2026 World Autism Awareness Day
Autism and Humanity – Every Life Has Value

Speaker Bios

PART 1: WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS

Melissa Fleming was appointed UN Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications in September 2019. She leads the UN's Department of Global Communications, which informs global audiences about the state of the world and engages them to build support for the work and goals of the United Nations.

In this role, Ms. Fleming oversees the Department's strategic and crisis communications operations, including its multilingual news and digital media services, public outreach programmes, and global campaigns.

Under her leadership, the UN Department of Global Communications developed the UN Global Principles for Information Integrity, a blueprint for healthy information ecosystems.

Previously, Ms. Fleming served 10 years at the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) as Spokesperson for the High Commissioner and Head of Global Communications. Prior to that, she was the Spokesperson and Head of Media and Outreach at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). She earlier headed Press and Public Information at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and before that, served as Public Affairs Specialist at Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty. She also worked as a journalist.

Ms. Fleming is a TED speaker, the author of the book, *A Hope More Powerful than the Sea*, and the host of the award-winning UN podcast, *Awake at Night*. She has published widely on strategic communications and is a frequent public speaker at universities and conferences.

She holds a Master of Science in Journalism from the College of Communication, Boston University and a Bachelor of Arts in German Studies from Oberlin College.

Professor Charlotte Valeur is an investment banker and seasoned FTSE Chair, Non-Executive Director and governance expert with a wealth of board experience across different sectors. She is a professor, published author, and public speaker in corporate governance, leadership, neurodiversity and equality & diversity.

A lifelong human rights advocate, Charlotte is driven to play her part in creating an inclusive society; she advocates for equality and inclusion for all, working at the intersection of Government, Industry, Academia and the Third Sector. To this effect she also founded the NGOs Board Apprentice and the global Institute of Neurodiversity, ION.

PART 2: REFRAMING THE NARRATIVE: FROM CURE TO SHARED FUTURE

Brian Bird
I am a public speaker and late diagnosed AuDHD self-advocate/mental health advocate. For the past 12 years I have run two support pages on Facebook and Instagram and have 96,000 combined followers.

I took part in the research and filming of the BBC Horizon Documentary 'Living with Autism' which I appeared in and was shown on television in 2014. I was also a speaker at the 2023 Autism conference with world expert Prof Tony Attwood & Michelle Garnett. I have since then forged a strong connection with Tony and Michelle who support my work, and we meet yearly at their conferences.

I am a public speaker at the London Autism and ADHD Show for the past 11 years. Also talks for Mencap and the National Autistic Society.

I am dedicated to promoting awareness, acceptance and inclusion. My work is aimed at supporting others, parents, fellow neurodivergents and professionals. I am a bridge builder and have forged international connections with other advocates.

I am a father to two sons, one on the spectrum and we are both 3rd Degree black belts in Taekwon-do. I also practice Tai Chi Chaun and have used Martial arts to recover from early life trauma. I am a great believer in mindfulness as a coping strategy.

Clarisse Fortes is a Brazilian pediatric neurologist, with a Master's degree in Public Health and a PhD in Child and Adolescent Health.

Since graduating in medicine, she has shown a special interest in neurodevelopment and neurodiversity. She works as a speaker in training programs focused on primary care, aiming to increase awareness and inclusion of neurodiverse individuals in health and education services.

She and her family live in the interior of Rio de Janeiro state, in Brazil, where she also works at the University and in her private practice.

Shaheda Moosa is an Occupational Therapist and Practice Owner based in Cape Town, South Africa. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Occupational Therapy from the University of Cape Town. She began her career at Charlotte Maxeke Academic Hospital in Johannesburg. After relocating to Cape Town, Shaheda transitioned into private practice, where she began focusing her work on neurodiversity.

Shaheda works with clients across the lifespan, with a particular interest in the intersection of mental health and neurodiversity. Her clinical work focuses on sensory processing, executive functioning, workplace and vocational rehabilitation, and supporting individuals experiencing burnout and other challenges related to navigating environments that are not designed with neurodiversity in mind.

She currently leads the Occupational Therapy department providing ongoing support to neurodivergent individuals and their families. Since 2023, Shaheda and her team have developed and facilitated social connection and support groups for neurodivergent tweens, teens, and young adults.

Beyond her clinical work, Shaheda is passionate about advocating for greater awareness and inclusion of neurodivergent individuals, she regularly contributes to professional discussions and speaks at events focused on neurodevelopmental differences and neurodiversity-affirming practice.

