

## **HONEST CONVERSATIONS**

### **Episode 4 - Public Awareness, Understanding and Acceptance**

**HOST:** Ally Garber

**SPEAKERS:** Karen Bopp, Maddy Dever

You are listening to the fourth episode of “Honest Conversations”, a podcast about Canada’s Autism Strategy. After the Federal Government’s Commitment in 2019 to produce a national plan to improve the lives of people with autism, the Autism Strategy was announced on Sept 26th. The objective of this series is to share the Autism Alliance of Canada’s expertise and reflections, with our members, as key leaders at the national level, now that the Strategy has been released.

**Ally Garber 00:00**

Hello and welcome. You’re listening to Honest Conversations, a podcast about Canada’s National Autism Strategy. I’ll be your host, Ally Garber. Thank you so much to Maddy and Karen for joining us today to talk about priority area four of Canada’s first Autism Strategy. And just as I do with the other episodes, I’m just going to read out the priority area so that our listeners can understand what we’ll be digging into today. Priority area four: a Canada where Autistic people have all their needs met in an environment where they feel safe and accepted, including when accessing services and supports. The plan also outlines a number of framework measures and strategy actions within this pillar.

I won’t read all of them, but a couple that we will likely touch on today is undertaking a national autism knowledge, understanding and acceptance campaign. The campaign will focus on key sectors, including healthcare, education, employment, community services and public safety, while accounting for intersectionality and autism across the spectrum to foster inclusivity in all aspects of Canadian society. With the focus on information for Autistic people and caregivers, provide and disseminate information regarding autism through the Government of Canada’s web page and communications, including on World Autism Awareness Day and for Autism Awareness Month in Canada.

And in terms of strategy actions, they’re looking to facilitate the advancement of education and training programs to combat negative stereotypes and increase public awareness, understanding and acceptance of autism, and support the launch of a national autism knowledge, understanding and acceptance campaign. Perhaps most important to note here, they are looking to leverage existing actions and the disability inclusion action plan to help address autism priorities in Canada and fund Indigenous organizations as they engage Autistic people in Canada on the Strategy.

So I’m going to turn it over to our two incredible guests today, Maddy and Karen, and I’m going to have them, to tell us a little bit about themselves. Maddy, perhaps I’ll ask you to introduce yourself first, if that’s okay.

**Maddy Dever 02:36**



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Yeah, no problem. My name is Maddy Dever. I'm an Autistic adult, and I'm also a parent of four kids who are also on the Autistic spectrum, most of them are adults now, which is a totally different thing. I'm also the Co-Vice Chair of the Autism Alliance of Canada, and I'm involved in a lot of autism education and training projects across North America. And really, I want to see a world that are, not just my kids, but my kids' kids that have, they may have to (?) be Autistic, of a world where they can thrive. So that's my vision.

**Ally Garber 03:12**

Maddy, thank you. I know that you do a lot of work in the autism education space. It was, you know, difficult to get you to take time to do this because of that schedule. So I really want to thank you for doing this. Your voice is really important because of that expertise. So thank you. And Karen, I'll hand it over to you.

**Karen Bopp 03:31**

Hi. Thanks so much for having me here today. My name is Karen Bopp. I'm not Autistic, but I have worked in the field of disability for over 30 years in Canada, mostly in British Columbia. I started my career as a speech language pathologist working with young kiddos, many of whom were Autistic and their families. Then went on to do a PhD in research in autism, and then was the director for autism policy in British Columbia for the government of BC, and currently I am with the office of the Representative for Children Youth, an advocacy arm of the government really looking to advocate for children and youth with disabilities.

That's my position there. I was at UBC for a while, where I created programs, kind of what we're talking about today, really about creating acceptance, but not in the way from: 'here's what autism is. And you know you need to, need to understand it and know it'. And it was more about looking at professionals. And what do they need to know? Like, what does a dentist need to know about supporting an individual in the dental chair?

You know, how can they support them to have a successful appointment and so, and how do they sort of learn to understand that they have strategies that they can do to help people every day.

Anyways, I'm going off on a tangent, but currently I also am the Co-Chair of the Autism Alliance of Canada, and I really see myself as not an ally, not an accomplice, but a co-conspirator, willing to sort of put myself on the line to advance the work of the Alliance and also to improve services for people with autism in Canada.

**Ally Garber 05:35**

Thank you so much, Karen. So we do have a couple of questions that we put together for you today, just to get a sense of where you feel we landed within this priority area, within the Strategy. And so, Maddy, I'll kick it off with you. After reading the Strategy and specifically this priority area, but don't feel as though I'm limiting you to that one, is this what you hoped to see?

