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STANFORD NEURODIVERSITY PROJECT

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Neurodiversity

is a concept that regards individuals with differences in brain function and behavioral traits as part of the normal variation in the human population.

Here at the Stanford Neurodiversity Project, we strive to establish a culture that treasures the strengths of each and every neurodiverse individual. We also work to empower neurodiverse individuals to build their identity and enhance their overall quality of life.

Featured Story

Perpetually in Character:

Diagnosed with Autism at Age 19, Isabelle Morris Shares Her Journey

By Helen Zhu

"I've realized that I can do all the things that I thought I'd be terrible at…[and] I'll still be terrible at them if I try to do them like a neurotypical person."

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Current Initiatives

Neurodiverse Student Support Program

The Neurodiverse Student Support Program (NSSP) is growing! After a successful launch this summer and fall, the program is continuing to accept new student participants and mentors. Structured around connection, learning, psychoeducation, and support, the program is focused on building a culture that treasures the strengths of neurodiverse individuals, empowers current students and attracts neurodiverse individuals to study at Stanford.

Program Overview

The Neurodiverse Student Support Program (NSSP) provides academic, social, career preparation, independent living, and mental health support free-of-cost to Stanford students. In NSSP, students utilize their unique talents in socially productive and personally fulfilling pursuits, whether they identify as neurodiverse with no formal diagnosis or have autism, ADHD, dyslexia, or other neurodiverse conditions.

Core Components

1. Topics in Neurodiversity: The PSYC 229 series, “Topics in Neurodiversity: Introduction and Advocacy,” is a one-unit course open to all Stanford undergraduate and graduate students. This class has three parts that are offered consecutively in the fall, winter, and spring quarters. All students in NSSP, as well as peer mentors, are encouraged to take this class.

2. Peer mentor program: Current and incoming freshmen are paired with upperclassmen peer mentors for the duration of the academic year. The peer mentors are paid; they are also trained by, and receive ongoing supervision from, Stanford Neurodiversity Project staff. Students and peer mentors work through a mentoring curriculum, and peer mentors also provide support in a variety of areas as needs arise.

3. Adult Neurodevelopment Clinic (ANC): This is a specialized clinic for neurodiverse adults with mental health needs. Students with a need for ongoing mental health support or medication management can be seen at this clinic.

4. Referrals: There are many resources on campus that, while not neurodiversity-specific, can nonetheless benefit neurodiverse students. Some of the offices to which we refer students include: the Office of Accessible Education, Schwab Learning Center, and BEAM Career Center. Referrals are provided on an individual basis, and we also assist students in navigating the various offices and procedures.

Who Can Participate?

Any Stanford undergraduate student who feels they would benefit from extra support and connection with a community of peers can participate in the program. Students can simply go to the Stanford Neurodiversity Program website and fill out the contact form to get started.

Support vs. Accommodations

Neurodiverse students possess a unique set of strengths and challenges. For Stanford students in particular, academics represents an area of strength. What many people don't realize is that while neurodiverse students may be incredibly talented academically, they may have difficulty with executive function, independent living skills ("adulting"), or navigating new social interactions in college.

Due to this, the traditional accommodations model alone is insufficient for neurodiverse students. Accommodations focus on providing equal access to the curriculum and physical spaces on campus, while the challenges often faced by neurodiverse individuals require additional education or support, and are outside the purview of the Americans with Disabilities Act. NSSP addresses this need by providing comprehensive support through the aforementioned components.

Campus Collaboration

Our support model is one of full inclusion and community integration. While we do have our own "in-house" supports, we are building a network of collaboration throughout the university. By working with existing resources on campus, we maximize the support for the students we serve and better prepare organizations to serve neurodiverse students. Over the past six months, the Stanford Neurodiversity Project has been collaborating with all levels of Residential Education. We have given presentations to the Residence Deans and Resident Fellows on the topic of neurodiversity and the resources our program offers. Additionally, we participated in the training of all (250+) Resident Assistants prior to the start of this school year.

