

If we want to build awareness, interest, and political commitment to the proposed National ASD Strategy, first person voices are crucial. Terry Batley has created a thoughtful and thorough process for supporting verbal autistics in reaching out and engaging other people regarding the Blueprint.

spearheaded by CASDA His invitations for autistics to reach out start from the comfort zone, and gradually move out to increasing levels of demand and challenge. We need this. Well done, Terry Batley. If you have autism and want a strategy for taking action, take a look. If you don't have autism, take a look and let your motivation to advocate for the blueprint get a boost.



Time to move forward

- What change am I referring to you might be asking? Even in these uncertain times we need to continue our work to get the Blueprint for a National ASD Strategy recognized at all levels of Government.
- 1. Ask yourself why the Blueprint for a National ASD Strategy is important to you?
 - a. Ask yourself if you are comfortable talking to people about the Blueprint for a National ASD Strategy
 - i. If you answer "no" consider why this is your answer.
 1. If it is, you are not comfortable talking to people.
 - a. Could you get out of your comfort zone once a month?

The presentation from Ewa Bochinski and the Autism Women's and Non-binary Network of Edmonton (AWNNE) left me both smiling and wistful. This peer group shares support and experiences around job application, interviewing, and working anywhere from alone to within large companies. The participants describe the group as a place where they feel safe to be themselves, where they feel truly heard, where understanding of each other is effortless, where they feel part of a community through sharing and peer mentoring, and where others not only understood their limitations but could validate them.

I wish this kind of network was available to all autistic adults, plus any interested teens!

Quotable quotes:
 Jennifer: *When the barriers we face are recognized and legitimized, we thrive. You want outside-the-box thinking? I am so far outside the box;*



others don't even know they're in the box.

Ewa: We need non-autistic people to highlight the voices of autistic advocates – not to speak for us, but to presume competence.

Danielle: When employers ask for my opinion on anything important or give feedback, I feel like I'm included and important, and don't feel like an ant in a big world.

Sally: If I'm questioning things, it's a strength. Once I have all the details, I can make the best decision, and do the best job.

Elsbeth Dodman has put some significant thought into how governing bodies can include autistic voices instead of tokenizing or excluding, even around decisions regarding autism policy, the way in which the Ontario Autism Plan did. This ethical issue of exclusion and tokenism has plagued the autism community. It's ironic. So many autism services are focused on helping children with autism to speak and

communicate, yet autistic voices are excluded from decisions that profoundly affect us, our families, and our supports. We need creative solutions for including autistic people in discussion and decisions, regardless of the supports we may need in order to



participate. *An organization that does not have the confidence of the people that it serves is failing as an organization, and failing at its mission.* We need more individuals and organizations in the autism field to champion the autistic voice, demonstrate inclusion, and lead by example in welcoming autistic voices and viewpoints.