



ISLAND OF MISFITS

NEURODIVERGENT STORIES

A compilation of stories, poems and art from the local neurodivergent community in Tauranga.

2024



Table of Contents

3	About
4	Note from Emma & Hannah
5	Chapter one Neurodivergent stories
30	Chapter two Overcoming shame
44	Chapter three Neurodivergent supports



About

ISLAND OF MISFITS

Kia Ora! My name is Emma. I'm autistic and I love community and bringing people together, art, music, travelling and writing. You'll find some of my artwork, writing and poems scattered throughout this booklet.

I run a group in Tauranga called Island of Misfits!
The Island of Misfits is a group where neurodivergent or marginalised teens/young adults can find belonging and discuss worldviews, faith and neurodiversity.

This booklet all began when my group and I were putting together an event called By Misfits For Misfits- a two day workshop for neurodivergents. We ran the workshop in March 2024.

Pretty early on, when the event was still in the early planning stages, we expressed how cool it would be to put together some kind of resource that could be beneficial to the community after the event!

Then, randomly on social media, I met an awesome person named Hannah.

We went out for coffee at the Whipped Baker to talk about the upcoming event. She expressed how she had a dream to put together a booklet of neurodivergents' voices!!

And so, our ideas combined and this booklet was born!
I hope this booklet helps you to feel less alone and helps you be proud to be your awesome self!!



A note from

Emma and Hannah

For neurodivergents: We hope when you read this booklet, you will feel less alone and that you feel empowered to live life as your authentic and beautiful selves

For neurotypicals: This booklet was made to share what it is like to grow up in the world as a neurodivergent person. Our hope is that you take this new found awareness and start to encourage and advocate for the young neurodivergents around you

Disclaimer: Every person's story is unique and every person is unique in their strengths and needs. This booklet does not represent the perspective or views of every neurodivergent person, simply those who have contributed.



Chapter One

Neurodivergent Stories

The next few pages are a collection of stories and art from neurodivergent young adults who are either a part of the Island of Misfits community or came along to the 'By Misfits for Misfits' event. We hope by reading these pages, you will gain greater insights into the lived experiences of neurodivergent people. If you are a neurodivergent person reading this, our hope is that you will feel less alone. You will also see photos of young neurodivergents who attended the Island of Misfits workshop: 'By Misfits, For Misfits' held at the Creative Community Campus.

By Misfits, for Misfits

Emma Cox

Autistic, whole & loved

Autism.

Diagnosed at 4

Or "Asperger's Syndrome" as it was called back then

Growing up, struggling with shame

There's no way I could have a label like THAT!?! I thought

"Unable to build proper relationships

"Fixated" "Obsessed"

"Unempathetic"

"No imagination"

But I love people!

But I love relationships!

How could I have a label like that!?!?

Put in a box

Misunderstood

Others didn't understand me...

God why? Why did you make me like this!?!?

Wishing I could have surgery

To take this so called "autism"

Taken out of my brain

So I could be so-called "normal"

So I could be like "everybody else"

But is that what I wanted!?!?

I guess not

Living in a world where people tell you to "Be yourself!" only not like THAT!?!?

Beating myself up

How could I say that

Cringing

Oh no, I'm doing that "autism thing" again

Masking

Covering it all off

Don't show any signs

Don't let them know

Striving for acceptance

For Belonging and friendship

To be loved just as I am

Not really seeing the love

That was right in front of me

All along

By caring people

Who love me all along

Despite the challenges

Slowly blooming

Year by year

With kind adults by my side

Who see the gold in me

When I don't see it myself

Finding refuge in camps
Youth groups and conferences
Escaping to be
Where I can truly be myself
Learning can be weird and it's okay!

Living in community
Finding my people
I need to face this shame head on
Living with people
Who see my best sides and
worst sides
And love me regardless
Even because
Of my neurodiversity

Learning to accept
Learning to confront
The shame I've held all these years

Contacting an autism parent's group
"Do you have anything for adults?"
"No we don't but maybe you could
start one!"

