

# Will-Fried-Interview-4-13-23

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

autism spectrum, people, disability, individuals, neurotypical, autism spectrum disorder, autism, support, express, invisible disability, terms, understanding, disabilities, self determination, person, inclusive, routine, skills, officiate, develop

## SPEAKERS

Will Fried, Paul Huddleston

### Paul Huddleston 00:00

We're talking today with Will Fried, who is a Disability Support Specialist in the Access Office at the Meramec campus. How are you doing Will?

### Will Fried 00:07

I'm doing very well this morning, Paul, I'm very excited to be here chatting with you all. And we're here to promote autism acceptance as a norm that we should understand and experience as an everyday thing in society to develop a more inclusive and accessible place attitudes, and in the communities where we go work to school, serve and live in.

### Paul Huddleston 00:37

I am glad to have you here. Now you do have some experience with dealing with autism both in your work as a disability support specialist. And personally?

### Will Fried 00:49

Yes, you are exactly correct Paul. I'm someone that that was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. During my junior year in high school when I was living in Bethesda, Maryland, at around age, 16 years old, I've been living with it. Now coming up on to nine years now with being someone that's like, on the Autism Spectrum. I have worked with students professionally on the autism spectrum before I was here at St. Louis Community College. As a Disability Support Specialist, I came from Berkley College of Music in Boston, Massachusetts, where I was an access advisor where I provided a lot of academic and housing accommodations for a lot of students with disabilities accommodations worked with students on self advocating with with their own professors. And one of the things that I've really enjoyed on my journey with with supporting individuals on the autism spectrum was a few years ago when I started a journey to go work on my master's degree in higher education and student affairs at Fort Hays State University and from the fall of 2020, to May 2022. And, and during that time, I came and embarked on a colleague in the art department, Amy Schmerbach, who has a child on the autism spectrum and is part of her work as a faculty member, she wanted to work on creating a like a new kind

of program for college students that were on the autism spectrum, because she wanted to ensure that not only herself, but but others and other faculty members and other parents in the community could get more support services and in 2022 I spent a lot of time giving her like a lot of resources to help like understand what college students on the autism spectrum need and in terms of more support with executive functioning, which is which is utilized to help a person's like thought process with the day to day activities that they do, to make sure that they're able to organize everything in a way that best fits them to learn and thrive and how to manage their time by understanding, like, how long does it take to do their homework assignments, versus other competing priorities such as like your, your play interests, your other social activities, recreational activities, extracurricular clubs, kind of understanding what importance you you have and what you need to prioritize. When people talk about autism spectrum disorder, what are they generally referring to and what does that mean to you? So with? Yes, with generally like referring to autism spectrum disorder is like, like is very broad. Like as a disability you have a lot of varying of different levels of autism spectrum, like you have people that are completely nonverbal, that do not talk. They they use something called an Ogg AAC devices, which is argumentative and cognitive communication, where they use a communication board to communicate everything be because there are non speaking individual you like you have people on the autism spectrum that do a lot of stemming, which is like having to rock back rock back and forth, kind of say kind of say some other things because that's like the way how they express themselves as true identity in order to be their true selves. And there's a lot of people that that believe that there's a lot of problems with stimming because they are being very disruptive to To other people in their presence and not kind of understanding or being aware of others, but that's like, how they express themselves. I personally have Asperger syndrome, which which my psychiatrist did diagnosed with me be because that's like used for someone that they labeled as a high functioning, but not all individuals feel, feel comfortable in labeling it like I'm someone with, with this, like with this or, I mean, having been on the autism spectrum that you have to understand that this is a norm in society that needs to happen, we have to acknowledge that this exist and then take the next step by understanding how does people with autism spectrum disorder interacting in your role? How, how does this come in contact with the data like day to day life and day to day activity, and people need to be prepared for it, honestly. So you mentioned stimming. Now that can be anything from as you said, rocking back and forth to some people will rub their hands or touch an object that they keep on them or stress ball, the stress ball, some people will just have constant movements, that those things are kind of a routine. They're they're sort of a comfort thing. Yep. It's, it's a comfort way for them to express themselves be be the true self be be who they are. And, like if you take away the stemming from someone, you're taking away a culturally appropriate practice for someone on the autism spectrum, when when you see like, I mean, I mean, the one thing that we have to move to is that seeing like disability and seeing on the autism spectrum, we have to become to a more cultural model that this is the way of the pride that someone shows that they're on the autism spectrum. And that is like I said, that's that's like a calming thing. So that and I noticed a lot of people have routines, they they do things in a certain order, or they know that this has to be done that this has to be done. Do you have routines that help you in your day to day one, one of the things that I know that I have every day is the support and mentors that I texted, reach out to the friendships that I've developed, through through over overcoming a lot of my own obstacles, to officiate basketball, at the high school level, as someone on the autism spectrum it with with I've officiated when I've been in Kan in the state of Kansas, in Massachusetts and Maryland From where I'm from and now here in the state, like in the state of Missouri, you just kind of have to know the people who have your back