Neurodiversity at Work

With approximately eighty percent of autistic individuals currently unemployed or underemployed, the Neurodiversity at Work (NaW) program aims to seek out qualified neurodiverse individuals from a variety of academic and professional backgrounds in order to help match them with suitable and meaningful employment.

To achieve our goal of cultivating a neurodiversity-friendly workplace, we provided specialized support not only to the neurodiverse individual but also her employer and co-workers. The specialized support spans from neurodiversity awareness training and best practices in the interview process before the job offer is made to on-going education and support after on-boarding. Most recently, Dr. Fung and his team have been awarded the Adult Transition Research Grant from Autism Speaks. Through this grant support, the SNP is charged to facilitate the hiring of and provide the support for eighty adults with autism in the next three years. To enhance the matching of neurodiverse adults to jobs in neurodiverse-friendly environments, we have established the Stanford Neurodiverse Candidate Registry and the Stanford Neurodiversity Job Bank in 2019. The SNP team has started extensive outreach to neurodiverse candidates and potential employers.

Objectives

The objectives of the Neurodiversity at Work (NaW) program are:

(i) to cultivate the concept of the strengths-based model of neurodiversity in organizations;

(ii) to empower managers and teams with skills to work with neurodiverse individuals;

(iii) to increase job readiness for neurodiverse individuals; and

(iv) to support both employers and neurodiverse employees throughout the employment cycle.

The NaW program aims to maximize the potential of individuals with autism by evaluating their cognitive strengths, personalities, and tendencies in a systematic fashion, thus placing individuals based on their overall strengths in available positions and training them in teams that embrace the value of neurodiversity.

Stanford Neurodiverse Candidate Registry

The candidate registry is now open to all applicants. Individuals matched with jobs via the candidate registry will be connected with prospective employers who embrace the strengths-based model of neurodiversity, which focuses on maximizing the potential of individuals with autism based on their strengths and interests.

Inclusion criteria to be registered and matched through the candidate registry includes: (i) being aged 18-55 years old; (ii) having a diagnosis of autism; (iii) possessing an IQ greater than 59; and (iv) having the ability to travel to work independently.

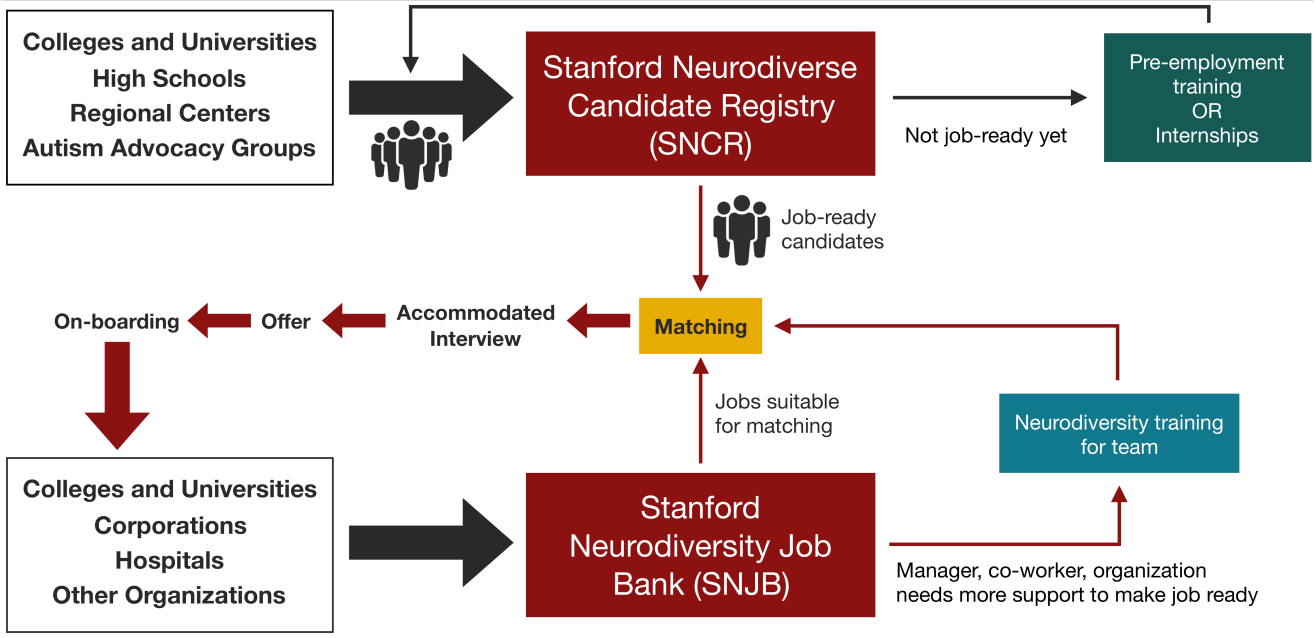
If you would like to enter the candidate registry, please visit our website (med.stanford.edu/neurodiversity) for instructions on how to become a part of this initiative.

