



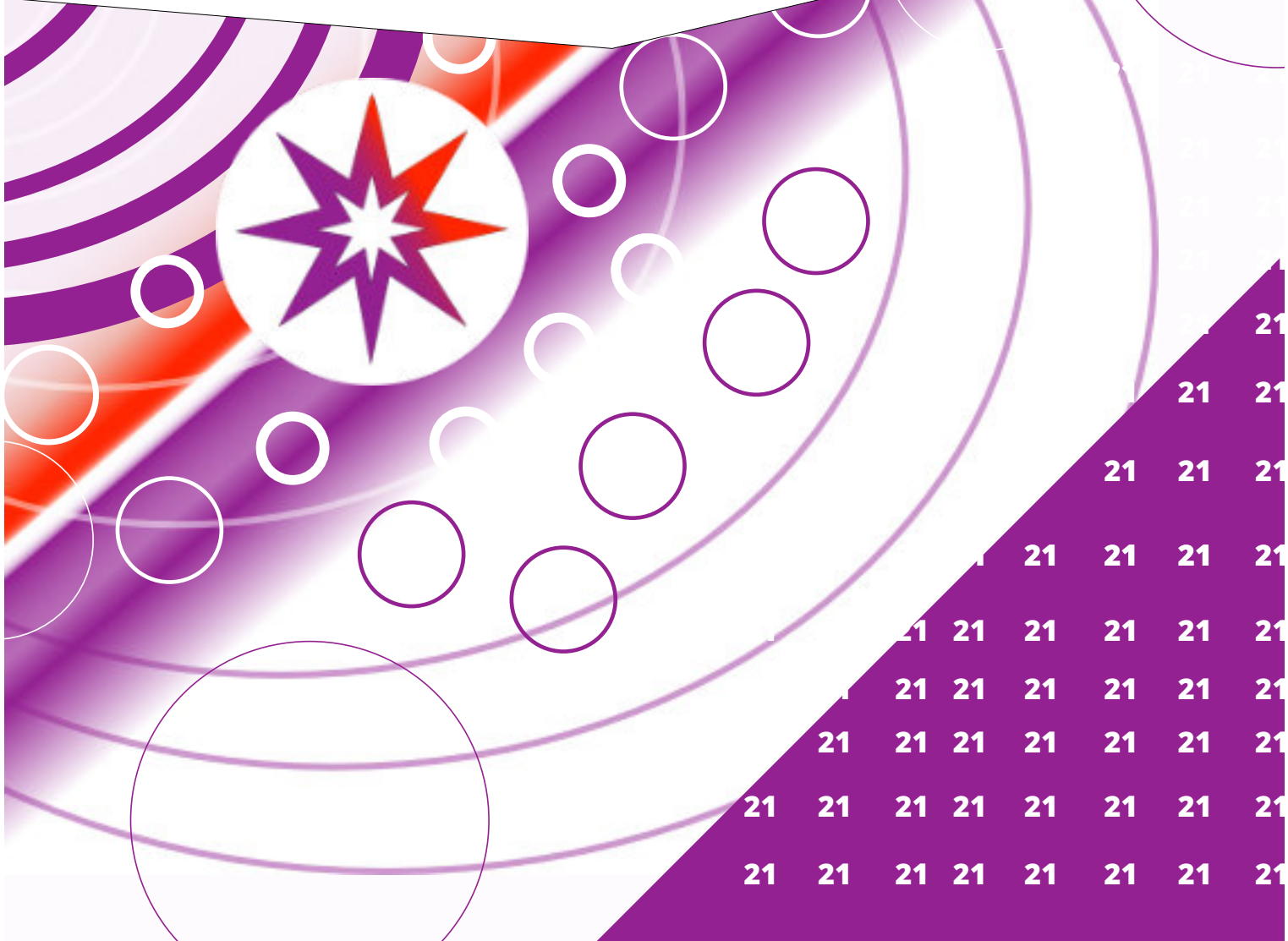
Twenty-one insight

Bitesize edition Part 1

**An insightful analysis of Hidden Differences
During the twenty-one year of the project director
in providing awareness projects**

**Autism, ADHD, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia
and Social Anxiety**

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Contents

Introduction 3

Chapter one: The Difficulties 4

Chapter two: Topics & issues

Understanding and information	5
Care, support and interventions	6
Influencing policy	6
Empowering	7
Social attitudes	10
Awareness insights and effects	11
Distinctions of difficulties	14
Diversity awareness	15
Generalised approaches and solutions	15
General disability awareness	16
Easy read materials	16
Autism-friendly zones	17
Acceptance	17

Chapter three: How did differences are represented

Learning disability misrepresentation	18
Characteristics	18
Limited representation	21
Limited Voices	22
Employment and education	23
Other opportunities	24
Hidden Differences representation	23
Public services	24
Public and other services	25

Further Information 26

Further details 27

About the author..... 28



Introduction

This document marks twenty-one years since the project director Keith Mckenzie started a variety of awareness projects, campaigns and activities.

This includes Differences Originals projects (formally Differences & Autism Challenge) with Plus Value Awareness since 2015.

