

“**Zack Siddeek** is an Autistic social worker and community organizer practicing in Seattle, Washington. He is passionate about increasing the representation of Autistic people in all matters and places that impact Autistic people. His main goals are to create programs that address the 9x higher suicide rate and 80% unemployment rate. He also works to reduce the disparities that Autistic people with intersectional identities are forced to endure.

He works as the Disability Systems Navigation coordinator at The Arc of King County. (<https://arcofkingcounty.org/>) He organizes the Square Pegs, (<https://www.meetup.com/Squarepegs/>) a series of 25 social and support groups for Autistic adults in Washington State. He is on the board of the Washington Initiative for Supportive Employment (<https://www.gowise.org/>) a nationally renowned organization that promotes equitable employment for people with developmental disabilities through innovation, training and technical assistance.”

Centering question: How have Autistic people helped those around us?

Introduction

- Who I am
- Talk about experiences as a kid.
- Growing up in deficit-based system
- Struggles with masking
- Early struggles with jobs
- What I do now is because of the ableism I experienced in my life

Barriers:

- Unemployment
- Homelessness
- Suicide Rate and Mental Health Crisis
- Talk about implicit bias and how it prevents Authentic relationships.
- The system is built around neurotypical discomfort and the discomfort perpetuates the barriers
- Autistic people are not well represented in Autism organizations, science or decision making bodies
- High/low functioning dichotomy
- Autism is often seen as a tragedy

Autistic Pride & What we bring:

- Community and advocacy building efforts: Started with Don't Mourn for us by Jim Sinclair, Early Communities formed through BBS and Chat Boards, Autreat, ASAN, AWNN, Square Pegs and other community groups
- Neurodiversity
- Autistic people have contributed so much to science like Temple Grandin. AASPIRE Partnership is leading the way in Autism Science.
- Seeing the world in a different way brought us Sci-fi, radios,
- Autistic people who have succeeded: Greta Thunberg as an example of leveraging Autism's strengths and moral judgements, Bjork, Anthony Hopkins, Daryl Hannah, Dan Aykroyd,

Call to action:

- Autistic Rights are Human Rights
- Stop seeing value through a neurotypical lens.
- It's on the non-Autistic people to listen to us.
- Speak up when you hear ableism
- Advocate for Autistic people to be hired in organizations that work with us.
- Having us at the table is a good start. But the org culture has to value listening to us and avoiding tokenization.
- When the world listens to us, we can devote more time focusing on our gifts and passions, rather than fighting for survival.