Sudhanshu Grover is a late-identified autistic educator from New Delhi, India, with over two decades of experience across general and special education. She completed her Diploma in Special Education (Autism Spectrum) in 2006 and has since been mentoring Autistic individuals across the lifespan, while also supporting the parents and educators who work with them.

Sudhanshu originally studied biology and chemistry with the aim of becoming a scientist. However, after her twin sons were born and faced challenges in school, her path shifted toward education and advocacy. This personal journey shaped her commitment to creating learning environments where students who feel “different can be understood, supported, and allowed to thrive.

Her work includes counselling parents, mentoring and training special educators, conducting workshops and sensitization programs, and facilitating support groups for neurodivergent individuals. She has developed and authored resource materials for parents and professionals. She uses a strengths-based approach that fosters authentic connections and recognizes that every student has a unique profile of strengths and challenges and that everyone can learn when the environment understands them.

Sudhanshu is a strong advocate for positive attitudes toward the Autistic community and for creating truly neurodiversity-affirming learning spaces where Autistic individuals are valued, understood, and celebrated. She is the co-founder of Powered by Autistics, India's only autistic-led consultancy and support provider. She is also the core member of the Autistic Alliance for Advocacy, where she contributes to advancing Autistic-led perspectives in advocacy and systems change.

Fatima de Kwant – autistic, late diagnosis
Fatima is Brazilian, living in the Netherlands since 1985.
Journalist, writer, autism advocate, and mother of three — one autistic (29).

Public speaker; administrator of a digital autism community in Brazil (600,000 people); HD Sunflower Ambassador for Latin America and Europe; Ambassador for Mama Vita (an autism mothers' organization in the Netherlands); creator of the Autimates Project; spreading autism awareness since 2004.

I am committed to informing and inspiring people to learn about and embrace autism, contributing to a truly inclusive and neurodiverse society.

Damien Green is a co-founder of the Hong Kong Autism Institute and a parent of two Autistic children. He is an advocate for Autistic People in Hong Kong SAR and is the former Asia President and CEO of Manulife and the former CEO of Manulife Hong Kong and Macau. Along with his partner and their five children, Damien is a Permanent Resident of Hong Kong SAR.

PART 3: INNOVATION AND ENTERPRISE

Ben Branson, Founder, Farmer & Inventor, spent 39 years not knowing his brain worked differently. In that time, he pioneered the global non-alcoholic drinks movement with Seedlip, the world's first distilled non-alcoholic spirit, taking it from his kitchen to 35 countries, 30 US states & 7,500 of the best bars, restaurants & hotels in just 3.5 years.

He continues to lead & shape how we drink with innovations including Sylva, the first distillery & maturation labs making aged non-alcoholic spirits.

Ben's autism diagnosis in 2022 led to creating The Hidden 20% , an award-winning neurodiversity charity, podcast & 250k strong community on a mission to include every mind using media, research & advocacy.

Ben's inspiring story charts the extremes of addiction, institutionalisation & abuse through to proof a different brain, properly understood, can change the world.

Victoria Burnip is an award-winning social entrepreneur, seasoned Chief Executive, and Non-Executive Director with extensive leadership experience across the VCSE, health and education sectors. A marketing expert and published academic, she is a leading voice in brain health and neurodiversity. Victoria has a proven track record of working at the intersection of industry and government, securing millions in funding to influence policy and drive campaigns that address health inequalities and drive social change.

As the founder of Unforgettable Experiences and Cognitive HealthTech Ltd, she bridges the gap between technology and human-centric care. Driven by lived experience and a deep sense of justice, Victoria advocates for fairness and inclusion for all ages and abilities, leveraging her platform as a public speaker and innovator to build a more equitable society.

Alan Day – co-founder of Autism Double-Checked was an accomplished travel agent who began his career with Liberty Travel in 1999, then on moving to Connecticut in 2005, he formed his own agency.

Alan's son has Autism Spectrum Disorder: When considering the impact that his son's Autism had on their own family vacations, Alan decided to refocus his agency and specialize in providing assistance and support for families impacted by Autism. For this purpose, he founded ASD Vacations to exclusively serve such families.
In addition to assisting individual families, Alan produced a unique group travel program called 'Magic for Autism'. The program provided support on flights and at the destination for as many as 25 families at a time.

