the present but also looking ahead to the future, considering the unique challenges that lie ahead for Logan as he ages into adulthood.

As a single mother, Isabel acknowledges the financial constraints she faces in securing substantial funds for her child's future. Despite these limitations, she remains resilient and navigates these complexities alone. Recognizing the importance of advocating for Logan, as he approaches adulthood, Isabel understands the need to explore her parental rights to ensure his well-being. She recognizes

the possibility of her making decisions on Logan's behalf as he becomes an adult.

For long-term financial planning, Isabel has established a high-yield savings account for Logan and designated a permanent guardian for unforeseen circumstances. To strike a balance between immediate needs and long-term preparations, she actively collaborates with Logan's state case manager in crafting a comprehensive transition plan covering education, employment, independent living, communication, self-care, social skills, and health and safety.

Isabel provides a glimpse into the unique challenges, considerations, and strategies involved in planning for the financial security of autistic adults.

## **CONCLUSION**

It is vital to recognize that autistic adults require tailored support to navigate the complexities of life. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that includes the development of specialized housing options, increased availability of support services, financial planning assistance, and social integration programs specifically designed for aging autistic adults. It is important to recognize and address these unique challenges to ensure that aging autistic adults have access to suitable residential options and the necessary support to lead fulfilling and independent lives.

While aging with autism presents its challenges, it's also important to recognize and celebrate the unique strengths and abilities

that individuals with this condition possess. With the appropriate support and care, they can thrive and enjoy meaningful lives well into their golden years. By fostering understanding, promoting inclusivity, and providing tailored resources and services, we can empower aging

autistic individuals to navigate the challenges they may face and live fulfilling lives. It is essential to value their contributions and recognize the potential for growth and happiness throughout their lifespan.



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# Having autistic children may negatively impact the quality of your marriage

*“It’s the smallest things that can truly make all the difference. A small note in his work bag, preparing a meal or ordering a takeout, making a cup of coffee after being up all night”.*



**BRONWYN RILEY**  
CONTRIBUTOR



Hearing for the first time that your child is autistic can be a heart-wrenching and a painful experience for parents. Everything in the household changes. Gears and rules change, and this happens regularly. Having autistic children can place an enormous strain on any marriage.

Couples grieve differently. Women are prone to express their feelings and emotions whereas men, on the other hand, tend to shut down because they are unable to solve the diagnosis and the only way left is to remove themselves from the situation.

This may be a time in your marriage when you and your partner are tested the most. Time is no longer on your side, and combined with fear, lack of resources, and extreme frustration, you and your partner may grow further and further apart from each other.

As parents, we go into a fight-or-flight mode. A lot of energy and effort is emphasised in taking the autistic child to therapy and enforcing necessary routines. We forget that as a couple we need each other, we need affection and intimacy, quality time, and moments to remember why we

chose each other. Working together as a team makes things more manageable.

During times when my family visited family or friends, I would have to leave just after we had said “hello” because my child would be anxious. I would have to say “goodbye” and head back home to a five-hour meltdown with my child. I spent many Christmases at home my son’s overstimulation from gathering and sounds of wrapping papers.

Feelings of animosity grew towards my daughter and toward the family and friends who were

all out having a good time while I was locked in the bathroom crying or trying to calm down a screaming child. Emotions ran high and often I would feel like I couldn't go on.

I remember being so tired due to days of no sleep, playing tag team during meltdowns and locking myself in the bathroom just lying on the floor for a sense of quiet. There was no time for dinners together at the table or having a peaceful shower much less a thought of making time for my husband. We were so busy just trying to survive that we forgot what really living felt like.

I remember jokingly asking my husband for a photograph of himself so I could remember what he looked like in between our children, our workload, and adjusting to a new way of life that the mere thought of giving more time to another person was exhausting. We were either catching up on sleep, doing chores, or setting up routines for the next day and when we did stop to breathe for a minute the exhaustion would just take over.

A few good years went by before we discovered something called stolen moments. My husband and I would plan our monthly grocery trip to the mall without the children and purposely extend it by half an hour so we could sit down and have a coffee or even take a nap in my car. We often found each other hiding in the bathroom, the walk-in closet or



even in my pantry and chatting about the day, and once every two months we would attempt a date night.

Two keys to achieving this; good planning and doing an activity with the intention of reconnecting. We made sure our kids had a trained sitter, ensuring that we left the kids in good hands. When we managed to get it right, we went out. On these outings, we did not talk about the children or therapy as a rule, this was difficult at first, but we just really focused on reconnecting with each other. We held hands, laughing at the craziness around us, or often just sitting in silence, feeling each other's arms around one another. Other times we would take a walk around the block, talking and listening to each other laugh. On rare occasions, it was the luxury of dinner and a movie.

