

Autism Acceptance Showing Autism Acceptance over Awareness.

Student name(s): **Blakely Rudolph** Student institution(s): **Whitworth University** Contact email: Brudolph24@my.whitworth.edu

Project & Goals

- Project: Create a passive event to open the conversation regarding Autism Acceptance instead of simply awareness.
- Goals: open the conversation at Whitworth regarding how we treat autistic individuals and celebrate Acceptance month rather than Awareness
- Whitworth University is in the beginning of starting a disability club. Plus, conversation has opening over how we treat other autistic individuals currently.

Background

An active member of our student body brought the idea of doing an autism acceptance month instead of awareness. I had never thought about the clear antithesis between the awareness of autistic individuals' existence, rather than accepting they exist. This project seeks to put a foot in the door for our university to celebrate Autism Acceptance Month and adopt the aligning ideals.

Currently, Autism is the fastest growing developmental disorder **and** the most underfunded. This stems from us requiring those with autism to conform to our ideals, instead of accepting their difference. This leads to seeing the other as the lower. However, recognizing that autistic individuals have unique strengths and weaknesses that attribute to different circumstances closes in on acceptance.



Figure 1. Poster #2

What I Did

Created a series of posters that included what the differences are, why they are important, and what our next steps ought to be,

With 45 posters in total across academic facilities, and word of mouth— multiple sectors of student involvement got involved. I had two students with autism review the handouts and posters with me, I organized with members of student government, and members of Whitworth's

Posters seen in Figures 1,2,3.

What I Learned

In being accepting, we are conforming to the differences of others. In awareness, we understand the existence. However, in order to wholly accept the other with autism, we must move from awareness to acceptance.

Working with students with autism, the difference between these two became stark. Nothing got done with me being aware of their autism. But once I accepted and changed my method of communication due to their difference – I accepted, and it resolved.

In changing how we view people with autism, we change the way we approach legislation and policy that affects the other.



Figure 2. Poster #1

What is Next?

Whitworth is currently starting a Disability Club where disabled students will be able to continue advocacy for acceptance for all difference. Ideally, this comes with moving forward with Autism Acceptance Month in place of awareness.

With this comes education towards acceptance instead of awareness. Already several students, those who helped with this project and starting the disability club, have opened the door for this conversation, which will prosper with the continuation of the club and the month itself.

Figure 3. Poster #3



Civic Perspective

How did this experience help me to understand the organization's mission, vision and goals? How did the experience help me to understand social justice issues impacting our community and potential means for addressing them?

Academic Perspective

How was I able to apply a skill, perspective or concept from my major or a recent course to my community experience? How has the project enhanced my knowledge of a specific theory or concept? How has it challenged or reinforced my prior understanding?

Personal Perspective

What personal strengths/weaknesses did my experience reveal? What skills did I develop that I might use in the future? How were my attitudes (toward self, toward community) challenged during this experience?