He co-founded Autism Double-Checked, an organization that provides training to the travel and hospitality industry on Assisting Guests with Autism. Autism Double-Checked is rapidly approaching a count of 100,000 people trained.
As an additional way of assisting the community, Autism Double-Checked sponsors and coordinates programs for the autism community to "practice" traveling. Autism Flies, for practicing going through the airport, and Autism Stays for practicing hotel stays.

Alan also originated the Autism Passport as a means for families to communicate the unique needs of their loved one to their travel agent, airport, airline, or hotel, thereby enabling the service providers to customize their service to the family. Alan writes a regular blog with tips and resources for families traveling with Autism.

Liani Baylis knows, as an Autistic woman with ADHD, what it takes to build neuroinclusive workplaces that work in practice. Liani is Managing Director and Principal Consultant at The Spiky Bureau, a boutique neurodivergent consultancy.

Her practice is grounded in lived experience, HR expertise, and global communications, shaped by a strong commitment to intersectional social justice. Outside of work, she is a ceramist, keen sewer, and devoted human to Sammy the Japanese Spitz. A special interest in elephant behaviour once saved her and her partner from being charged by a lone bull camping in South Africa.

Kate Wardle, MBA, is Founder of Include Me Consulting and the South African representative for the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower. She works at the intersection of disability inclusion, workforce policy and organisational governance, supporting institutions to move from awareness to structural change.

In the South African context, where hidden disabilities remain significantly under-recognised and under-disclosed, Kate advises leadership teams on strengthening disclosure environments and aligning inclusion with employment equity obligations and measurable organisational performance.

Bringing both professional expertise in organisational change and personal insight into hidden disability, she advocates for policy approaches that are defensible, human-centred and grounded in lived reality.

Melissa Munoz-Flandez is a Chilean autistic engineer, researcher, and social entrepreneur, founder of Prisma Neurodivergente SpA and creator of AutistApp, a free application that supports the daily lives of autistic and neurodivergent people from adolescence through older adulthood. Her work combines technology, research, and lived experience to design practical, accessible, and non-pathologizing tools grounded in the neurodiversity paradigm.

She has been recognized for her innovation and social impact, including being awarded MIT Innovators Under 35 LATAM, for developing inclusive technological solutions. Melissa is currently pursuing a PhD in Mental Health at the Universidad de Concepción, where her research focuses on mental health, neurodiversity, and the development of inclusive, evidence-based digital tools that promote autonomy, wellbeing, and social participation.

PART 4: ART, CULTURE AND SPORT

Ishmael Burdeau is a seasoned ultra endurance athlete, with finishes in events such as the 2,200-mile self-supported Transcontinental Cycle Race and the 268-mile running event, the Winter Spine Race as well as many 100- and 200-mile mountain running events. Ishmael's late autism discovery and diagnosis have helped him better understand his own relationship to sport and the outdoors. Ishmael believes that neurodivergence and sport are poorly understood, but that by applying a strength-based approach, autistic athletes can excel in ways that also complement their neurodivergent identities. He also holds a qualification as an ultrarunning coach through UESCA.

Flavia Callafange is a Brazilian autism activist, public speaker, and regional director for disability inclusion in Ibero-America. She is widely recognized as Felicia's autistic mother and a dedicated advocate for neurodiversity and neurodivergent rights.
In her 50s, she received a late diagnosis of ADHD, which strengthened her mission to raise awareness about underdiagnosed conditions in women and adults. She represents the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower program in the region, promoting visibility and inclusion for people with non-visible disabilities.

Alongside her advocacy work, Flavia built a recognized career in multinational companies as a Commercial Leader in Latin America, leading strategic growth, market development, and regional expansion. She brings together corporate leadership experience and lived experience to drive systemic change toward more inclusive environments and organizations.

Amrit Khurana is a self-taught artist whose work is distinguished by her extraordinary visual memory, deep sensitivity to human behaviour, and a unique ability to translate fleeting observations into vivid, expressive artworks. She often draws from images she has seen only once—on television, in books, or in everyday life—creating compositions that reflect emotion, movement, and storytelling.

Her art emerges from an intuitive creative process and reflects a distinctive visual language that celebrates individuality, empathy, and inclusion.

<u>Achievements & Recognition</u>

- <u>Documentary Feature</u>**:** Amrit's life and art are featured in the award-winning documentary The Reason I Jump, which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival and won the Audience Award.
- <u>International Art Feature</u>**:** Her work has also been showcased in Our Stomping Ground –Arlington's Inaugural Art Auction.