These moments are important in any marriage but more especially in one where there are special needs children. Living past each other is not an option when you need to be a team for your family. It's like being in a war zone where you are constantly fighting for peace - looking at different strategies, and interventions, and having to choose the right practitioners to help.

Without the reassurance from the one you love and do life with; marriage can become a very difficult and lonely place to be in. Being on the same page, listening to each other, and drawing strength from one another is vital to being a good team for everyone in the family.

My husband and I would often get the question around our birthdays - what would we like to do or what would like as a gift?



For years our go-to answer was to just get some sleep or have a long bubble bath alone. On Mother's Day, he would take the kids to the zoo so I could catch up on sleep and perhaps a lunch date with a friend. On Father's Day, he would go out and play a round of golf or enjoy a day out with friends.

These types of gestures allow our partners the blessing of "me" time and to connect with others, siblings, family members, and close friends – close relationships that are often lost due to the pressures of having a special needs child. This not only shows that you support, love, and respect your partner but that you value them.

It's the smallest things that can truly make all the difference. A small note in his work bag, preparing a meal or ordering a takeout, making a cup of coffee after being up all night. It is important to realise that just surviving is not living, realising that keeping the connection alive and strong is the key ingredient, and if stolen moments are all we get, then we need to take them with both hands to grow relationships and most importantly your marriage.



*My name is Bronwyn Riley, mother to three beautiful children. Two out of the three have autism spectrum disorder. I love to write and share our story not just to heal but to share with other families that*

*are going through the same struggles. Navigating through this journey is never easy and often terrifying but knowing you are not alone is one less burden to bear.*



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GET IN TOUCH

# EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR AUTISTIC ADULTS



In today's rapidly changing world, embracing diversity and fostering inclusive environments has become a moral imperative. When it comes to employment inclusion, individuals with autism hold untapped potential and unique abilities that can greatly enrich the workforce.



WRITTEN BY  
GRACE SILLER

Let us explore the importance of employment inclusion for individuals with autism, shedding light on their immense talent and the specific challenges they face. By understanding the global perspective on autism and employment, addressing the unique obstacles in Africa, and providing practical strategies for employers, we can pave the way for a more inclusive society that harnesses the talents of every individual, regardless of neurodiversity.

## Employment Challenges

Adults with autism frequently face challenges related to unemployment and underemployment, which can persist over their lifetimes. These difficulties often begin during the interview process, where conventional expectations emphasize traits, such as making eye contact, projecting a bold personality, and establishing a personal connection with the hiring manager. Consequently, individuals with autism may struggle to meet these expectations and encounter obstacles in securing employment.



Once employed, individuals with autism may encounter further difficulties in navigating the complex social dynamics of the workplace. Challenges can arise in understanding and managing assignments, interacting with clients, and navigating office politics. The nuances of workplace communication and social interactions, which may come naturally to neurotypical individuals, can pose significant obstacles for individuals with autism. These challenges can impede their ability to effectively perform their job duties, resulting in difficulties meeting expectations and potential job loss.

The social challenges faced by individuals with autism in the workplace can be multifaceted. Difficulties may include interpreting nonverbal cues, understanding unwritten rules, adapting to changes in routines, or effectively communicating with colleagues and supervisors. These challenges can hinder their ability to form positive working relationships and integrate seamlessly into the social fabric of the workplace.

Moreover, the lack of awareness and understanding about autism in many work environments can exacerbate these challenges. Employers and coworkers may be unfamiliar with the unique strengths and abilities of individuals with autism and may struggle to provide appropriate support and accommodations.

#### BENEFITS OF HIRING AN AUTISTIC INDIVIDUAL

It is important to recognize that both employers and society as a whole can benefit from hiring workers on the autism spectrum. Despite the diverse range of abilities and challenges exhibited by individuals with autism, many higher functioning individuals can excel in jobs that align with their unique abilities and interests. This can encompass a wide spectrum of roles, from tasks such as folding laundry that require meticulous attention to detail, to positions involving coding and software development that leverage their analytical thinking and problem-solving skills.



With the increasing prevalence of autism, it is crucial for companies to adopt an abilities-centered approach to employment. This involves identifying the specific strengths and talents of autistic employees and creating opportunities that leverage their skills. By recognizing the distinct capabilities of individuals with autism, employers can tap into a pool of dedicated and hard-working individuals who can bring valuable contributions to the workforce.

