RE-IMAGINING THE SPECTRUM OF LIBRARY EXPERIENCE

OVERVIEW
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), an enigmatic condition that impacts 1 in 68 American children, can make accessing community resources challenging. Though there has been an increase in public library services and programs for those with cognitive disabilities, the community targeted tends to be children on the spectrum. There is a glaring lack of support and resources for young and emerging adults with ASD, leading to a rich opportunity for fostering supportive communities and collaborative environments within public libraries.

DELIVERABLE SOLUTION
Through reviewing existing literature and interviewing individuals on the spectrum, parents, caregivers, autism professionals, and librarians we created an adaptable digital toolkit to assist public libraries with creating more inclusive spaces, services, programs, and customer service approaches to meet the needs of young/emerging adults on the autism spectrum. This digital toolkit provides a strong foundation for libraries to break down barriers of access for individuals on the spectrum and encourage more meaningful engagement in programs and services. The digital toolkit features strategies in the following areas:

- Living Stories
- Space Adaptation
- Programming
- Customer Service

1) THINK WHAT LIBRARIES DO EXCEPTIONALLY WELL IS PERMIT THOSE INDIVIDUALS TO TRY THINGS OUT IN A SPACE WITHOUT PRESSURE SURROUNDED BY THE COMMUNITY–TO TRY OUT WORKING, CONVERSING, INTERACTING, ASKING, A WHOLE RANGE OF SKILLS.  
STEVE KIESELSTEIN

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Master of Library & Information Science, Capstone 2016

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NEXT STEPS
To publicly share our toolkits with the public library community and...

- build awareness about the unique needs of young/emerging adults on the autism spectrum
- challenge the misconception that individuals on the spectrum are disruptive or unable to access and utilize libraries as their neurotypical peers would
- reduce stigma, fear, and assumptions, and encourage librarians to get creative, take chances, and foster more inclusive spaces
- empower information professionals to engage administration in a dialogue about best practices for serving the underserved

BE GENUINE. IT’S OK TO SAY, “I’M NOT REALLY SURE HOW TO HELP YOU. CAN YOU GIVE ME SOME CLUES?” LISTEN AND OBSERVE EVERY BEHAVIOR IS TELLING YOU SOMETHING. RELEASE YOUR OWN AGENDA, PRIORITIES, AND JUDGEMENT. TRY TO SEE THE WORLD THROUGH THEIR LENS. GET TO KNOW THE PERSON. DON’T ASSUME THAT THERE IS EVER A ONE SIZE FITS ALL LIBRARY EXPERIENCE.

JULIE BARNES NIELSEN

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