- Suta Collaboration: *“To Amrit with Love”* a collection created with the brand Suta, became their highest-selling saree collection, translating Amrit’s artworks into textile designs.
- Art for Inclusion Fellowship (2023): Recipient of the fellowship recognizing artists who promote inclusive art practices.
- Hyundai Artforhope Grant (2024): Awarded in recognition of her artistic contribution and to support her creative journey.
- Public Art Collaboration (2025): Collaborated with St+art India Foundation and Asian Paints on the mural project *Udaan* for Arpan, a school for people with multiple disabilities.
- Institutional Display: Amrit’s work has been displayed at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.
- Media & Press Features: Her artistic journey has been featured by Zoom Autism Magazine, Mojarto (NDTV), The Art Compass, Fine Art Miracles, and in publications such as The Sunday Guardian, The Hindu, The Pioneer, and The Indian Express.

Letícia Sabatella is a renowned Brazilian actress, director, singer, and activist known for her emotionally powerful performances across television, film, and theatre. She began her career at TV Globo in 1991 and rose to prominence with memorable roles in productions such as O Clone, A Muralha, Hoje é Dia de Maria, Caminho das Índias, and Nos Tempos do Imperador.

In cinema, she appeared in films including Bela Donna and Chico Xavier and directed a documentary about the Krahö People of Tocantins. Beyond her artistic work, she is widely recognized for her advocacy on social, environmental, and human-rights causes. In 2023, she shared that she had received a late autism diagnosis at age 52, describing it as a liberating moment in her life.

João Carlos da Costa is a Portuguese, non-speaking autistic author whose work has reached audiences across Europe, the Americas, and beyond. João Carlos writes with the physical and communicative support of his mother, who is both his essential tool and his living voice, the hand through which his words enter the world.

Despite communication challenges, he is an internationally published writer and speaker, with bestselling books, scientific and artistic collaborations, and participation in major international conferences on autism and neurodiversity. His writing offers rare and deeply human insight into the inner experience of autism, standing as powerful evidence that intellectual, creative, and spiritual authorship can flourish when support, trust, and love are present.

Helen Costa is an educator, international speaker, and dedicated autism advocate, best known for her role as the mother and support partner of João Carlos da Costa, a non-verbal autistic author published in Portugal, Brazil, and the United States. Acting as both facilitator and advocate, she has helped bring forward a powerful body of work that challenges traditional perceptions of non-verbal autism and highlights the intellectual and spiritual depth of autistic individuals.

Her mission is clear: to amplify her son's voice, expand awareness of non-verbal communication, and promote a paradigm shift in how society understands autism, beyond labels and limitations.

Kell Smith is a Brazilian singer, songwriter, and writer whose work stems from a unique perspective: that of an autistic woman who translates the complexity of real life into songs and narratives. With nearly 1 billion streams, her music has become a pillar of the country's emotional vocabulary, offering a safe space for belonging and representation.

She has transformed her platform into an ecosystem of active representation where her songs, interviews, TV appearances, and content serve as tools for fostering this sense of belonging. By addressing the topic with depth, truth, and naturalness, she inspires thousands of neurodivergent individuals to see themselves and feel empowered.

Today, Kell Smith is more than an artist: she is a movement. A guardian of Brazilian music, she uses her voice to build spaces for transformation and to place mental health and accessibility at the centre of the conversation, proving that true art is born from purpose.

Swara Swami is an autistic Music Therapist, Expressive Arts Therapist, Singer, Vocal Teacher and Self-Advocate. She did a Bachelor's in Music Therapy at Berklee College of Music in the USA, and a Master's in Clinical Mental Health Counselling: Expressive Arts Therapy at Lesley University. During her coursework, she had done 5 practicums: - special education, older adults, community, psychiatry and medical. She did her 9-month internship at the Community Music Centre of Boston, where she worked with both neurodivergent children and adults. She worked as a Music Therapist at V-Excel Educational Centre at Nashik, where she worked with neurodivergent children. She did her Masters in Expressive Arts Therapy specializing in Clinical Mental Health Counselling at Lesley University.