It is important to debunk misconceptions and stereotypes surrounding autism that may hinder employment opportunities. Autistic individuals possess a range of talents and abilities that can positively impact the workplace. Their attention to detail, strong focus, and ability to excel in structured environments can be tremendous assets in various industries. Moreover, employers who embrace neurodiversity and provide appropriate support and accommodations can create an inclusive work environment that fosters the success and well-being of autistic employees.

#### GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Globally, employment rates for autistic individuals remain significantly lower compared to the general population. Various factors contribute to this disparity, including stigma, limited awareness and understanding of autism, and a lack of tailored support and accommodations in the workplace. Autistic individuals often face difficulties in navigating the job application process, social interactions, and adapting to the demands of traditional work environments.

Around the world, there are inspiring examples of successful employment initiatives and programs that prioritize the inclusion of autistic individuals. In the United States, companies like Microsoft and SAP have implemented autism hiring programs, recognizing the unique skills and talents that autistic individuals bring to the workforce.

Forward Coffee Roasters in Singapore creates inclusive employment





opportunities. According to their 2022 Impact Report, the organization's workforce comprises 31 employees, with an overwhelming majority of 27 individuals identifying as having a disability or mental health challenge. "We hypothesize social stigma towards persons with disabilities will reduce when customers interact more with us. This is what makes us Foreward – advocating for social inclusion with our staff with disabilities, and acknowledging we are an agent of change," (Foreward Coffee Roasters).

In Australia, the Specialisterne Foundation has pioneered the concept of "neurodiversity employment" by matching autistic individuals with roles that align with their strengths and interests. By focusing on their unique abilities, this approach has led to successful employment outcomes and job satisfaction for autistic individuals.

These initiatives provide specialized training, mentorship, and ongoing support to ensure the success and long-term employment of autistic individuals.

#### AUTISM IN AFRICA

The prevalence of autism in Africa varies across countries due to factors such as cultural norms, access to healthcare, diagnostic resources, and awareness levels. Limited research and inconsistent diagnostic practices make it challenging to obtain accurate prevalence rates. However, it is increasingly recognized that autism is not limited to any specific region and can be found in diverse African communities.

Autistic individuals in Africa face unique challenges that hinder their journey towards employment inclusion. Limited resources, such as restricted access to diagnostic services, therapies, and specialized education, create obstacles for timely diagnosis,

intervention, and skill development necessary for employment readiness. Additionally, a lack of autism awareness contributes to misunderstandings, and discrimination, limiting employment opportunities. Cultural factors, including stigma, traditional views on disability, and societal expectations, further isolate and exclude autistic individuals.

#### PROMISING OPPORTUNITIES IN AFRICA

Despite the challenges faced by individuals with autism in Africa, there are encouraging opportunities emerging for their employment inclusion.

Autism advocacy groups and organizations are working tirelessly to raise awareness, challenge misconceptions, and educate communities about autism. By fostering understanding and acceptance, they pave the way for inclusive workplaces.

Some autistic individuals in Africa are finding success through entrepreneurship and social enterprises. By leveraging their unique talents and interests, they create their own opportunities and inclusive work environments that embrace diversity.



In the Western Cape of South Africa, Clayden Botes, diagnosed with autism at the age of 6, has defied societal expectations and transformed his passion for art into a thriving business. What began with posters has now expanded into a diverse range of art pieces, including pillows, blankets, hoodies, shorts, pants, and leggings. Clayden's triumph as an entrepreneur serves as a powerful reminder of the significance of breaking down societal stigmas and providing unwavering support to individuals with autism.

Collaborations between educational institutions, non-profit organizations, and the private sector are creating avenues for skill development and vocational training tailored to the needs of autistic individuals. These programs equip them with valuable skills that align with local industries, enhancing their employability.

Africa is witnessing a growing number of initiatives and organizations dedicated to promoting employment inclusion for individuals with autism. Their objectives, strategies, and impactful initiatives are paving the way for a more inclusive society.

In South Africa, the government has implemented the Employment Equity Act, which promotes diversity and inclusion in the workplace, including individuals with disabilities. Non-profit organizations like Autism South Africa collaborate with employers to create inclusive work environments and facilitate job placements.



In Kenya, the Autism Support Center Kenya (ASCK) has played a pivotal role in advancing employment inclusion for individuals with autism. ASCK actively coordinates a range of comprehensive programs aimed at engaging young people with autism in various services. These programs are designed to enhance social interaction, facilitate participation in vocational training opportunities, and improve social support systems.

autism. These initiatives focus on developing skills that align with their personal strengths and interests, enabling them to engage in productive and fulfilling work.

