

Ég mun gefa mína ræðu á ensku. Partur af minni einhverfu er að ég tjái mig miklu betur á ensku og ég hljóma öðruvísi þegar ég tala ensku, sem að mér líkar betur við.

Getting to know the autistic me

My name is Valrós, I'm an artist and a computer geek, born 1996 and I work in at Garðheimar. I was born prematurely and spent a lot time at the hospital when I was a child. My mental development was not in sync with other children or my older sister, so my parents started quickly suspecting that something was not like it was supposed to be.

I was six years old when the suspicion of autism increased, I showed all classic symptoms; i was always alone, in my own world and had no need or desire to talk to my classmates. And so we set out to diagnose me, which concluded when I was 8 years old and I was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome.

Pre-school was fine. I spent most my time drawing and letting my imagination run freely. A good example of my early undiagnosed autism was when two girls invited me to play house with them and they wanted to play a Mother and daughter and i wanted to play a gold hoarding dragon that could breathe rainbow fire. They didn't want to play with me.

This all came as a shock to my parents, and it took some time for them to accept these results, they didn't know anything about autism, except what they had seen on television, which at the time was a 1988 film called „Rain man“

It was difficult to transition me from pre-school to elementary school. It was hard to get the school to meet my special needs and my parents decided to transfer me to a different school, which went great! That school had a great program which did wonders for me.

I never liked elementary school, for a lot of reasons. I didn't want to be around many people, I struggled in mathmatics, I got picked on. My old school was rather „old fashioned“ so the faculty would brush off bullying as „rough play“ or „kids being kids“ so you can imagine how they handled Special Needs Kids.

The only special treatment I can remember getting is that i was allowed to have headphones during lunch because the noise in the cafeteria would really upset me. But when I transferred, things got better.

That school's policy was to focus on the children's self-esteem first. Which makes perfect sense to me.

You can't produce good results unless you feel good about yourself.

In my new school, my special needs and limits were taken into consideration. I was able to skip difficult social situations that would make me exhausted. During recess I could always go somewhere where it wasn't noisy.

I loved that school, I have a lot of good memories from there, all the teachers I had were really receptive to special needs kids and were really caring. I made good friends there and they would treat me as an equal and wouldn't put me down, or elevate me for being autistic.

But I still never managed to escape or skip my mathematics classes, my worst nightmare. I never got the grasp of it and it got to the point where I started to develop serious anxiety and depression. No matter what I tried; Different textbook levels of mathematics, special classes, private tutoring, it would never stick in my head. As time went on my mental condition worsened drastically, and I ended up seeking help from BUGL to get my anxiety under control and I was put on medication that I did not want to take.

It's a special kind of humiliation when everyone around you understands something, and you're left struggling to even try to get a grasp of it. I felt left in the dirt by my classmates who could do algebra and fractions and percentages and I would sit there struggling feeling like an idiot. It didn't matter if I was good at other subjects like English or art. I couldn't keep up with everyone and it was extremely upsetting.

I didn't enjoy my first treatment at all. Medication without therapy doesn't make a lot of sense to me, and I personally can't stand taking pills. It makes me really uncomfortable to swallow something whole, especially if it's small, makes me feel like I'm doing something wrong. So I avoided taking my medication.

After a difficult high school experience I decided I would attend FÁ, Now there were higher demands and expectations, and I had no special help available to me. Math was still my kryptonite and nothing worked to get me to grasp it. My anxiety got worse, my depression increased, and thoughts of self harm started to spring up from the mess. My mental illness became so serious that when I got sent back to BUGL I was in a way worse condition than when I was there the first time.

Whenever I would walk into math class, I would try to mentally prepare myself and tell myself it's not so hard and I just need to focus. Then I would look at the worksheet and at that point, my depression and anxiety would just be dancing around on my hippocampus like they own the place.

After 5 months of therapy I started to get better, I found mental balance in art therapy, and it was very clear that school was making me sick. Art made me happy, it made me strong. It was decided that I would not go back to school and instead receive training from Janus and their work program

Art has always been one of my biggest strengths, It's a hobby, it's a skill and it's a very good tool for coping and venting out my feelings, good or bad. It was amazing to have an art therapist who could understand the visual representation of my suffering and talk to me about it.

Not long after I joined the work rehab, I got diagnosed with dyscalculia, which is a form of dyslexia specifically for mathematics. That immediately explained so much and helped me accept that it's just something I can't do, and I should instead focus on what I'm good at.

I was 19 years old when I joined Janus, and I'm so thankful for their service. Everyone who was in the program with me was much older than me, which didn't bother me, but it did solidify the reality of no matter how old you are, mental illness can affect anybody, and it's up to you to learn to manage yourself, know your limits and know your strengths.

I got a job at Garðheimar through VIRK where I'm surrounded by pots and plants, I feel good there, I'm in a stable mental state and I like my job and co-workers.

I still live at home, but I put a percentage of my income to savings so that I can one day have a home and take care of myself, I'm optimistic and confident that I'll be independent and self-sufficient. If I can continue working in an environment that is considerate of my situation, I'll be okay.

I spend my free time doing art and writing campaigns for Dungeons & Dragons for my friends, I also play video games when I can, either alone or with my friends.

After all the struggle with school that I went through, My dad worked to suggest a change in the school system for children with autism. He suggested a system where students with special needs could take their studies partially through the internet instead of being in a social environment that can be taxing, and that students could possibly swap out a subject that they cannot do for something of equal value which is manageable. With that system, children on the spectrum would be more likely to finish their student's degree and continue schooling on their specialty. With reasonable academic demand there would be a less likelihood of them developing depression and anxiety.

If something like that was offered to me, I would have had a way easier time with school, and I hope that this option will be a possibility sometime in the near future.