The purpose of this document is to provide objective analysis and observations over two decades from the project director. It covers the progress of understanding, examples of valuing the setbacks and suggestions of positive ways forward.

Please note the project doesn't cover every single issue but only matters through the project director's observation. Also, the projects mainly cover the human aspects related to able-bodied, independent and intelligent adults with hidden differences associated with autism (mild & moderate level), ADHD, Dyslexia (short term memory), Dyspraxia and Social Anxiety. However, the document does not apply to the classic or severe symptoms of the conditions mentioned.

The method of this document is through observations of ground-level expressions from hidden differences from social media, blogs and news articles and other sources online. Also the project director observations through society along with articles and research materials.

Please note the Analysis & conclusions to the issues covered are available in a special supplementary documents. See Page 27 for details.

The Difficulties

Hidden Differences is a collective term used by this awareness initiative related to physically abled, articulate and independent individuals who live with several difficulties which are not visually noticed to the eye.

This is associated with autism (mild & moderate levels*), ADHD, Dyslexia (short-term memory), Dyspraxia and Society.

How a life affects a person with hidden differences can affect specific abilities which most people would take for granted.

The examples including mind related abilities (including memory & comprehension), physical and practical skills. It also covers communication, interaction, managing specific environments, reading, writing & calculation.

Note:

* - The information on this document does not apply to severe levels of autism as their difficulties are greater than mild & moderate. Also, the issues and approaches are different therefore it would not be appropriate to generalise across the Autistic spectrum. Also, this insight document does not apply to hidden differences with sight-related difficulties.

Topics & issues

The aspects of understanding & information

The approach for information and understanding can vary depending on the specific conditions.

Understanding & information

How information is presented for better understanding depends on how this is communicated and presented. Because of this, certain conditions are better represented than others.

Out of all of the conditions linked with hidden differences, the autistic spectrum is the most complicated and can be very challenging for providing and accessing relevant understanding depending on the individual's ability levels. A particular approach is presenting a generalised approach related to information especially with the autistic spectrum. However, this can lead to inaccurate generalisations and misrepresentation, leading to many boundaries. Especially those with articulate and independent autistic individuals where they are easily disbelieved and would be wrongly judged based on perceptions and characteristics.

Various difficulties and factors can affect a dyslexic person. However, this can be misinterpreted around sight and legibility only. However, short-term memory is becoming increasingly recognised as a difficulty with Dyslexia.

Hypersensitivity is the most recognisable factor which is associated with ADHD. But that's not the end of the story, some people of ADHD are well understood. However, there are additional examples of difficulties which may not be noticed including memory, physical appearance and practical tasks. However, through the project director observations on social media there is a misperception related to behaviour and medical treatments rather than understanding.

Several organisations have provided a variety of understanding information on Dyspraxia, despite other hidden differences are greater recognised.

Also, various information is available on how life affects Social Anxiety. However, it can be easily overshadowed by general anxiety and Mental Health as a whole. What doesn't help the process is the false generalisation of shyness without considering the mental health implications.

However, there have been certain voices that wrongly misrepresent Dyslexia against their characteristics and an issue of parenting.

Topics & issues

Understanding & information

Depending on the condition of hidden differences, the presentation of understanding and information can be overbearing and some provide simplified examples or generalised information.

The dangers of generalisation and simplified information can cause distorted perceptions and inaccurate profiling.

For example, they have been many situations that the autistic spectrum that can be wrongly be associated with mental health and personality disorders and therefore been mistreated against their human rights

Care, support and interventions

Some experts and professionals have a generalised approach towards hidden differences around support, care and interventions. Many people with differences would see these approaches as derogatory and deliberating against their intelligence levels. Some of the languages used to provide understanding and services can be seen as demeaning towards a person with differences. When the project director was presenting Plus Value Awareness at a major awareness charity's annual general meeting. One of the charity's management made a generalised presumption that my project is about changing the behaviour of hidden differences. This means certain experts make an one-sided judgement of an autistic person difficulties is a kind of behaviour. This type of perception lacks any human aspects or ground-level insight and context.

Influencing policy

When it comes to developing policies on understanding, information and solutions are involved by experts and professionals linked with specific research. This is mainly related to studies and analysis related to health, medical, science and other factors. There is some limited contribution from hidden differences to take part in particular topics and issues. However, some of the awareness activities lack any ground level insight and context because certain consultation is only limited to multi-option surveys.

Topics & issues

Empowering

There is a lot of emphasis on awareness, information and understanding. When it comes to empowering and embracing the overall observation seemed very mixed, depending on specific hidden differences. As mentioned elsewhere there is some positive aspects of empowering along with an increasing amount of achievers and role models with hidden differences.

One of the stronger examples is related to Dyslexia and the activities from the organisation "Made by Dyslexia" which provides education and promoting positive strengths and attributes. Several years earlier the British Dyslexia Association developed a special partnership project called "Dyslexia.io" which promoted positive attributes online and on social media.

Within the recent years Neurodiversity has emerged with a variety of positive examples of projects and activities around the world. Not only it this covers hidden differences but also other types neurological conditions such as Tourettes Syndrome.

This was developed by a sociologist Judy Singer with journalist Harvey Blume in 1998. However, neurodiversity has been well recognised in the recent years. This has expanded to several organisations and support groups at community levels along with campaigners and awareness initiatives.

