

## How my Disabilities Led me too Forensic Science

Growing up with ASD and ADHD felt like living in two different extremes. On one side my brain was moving too fast, constant racing thoughts, distractions and sensory overload. On the other side I could become laser focused on a specific task, interest, or mystery. For years I struggled to fit into the traditional school system. Teachers did not understand my restlessness and inability to focus or my complete disinterest in what they were trying to teach. But underneath that was a mind eager to learn in a way suitable for me and my needs. Although frustrating, these challenges are what inevitably led me to discovering my passion for forensic science.

I have always had an interest in medicine, more specifically injuries and trauma. My mother is a nurse and I would ask her about the kinds of people she worked with at the hospital. I would do my school projects on medical conditions whenever given the chance. I always wanted to become a doctor or surgeon but as I grew older I realised my ADHD and ASD would become a major obstacle in that dream. I knew I would struggle with the constant focus needed during long shifts or the many years spent listening to lectures, so I put that dream to rest.

Along with this interest in medicine was another love, puzzles. Whether it was a jigsaw on the table or an unsolved mystery in a show or movie, I could spend hours decoding patterns, analyzing clues, and imagining how events unfolded. My ADHD made it hard to sit through lectures or follow long sets of instructions, but when I had a mystery in front of me, everything else fell away. That hyperfocus, often seen as a symptom of both ADHD and autism, became my strength.

Living with ASD gave me an unusual relationship with social cues. I often felt like I was an outsider, observing in social situations rather than participating. While this was

painful in my early years, it made me highly observant. I began noticing things others overlooked like changes in tone, patterns in behavior, inconsistencies in stories. What began as a coping mechanism eventually became an analytical skill that fits perfectly within forensic science where noticing the smallest anomaly can change the direction of an investigation. My brain, wired for detail and curiosity, feels at home there.

For a long while I was unsure of the path I wanted to take post secondary. I struggled to find something that interested me while also being something I felt I would be able to do with my disabilities. The deadline to put in university applications was fast approaching when a friend had mentioned forensic science, which I wasn't very familiar with. I did research on the subject and became very interested. For the first time, I saw a real-world application for my strengths. I loved the way forensic science combined biology, chemistry, and deductive reasoning. It was structured but creative, grounded in evidence yet driven by instinct.

Of course, there will be obstacles. Group work has always been intimidating, transitions will be hard, and executive function challenges make planning and time management difficult. But I have worked strategies, breaking tasks into small steps, using visual planners, and asking for accommodations when needed. Instead of fighting my brain, I learned to work with it.

Choosing forensic science wasn't just a career decision, it was a declaration of self-acceptance. I am not pursuing this field despite my disabilities but because of them. My autism gives me focus and pattern recognition. My ADHD gives me energy and creativity. Both give me empathy for those who are misunderstood, overlooked, or wrongfully judged, something that drives my passion for justice.

With this degree, I hope to work in a forensic lab or crime scene investigation unit, contributing to the fair and accurate resolution of criminal cases. I believe that justice

depends on the precision and integrity of science, and I want to be part of that process. I also hope to advocate for more neurodiverse representation in STEM and criminal justice fields.

My disabilities have shaped the way I see the world, not as something broken, but as something complex and solvable. Forensic science mirrors that belief. It's about seeing what others miss, asking hard questions, and piecing together the truth. In many ways, it's the perfect field for someone like me.

## Documentation



Dear Sarah,

Student Number: 0895958

I am delighted to share the news that you have been accepted to Trent University for the following program(s):

Program	Session Start	Campus	Load
Honours Science Program, Forensic Biology	September 2025	Peterborough	Full Time
Bachelor of Science, Forensic Science Program	September 2025	Peterborough	Full Time

I hope you will take in this moment of accomplishment. After all, it is your academic performance and record of achievement that have led to this milestone. That is why it is a particular pleasure to share that you are tracking towards a generous entrance scholarship, starting with **\$2,000** in your first year and renewable for up to four years and up to potential scholarship total of **\$8,000** if you maintain your average throughout your time at Trent.

Should your average increase between now and the end of the year, your scholarship amount could increase as well. Be sure to watch for updates on your full scholarship potential.

I invite you to visit [trentu.ca/trentubound](https://trentu.ca/trentubound), where you will find helpful information related to your scholarships, important next steps like accepting your offer - even ways to connect with future classmates.