Stanford Neurodiversity Job Bank

Individuals on the autism spectrum possess a unique way of thinking, thus potentially boosting innovation. However, their potential remains largely untapped.

The primary objective of the neurodiversity job bank is to connect prospective employers who embrace the strengths-based model of neurodiversity with individuals on the autism spectrum as well as to improve the efficiency of job matching (please see image below).

If you would like to hire neurodiverse individuals and find suitable employees to fill positions within your company, please visit our website (med.stanford.edu/neurodiversity) for instructions on how to become a part of this initiative.



High School Neurodiversity Outreach Program

This past summer, the Stanford Neurodiversity Project hosted its first High School Outreach Program. Nine students from high schools across California attended the two-week program which aimed to increase awareness and education, as well as to equip students to return to their respective schools and build neurodiversity initiatives, clubs, and committees of their own.

The program's curriculum sought to create a meaningful and deep understanding of neurodiversity and the often complex and various factors which surround it. Students gained knowledge on issues such as neurodiverse conditions and their comorbidities, the strengths-based model of neurodiversity, design-thinking processes in relation to neurodiversity, and navigating advocacy on a manageable scale. They also participated in a variety of activities which encouraged collaboration and the implementation of their new knowledge on the topic.

Zachary Fung, one of the program's participants, shares his perspective on his time during and following the Outreach Program:

"During my time at the summer camp, my campmates and I participated in various lectures and activities. The type of activity varied every day, but one of the most memorable activities I had fun with was the design-thinking process activity, where all of us would create our own wallet that was more secure than an average one, but also not as costly. Personally, it was fun making the wallet itself, although I had to be aware of the material cost. However, I'm also looking forward to spreading my new knowledge on neurodiversity and design-thinking to my friends. One day, we invited a few guest speakers over to the camp. Some of these speakers were brain doctors; others were experts on neurodiversity. Eventually, I was eager to start my very own neurodiversity club to spread the word to my own school. What I ended up learning was that neurodiversity is not just knowing about the conditions, but also to spread awareness of these conditions as positive talents. I would highly recommend other high school students like myself, neurodiverse or neurotypical, to join the camp and learn more about the concept of neurodiversity and the awareness that goes with it. Even better, they can also start their own neurodiversity club for their own high school. After getting approved by my school administrator, I finally was able to establish my very own club. The goal of the club is to generally spread awareness about autism throughout the campus." ■

Featured Story

Perpetually in Character:

Diagnosed at Age 19, Isabelle Morris Shares Her Journey

By Helen Zhu

The clicking of keyboards reverberates through the space of the Stanford School of Medicine Psychiatry building as Isabelle Morris, sitting at her cubicle with earbuds plugged in, works on material for the Stanford Neurodiversity Project.

After originally being erroneously misdiagnosed with borderline personality disorder, Isabelle was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) at age nineteen. She took a leave of absence halfway though her freshman year at Stanford for inpatient mental health treatment, which she anticipated to be a four- to six-week stay; she ended up taking a year and a half off of school. Due to the fact that she couldn't hide her meltdowns because she was living there, her therapist in treatment began to notice a pattern. Isabelle was extensively evaluated, and while she scored in the 99th percentile for IQ, she was in the 8th percentile for adaptive functioning. While many may have had a negative reaction to these results, Isabelle was relieved as it provided an explanation for her struggles.