However, beyond using neurodiversity or Dyslexia, there are very limited examples of empowerment specifically for Autism, ADHD or Dyspraxia. Companies and businesses are gradually to embrace neurodiversity. However, there is a long way to go, through the observations the project director there haven't seen a single example of high-pressure profile politicians who would embrace neurodiversity apart from politicians who live with hidden differences. Frequently there are high profile voices of generalisation of encouraging more disabilities (includes hidden differences) into employment without considering ground-level insight and context. This has been addressed several times in patronising and lecturing tone such as "having a sense of purpose and to contribute to society". However no emphasis mentioned on any strengths and positive attributes a person may have.

Though observations there are limited high profile examples on how hidden differences can be a positive asset to business, communities and the rest of society. As well as their unique experiences, insight and expertise. This does not mean any type of participation has not addressed this, however there is a lack of high-profile embracement at the same levels as other members of society.

However, there are some positive examples of empowering hidden differences by organisations and charities at the local & community level. This is also developed by parents, and those living with hidden differences with their valuable insights & context. They have greater opportunities to share and connect with society in a variety of ways including online, blogs, podcasts, videocasts, social media and video conferencing.

Topics & issues

Empowering

The World first Neurodiversity Celebration Week began in 2018 created by the award winning campaigner and advocate Siena Calleston which lives with Autism, ADHD, Dyslexia and Dyspraxia. This education event has expanded to different countries and territories around the world. Also, businesses, government, authorities, public service organisations and community organisations have embraced this event in recent years

Me.decoded is a neurodiversity embracing project created by Helen Needham to promote the positives and value of Neurodiversity.

Journalist John Offord hosts a series of interviews on the award-winning Different Minds podcast, featuring a variety of neurodiversity role models.

The organisations Masked Off by Venessa Bobb and A2nd Voice by Lauren Fernandez has been involved with community projects training and seminars to address autistic life experiences generally and within the multicultural communities. Also, both organisations work in partnership with different organisations at the community, local & national level

There are many more projects and groups developed by individuals with Autism, Dyslexia ADHD Social Anxiety and Dyspraxia at community and local levels

Parents and family members of hidden differences have a major role in embracing and campaigning positive initiatives

Bernie & Stephen Adams, autistic parents and are supporting friends of the project director who has committed to embracing the autistic spectrum positively with a range of projects and have hosted international campaigners and influencers to the UK from around the world.

Carrie and David Grant are parents of young people with the autistic spectrum have been campaigning to spectrum access to education and two in place positive aspects of young people on the spectrum.

Similarly, Christine & Paddy McGuinness also campaign-specific issues affecting the autistic spectrum through their experiences as parents of autistic children.

Anna Kennedy OBE has committed to embracing the autistic spectrum, education campaigns, projects, events and broadcasting. This includes the showcase events Autism's Got Talent & Autism Hero Awards. And that hosts many campaigns including the annual give us a break drawing anti-bullying week. And I also close a regular radio show that interviews a variety of influential people of the autistic spectrum from all walks of life.

Topics & issues

Empowering

Also, Paula McGowan MBE has been campaigning to improve healthcare experiences towards autism and individuals with learning disabilities. Based on her experiences her son Oliver sadly died through mistreatment though over medication. The project director attended her presentation over her experience with Oliver and her campaign to change health care in how they treats people with autism and learning disabilities in the UK.

Similarly, a mother Melanie Leahy has been campaigning for around ten years searching for accountability and demanding some answers after her son tragically died in a mental health unit. This is after so many years of legal actions and enquiries without a clear action.

Topics & issues

Social attitudes: Traditional Presumptions

There are still some members of society with old fashioned perceptions and attitudes related to a person's hidden difficulties. Including disregarding a person's difficulties and would make negative implications, linking gaps of required abilities with parenting and lacking discipline. This type of ignorance is not only insulting to a person with differences it is also very offensive towards parents and family members of hidden differences and communities who are trying to support and embrace hidden differences positively.

Due to the increasing number of individuals being diagnosed, some people have obsolete judgements such as "too many people diagnosed". Through the project director observations there have been an increasing amount of one-sided opinions has been made against hidden differences in the press and media. This usually from high profile figures and professionals that do not have any insight or context on how a person with differences lives.

Sadly some people disapproves on embracing hidden differences and would respond with outdated attitudes including not to display any sign of difficulties with language such as "pressurise themselves harder" and unrealistic demands such as "act and think correctly."

Despite this kind of mindset from the late 20th Century, these attitudes still occurs today. Also there has been an increasing amount of lazy & trivialising attitudes that judges particular persons with hidden differences through perceptions and stereotyping. For example, there have been constant news stories that falsely presumes that the Russian president lives with autism because of perception from how he presents himself. This type of language is lazy type casting and it is an indirect offence.

Another kind of response is to disrespectful against hidden differences who has faced negative life challenges and situations. Without knowing any context and insight many have responded such as "you brought it on to yourself". This is used as an automatic rejection to downgrade and underestimate what are the experiences of a person with differences mentioned.