She is also a singer. During her time at Berklee College of Music, she was part of the Berklee Indian Ensemble where she worked with artists like Vijay Prakash, Shreya Ghoshal, Indian Ocean etc. and she also worked on an album with them called "Shuruaat" which was nominated in the Grammys. She was also a part of "The Lotus Sound", a circle singing group, and she worked on an EP with them called "Keep

Dancing." She currently works as a Western Vocal Teacher at Spardha School of Music. As part of her internship for Masters, she worked as an Expressive Arts Therapist intern at Jinshiksha, Borivali. She is very passionate about autism and mental health awareness. Swara hopes to one day build her own centre for neurodivergent children, where she hopes to do some expressive arts therapy, spread awareness about neurodivergence, mental health and expressive arts therapy, as she feels our country lacks awareness.

Nishant Sriram – Freelance Artist, Co Author – Talking fingers, 30 years.
Nishant is a part of the programs offered at The AMAZE Charitable Trust, Coimbatore. He was trained under their flagship program AMEYA – Amaze Program for Mentoring and Empowerment of Young Adults. He does Art and Digital Art and Cooking, Housekeeping and Fitness activities. He loves long distance Cycling and Trekking in the mountains, travel and Listening to Music of all genres.

He has won many State and National Level Bronze medals for Special Olympics Bharat, Cycling. His Artwork was chosen for eCAPA online exhibitions in 2020 and 2021 as well as featured at the eCAPA exhibitions at Stir Gallery. New Delhi in 2022 and 2023, Salarjung Museum, Hyderabad in 2024 and D'tale Gallery, Whitefield Bengaluru in 2025.The eCAPA exhibitions for Outsider Art are curated by The Art Sanctuary and NGO based out of Bangalore.

His artwork has also been featured in calendars, and he won several logo and Poster competitions – notably he was commissioned for the Volvo calendar 2022, Nuron Calendar 2021 and the Artytude calendars in 2023, 2025, 2026. His designs are also used in many curated products like trays, coasters and other gift items.

Nishant is very affectionate by nature and is happy go lucky by character …he dreams of a world where everyone is happy can do what they like to do. He has come a long way from the initial days of his diagnosis as having Regressive Autism and Apraxia.

His mother Akila Vaidyanathan worked with him intensely in the areas of functional communication, life skills and helped him to explore his interests. Diagnosed at 3 years with regressive Autism he did not learn to speak or write through traditional approaches to his severe Sensory and Motor planning issues. He could understand a lot but could not speak to communicate. He was given early intervention, speech therapy and occupational therapy from age 2.5 and attended mainstream school till grade 5.

The turning point in his life was at age 6.5 when they implemented PECS – the ability to communicate reduced anxiety and stress and he could focus more on learning and exploration!! In 2006 he started using a VOCA device Techspeak – that literally gave him a voice. He uses AVAZ app on his iPad to communicate his basic

needs since 2010. To answer questions, he uses the Letter chart [Rapid Prompt Method] as well as a Clicker Docs app on his IPAD which converts text to speech. The iPad is his friend philosopher and guide – he carries it everywhere and uses it for communication, regulation and leisure. He also uses the computer to create his graphic art and to create simple graphics and content for TLM /Teaching Aids.

PART 5: EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY

Daniel M Jones is an autistic advocate, international best-selling author, and the creator of **The Aspie World**, one of the largest autism awareness platforms online. Diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome, ADHD, and OCD, Daniel has dedicated his life to helping autistic individuals understand their brains and build lives that work for them. Through his YouTube channel, podcast, books, and training programmes, he provides practical strategies and personal stories to over 700,000 followers across 180+ countries. His mission is simple: to ensure no autistic person must figure it all out alone.

Hana Saemon-Beck, PhD, is an educator, adult trainer, and curriculum designer whose work centres on advancing equitable opportunities for individuals and communities whose strengths and ways of thinking are not always recognised by conventional systems.

She brings more than 20 years of experience across higher education, adult professional training, and community education in Singapore and Aotearoa New Zealand. She currently teaches in tertiary education and delivers training for educators and professionals, while designing curricula that support diverse learners in developing communication, critical thinking, and confidence.

Her PhD in Education from the University of Canterbury examined meritocracy, social mobility, and the lived experiences of students across different educational pathways in Singapore. This work continues to inform her approach to teaching and curriculum design, grounded in the belief that education systems must recognise and respond to different ways of learning.