Once again, Sarah, congratulations on joining the outstanding, close-knit community of scholars at Trent. We are dedicated to helping you reach your highest potential academically and ensuring you have an extraordinary time along the way. If there is any way in which we may be of assistance to you, please do not hesitate to get in touch with our admissions team at [admissions@trentu.ca](mailto:admissions@trentu.ca) or 1-888-739-8885.

I hope to have a chance to meet you on campus.

Sincerely,

Dr. Michael Khan  
Vice-President Academic and Provost

Client Name: Sarah Wasyliw  
Date of Birth: June 14, 2007

Mrs. Wasyliw completed the parent version of this questionnaire. Based on her ratings, no significant elevations emerged in the areas of externalizing problems (hyperactivity, aggression, conduct problems). Sarah was reported to demonstrate a level of self-control that is similar to the levels displayed by others of the same age, does not tend to act aggressively, and demonstrates rule breaking behaviour no more often than others of the same age. Concerns emerged in terms of her attention regulation skills. Elevated ratings (within the "at-risk" classification range), were seen in relation to internalizing problems. She reported that Sarah sometimes displays behaviours stemming from worry, nervousness, and/or fear and at times can be withdrawn, pessimistic, or sad. Mrs. Wasyliw endorsed that Sarah sometimes engages in behaviours that are considered strange or odd, is generally alone and has difficulty making friends or is unwilling to join group activities. Mrs. Wasyliw reported that Sarah has difficulty adapting to changing situations and takes longer to recover from difficult situations than most others of the same age, has difficulty complimenting others and making suggestions for improvement in a tactful and socially accepted manner, has difficulty performing simple daily tasks in a safe and efficient manner, and demonstrates poor expressive and receptive communication skills and has difficulty seeking out and finding information on her own. Her leadership skills were rated as typical in that Sarah displays an appropriate level of creativity, ability to work under pressure, and is able to work with others to complete tasks.

#### FORMULATION

Sarah was cooperative and friendly throughout the assessment. She engaged well in testing and a working rapport was established and maintained. She demonstrated good perseverance and motivation throughout the assessment. The results can be validly interpreted as estimates of her abilities.

Sarah is an intelligent and conscientious young adult with many processing strengths and positive attributes. Her verbal thinking and reasoning skills were well developed, with performance in the High Average and Very Superior range on most tasks, with the exception of a subtest of crystallized knowledge. Her nonverbal thinking and reasoning skills were exceptionally well developed, with an overall score in the Very Superior range and subtest scores ranging from the 84<sup>th</sup> to 99.6<sup>th</sup> percentile. Measures of cognitive proficiency were discrepant to intellectual ability and emerged in the Average range overall. She demonstrated some difficulty on working memory tasks, with performance in the Low Average and Average range. Her processing speed ability was in the Average range, as was her visual motor integration skills, visual perception and fine motor control and planning skills. Sarah demonstrated strong visual memory skills (High Average range) and extremely well-developed verbal memory skills (Very Superior range). Her delayed memory skills were also quite robust and emerged in the Superior range of performance. Her academic achievement skills were appropriately developed. In terms of reading skills, Sarah demonstrated well-developed (High Average range) word-level reading skills, decoding ability and reading comprehension skills. Her phonological awareness and phonemic proficiency skills were within age and grade expectations. Her writing skills were in the Average range overall, with High Average sentence writing skills, and Average essay writing and spelling skills. Her mathematical skills were in the Average range for both math problem solving ability and numerical operation knowledge. Sarah continues to experience clinical concerns related to inattention, restlessness, impulsive control and emotional regulation and executive functioning. Sarah continues to meet diagnostic criteria for Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, Combined Presentation. Sarah has received a number of accommodations over the past several years which have enabled her to perform to her expected ability. Continued accommodations and support at the post-secondary level are warranted and essential.

Based on assessment results, an additional diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (DSM-V 299.00) is warranted. There is no accompanying language impairment or cognitive impairment. Sarah exhibits persistent challenges in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts. There is evidence of a history of fixated/intense interests, repetitive body movements, hyper-reactivity to sensory input, preference for routine and structure, difficulty managing changes, inconsistent eye contact, and challenges related to peer interactions and social relationships. These symptoms have been persistent, have been present in childhood and have impacted various aspects of functioning.

Supporting individuals with ADHD and autism involves a multi-faceted approach that considers their unique strengths, preferences, and needs. Establishing a structured and predictable environment can help individuals with autism navigate daily tasks more effectively. Clearly defined schedules, visual supports