Also, this type of attitude occurs with false implications that a person with differences did something wrong to cause their mistreatment, while in reality the prejudiced person has made a distorted perception and ignorance towards hidden differences and use this and make their lives difficult. This ranges from misogynistic harassment to aggressive and disrespectful threats to undervalue a person with hidden differences dignity or when disagreeing.

Topics & issues

Social attitudes: Unrealistic expectations

As mentioned elsewhere many people haven't accepted articulate and independent adults who live with hidden differences. This can lead to pressurises a person to hide their difficulties and put a strain on themselves by using masking techniques. This can lead the hostility, discrimination and disrespectful attitudes. if they are displaying any differences.

Awareness insights & Aspects: Greater amount of positive achievers

The positive aspect of awareness over the twenty-one years with the increasing amount of achievers and role models with hidden differences. This is important as they can share their ground-level insight, experience and context which some awareness professionals and experts cannot. This means the achievers from hidden differences are more positive than the generalised approach to awareness greater inspiration. Find out more on the achievers and role models within the representation chapter of this document.

Awareness insights & Aspects: Summary awareness of understanding

There is a variety of awareness and understanding information is available online and from many awareness organisations and support groups. Some of the approaches have an accurate insight, Meanwhile other present their information with a generalisation of difficulties and general associations with each of the conditions.

Some of the descriptive language contains scientific references and perceptions. The medical aspects may be very important from the scientific and medical community, however, this can cause problems if these types of communications are used inappropriately along with associated topics.

Topics & issues

Awareness insights & Aspects: Summary awareness of understanding)

The project director attended a seminar back in 2000 organised by South Maudsley Hospital in South London with a mixture of scientific experts and achievers living with the autistic spectrum. This was presented to an audience with a variety of support organisations, medical professionals, individuals with autism along with families and support groups.

During this event, a presentation was made by a medical professional. Throughout this presentation, this person kept making medical and scientific references on educating an audience including people including autistic people. This type of communication was very inconsiderate and dehumanising, this caused a high amount of distress to the audience and have provoked many people with autism anxiety attacks and emotional despair. This is because the presentation makes them feel less human. The event itself was temporarily stopped and despite the hurt and despair caused, the medical professional who hosted the presentation didn't apologise or show any consideration and how the autistic audience felt.

Another problem caused by certain professionals within the awareness environment has an approach with imposing fundamental information without any consideration towards the person with differences.

This also occurred when an awareness professional provided a mini-presentation to a group of autistic adults in Birmingham and was instructed to watch a traditional educational documentary on how many intimate relationships are traditionally formed between men & women. The document narrated and how women chose a man for a relationship as a potential father to form a family. The documentary has a very high amount of medical and scientific language.

Again this causes the audience of autistic adults upset with extremely emotional distress to a level when the autistic audience were crying. This sort of inconsiderate presentation and videos makes the autistic audience feel inadequate or a failure.

Two examples of how awareness experts and professionals can provide awareness inappropriately which not only dehumanises a person with differences but makes them feel less human and be wrongly undervalued.

Topics & issues

Awareness insights & Aspects: language

Another problem of the awareness approach is the language which makes perceptive judgement without context and insight.

This can potentially damage the creditability towards a person with differences. For example, the word behaviour can be used inappropriately with descriptions used similarly towards children. This can cause many negativity and problems against a specific person with differences.

Also, if a person with differences was provoked upset, with anxiety and emotional despair deliberately by a prejudiced person or group of people, the person with differences would be wrongly blamed for a situation. Meanwhile in reality a person with differences was compromised into a situation beyond where they can't cope by a prejudiced or intolerant person causing the autistic person psychological and emotional side effects. This type of language is also used for difficulties and some have used it as problems of abilities. This inappropriate kind of description can be seen as offensive and disrespectful for people with differences who face many life obstacles and challenges, not through no fault of their own.

The examples mentioned can cause negative stigma which implies they are wrongly categorised as badly behaved as a choice. This type of perceptive language is not just used by individuals who don't fully understand hidden differences but also by certain officials within organisations that are supposed to provide understanding. This can be very damaging for a person with differences self-worth where they can be wrongly discredited by other officials in the community without any context and insight.

We have to be very careful in the language we communicate and how we perceived how a person with differences responding or coping situations. It is very important to have with context and insight before many judgements. This is why representative voices are essentials for accurate and concise understanding. Find out more on the representation chapter.

One of many life challenges is to confront any myths and stereotypes. Despite some of the stereotypes and myths are challenged, it is sometimes not enough to change public perceptions. One of the reasons is because there are so many closed minds on understanding with too much emphasis on scientific and medical aspects.

This can cause prejudiced attitudes which undermines a person with a hidden differences place in Society.

Topics & issues

Distinctions of difficulties

With certain hidden differences, there is a lack of a distinction of the varying levels of abilities.

There is a variety of information on understanding differences within specific conditions.

However many people still don't grasp the variations with how difficulties can differ from person to person. This is not only on the type of difficulties but the varying ability levels.

For example, with Dyslexia, most people are associated with reading and writing challenges which are not the same as short-term memory challenges.

The autistic spectrum has a complex set of difficulties and ability levels. This leads to misinterpretation because some people on the mild end of the spectrum can be disbelieved against the severe end.

