



NEURODIVERSITY

1 in 10 people identify as neurodivergent.¹ Neurodiversity refers to the range of differences in people’s brain function and behavioural traits. Autism is included under the umbrella of neurodiversity. Strategies that support neurodiversity often focus on individual strengths.

SUPPORTED INDEPENDENT LIVING

Independent living is a living arrangement that maximizes independence and self-determination, especially of disabled persons living in a community. Finding independent living solutions that combine housing with appropriate levels of support and funding are challenging. The type and level of support are different for every individual. Support needs are dynamic and often change over time based on levels of developmental, physical and mental health, social inclusion or exclusion and employment.

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

Many individuals with autism continue to live with their parents well into adulthood and middle age, and rely on their parents to function as their support system. Parents ask, “What will happen to my child when I am gone?” Without appropriate planning and support, it is a matter of time before an individual with a disability whose support system has disappeared is in crisis. Population based trends increasingly describe autistic adults experiencing food and shelter insecurity and homelessness.^{2,3}

CHANGING THE ODDS

Working one-on-one with individuals improves their odds of success within existing systems. **Working at the community and systems levels, changes the odds of success for many.** Based on our work, we have identified a number of policy level opportunities that have the potential to change the odds for neurodivergent individuals.

➔ **Champion Person Centred Approaches**

Generally, people do better with supports that are person centred. Funding that is flexible enough to enable a variety of support models will result in more supported independent living opportunities. Authorizing family managed funds to be used to purchase support services from all accredited agencies,

including those agencies not currently on the “approved provider list” will allow families to make important support service choices.

➔ **Focus on Functional Ability**

Consider adaptive function as a qualification criteria rather than IQ. Children with autism qualify for support funding. For adults with autism, one of the current criteria to qualify for funding is an IQ of below 70. Many emerging adults with autism who have an IQ over 70 have significant adaptive function challenges and struggle with the transition to adulthood. They would benefit greatly from funding support during this critical transition time.

➔ **Consider Variations of Support**

An affordable place to live is an important component of independent living. Ensuring a reliable, trustworthy support system is critical. In particular during times of transition, a range of support models offering higher or lower levels of support may be required. Housing and support models that adapt to changing needs across the lifespan are required. Encourage models that allow for variations in levels of support and include the building of natural community supports into affordable housing models.

➔ **Incentivize Respite & Transitional Housing**

There is an urgent need for respite and transitional housing. Respite care improves family health. Transitional housing helps young adults build independent living skills in a safe and supported environment so that when they move away from the family home they are safe and successful.

¹Neurodiversity Hub <https://www.neurodiversityhub.org/>

²Food Insecurity in U.S. Households That Include Children With Disabilities (2016) <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0014402916651847?journalCode=ecxc>

³The prevalence of autistic traits in a homeless population (2018) <https://journals.sagepub.com/stoken/default+domain/AMuFddNNmeCRNV5RWXY/full>

ABOUT THE SINNEAVE FAMILY FOUNDATION

Sinneave is a Calgary based charitable operating foundation dedicated to improving the transition to adulthood for individuals with autism. We believe that investment in the key life transition period between age 15 and 25 will improve the outcome trajectory for individuals with autism and their families. At Sinneave we work with individuals, families, communities and systems to improve outcomes in education, employment and independent living.

A note about language: There are varied preferences in the autism community regarding the use of language. Sinneave appreciates that language is personal and evolving. We aim to be inclusive and use language that represents a variety of perspectives.