In Nigeria, the Champions Vocational Center emphasizes vocational skills development that is tailored to the unique strengths and abilities of each individual. They recognize that personalized vocational training plays a critical role in unlocking the potential of individuals with autism.

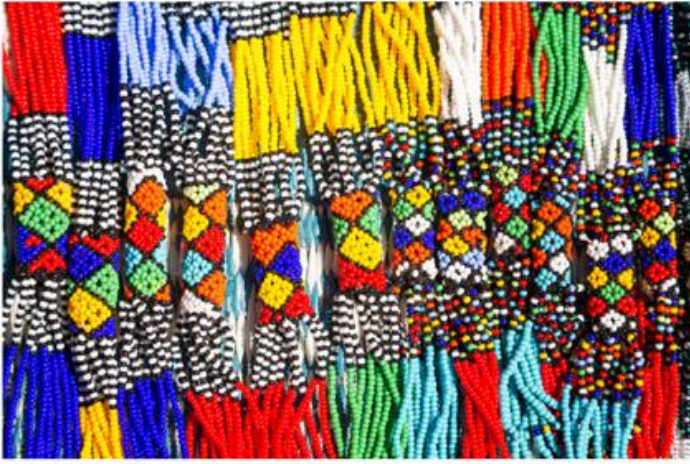
These promising opportunities indicate a growing recognition of the potential and contributions of autistic individuals in the African workforce. As awareness increases, skills are developed, and inclusive policies are implemented, the employment prospects for individuals with autism in Africa are steadily improving. With continued efforts and collaborations, the continent can unlock the untapped potential of this talented and diverse population, fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

#### PRACTICAL STRATEGIES

To make a significant dent in the unemployment rate for people with autism, raising awareness is crucial. Education campaigns, community engagement, and collaboration with cultural and religious leaders can help dispel misconceptions, reduce stigma, and foster acceptance of autism. Building resources is equally important, requiring investments in diagnostic services, therapy centers, and educational resources. Governments, non-profit organizations, and international partnerships can play a significant role in expanding access to these essential resources.

Tailored support and training programs are vital to help autistic individuals develop the skills needed for employment. Collaboration between educational institutions, non-profit organizations, and employers can create opportunities for vocational training, job coaching, and supportive services. By customized support, autistic individuals can gain the necessary skills and confidence to thrive in the workplace.

Advocacy efforts and policy changes are necessary to drive employment inclusion. Governments should implement policies that promote inclusive hiring practices, reasonable workplace accommodations, and incentives for employers to embrace diversity. Advocacy groups can play a crucial role in influencing policy changes and ensuring the rights and needs of autistic individuals are addressed.



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Employers can foster an inclusive work environment that promotes the employment inclusion of individuals with autism through proactive strategies and ongoing support.

Addressing employment-related challenges requires a multifaceted approach. It involves fostering inclusive hiring practices that focus on competencies and skills rather than solely relying on conventional social expectations. Providing training and education to all coworkers about autism and its characteristics can promote understanding and empathy. Embracing an abilities-centered approach and recognizing the reliability and dedication of autistic employees, employers can harness the potential of this untapped talent pool.

Additionally, implementing workplace accommodations, such as clear communication channels, structured routines, and social skills training, can help individuals with autism thrive in their roles and contribute their unique talents to the organization.

By recognizing and addressing the barriers that individuals with autism face, employers can establish an inclusive work environment that supports the employment inclusion of individuals with autism. This not only benefits autistic employees but also enhances overall team dynamics, productivity, and innovation within the organization. Embracing diversity and providing accommodations and support paves the way for the success and fulfillment of autistic individuals in the workplace.

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#### THE FUTURE OF EMPLOYMENT INCLUSION

It is imperative to recognize the significance of employment inclusion for individuals with autism, not only in Africa but globally. By shedding light on their immense talent and addressing the specific challenges

they face, we can work towards building a more inclusive society that values neurodiversity.

Understanding the global perspective on autism and employment allows us to learn from best practices and implement strategies that have proven successful in other regions. However, it is equally important to acknowledge the unique obstacles that exist in Africa and develop practical solutions tailored to the local context.

By providing support, accommodations, and training opportunities for employers, we can create an environment that fosters the success and well-being of individuals with autism, unlocking their full potential and enhancing our communities and workplaces. Ultimately, by embracing employment inclusion, we pave the way for a society that harnesses the talents of every individual, promoting diversity, equality, and a brighter future for all.



# Keitu's Book Collection

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