Though the project director observation many people haven't grasp any sort of Anxiety including Social anxiety. Sadly misinterpretation can occur with lack of support and can be judged as a form of shyness.

There is much more to any ADHD than hypersensitivity it can affect every detailed task and action most people take for granted.

With Dyspraxia, many examples go unnoticed beyond the difficulty of practical tasks and following lists. Overall, short term memory & anxiety are the least recognised difficulties throughout all of the hidden differences therefore they a person with differences can be misjudge and unfairly discredited.

Topics & issues

Diversity awareness

There is the inconstancy of understanding and information of hidden differences from different diverse backgrounds.

There are many workshops and training on specific areas including women and men at a high level. At the community level there is a greater insight into multicultural backgrounds and LGBT along with representative voices. Despite the importance of variations, it has led to resentment on social media especially from some men with hostility against women with differences. There have been voices with the awareness environments which has mentioned that men from a multicultural background are less represented and have limited voices. This means they are highly likely to be judged negatively due to misrepresentation.

Generalised approaches & solutions

As mentioned elsewhere, some organisations and services related to awareness, health & social care use a generalised approach towards solutions. This includes understanding, support, intervention and supervision.

However, these examples should not be the ultimate way forward. Some people with differences will find these examples as backwards and deliberating especially for those who are ambitious and passionate.

Topics & issues

General disability access

In the recent years certain public facilities for the physically disabled and the blind have been expanded towards a variety of invisible disabilities (including hidden differences) who appear physically able. This has caused major tensions from the physically disabled and are frustrated with their conclusion that these facilities should be only for them and not anyone else. This includes the blue badge priority parking (including the blue badge schemes at supermarkets, hospitals and other public facilities) and toilets for disabilities. Despite many people with invisible disabilities are pleased with the adjustments at these for them, it has caused an increasing amount of criticism and in some cases hostility against individuals including hidden differences and their families.

Easy read materials.

Certain public services and care providers have presented certain documents in a easy read approach. This is usually presented with oversimplified use of clip art images of very large size text. These documents are essential for learning disabilities such as Downs Syndrome. However, these type of documents can seen as inappropriate for articulate adults with Autism and Dyslexia. One example is the official easy read edition of the coronavirus guidelines. They have presented these documents with a very simplified layout of text and images with clipart images including images of thumbs up and cut images of people. This kind of presented document is very insulting to the intelligence of hidden differences and is very embarrassing. This type of easy read documents are also used generally including care plans by some providers of supported living or home care.

It is very important to avoid the broad-brush approach when creating and presenting legible materials. This means creating appropriate more intelligent presented materials for hidden differences without creating the stigma associating legibility and limited intelligence.

Topics & issues

Autism-friendly zones

Autism-friendly zones (or quiet zone) are created for autistic families in particular those with children and certain adults on the spectrum and for adult support groups to access places that are customised to be quieter, less noisy and less busy and to reduce stress. The scheme has been developed at various locations such as cinemas, theatres, supermarkets and art centres.

However inappropriate suggestions have been made towards independent adults with autism by staff or management to redirect towards these autism-friendly time slots if they can't cope with the way they are treated. (Even if the suggestion is inappropriate for them). Similar suggestions have been made towards independent people with autism after an accidental incident occurred at a cinema when an autistic woman was instructed to leave the particular cinema after accidentally laughing out too loud. This led to prejudiced remarks by attendees nearby including "that they should limit her surroundings to disability only environment."

Also, this type of suggestion can be used as an excuse not to make reasonable allowances towards autistic people if they have been wrongly mistreated. This is damaging integration and the remarks are backwards, retrograding and inappropriate levels suggestion is a way of segregation and downgrading their social status and limited to autism and disability surroundings. This is very stigmatising, embarrassing and can cause a damaging effect on relationships and the ability to relate to others (the vital tool of integration).

Acceptance

Some people of differences think understanding and acceptance is the most important aspects. However, with the ever-changing expectation and these examples will never be enough. Especially with escalating negative attitudes towards differences especially with Autism and ADHD. There is a lack of a balanced approach related to awareness, understanding and the overall direction.



How Hidden Differences are represented

This section focuses on how hidden differences are seen through the eyes of communities and Society. It addresses issues on misperceptions on what factors everyone needs to pay attention to not to misrepresent hidden differences.

Learning Disability misrepresentation

One of the major misconceptions towards hidden differences includes judging their intelligence level inaccurately with wrongly perceived as very limited intelligence, similar to a learning disability. This leads to unhelpful presumptions and wrong suggestions, assuming that only being supervised and being intervened is the only approach.

This leads to unhelpful and demeaning presumptions. For example, some comments have been made who don't take notice of the mild end of autism with lazy assumptions all people of the spectrum attends day centres. This is despite the reality that mild people with autism live more independently than this.

Characteristics: Misinterpreting difficulties as negative

Some people are hidden differences including those with ADHD and Autism can face many negatively judgements against their identity and characteristics generalised assumptions.

In recent years, there have been increasing cases of criminal offences with differences however through different news sources. However, the majority of people with disabilities and mental related difficulties are law-abiding citizens. So there is no evidence to associate hidden differences and criminality.