**Maddy Dever 06:07**

I think what we have here is the first layer of a blueprint of how we can move things forward, so that the world around us Autistics can become less foreign and more accepting, more including of us. And so I see some of the measures here that are captured; of what we need to do, what needs



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to happen. And I love the fact that we've really embedded the word acceptance, and we've moved away from just talking about awareness; awareness, over time, brings stigma, and the stigma gets in the way of how you support the Autistic in front of you.

It creates barriers of attitudinal barriers that get in the way of Autistics being able to be included in living their full life, whether it's in the home, whether it's in the community, whether it's in school, whether it's at work.

So, I love the fact that they've moved away from awareness. They're talking about knowledge and understanding, which are two different things, as opposed to awareness and acceptance being embedded as this is. This is not just what we're hoping to go for; this is what this is. This is what we will be doing. So in that respect, I really like that we've done this language shift. It's the first layer, like this is the first step in our blueprint, and what gets added on that in the, over the next five years, that's what's really going to be important.

**Ally Garber 07:43**

That's, I love what you said about awareness. And Karen, I'll, yeah, I'd love to hear your thoughts. But Maddy, thank you for; you articulated that really well. That's been my issue with it as well. So thank you for stating it as such. Karen, over to you. What did you do?

**Karen Bopp 08:01**

Yeah, I just want to build on what Maddy was saying. You know, I really like that idea of, you know, what, you don't like the idea. But I think awareness really is sort of a tiered barrier, sort of, 'well, I'm aware of you, you know, like, I'm still me and you are still separate.

Because I'm just aware of that; you're separate and different'. Acceptance: I like it more. As Maddy said, it's about action. It's about, you know, 'what can I do?' I'm hoping that, you know, I'm hoping that we're going to live in a world one day where we don't need to have awareness and acceptance campaigns for people with disabilities or Autistic individuals, but we're just sort of all understanding of one another.

But that's going to take some real systemic change from, you know, birth to adulthood and education in schools and things like that. So, but I really do think about that idea of, you know, awareness being sort of this really sort of tiered, sort of barrier for folks. It's not very helpful. In terms of, sort of, is this what we wanted? I mean, it's a start, you know, we have to start somewhere. It is, you know, there are some good things, especially in, you know, in this area, you know, we do have a lot of work to do.

There are many people who don't understand what autism is, or continue to think autism is, you know, what they see in popular media, you know, on TV shows, and that's sort of their reaction to it. And so I think that we do have a lot to do to just sort of make people understand and humanize who we all are, but also know that there are things that people can do in their daily life to have others feel more accepted and included. And just part of the society and the conversation.

**Maddy Dever 10:05**

One of the challenges we have with the way that we've had awareness campaigns in the past, you know, 40-50 years ago, we started with those families that had that children with the most significant needs, and that was what was painted as autism for, you know, the first 10-20 years,



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and as our understanding of autism increased in some of the people that we had given different diagnosis or treated differently are all into this autism umbrella.

And it's important that when we are educating and providing knowledge about autism, the representation of the many different types of Autistics: those who are not speaking, those who also have intellectual disabilities. There's a wide variety.

And the way we build acceptance is learning how to accommodate. The societal barriers we have, we really need to build a culture of accommodation. So it really doesn't matter what your label is. It matters what the needs are in front of you. If we can accommodate, that's acceptance, and acceptance leads to inclusion, which is what I think in our hands we all want.

But how we do that really requires leadership. If we just are building a web page that talks about autism, we haven't done our job. If we're building things that can bring that interpersonal, direct understanding, to businesses, to organizations, to things, so that they can experience the different aspects of autism, so that they, it's not just a one size fits all.

I think that's really crucial. This is, again, the first layer. What I'm talking about are the things that we need to build on top of that to ensure that these words actually will be, the outcomes of these words, will actually have the meaning that Autistics really need in order for us to flourish and thrive.

**Karen Bopp 11:52**

Yeah, to lead to action, right? Because, you know, as we know, a person is not disabled by what they cannot do, but by the barriers put in front of them by society. And so it's breaking down those societal barriers and for people to, you know, for example, you know, a lot of people, when they think of, you know, barriers for people with physical disabilities, it's sort of adjustments or accommodations.