"The funniest thing to me is that I scored in the the eighth percentile, while thinking that I gave all the 'right' answers, which means I just had no concept for how much easier other people had it, how much I was struggling. And that was the first time that it had really been noticed. I didn't cause problems for my teachers: you didn't need to worry about me academically, I preferred to talk to my teachers than to my peers; teachers liked me; I was well-behaved; I was very rule-governed. So the fact that everything else was a giant struggle was brushed off with, 'She's really smart, so there's not a problem,' and this was the first time anyone looked holistically at these two things," Isabelle said. "So that was really validating for me since there's a reason I felt like life was impossibly difficult; there's a reason that me being really smart doesn't translate to me being really on top of my life and managing to live on my own and things like that."

Despite having many accomplishments on paper, Isabelle had a completely different experience internally that others did not, and possibly could not, observe.

"It's easier for me to work on calculus homework than it is to wash my face, brush my teeth, and put pajamas on. And I was left with the only explanation that I just needed to do better, work harder, and was kind of beating my head against the wall, feeling like I was failing at every turn. But all of these things, only I knew I was failing at," she said. "The rest of the world kind of looked at me and all the things that I was accomplishing on paper, and everything looked perfect—this kid is going to Stanford, this kid has a scholarship, check all the boxes. And then having this internal experience that was completely different from that was the thing I really struggled with."

> *"Yes, I graduated from Stanford with above a 4.0 GPA, and my honors thesis, and was a varsity athlete all four years. However, the thing I'm most proud of is that since July, I've figured out how to get my teeth brushed, like, six days out of the week.*

Something that most people do without a second thought on a daily basis, brushing one's teeth, is one of Isabelle's proudest achievements. This year she formulated a schedule to brush her teeth on a regular basis, and succeeded.

"To most people, it's not obvious that I was not able to figure out getting my teeth brushed until, I think, July. Yes, I graduated from Stanford with above a 4.0 GPA, and my honors thesis, and was a varsity athlete all four years. However, the thing that I am most proud of is that since July, I've figured out how to get my teeth brushed, like, six days out of the week. Because I need visual reminders and I need it to be built into my schedule, I have an app for a child on my phone about schedules. And you can't see that," she said. "Those things are harder for people to observe, like on the

surface, which is why I think being in treatment was the environment that it took, unfortunately, for me to get a diagnosis."

Instead of the self-injurious stimming (stimulating) that was not as apparent, like scratching her scalp until it bled, she has now learned to stim in a healthy way by doing things like using "stim" (fidget) toys to keep her hands busy.

"Now, I'm not willing to end up getting my sensory needs met by self-harming, whether I'm paying attention or not. I'm not willing to do that just so I look normal to other people. After getting diagnosed, I've learned to do it my way, and other people will be fine. I'm not willing to sacrifice my mental health," Isabelle said. "Yeah, I look more autistic now, but I'm really proud of it. It's not a thing that I'm inventing because I got a diagnosis; I just stopped trying to hide it and am slowly unlearning all of the maladaptive coping skills that I developed."

While some people in her life struggled to understand her diagnosis, the majority were supportive. Isabelle's mother was no exception. "My mom was proud of me before this diagnosis became part of me, but she also now embraces the fact that I'm autistic," Isabelle said. "She's fine letting other people know, and she's been really great."

Since receiving her diagnosis, Isabelle has embraced autism as a part of her life, both as part of her work as well as developing a way to express herself. "It's not that autism is, like, an excuse to behave however I want, but I am a lot more authentic and a lot more open to other people," stated Isabelle. "If someone says, 'Why are you not making eye contact?' I now have a language in which to express and explain this."

Growing up, Isabelle disliked public speaking, and that carried over into college. She realized, however, that she had only disliked it because presentations were the times she had to pretend to be the most neurotypical. Once she began integrating statements into the beginning of her speeches explaining why she wouldn't be making eye contact, the negative emotions and stress associated with public speaking faded away, and the mystery was removed for her audience. The only thing that changed was that she was not performing tasks "in character."