Despite the low association with criminality, some people with differences (in particular with ADHD and the Autistic spectrum) can be wrongly judged on occasions as suspicious and less trustworthy. In addition, people with differences can face broad-brush generalisation with individuals with personality disorders who have a greater track record of criminal offences.

Also, there has been the generalised language of with an assumption of a danger to others, this kind of judgement is made without context & insight. What doesn't help is when high-profile figures including politicians and high court judges making generalised opinions against those with ADHD and the autistic spectrum. This includes comments like "Autistic people lacking moral compass" and "Prisons needs to check who lives with ADHD". This kind of broad-brushed generalisation can influence an increase of discrimination and prejudice attitudes against those with Autism and ADHD with harmful implications for both conditions when being seen in society. This can also affect many life opportunities along with any relationships and friendships they have at present and in the future. In addition, there is a lack of a balanced response from major awareness organisations to react against any potential stigma that can occur as a reaction.



How Hidden Differences are represented

Characteristics: Toxic labelling & presumptions

As mentioned elsewhere, society's attitude has slightly changed during the twenty-one years. With current years the social attitudes have been more prejudiced which leads cause damaging implications against a person with differences. For example, if a person with differences appear slightly different with their body language and physical appearance they can be wrongly judged as unnatural and lacking personality. Also, they can be wrongly judged as awkward and undesirable.

Characteristics: Lack of acceptance of particular and intelligence

Many people with differences especially the mild end of the autistic spectrum faces disbelieving attitudes such as "you don't look autistic". When if a person with differences, in particular, the mild level of the autistic spectrum is addressing issues in an articulate and objective matter they can face an attitude with denigrating their intelligence. For example, they can be wrongly accused of thinking too much or overthinking. This kind of comment is extremely offensive which imply as not as intelligent as they tend to present themselves. It is also used if a person with differences in communicating topics with the other person hasn't fully listened therefore dismiss what is communicated.

Another kind of its response is when a person with differences would be accused of appearing too toxic with offensive labels such as arrogance which implies they are not supposed to communicate at a particular level of intelligence.

Unfortunately, some make false & outdated perceptions and how certain people with differences are supposed to be present themselves. This includes appearing submissive, only speak when they've been spoken to, be very softly spoken, not display any emotions to and not push themselves beyond what others appear. This can mean if a person with differences is very ambitious and passionate would be wrongly accused of drawing attention to themselves and a nuisance.

On social media that have been some denigrating attitudes against the mild end of the autistic spectrum with accusing of "pretending to be normal". if a person with differences is communicating with dignity and challenging any issues which are wrong and unacceptable can wrongly seen as awkward, rude, aggressive and out of control. This is usually from people who have a shallow insight on hidden differences and refuse to look beyond perceptions.



How Hidden Differences are represented

Characteristics: Resentment with the same condition)

Some people with hidden differences can face disrespect and hostility within the same condition. The examples of how this can affect the Autistic spectrum with unstable misrepresentations. Also, certain people with autism expect the other person on the spectrum to have the same standards and abilities. This leads to quick intolerance due to unrealistic expectations. The project director has experienced this when attending gathering or events for the Autistic Spectrum.

Characteristics: Inappropriate intolerance and disrespect

Within the group and event environments, there has been an observation intolerance between two or more people with hidden differences. For example, hostility can happen if one person takes longer than the average to read and decide on a menu from a pub or restaurant. Rather than help the person struggling the other person getting impatient with creating a confrontation situation by snapped in the menu the person who was originally reading the menu causing upset inappropriately. Not only intolerance can occur against a person's difficulties but also this can happen against how adjustable a person is. For example, there can be resentment against a person with differences who appear more adjustable and can face a series of hostility and exploration to cause discrimination.

Characteristics: Lack of accepting the distinction within the condition

Some independent and articulate people of the autistic spectrum get very offended with any references on the distinction of their abilities. These are described as levels and functions. However, there is a reason why the distinction exists to prevent inaccurate profiling and generalisation. (As mention earlier in this chapter).

Despite there are many positive examples of empowerment to promote positive showcases, this can lead to a negative backlash with resentment from families of the severe end of the autistic spectrum (who cannot speak and have to have round the clock care as they do not have any abilities compared to the mild level or high functioning of the spectrum).

This can mean any positive achievers and any campaigners can face constant disrespect. This is a basic reminder to be considerate of all abilities of the spectrum. However, some of the criticisms are much more disrespectful to promote shame with references to medical cures. Others go even further of harmful prejudice by undervaluing accusing mild or high functioning of the spectrum as not autistic.



How Hidden Differences are represented

Limited representation

Many awareness charities and other organisations involve those living with hidden differences in various surveys and research purposes towards to provide a particular issue or topic. There was are the inconsistency of representation depending on a specific condition. Some have some representative voices are limited to survey responses (multiple choice questions and answers) and sound bites on how their conditions and difficulties affect them.

Many organisations provides research on hidden differences. However, many examples are centred around the scientific and medical context. Some people find this these kind of participation very dehumanising and demeaning with some of the people participating feels exploited as they do not receive any outcomes of their participation. Because of the issue of privacy, we have to be very careful not to exploit hidden differences voices and insight it on their circumstances or could be used not as beneficial to them. There is a limited opportunity for hidden differences to be used as a representative voice to help shape society. However, the project director was informed that the process of the local system in society does not cater for minority voices and experiences.