You say, I like the word adjustment, better accommodation systems or legal terms sometimes, but adjustments sort of come more easily to mind, right? You know, I can build ramps coming up into my store. I can have wider halls. I can have closed captioning. I can have a bigger font. But when you say: 'Well, how can I support an Autistic individual in childcare or the primary care or a physician, like, How can I support my interactions with them? What can I do to help that individual?' Things don't as easily come to mind. They're kind of like, you know. You know, I don't know what to do. But what I find really encouraging is that we are starting to live in a society where people are asking what they can do. They're wanting to know what they can do, which to me, 5-10 years ago, wasn't happening. It was like the medical model. Well, you, Autistic person, need to sort a, b and c out before you can come to this recreation program.

Before we can, you know, sit in a dental chair. And I think that, you know, what is, what we need, and what, Maddy, what they're saying, is that, you know, we really need to sort of meet people where they are and give them skills and have people feel confident that they sort of understand the wide spectrum of autism or the wide differences of others, and sort of know what to know, what to do and know how to better support an individual, no matter where they are.

And let's be clear, learning how to better support an individual in a workplace or childcare, isn't just helping Autistic individuals. It's helping all individuals. It's learning how to be, you know, just better.



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**Ally Garber 14:09**

That's where Maddy's comment of the culture of accommodation. Maddy, I love that. I want to get it tattooed. I just think that's just brilliant. Because one of the things that I've, noticed doesn't just seem to be the right word, discovered, since my son was diagnosed 10 years ago, 11 years ago, is that there is an unquestionable divisiveness in what, you know, many people call the autism, quote unquote, community. And you know, even that phrase is, you know, divisive to some. And so I think you talked about it, how autism is a very vast spectrum. And so I think that's where it's been a struggle, in terms of awareness campaigns in the past.

Because, how do you, and I come from a communications background, how do you effectively communicate that diversity that exists within that spectrum? You know, because people see one individual's presentation of characteristics or traits, and then another is, and it just doesn't line up. And so, the culture of accommodation is so brilliant. And so I guess I do have a bit of a lofty question for you, and you can absolutely choose to roll out of the room and not answer it. But what do you think? Do you think that perhaps this knowledge and understanding campaign could help to address some of the divisiveness that exists between Autistics themselves, parents of Autistic children. What do you...? What is your take on that?

**Maddy Dever 15:58**

So, okay, I think that this pillar can provide some of that, but it really, in the face that, you've got parents who have more challenges, and their kids that may have more complex needs. There's challenges when parents first get a diagnosis, there's challenges when parents experience Autistic puberty, and all of these challenges, acceptance gets, opens some doors.

Acceptance is what we're all looking for, but I think the need, if the needs of the community, are met through the other pillars as well, and there's better care, and there's, you know, quicker diagnosis, and we see a really good training of medical professionals in what autism is, beyond the autism fields.

You know, as we see these other pillars come to fruition, I think that this acceptance model, the understanding, the knowledge, will wrap around and make those barriers between the different communities dissipate. We'll see more bridges between them. It's really like, it'll take the whole, it takes a village to raise an Autistic. It takes a whole Strategy and an action plan from it to actually see that Autistic cross, and their family.

**Ally Garber 17:34**

It goes back to that culture of accommodation. And, you know, the reality is that there's going to be some parents out there who misstep and misspeak, but at their heart, they want the best for their children, and they're asking for help. And so how can we accommodate those parents to be equipped to seek the right kind of support for their children?

And how can we, you know, make sure that, you know, we're supporting Autistic teens going into adulthood, and you know, it, I think you're bang on Maddy, it's seen the other priority areas come to fruition that will help public awareness, understanding, acceptance, really, be truly fulfilled. So Karen, sorry, I'd love to hear your thoughts on the matter.

**Karen Bopp 18:18**



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Well, I do think it is a package. You can't have one without the other, you can't have an acceptance campaign and think, 'oh, that's just going to lead to inclusion for everybody. And we're all going to sit around the fire and say kumbaya, it's all going to be great'. Because it's not. Because you need all of the things to work together.

You need all of the things to wrap around the child and the family. You need, you know, I talked about the social model of disability, but you also need that medical model of sound (?). There are many people who need therapies and services to reach their own potential, and we can't just say, 'well, we're just going to make everybody feel accepted, and we're not going to really focus on, you know, somebody who may be having some significant needs, maybe self-injurious behaviors, maybe communication needs'.