"I've realized that I can do all the things that I thought I'd be terrible at," she reflected, "[and] I'll still be terrible at them if I try to do them like a neurotypical person."

No longer willing to sacrifice her well-being just to "look normal," Isabelle has learned to perform tasks in the most comfortable and efficient way for her.

"I've had a lot more opportunities to network, because if I was trying to do that like a neurotypical, I don't know how I would have done that. Because there's not a social script for that, I would have just avoided talking to that person. The biggest thing for me is that all these social rules that I spent all this time learning, they're actually not that important; I'm just going to stop pretending that I'm something I'm not," Isabelle said. "And I'm actually way more effective at everything I do because I'm not spending all of that mental energy essentially feeling like an alien trying to pretend to be a human. I'm going to do it my way, and that's going to be okay. And if it's not okay for someone, I probably don't want to be around them."

Isabelle's journey to a place of acceptance and peacefulness is one that is not foreign to those diagnosed with ASD as adults. Unlearning maladaptive behaviors and replacing them with behaviors that encourage and promote self-growth is something that Isabelle excels at, however, because of her openness and willingness to accept and embrace parts of herself she was always told to mask prior to her diagnosis. Throughout my time with Isabelle, I noted two specific traits within her: resilience and tenacity. These qualities are what shape Isabelle's successes, no matter how big or small they may appear to be. Her courage is both admirable and uncompromising. ■

Helen Zhu is a student of The Harker School. She is a passionate advocate for neurodiversity and has interests rooted in interdisciplinary research involving neuroscience, music, psychology, and computer sciences.

Program News

Awareness and Education

Our group has given presentations at conferences and summits around the world, including the United Nations. If you would like to learn more about neurodiversity and are interested in having us speak to your group or organization, please reach out to us via email (stanfordneurodiversityproject@stanford.edu).

Special Interest Group (SIG) in Neurodiversity

The Special Interest Group (SIG) in Neurodiversity is a grassroots effort aimed at promoting neurodiversity awareness, acceptance, and education. Monthly SIG meetings feature guest speakers from a variety of personal, educational, and professional backgrounds. Our meetings are attended in-person and virtually by members around the world.

If you are interested in joining the SIG, please feel free to send us an email at stanfordneurodiversityproject@stanford.edu, and we would be more than happy to add you to our mailing list.

Course: Topics in Neurodiversity

The PSYC 229 series, “Topics in Neurodiversity: Introduction and Advocacy,” is a one-unit course open to all Stanford undergraduate and graduate students. The course contains three parts that are offered consecutively in the fall, winter, and spring quarters.

In PYSC 223B, “Topics in Neurodiversity: Design Thinking Approaches,” students explore ways of maximizing inclusivity in areas such as education, employment, and community. Using the design-thinking process and the universal design framework, students design and develop processes, systems, experiences, and/or products to maximize inclusivity and the potential of neurodiverse individuals.

Neurodiversity Celebration Week

Stanford Neurodiversity Summit

This spring, we will be hosting Stanford’s first Neurodiversity Summit!

The theme of this year's Stanford Neurodiversity Summit is "Scaling Up the Neurodiversity at Work Initiative". This summit is a unique conference bringing together neurodiverse/neurodivergent individuals and jobseekers, employers, service agencies, educators and students, parents, and professionals from all areas of the field. The conference will feature a job fair and reverse job fair (employers visit the job-seekers) and panels covering a variety of topics.

We've noticed that many conferences on the topic of neurodiversity are actually not set up to be neurodiversity-friendly. So in planning our conference, we are applying Universal Design concepts to maximize accessibility and inclusion. We *want* neurodiverse/neurodivergent individuals to come, be comfortable, and be able to participate.

