

Making a difference with disability

by : Brooke Moore

People occasionally ask me, "When did you realize you were autistic?" There were a few pivotal moments when this realization became clear to me. These experiences have significantly shaped who I am today and are the reason I strive to be an exceptional social worker. What still perplexes me, however, is that I remained unaware of my disability until I was 13 years old.

I cover my ears as I sit on the ground, crying. Panic overwhelms me as I look around, feeling helpless. My vision blurs as tears swell in my eyes. At just nine years old, I was unaware of how the world truly functioned. I didn't understand that people could be so cruel. As a child, I often found myself repeating phrases, pacing back and forth, and avoiding eye contact with others. This behaviour stemmed partly from my awkwardness and fear, as the girls in my fourth-grade class didn't like my appearance or demeanour. To this day, I still struggle to comprehend why they made my life difficult and why they chose to hurt me. When I confided in the social worker at my school, she didn't believe me. From that moment on, I became terrified of discussing anything like that with anyone again.

I was diagnosed with autism at the young age of two. My parents enrolled me in school, and by the time I was seven, I had an Individualized Education Program (IEP). I didn't fully understand what it was; I just knew that I received extra support in nearly every subject. There were always aspects of myself that I struggled to comprehend, such as the way I masked my personality and emotions for the sake of others. It wasn't until I was twelve while playing on the playground, that I was pushed and called the R-slur. When I asked what that meant, the person told me it meant I was stupid. I was deeply hurt by this, and I later learned that the term was primarily used to demean individuals with special needs. The more I reflected on it and researched the topic, the more I began to wonder if I had some form of disability. In September of my seventh grade, I asked my mom about it, and she confirmed that I am autistic. At that moment, everything clicked into place.

I aspire to become a social worker, specifically a Children's Aid Society (CAS) social worker. My passion has always been to help others. While I believe I possess the skills for this role, my primary motivation is my desire to support both children and adults. My commitment stems from my own experiences, as I felt unsupported and unheard in my past. Since then, I have vowed to assist as many individuals as possible, as every child deserves mutual respect and consideration.

I would like to work with CAS because it is a valuable field for someone like me who wants to make a positive impact in the community and empower those who need assistance the most. I

have had a few interactions with them, and often, nothing was accomplished. Therefore, I aspire to be someone who actively addresses problems and overcomes adversity.

I often reflect on what might have happened if that social worker had believed me. Perhaps my career choice would have changed, and maybe it still could, but I find comfort in knowing that I am proud to have chosen this path. In short, I am strangely grateful for everything that has happened to me. I am happy to be who I am, to think the way I do, and to look the way I do, and I am pleased to say that will never change.