everyday who strive you to, to have that source of strength within you every day. So if something happens with the routine, and there are changes is that challenging to you, depending on the day, it can, it can throw me off the rails. Because you have because as a person on the autism spectrum, you have to adapt more to other people that are like neurotypical non disabled because because our society is not ingrained in a way that to understand a process that a neurodivergent person on the autism spectrum is because of the way how they communicate and express themselves might not be complete thoughts.

**Paul Huddleston 08:35**

Now you've used a couple of terms neurodivergent and neurotypical. Yep. And I prefer those as opposed to what people would generally use normal and usually disabled, challenged, et cetera, one of those, that terminology is shifting now, and neurotypical and neurodivergent seem to be coming more into play with autism spectrum and a lot of other what people would consider invisible disabilities. Is that correct? Yes,

**Will Fried 09:07**

yes. And even people who have like ADHD, dyslexia dyscalculia, even like Crohn's disease, other autoimmune diseases do do identify themselves as neurodivergent we're seeing a lot of similarities with with ADHD, ADD, Autism Spectrum Disorder in terms of coaching services that are being provided for these individuals and what what I mean with coaching services, it's about exploring how the individual is on ways how they can manage their their time to do their homework where like, wait like where they have to develop a routine that best fits them to complete how it's done, maybe schedule some intervals and then have some and stimulation breaks and then go back and doing their homework, also teaching them the self determination skills, which is to set a goal, develop them and evaluate your goals and where your processes kind of I mean are and self determination comes from this idea, which was helping people and persons with disabilities get out of institutionalization.

**Paul Huddleston 10:28**

Right. So making them in charge of their own destiny, giving them that agency in their own life.

**Will Fried 10:33**

It Yeah, it's, it's, it's truly it definitely is with that.

**Paul Huddleston 10:38**

So, again, going back to neurotypical, most people would say that, in general, the world is geared toward neurotypical, what's it like moving through that world as someone who is neurodivergent

**Will Fried 10:52**

I'm like, like, I would say that people don't understand the way that you mean, the way that you write things. The way that you phrase things like they say, this can be like more confusing. And doing that like you like like at times you you have to expend your energy on doing more explanations to others of what you really need to do. And one of the things that I've kind of learned over the past few years is that there's one disability activist, Mia Mingus, who's coined a term called unforced intimacy, which means that people with disabilities have to disclose their most personal needs in order to get what they

need from able bodied, non disabled individuals. And we have to I think, as a society, acknowledge that this is happening and that and that abled bodied neurotypicals that don't have a disability don't have to disclose their most personal needs.

**Paul Huddleston 12:00**

When put like, that absolutely sounds wrong. But it also sounds I was about to say plausible, but sounds like something that definitely would be happening, because you see that in a lot of areas where you have to really bare your soul so to speak, in order for people to take you seriously on things. Is there anything we can do to help make people more comfortable with neurodivergent individuals or individuals who have an invisible disability?