Confirmed speakers include:

- Hala Annabi, PhD
- Neil Barnett (Microsoft)
- *Siena Castellon (Neurodiversity Celebration Week)
- *Marcelle Ciampi, MEd (Ultranauts)
- Michael Fieldhouse, MBA (DXE Technology)
- Lawrence Fung, MD, PhD (Stanford University)
- Alison Morantz, JD, PhD (Stanford University)
- *Haley Moss, Esq
- Anthony Pacilio (JP Morgan Chase)
- *Paulette Penzvalto, PGDip, AD (Google)
- Hiren Shukla (Ernst & Young)
- Jose Velasco (SAP)

* indicates speaker identifies as neurodiverse/neurodivergent

For more details on the summit, including registration information, visit med.stanford.edu/neurodiversity/ncw.

Neurodiversity Unity Contest

Calling for creative expressions of neurodiversity and unity!

This contest is an opportunity to creatively express belonging, coming together, and connection as our authentic, individual, unique, and neurodiverse selves.

With this contest, we challenge you to consider what inspires you and brings you and others together.

This contest is open to all: students, therapeutic participants, advocates, parents, artists, song writers—all neurodiverse or neurotypical—this contest is a call for a look, feel, sound, image, written, sung or spoken word or symbol that represents celebrating neurodiversity and bringing people together. Consider celebrating strengths that unify us all, such as perseverance, loyalty, honesty, and deep interests and knowledge.

Contest winners will have their representation of neurodiversity and unity shared virtually with the wider community; it will also be featured as part of Neurodiversity Celebration Week. ***Submissions are due by March 1, 2020.*** ■

SNP Staff and Contact Information

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SNP Staff Photo

SNP staff pictured left to right:
Back row: Isabelle Morris, Janet Miller, David James, Kevin Sun, Lawrence Fung
Front row: Christy Matta, Vicky Lam, Quyen Nguyen, Marci Schwartz

Stanford Neurodiversity Summit

Scaling Up the Neurodiversity at Work Initiative

MARCH

14

When: Saturday, March 14th, 8 AM to 5:30 PM

Where: Li Ka Shing Center at Stanford University, 291 Campus Drive, Palo Alto

Registration: Registration is free! For registration details, visit: med.stanford.edu/neurodiversity/ncw

About the conference:

The Stanford Neurodiversity Summit is a unique conference bringing together neurodiverse/neurodivergent individuals and jobseekers, employers, service agencies, educators and students, parents, and professionals from all areas of the field. We are planning the conference with Universal Design in mind, to maximize accessibility and inclusion. The conference will feature a job fair and reverse job fair (employers visit the jobseekers) and panels covering academics, employment, K-12 and college education, and mental health.

For more information, visit med.stanford.edu/neurodiversity/ncw

If you have any questions about the summit, please send us an email: stanfordneurodiversityproject@stanford.edu

What is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity is a concept that regards individuals with differences in brain function and behavioral traits as part of the normal variation in the human population.

What is Unity to you?

It may be a look, feel, sound, image, or symbol that represents celebrating neurodiversity and bringing people together. Your submission may include any medium you choose.

video | art | poem | music | story or written word | image | poster | gesture | color

How to Submit

Scan QR Code or type https://tinyurl.com/y5k9d2me into your browser

Or click here

→ Upload Your Submission in .jpeg. Mp4, .doc, PDF, .mov format

→ That's it!

Unity Contest

Neurodiversity Celebration Week

March 14-20, 2020

The Contest

1. **The Project:** Design a creative expression celebrating neurodiversity and unity that can be shared with the wider community and featured during Neurodiversity Celebration Week. March 14-20, 2020. (Individual and Group projects welcome).
2. Criteria for review will include ability to be shared widely and easily on a virtual platform.
3. **Submission Deadline:** March 1, 2020 review and selection begins
4. **The Winner:** Winner(s) will be notified March 9, 2020.
5. **The Event:** The winning Expression of Unity will be shared virtually and in person as a central feature to Neurodiversity Celebration Week on Monday March 16, 2020.
6. **Prizes:** First prize will be honored with a plaque. 2nd and 3rd prizes will receive a certificate and, along with honorable mentions, will be displayed during the opening celebration.

Connecting Around the Globe

Winning project shared virtually to open Neurodiversity Celebration week