

Autistic Rights Agenda

Drafted by Rhizome Core Dec. - as of 2015 Dec 31

Agenda

Principles

- We must have the same **rights and freedom** as others. We must not live in captivity or isolation.
- We deserve the same **opportunity** as others, in things like education, jobs, travel, and therapy. Disability cannot be a reason for being second class citizens.
- The dominant narrative of autism as a disease to be eradicated is essentially a **war against us**. We don't want interventions directed against us.
- **Autistic children** must to be raised with freedom and dignity, not treated as defective. We may need different kinds of education or jobs than others in order to be equal.
- We need **safe autistic space** in which to be ourselves without pressure to become allistic. We deserve to grow mentally, emotionally and spiritually, to overcome internalized oppression and trauma. We need autistic-accessible workspaces to be able to contribute authentically.
- The pursuit of justice for us is entwined with the pursuit of **justice for all**; the movement must oppose all forms of oppression.
- We will **treat each other compassionately** in the struggle for justice, recognizing how we are all different, incomplete, traumatized, and yet worthy of being a part of it.

Background and perspective

- There is an attempt worldwide to "correct" autistic people. This is a failed mission and the system that has been formed to deal with autism is not working as promised. Autistic people and some in the field **refute the validity of the behavioral approach** and question the advertized results.
- **Captivity, isolation, and segregation** is the way of life for possibly millions of autistic people.
- Autism is in some ways a real thing, and it is also a constantly changing social construction deliniating a range of people falling from favor. That group has **ballooned in size** in recent decades.
- The **autism economy** (in the US) is a multi-billion dollar phenomenon of people intervening with drugs and behavioral interventions. We're the tokens used to capitalize on the condition.
- **Filicide** of autistic people may be on the rise.
- There has been an **autistic rights movement** for some decades.
- Autistic people are **not unitary** in our values, our understanding of what is going on, our requirements for safe and accessible space, or our priorities. Our diversity and our tendency to be independent make collaboration on building the movement very difficult. In fact our movement is still marginal compared to the dominant narrative.
- **Oppression** works especially when internalized. Some autistic people see ourselves negatively as if the disability is intrinsic, or we "use the master's tools"; this further complicates building a movement.

Objectives

- Abolish or transform the **autism industry** - the collection of professionals, regulators and other machinery that has built up around autism.
- Ensure our **civil rights** are universally respected in all venues, public and private - legally, in education and employment.
- Build **equal opportunity and equal access** to self-expression, contribution, and pursuit of our interests for all autistic people.
- Transform **education** for autistic children to be inclusive and compassionate, so that they reach an adult stage of freedom regardless of disability.

Large scale projects needed to achieve this agenda

Organizational

- Establish an effective network of autistic organizations that allows autistic people to plug in and be part of the solutions.
- Create a "constitution" or agenda such as this document, which has broad acceptance.
- Form alliances across organizations in the movement.
- Form alliances with other social justice organizations.

Autistic space

- Create on-line platforms for effective networking, support, collaboration, and play, with appropriate levels of oversight.
- Hold retreats in autistic space.
- Create autistic-controlled spaces for residential communities, ongoing retreats, and islands for travel.

Research and communication

- Study and disseminate information about the effects and ethics of behavioral interventions that are commonly used against us.
- Disseminate information countering the narrative of tragedy and the workings of Autism Speaks and other parts of the industry.
- Study and disseminate coordinated information answering questions about "what autistic people need", in areas such as health insurance, education, and accessible spaces.
- Create defining criteria for autism from an inside perspective.
- Disseminate information in the form of "welcome packets" for newly diagnosed or self-identified people, which steer them towards aut-positive resources.
- Curate the "top" information in some democratic way. (Currently anyone can write and share anything, but of the millions of blog posts and books, only a few stand out as widely representative or inspirational.)

Education

- Create schools without segregation, conducive to our way of learning, which are highly accessible.

Policy

- Exert political pressure to enact legislation supporting this agenda.

Barriers

- Newness
 - ◇ The movement is young. We have a long way to go before the society understands who we are and how to approach us.
- The state of organization: Organizations currently working in this movement have a number of obstacles that they appear to face:
 - ◇ "Founder's Syndrome" - Most new nonprofits suffer from the problem that they are essentially a following of one leader; when that leader goes, the whole organization ends or becomes ineffective.
 - ◇ "Cells" - A number of organizations are opaque and work mainly behind closed doors. Although they may be called "networks", there is no way to join them. There may be competition between different cells, who might view each other negatively even if they share most of their values and objectives.
 - ◇ Because of the above, there are many small organizations and informal groups that don't appear to operate synergistically.
- Poor representation and visibility
 - ◇ Among disability groups, autism stands out as the one for which the least representation exists by disabled people in the mainstream organizations. We're not allowed to participate in decisions that affect us; our struggle for inclusion is opposed. This is not the case as much with other disability groups.
- Independence and energy
 - ◇ Because independence is a key part of autism, our ability to rally behind leaders, and the way we can be leaders (and similar factors) is different. While some groups exist, many more of us are not part of the main groups. Our movement has not really matured to the point where we know how to collaborate.
 - ◇ We can often insist on terminology that is different from other autistics (such as whether autism is a "disability"), which can lead to misunderstanding, broken ties, and isolation.
 - ◇ We can often lack "spoons" (energy) or experience triggers, making it hard to function or accomplish things, due to the stresses of ongoing discrimination and past traumas.
- Internalized ablism
 - ◇ Many of us see our problems as just ours - we're sorry we're a burden on others, and we subscribe to the notions that we need cures, training, and other interventions in order to be acceptable. We might think of "autistic" as an insulting word, or want to become "normal".
 - ◇ If we are extremely inside the system (Medicaid, caretakers, rehabilitation, etc), we are barely exposed to the movement, and might not even know there is any alternative to seeing autism and

ourselves outside the oppressive views and terms used in the system.

- ◇ In the fledgling movement it has possibly been more practical to use the structures and patterns of fighting oppression that are themselves not accessible or yield power imbalance. Some call these "the master's tools".
- Famous people
 - ◇ Very famous people such as Temple Grandin may not be good spokespeople or movement leaders since they benefit from the publicity they receive.
 - ◇ Second-tier leaders (such as people leading the current organizations, professors, some Ted speakers or others published in the mainstream) may aspire to more fame. In any case they are often not accessible to the rest of us outside their cells.