**Will Fried 12:35**

I think, I think one of the things based off the research and spending the hours in the advocacy space and attending a lot of webinars, the biggest thing that I have learned is from Lydia XC Brown, who's a activist, a scholar, and an attorney and disability studies, lecturer at Georgetown University has created something called an access affirmation which I can go big, into, it's like when you're teaching a class, like I mean, like teaching a class or having an event, you have a statement at the beginning, where like, it's read about how in like about how you've, accept like, sitting in a way that feels comfortable to your body's having any comfort needs, such as any pillows, feeling free to pace the room or the area, walk, I mean, walk around, having your other like, I mean, be being able to express your even your gender identity with your pronouns, as well. If you're doing like a virtual event, kind of just knowing that you can like like, have your other cuddle animals, your other emotional support things, whatever you need to de-stimulate yourself, you have to redesign and reimagine what the classroom experience is going to look like. So the environment and for classrooms and events is built. So so we're building a more inclusive, normal idea.

**Paul Huddleston 14:19**

So something that where, regardless, if you're neurotypical, if you're neurodivergent, if you have positioning or motion issues where you have to be up and walking, all of those things would be acceptable in an ideal class. Yes, that would be I think, that sounds like a fantastic idea. Whoever decided that sitting down in one spot for hours is a great way to learn. That just it's,

**Will Fried 14:48**

it's not and then you can have people that have other stimulation or have other things like I mean, I mean, I mean, it's about read, it's read, read is redesigning to get have things, I mean, multimodal, also giving faculty and instructors the resources about how to put this into their discipline. Yeah,

**Paul Huddleston 15:15**

I completely agree with you on that, I think that would be a fantastic way to be inclusive for everyone. And I probably know a number of neurotypical individuals that would be grateful for the ability to get up and stretch or move during a class period, as opposed to sitting in one spot. So it's not something that's it's catering. It's, it's good.

**Will Fried** 15:44

It's also this. Like, it's also the, also the design of the classroom may not be inclusive, because you may not have a desk that's for right handed or left handed users, you don't have seats that are utilized for all different kinds of body types.

**Paul Huddleston** 16:02

Yes, I have witnessed some of those in classes that I have been in both assisting and taking. Was there anything else you want others to know about you? Or about autism spectrum disorder, Asperger's? Even just being neurodivergent?

**Will Fried** 16:25

related? I mean, like, I mean, like, I would definitely, I mean, I mean, say out there, like is that we have to come come into a way to stop treating people like on the autism spectrum, like they, like they are like mental, I mean, patients because baby because in terms of like the mental health side of things, there's, like, there's things where we're like, where they feel like the like, there's other behaviors of people on the autism spectrum, because of the how their like, nonverbal skills are perceived their, their social skills, as they go into adulthood, treating them at times like, like doing social skills, supports for adults on the autism spectrum to adapt to the neurotypical. I mean, folks, and we have to understand that the environment is the barrier for the individual that's causing the difficulty with their socialization with others.

**Paul Huddleston** 17:27

That was one thing that you brought up that I'm really interested in is, you know, so many people hear autism, and they think, more along the lines of in strictest terms, dis-ability, these people can't do x, y, z. And that's not the case.

**Will Fried** 17:47

It's, it's about finding their talents and their skills to create other I mean, opportunities that we I mean, have I mean in like, I mean, like in the St. Louis area, I mean, we do with with Easter Seals, Midwest have the link program, which teaches people with disabilities on the autism spectrum. I mean, like the soft skills and gives them a course to prepare them to go into to go into their fields of interests, and gives them coaching for what they kind of need. And then we have Starkloft Disability Institute that's been working with a lot of college students this area on the autism spectrum, other disabilities to help them through the path of how to embrace their disability identity, to go into a workplace environment.

**Paul Huddleston** 18:39

Will it has been wonderful talking to you today. I'm really glad you came by. Is there a way that anybody who's listening and would be interested in talking to you? Do they have to be on the Meramec campus? Or can you assist on any of the campuses? Or do you just refer back and forth?

**Will Fried** 18:54

So So typically, so typically, like what we do is that each of us with, like, we have an access Office on each of our campuses, and we do have an email address for for each access Office. But if someone

just wants to talk with me with more information about autism spectrum disorder, I will be happy to have a time to chat in what best fits them. And my email address is wfried@stlcc.edu

**Paul Huddleston** 19:27

All right, thank you so much. Well, it's been great talking to you. Thank you.