Alongside her academic and training work, she has founded and led several social initiatives, including Literacy Initiative for Equity (LIFE SG), Aotearoa Adaptive Archery, and the Aotearoa Multicultural Women Association. These initiatives created opportunities for individuals and communities who are often underserved. Her interest in neurodiversity is grounded in lived experience as an educator working closely with both youth and adult learners. She believes education should create space for different ways of thinking and being, rather than expecting everyone to fit the same mould.

Dr. Emile Gouws is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of South Africa (UNISA) and a globally recognised disability activist who attends Commonwealth and United Nations high-level political meetings. Dr Gouws is the president of the Board of ICDL and is only the third person to hold this position. In his free time, Dr Gouws currently represents marginalised groups on the Commonwealth Disabled Peoples Forum. In 2023, he was nominated for the Commonwealth Youth Awards and is a member of the South African steering Committee reporting to the United Nations. Dr Gouws has contributed to various international articles and research papers on neurodiversity, including a published article in Forbes magazine Japan. He was also invited as the academic representative on the steering committee of South Africa's response to the United Nations. He is married to a lovely Alexic autistic woman named Sammi, who is also an autism self-advocate. Together, they do advocacy on relationships and married life as an autistic couple.

Dr Tony Lloyd is an internationally renowned speaker, consultant, trainer, author and campaigner who has been a pioneering advocate for a neurodiverse paradigm in health, education and business. Tony is the MD of his own consultancy https://drtonylloyd.com and an associate of Neurodiversity Training UK. https://neurodiversitytraining.uk and ION Institute of Neurodiversity https://ioneurodiversity.org/

Dr Lloyd has also played a key role in national service reviews with NHS England, NHS Innovations, Government forums on ADHD in the Justice System, NHS Task Force, and all-party parliamentary groups relating to mental health. A Counselling Psychologist, Tony is a specialist in ADHD in health and education, mental health and addictions, working with clients across all sectors and those working in the performing arts and television. Tony continues to provide training for the NHS, private health sector, business sector and fostering and adoption services.

Dr Lloyd is the recipient several national awards including:

- National Diversity Lifetime Achievement Award 2023
- National Leaders Award in Education 2020
- The UK Top 50 Inclusive Leaders 2024
- UNESCO Paris 2024 - International Federation of Inclusive Practitioners in Education
- Top 100 most influential UK LGBTQ+ Leaders 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019.
- Honorary Fellow Liverpool John Moores University

Aditi Sowmyanarayan is an award-winning writer and an avid blogger. She is twenty. Her novel, Thus She Rose, opened at No. 1 in new releases on Amazon US. Her fiction novella, Gobble Thy Prejudice, won the Best Manuscript award at JK Auther Awards season 4, 2022-23, presented by JK Paper and The Times of India. Aditi's collection of short stories, Small Stories Big Thoughts, was launched on February 11, 2023 to positive reader reviews from many quarters including the

Stanford Neurodiversity Project.

An autistic self-advocate Aditi writes blogs for Avaz Megaphone, India Autism Centre and Sol's Arc to promote awareness and inclusion of non-speaking autistics. She was adjudged the Fellow of the Fellowship at YLAC Artivist Fellowship 2023 and was recently conferred the Sabal Changemaker Award by Tata Steel Foundation, for her impactful work in raising awareness and promoting autism acceptance. Aditi is on the steering committee of Institute of Neurodiversity (ION) Global. She has presented at the United Nations World Autism Awareness Day observance in 2023 and 2025 and has contributed to the NALSAR committee report on accessibility which was the basis of the historical Nov 2024 ruling of Supreme Court of India on accessible spaces. Aditi was recently recognised as one of the fifteen Changemakers for 2026 by Deccan Herald for her work in raising awareness and promoting acceptance of non-speaking autism. Aditi regularly blogs on www.smallstepbigthought.blogspot.com

PART 6: GLOBAL YOUTH VOICES

Hari Srinivasan is a neuroscience PhD candidate at Vanderbilt University whose work sits at the intersection of brain science, disability, and public policy. A graduate of UC Berkeley, he studies sensorimotor systems in autism, building on earlier research exploring awe and empathy in autistics. A recipient of the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship, the Paul & Daisy Soros Fellowship and the Berkeley Haas Fellowship, Srinivasan is equally engaged beyond the lab. His work examines how research methods and institutional assumptions shape whose voices are included — and excluded — in science. He has served on NIH's Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee, and is on nonprofit boards and other advisory bodies, helping bridge lived experience with science and policy conversations. An autistic and ADHD thought leader who navigates significant spoken communication challenges, Srinivasan brings personal insight to his scholarship and writing. His public commentary has appeared in outlets such as Time, Newsweek and Fortune. Across research, journalism, and advocacy, he focuses on expanding who gets heard, who gets represented in evidence, and how systems can be redesigned to better serve people with disabilities.