They need the therapies and the services to be able to sort of bring themselves, their person-centered selves, up to their potential and families are asking for that. So, you know, it is hard, because, you know, when we talk about acceptance campaigns, you know, you don't want to just sort of end in, 'well, yes, I'm accepting now'. Well, what does really accepting mean, you know, and does that lead to inclusion?

Does that lead to you as a recreation provider, saying, Okay, here's a non-speaking Autistic individual as a co-occurring condition of intellectual disability. And yes, I'm going to, know, have some skills and accept and bring and include that person into my program, rather than just in sort of including the, you know, an individual who maybe doesn't have a co-occurring condition and other things.

There's so many differences there. I don't know if I'm saying that correctly Maddy, and I don't want to offend anybody, but I do think that, you know, I agree it's more than just the website. It's more than just a social media post about being accepting. Acceptance doesn't necessarily mean inclusion, and we have to start thinking about what inclusion means.

### **Maddy Dever 20:28**

Yeah, I thought a lot about this over the years, and one of the things that I've really come to: acceptance has to be an action. It's not just a feeling. And so one of the things that I teach is that only when you have accommodation and acceptance do you actually have true inclusion. Acceptance needs to be intentional. It needs to be proactive. It needs to, like, it's, for example, you know, if you have a door, I'm in a wheelchair, so I'm gonna use a wheelchair metaphor here. So if there's a door to a building and it has a button, but I actually have, you know, but the button doesn't work, and I have to knock on the door and somebody comes and opens it, that's an accommodation. It's not accessibility; it's not real acceptance yet.

Making sure that the button always works, that you can do it yourself. That's actually accessibility, that's actually acceptance, and I'm able to be included in that environment. It's the same thing. There needs to be, we need to have people understand what they can do to make sure that the button is there, and and in working. As alongside sometimes the steps to get there mean that you have to be aware that somebody's at the door, and so understanding what autism means, and having representation in media, having representation in organizations, having representation at, every table that's talking about autism should have Autistics there.

When you have that, then you're co-designing the future for Autistics. You're co-designing the way businesses can adapt and pivot to be supportive of Autistics, and like you said before, when



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you make accommodations for one person, there are so many other people that can use that accommodation. It's like the first step of a domino. It's that attitudinal barrier. You'll remove that first domino. You remove that first barrier.

All of the other ones become easier to do. It's not expensive, it's not rocket science to learn how to provide basic support to Autistics, and then as the needs are more, maybe more extensive, then knowing who to go to, knowing, having that body of knowledge that can share best practices on how to support Autistics in the workplace, how to support Autistics volunteering, how to support Autistics on your board, how to support Autistics who do not use their mouth to talk but have other methods of communication. Language is not talking. So, you know, looking at how we support the non-speakers, in every other aspect, I think is important. It's the sum of the whole that will actually bring us that world that I envision of us thriving.

**Ally Garber 23:32**

Are there any actions in this priority area that you can point to and say, this one here, if followed through, could immediately improve my life or improve the work of the organization I work with. Not to put words in your mouth, but I was very happy to see increased recognition of the importance of intersectionality throughout the Strategy. So I think that's going to make a dramatic impact. But turn it over to the two of you. What do you identify?

**Maddy Dever 24:13**

There's two things and what you, I'll talk about what you just mentioned, the accounting for intersectionality. One of the things that we, in all of the research that we've been doing that, especially as we've been getting more into researching Autistic adults and whatnot, that we have a lot of gaps in terms of who we are hearing, the families that we're hearing, the Autistics that we're hearing.

We have the immigrant community, francophones, Indigenous, rural, there's a lot of places where we're not supporting them as well as we should, because we understand what autism looks like, you know, in a little white boy, girls, that it's taking time to learn that it can be different, but when it intersects with other other demographics, other disabilities, there is just, there hasn't been this intentional way of researching it and disseminating it and sharing with the population, so that, you know, autism looks different, like my oldest two kids, they're half black.

They present differently than other kids, and we ascribe more difficult, challenging, inappropriate language when we're talking about what we see these kids doing. Like, what, the way a behavior is described by a black boy and a white boy are very different, and you hear the words defiant and non-compliant with one and hyper and overactive with the other, and this the same dang thing. So understanding that the lens of autism isn't just the only lens that we need to apply to a particular child, and family situation is important.

And so the second thing following from this is really trying to support Indigenous-led Indigenous Autism Strategy, that we can partner alongside, but really help, you know, put Indigenous people in the lead of how they support their communities. Because, again, it's a different culture that looks at autism differently than the Eurocentric North American...