Because of some inconsistency, there is a lack of opportunities for unfiltered ground-level voices, many people with differences can also face misinterpretation challenges. In addition, any changes of access to services or facilities (from retail through to any public services) when not considering hidden differences can lead to cause a disruptive effect towards some people with differences. Examples include a cashless society through to changes to grocery delivery are made.



How Hidden Differences are represented

Limited voices

Because a person with differences can have a limited opportunity to have a representative voice, they can face many boundaries when they do attempt to have their say.

Social media and online forums are a few examples of when a person with differences can have a chance of their say on their experiences and insight.

However, they can be challenged and face disrespectful responses. Some people on social media can be very irritable or fatigued when a person with differences is sharing their experiences. Also, if a person with differences is sharing their frustrations (if they are being misjudged and mistreated) would face disrespectful responses with labelling those with differences as moaners. There have even been voices that would make a disrespectful generalisation with closed minds are one of many examples of negative responses. One particular person made generalised disrespect against those with Asperger's syndrome by mentioning that they have had enough on hearing about any understanding and mentions they refuse to accept any friends request from those with Asperger syndrome with an offensive generalisation labelling them as weirdos. Because of this, many people with differences would not share their difficulties or their experiences on social media and online to prevent damaging stigma.

Some prejudiced individuals have published hatred blogs and web pages against particular conditions or particular achievers at professional and high-profile levels.

One horrifying example of an extreme level of prejudice is when an autistic person was writing their expressions on their online blog have faced hatred responses including death threats against their life. This is related to extreme negative stereotypes against autistic men such as abusers and killers. These and other examples discourage a person with differences to have their say online & on social media. This means some feel they are forced to mask the difficulties to prevent any kind of stigma or hostility against them. Unfortunately, some would take their prejudice further against particular persons with hidden differences.



How Hidden Differences are represented

Employment & education

During work, education there can be an expectation to not display their differences to maintain credibility. Specifically, some people with the autistic spectrum can find these environments very challenging and in some cases impossible. They would face a double expectation that is socially adaptable, masking their specific difficulties along with pushing beyond their skills and abilities. Unless the learning environment is well represented, supported and understood are exposed to a greater amount of situations that potentially affect their confidence and self-worth. If a person with differences display certain strong abilities can face misinterpretation in learning environment other people who could prejudice and resentment was disrupts that person with differences to pursue their education with stability.

If there is a conflicting situation that affects a person with differences at work & education was face pressuring demands to not display any baggage. This can occurs when they are pressurised not to share what they are going through. A person with differences can face demands and hostile augments if they don't go beyond masking their difficulties with separating their mindset when at work & education.

Other opportunities

For some people with differences, other life opportunities can be very limited or none at all unless they have a supportive surrounding. This can lead to them being classified negatively preventing them from a variety of opportunities. From developing an idea to start a business, taking part in unregulated social groups (including Meet-ups) and dating.

Hidden Differences representation

We need to break the cycle of lack of true representation otherwise hidden differences would never be fully understood or valued. Voting, consumer, public service customer, transport passenger, a customer of retail and other services, attendee of festivals along with sporting leisure events. It is so important that even different voices need to be represented in or these areas and not seen as insignificant if their experiences are unique. Every voice matters and every representative matters. Using the factors of the majority or minority experiences or insight is not an excuse to silence a person with differences.



Differences and Society

Public services: Local authorities & welfare)

Accessing services through local authorities can vary depending on locations & areas. This includes applications, enquiries, issues to share & reporting, face to face contacts and challenging issues. Some people with differences can face many challenges when accessing specific services or facilities with exceptions and requirements through phone and online forms. The information presented can be impossible for a person with differences with receiving excessive amount of information or when the language is presented with technical jargon. In some situations especially with assessments and deadlines can cause a high amount of pressure. Depending on the particular organisation some have no extra support to help guide them through the application process even if the process is hard. This means some people with differences are being forced to struggle and can be pushed beyond how they can manage. If a person with differences is experiencing a conflicting situation while going through complicated applications and assessment with a tight deadline can lead to the high amount of anxiety and emotional despair can occur.

Public services: Other types of application and assistance

Other types of challenges that can occur include housing support, council tax benefit, funding for particular assistance. This can unfairly challenges a person with differences without allowances and can be wrongly judged as not trying hard enough. If a person with differences who are struggling to articulate a particular point when enquiring can be shunned and prevented from accessing help because they could be wrongly judged as a nuisance. At face-to-face meetings with an officials, intolerance can occur simply because they are wrongly seen as “slower” in their abilities. This can wrongly discredit a person with differences who would feel discouraged to a level where they will mistrust any similar meetings in the future. On occasions, there is a situation when a local authority will needed to be reported to on any problems issues or situations are problematic. However, when this is being done online can lead to complications to a person with differences with various challenges from remembering registration codes through to the pressures of effective writing when reporting onto an online form with a particular word limit. The word limitation in forms is a nightmare for a person with differences when they may find it difficult to articulate all their points which means some issues they want to share are aborted.