Ayanwole Boluwatife Joshua is a prominent International Neurodiversity Advocate and expert in Africa, promoting awareness and inclusion for neurodevelopmental conditions, supporting neurominorities and People of Determination (PoD). He specializes in diagnosis, evaluation, talent identification, and management of Autism, Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, Dysgraphia, ADHD, and Twice Exceptionality (2e). As Team Lead of U35 ION-Nigeria and Global Youth Ambassador, Boluwatife promotes Autism awareness and supports neurodivergent individuals globally. He's spoken at ION & the United Nations World Autism Awareness Day 2025, International

Dysgraphia Awareness Day 2025, Autism & SENshow Africa Conference, Ghana 2025, and International Neurodiversity Conference, UAE 2026. Boluwatife has authored articles, featured in podcasts (Early Intervention Matters Podcast, UK), and shared expertise online, advocating for Neurodiversity & inclusion. His work is recognized in Nigeria's leading dailies, including Nigeria Tribune and The Punch. He collaborates globally to drive awareness and create positive change, fostering empathy and understanding for neurodivergent individuals. Based in Lagos, Nigeria.

Vincent Obisie-Orlu is a sustainability, climate and political risk analyst/researcher (he tries to make sense of information and the ways in which different systems connect to create and influence our society). His diagnosis is ASD and ADHD-C. He is proudly neurodivergent and is a strong believer in the important role that access to information and support plays in the lives of neurodivergent individuals. In particular, he is aware of the importance of providing access to information and support to people from underserved communities. Neurodiversity, in particular ADHD and ASD have impacts across the entire lifecycle of the individual which require a level of support and assistance to navigate effectively.

Growing up, Vincent wanted to be a pilot, nuclear physicist and astronaut. Guided by a hunger to understand the world and how the pieces fit together he found his way into the social sciences.

A lover of information and combining different sources and forms of information the puzzle that is knowledge, Vincent holds a Bachelors in International Relations and Political Studies from the University of the Witwatersrand, a Post Graduate Diploma in Management in Energy Leadership from Wits Business School, and is in the process of completing his Masters in Management in Energy Leadership, also from WBS. He is currently contemplating whether it would be a rational decision to pursue a law degree to add to perspectives through which he sees the world.

When he is not finding different ways to see the puzzle that the world is, he secretly writes and makes jokes that he thinks are funny (he has no sense of humour) or is raging at the less than adequate media representation of ASD and ADHD.

Hector Mendonça Ishikawa is an autistic 20-year-old professional with technical training in Veterinary Medicine from the Centre for Technology and Professional Education, completed in 2024 after finishing his High School education in 2023. His trajectory is marked by a strong affinity with animals, and he currently works as a collaborator in two prominent institutions in Campo Grande (MS): the Bioparque Pantanal, the world's largest freshwater aquarium, and at the Equine Therapy Centre of the Military Police, where he applies his technical knowledge in environments that require expertise in animal welfare and therapeutic practices.

Beyond his professional responsibilities, Hector is an active and engaged participant in initiatives related to Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and neurodiversity in Campo Grande (MS). His participation in ASD awareness events, promoted by the Public Ministry, Fire Department, and State Department of Social Assistance, where he shares his professional experience and technical knowledge, demonstrates his commitment to inclusion and the dissemination of information about neurodivergences. This multidisciplinary approach positions Hector as a professional who integrates technical competence with social responsibility, contributing significantly to the local autistic community.

Hello, my name is **Martin Cortes Araneda**, I am 18 years old and I am from Chile. I was diagnosed as autistic at 6 years old, and since then, my journey has been one of understanding, growth, and purpose.

First, I would like to sincerely thank you for this opportunity. It is truly an honour to be part of this space. This will be my first speech outside of Chile, which makes this moment even more meaningful to me.

On February 21st, 2023, I officially became an autistic activist, committed to advocating for rights, visibility, and dignity for autistic people. In September 2025, I created the digital campaign *Autismo365*, with a clear mission: to raise awareness and promote autism inclusion 365 days a year — not only on specific dates.
Today, I continue working so that autism is understood with respect, empathy, and acceptance. Because *inclusion begins with you*.