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Yeah, the coloniality. It's different, and I love the fact that it's included here. I want to see outcome measures so in five years, we know that we've been able to see real, tangible growth. I'm not sure, success is really individual to the child, but if we want to see growth in these areas, these kids, these adults, these families, better supported, this is the way to do it.

**Ally Garber 27:13**

Maddy, I'm just going to, before we go to Karen, I do want to touch on the point you made about targets and success factors, because I know before in our pre-recording conversation, you know, you touched on the importance of both targets and success factors, because you're right. How will we know if we've succeeded, if we have nothing to aspire to? This is aspirational, and that's wonderful, but how do we know we hit the mark? And so would you mind expanding on those thoughts a bit.

**Maddy Dever 27:43**

So there's two things here: we have what's in this pillar, and what's in here is important. It's building upon what's been done, and it's in us, giving a direction. What's more important is what's not in here. And what's not in here are things like outcome measures.

How do we know at the end of five years that this Strategy has been successful, that it has changed lives, that it has made people more understanding and accepting of Autistics, that it's allowing Autistics to be included more in the workforce, in education, in the community, that we understand that Autistic quality of life is different than, it's individually measured.

That's a huge thing that's not here. So as I said, this is the first layer, and I really hope that over the next year, as this Strategy begins to happen, that we start building the layers on top of that, so that we really see tangible results. Like these are all really good, beautiful words, but if they're just words, it's a word salad that'll give us indigestion and it won't really move the statistics forward. We need to see the action, and in order to do that, we need to know: how do we evaluate it?

**Ally Garber 29:11**

That's perfectly said. Karen, what do you think is the biggest thing missing in here? Do you agree with Maddy's assessment? Is there anything you'd add to that?

**Karen Bopp 29:21**

Yeah, so I want to build on what Maddy was saying. And I do believe benchmarks; we need to know if, you know, when you're driving somewhere, how do you know that you've gotten to that destination? And there is nothing in here to show us what our destination is and to understand that, and not to say that we're going to get to the benchmark.

And having an unrealistic benchmark is just like having no benchmark at all, you know, that everybody's going to be or having this theoretical, you know, acceptance across Canada, you know, life is going to be great for everybody is also not an appropriate benchmark. So I think some work needs to be done, especially from the Autistic community, how an Autistic individual sees, how it impacts their day to day life, like, do they feel it on the ground? Do families feel it on the ground? And how do we measure that? And that's a tough one to measure, but it doesn't mean, just because something is complex doesn't mean that we should not try to address it.





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And so I think that's something that needs to be addressed in here, is that sort of understanding of that benchmark; like, what is a benchmark? And having benchmarks are things like 'we've done, you know, 8 million or 500 social media posts, and by the end of five years, we'll have four commercials, and we will...', you know, all those things are not the benchmark. To me, the benchmark is the impact on an individual in their daily life. Do they feel that the needle is changing? I wanted then to sort of just pull back a bit and go back to stuff you said about intersectionality as well. And I think that sort of what's missing there is we have to be very careful in any sort of acceptance or awareness campaigns.

Let's, you know, be truthful. We're talking about campaigns here that autism doesn't overshadow everything. People with autism, surprise, have other co-occurring conditions, just like everybody else does. Somebody can have an anxiety disorder and also have an intellectual disability. Somebody can have autism and also have ADHD. And so I think what we need to sort of, that needs to be sort of put in there, because what I see from the professional side is that many people, say a teacher, 'oh, that's just because he's Autistic'.

And it's like, well, actually, I see an anxiety issue here, and we need to look at the anxiety right now of getting into this classroom or doing whatever the issue is; not autism. So we have to be careful that in any sort of campaign, we're not just sort of painting this big brush over autism. And once you understand autism, you now understand that person completely. And you don't, because we don't understand anybody completely, because there are, you know, we all have co-occurring issues.

And maybe the issue isn't Autistic, maybe the issue is ADHD, or anxiety, or whatever it may be, or allergies, you know, like people go to physicians, and, you know, always a non-speaking Autistic child. 'Well, it's because they're Autistic'. But they may have an ear infection, and nobody knows.

### **Maddy Dever 32:51**

And, yeah, this is where we wrap the other pillars together. And this pillar cannot stand on its own. You know, it cannot be done in isolation to other things, and training and supporting medical health professionals in the multi-discipline, the multi-modal approach of understanding autism and what supports are needed and what supports are offered, is essential. There's a phrase that 'you've met one Autistic, you've met one Autistic', right? There are some similarities.