If a person with hidden differences is facing a particular crisis such as hate crime including verbal harassment and physical assault can be ignored from getting support, even if they have been threatened not to say any details to the officials which involves an offender they know.

Detailed examples are available through the supplementary insight by the author. (Ask for details)



Differences and Society

Public Services: Social services & support providers

How a service is provided for hidden differences & how are treated can vary from person to person. Some examples below show very ways of how people with differences are treating when accessing many services. When some people are facing assessment to access funded support (organised by social services or social care) for their person's circumstances can find out that decisions can be made without involving a person with differences. It is regardless of their level of intelligence, even if it decision made was not appropriate for that particular person with differences.

Public & other services: Helplines by phone

As mentioned elsewhere are certain call centres and helplines can impose a performance-related target to complete a particular customer within a short amount of time.

For some people with differences, they can be wrongly punished if they cannot communicate their point effectively. Also, If a person with differences are distressed and show some emotions can be judge badly as a trouble maker. This can discourage a person with differences from accessing help.

Public & other services: Listening services & counselling

The level of service depends on the person providing the service. Also, how well they understand hidden differences and how a person with differences are understood against the difficulties they live. Accessing assistance to counselling and listening services that are supposed to provide listening support. This can be a nightmare for certain people with differences unless they are fully understood from the outset. For example, if an articulate and independent person with autism access particular counselling services can face the wrong kind of interventions which implies they are less intelligent and can face hostility as a way for that autistic person to stop being too articulate. This occurs when specific counselling services are poorly educated on the autistic spectrum, especially when they are not aware of varying levels of intelligence depending on person to person.

Some people with differences benefit from sharing and to others and for someone to simply listen to resolve a particular problem or issues which they struggle with when not interacting with anyone. However, some people with differences can face hostility and disrespect when accessing listening support & helplines leading can be discredited as wasting the services time. Detailed examples on this matter are available through the supplementary insight by the author. (Ask for details)



Other information

This document is a special insight document to mark twenty-one years since the project director Keith Mckenzie started awareness projects, campaigns & activities.

It started back in 2000 under the Autism Challenge brand with a number of awareness activities including a UK wide Asperger Syndrome Survey, exhibition displays and presentation talk and visual art. Then in 2006, the awareness initiative become online with an expansion to cover different differences two years later with an introduction of Differences projects. A major milestone in 2015 with the introduction of Plus Value Awareness. The original family projects became part of the plus Value Awareness family as Differences Originals from 2020.

This awareness initiative has developed projects with different awareness organisations around the UK. In 2008 the team at Google nominate Plus Value Awareness the Thrive Mental health Awards as the awareness initiative supported an ADHD staff member at a Birmingham based Google Digital Garage.

The pandemic did not stop the progress, so in 2021 a special online feature called “Unity Forward” of information and encouragement during the worldwide pandemic and beyond. A special insight document was based on the “Unity Forward” feature.

Other awareness developments

Plus Value Awareness initiative has provided a family of joined-up information & guideline documents with concise information customised to varying roles of salsa classes & events organiser in Birmingham. In addition, a detailed information guide was developed for managing roles.



Further details of the twenty-one insight

Further insight into the twenty-one insight is available by reading part two of the bite-size document.

Featuring the chapters: the difficulties, topics and issues, how differences are represented.

There is also a full version of this document available with a total of 50 pages. Visit the back page of this document for details

Twenty-one Analysis

The analysis and conclusions of the subjects covered in this insight documents is available in a separate Twenty-One analysis document.

Twenty-one Supplement

In addition an examples of person experiences from the project director Keith Mckenzie are available as part of a talk presentation in for awareness events, conferences and webinars. An insight supplement is to be also presented as a document

To receive a copy of the analysis document and to access the personal supplement for awareness events, conferences and webinars get in touch via the Plus Value Awareness Website

Also get in touch via Keith Mckenzie profile on Linked-in via the website keithmckenzie.weebly.com



About the Author

This document is written by Keith Mckenzie project director of Plus Value Awareness.

For over the past two decades Keith has developed a variety of awareness projects, campaigns and activities. His projects have been involved with different awareness and support organisations across the UK and have participated in several presentation talks different events around two decades.

Outside awareness, Keith has been involved in behind-the-scenes we've and music project with involved filming and behind-the-scenes assistance with developing video documentaries and music events that involves music artists DJs and producers.

Also, Keith is a participant in salsa dancing classes in the community as a helper along with volunteering and a participant for a major salsa dancing conventions based at Birmingham's NEC.

Keith has a background of art & design and has been involved and number of projects related to Graphic design, selected photography and visual art.



The project director would welcome any organisations, media or support groups who would like to feature extracts from this insight document and the online feature as part of a presentation talk, interview report or article.

If you are interested to feature “Twenty-one insight”, please get in touch.

**You can fill the online contact form via the website plusvalue.dudaone.com
Follow on social media**

Also follow the links to Keith Mckenzie profile on Linked-in via the website keithmckenzie.weebly.com

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The contents of this document provide a series of observations and insights. So you are advised to be cautious before adopting any information. Therefore the initiative cannot accept responsibility if any errors which may occur.

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