

Focusing on Strengths, Not Deficits in Neurodiversity

Rebuilding Lives Through Research Transcript

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[music] At Kessler Foundation, a fresh perspective is reshaping how we approach neurodiversity. Rather than focusing on limitations, researchers are exploring the untapped potential of individuals on the autism spectrum - highlighting their strengths, talents, and capacity for growth. This shift is not just innovative; it's empowering.

Programs to address the learning, communication, and behavioral differences of people on the autism spectrum traditionally have focused on their deficits - the skills they lack. Researchers at the Center for Autism Research at Kessler Foundation have developed a groundbreaking intervention that instead targets the strengths and abilities of neurodiverse adolescents and young adults.

This shift in perspective is especially critical when it comes to employment. The challenges neurodiverse individuals face in the job market can have lasting impacts on their confidence and motivation.

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This is particularly significant for those seeking employment. Studies have shown that neurodiverse individuals have greater difficulty finding and maintaining jobs, which leads to frustration, less motivation, and a sense of failure.

To combat this negative cycle, Doctor Helen Genova, associate director for the Center for Autism Research, developed Kessler Foundation Strength Identification and Expression - KF-STRIDE - an innovative, positive-psychology approach that helps identify and build on individuals' unique skills and talents and provides training to perform well in job interviews and the workplace.

"Preliminary findings have shown KF-STRIDE effective in preparing transition-age autistic youth for work opportunities. Study participants learned to recognize their strengths and convey them appropriately in an interview setting. They also demonstrated greater confidence and self-awareness," explains Doctor Genova.

With promising results in hand, the focus now shifts to scaling access - ensuring more individuals benefit from this innovative tool through strategic partnerships.

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One of the first moves in this direction is a collaboration with SpectrumWorks, a New Jersey-based organization committed to building a more neurodiverse workforce. Through this partnership, KF-STRIDE will be made available to the broader autism community, helping more individuals prepare for meaningful employment.

Equally important is Kessler Foundation's partnership with Understood.org's NeuroEquity Research Collaborative, a consortium of thought leaders and experts in neurodivergence. The group is working to advance understanding of



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neurodiversity and create a research base for a social and structural shift toward equity and inclusion. This partnership is funding the expansion of Dr. Genova's research to youths with learning and thinking differences such as ADHD and dyslexia.

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"None of this would be possible without the generous support of our donors. Together, we're making great strides in helping neurodiverse individuals achieve independence." says Dr. Genova.

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If you're inspired by this strength-based approach to neurodiversity and want to explore it further, we invite you to learn more. Discover the work of Dr. Helen Genova, the Center for Autism Research, and the KF-STRIDE program - each playing a vital role in empowering neurodiverse individuals to thrive.

Links to additional resources are available in the program notes.