There's some approaches that you can take, especially looking at sensory environments and being patient and learning how to listen, pivot and adapt. But those other intersectionalities, whether they're racial, demographic, language or disabilities, other disabilities and illnesses, like right now, you see me talking and whatnot, and I'm pretty good at that. If you add new acute pain, I have a spinal cord injury. If I get new pain, I can't talk. I cannot and if you evaluated me and said, 'Oh, autism', and this has happened to me, some of the true medical challenges get missed, the silos of awareness are what need to get undercut, and that's why true knowledge and understanding leads to the acceptance and the accommodation and the support, which brings us to inclusion. They all fit together.

And, you know, the Strategy, I like the fact that it has these multiple pillars. If you put a plank on four legs, it will hold. If you put that same plank on three legs, depending on how it, but, and you didn't, you know, move the pillars around, the legs around, it's going to be wobbly, or it's going to



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fall apart. You take one more, boom, it's not, it cannot stand. So this pillar really cuts through and wraps around all the rest of the Strategy.

**Ally Garber 35:08**

My son is 15 now, and he, over the last number of years, has become a vocal advocate, not just for autism, but he educates on his experience with obsessive compulsive disorder, and it's been a real reality check for us as parents, for his medical professionals, because we did have to battle to get him supports he needed for OCD, because for so many years, it was, well, there's a lot of, you know, traits that you know are similar to OCD, but this is autism. And once he was treated for OCD, his quality of life, absolutely, you know, skyrocketed, he's able to articulate now so succinctly, 'no, this is autism, those routines and, you know, repetitive actions, bring me relief. They make me happy. These repetitive actions cause me significant distress'. And so it goes back to, here, getting people directly at the table to share that. And so it's just, you know, thank you, Karen for bringing that up. And Maddy, I've known you for a number of years now, and my son and his peers are watching you, and you've given them the confidence and courage that 'I have something to say, and people are going to listen'. So thank you for that. And I know we're running out of time, but I wanted to just ask each of you, if you wouldn't mind just perhaps saying, from here, what are your hopes? Where do we go?

**Karen Bopp 36:42**

I mean, I'll start. I just wanted to just, again, go back to what, Maddy, you'd said there. We have to avoid that, 'I love the silos of acceptance', right? Let's avoid those silos of acceptance. So that I think is really important. So that's what I want to avoid in the future. And I also have to say that, you know, I think that this National Autism Strategy, and the actions that will come of it have to be based on the voices of Autistic individuals and those with lived and living experience in this country. The most I've learned, I've read a lot of articles and read a lot of books and done a lot of things, but the most I've learned is listening and hearing about the experiences of Autistic individuals and their families and what they need, to impact and to change their lives. And that's what we have to listen to. We have to uplift the voice of your son, uplift the voice of Maddy and your children, uplift the voices of all so that people feel confident that they can say, because it's pretty scary coming in sometimes and expressing your opinion to a bunch of professionals or a doctor or whomever. So I think that, to me, is where we, you know, I do see that there is a lot of, you know, 'nothing about us, without us' underpinning all of this. We just have to make sure we don't deviate from that and that we can keep on that road, because we're not going to learn, we're not going to change without those voices.

**Maddy Dever 38:31**

What's really important is: this Strategy that's been presented isn't just a strategy for the government; it's laying a strategy and a blueprint for everyone in this country. And the co-design of our future is so important; it really means finding the voices that are missing, bringing us to the table, passing us the megaphone, and listening to what we're saying and what we're needing. When you include us, we're going to have better outcomes. When you include us, we're going to



be able to tell you, you know, what are the things that tend to change and modify and improve our quality of life?

If you include us, you know, you won't have to go back to the drawing board every couple of years as things get put out for us, but not with us. If it's important that Autistics are accepted and that our agency is respected, that our autonomy is given to us as long as possible, and all of these things can't happen unless we start with that concept of inclusion, concept of acceptance, concept of that culture of accommodation. It's not just what we expect the government to do. It's what we need to do with each other, with the government, with Autistics and their families.

**Ally Garber 40:07**

This has been such an incredible conversation. Thank you to both of you for making the time. Your insights on the Strategy and this pillar are fantastic, and I think they're going to be really beneficial to those who are overseeing it. So I just wanted to thank you both for, again, taking the time, and for everything you're doing within your community. So thank you to you both, and I look forward to seeing you soon.

**Maddy Dever 40:33**

Thank you.

**Karen Bopp 40:34**

Thank you.

**Ally Garber 40:41**

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