Confronting the fact that I am autistic
And that's okay
Learning I am loved

Learning my autism is not a mistake
I am made by God
I am loved as I am
And that is not a mistake

Starting a group
The Island of Misfits
A home for the misfits, the outcasts, the
weirdos
The different, the broken, the "just
haven't found their people"
Anyone is welcome
Free to share their views
Eating together
Laughing together
Bringing others into community

Embracing my neurodiversity
As something to celebrate
Rather than hide
Running an event
By Misfits For Misfits
To celebrate our differences
And know we're not alone
I am loved
Strengths,
Weakness
And all
A child of God
Autistic, whole and loved



Mykal Mayne

Spoken Poem

Hi, I am Mykal Mayne. I am 20 years old and will be turning 21 in 2 weeks. I have CP (Cerebral Palsy) and ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder). I have a witty attitude and am intelligent. However, the things I do are impacted by my physical limitations. I am studying for my Diploma in Software Development, Level 6, which is impressive due to my limitations. I like Star Wars, D&D and video games. I also like attending events like my Sunday church, Young Adults group, and the Island of Misfits.

This spoken poem is a metaphor for my journey and the struggle that I live through. The symbiote represents my autism. The quotes in the spoken audio are thoughts that I contemplate daily. I know things will get better but my thoughts are ginormous compared to the good things in life.

An old proverb says, "Even if I walk through the valley of The Shadow of Death, I will not be afraid because there is one who is always beside me, and he is always making a way for me."

My Story

I feel as though I've got a symbiote
Something that is attached to me but is not me
Asking: "What if I don't do that? That is not going to work"
Trying to drag me down
Pulling the UNO reverse card on everything in life
Rebuking everything I believe
Rebuking everything I say
Trying to say "If I do more, then I will be more"
But I can't pull it off
It's choking me and making me cough
But what do I say to the symbiote?
Nothing, because I don't have enough steam
So I hold on to the promise of the Promised Land
When Moses took me out of Egypt
The symbiote is going to try and make me think different
To think more positively about life
Trying to pull a detour on me
Trying to make me turn around like a boomerang
And I know that is not my jam
But it will be the wine that I drink
As I sit at the table when He comes again
So what is the symbiote trying to do to me?
It is trying to make me flip a coin, 50/50
Have bad days when I feel blinded by smoke
Or when I have good days and I'm up in the clouds





Jasper of the river

My name is Jasper, I am 24 years old. I am autistic and I have ADHD. My pronouns are he / him. My special interests are poetry, trees, mushrooms and photography.

Takiwātanga is the Te Reo Māori word for autism, which translates to "in his/her/their own space and time." I chose this title to describe what it feels like to experience life as an autistic person at my own pace. This is also a poem that explores autistic joy and my connection to my inner childlike self that still feels awestruck. I chose to write about this as it's all representative of my unmasking journey and me coming to know my authentic autistic self.

Takiwātanga

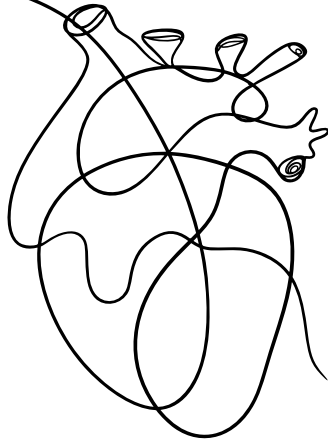
You may or may not know
the geography
of my mind's landscape
beyond the borders
of what I mask and present,
but these thoughts need
a place to roam.

Up in the safety of my stratosphere
the burden of being has no weight
I feel lighter
than a feather
or the shadow of a bird
I allow myself to be free of fear
to know that all I need is to be me,
to not play hide and seek with the traits
that only society doesn't wish me to
see.



All that is whimsical
feels like an old friend
that whisks us away
to witness the wonder
our inner children still knows
when we let them out to play.
And when the mask I wear
falls asunder,
the play begins again.

I ground, I love, I roam, I speak.
My heart finds me again
with courage that is true to form
to feel like earthworms
being roused with the rhythm of the
rain
I am with them in the storm
standing on my own two feet
abandoning the humdrum
of the expectations
society wants me to meet.



I yearn, like all of you
to be left breathless
and reminded to breathe
with bliss, a burgeoning blooming.
I was born with an optimistic draw of
luck
found with synapses
that are still not pruning.
And trust me, when I say,
this is not a burden, I am not stuck
all I need is a release;
to dance, to stim, to feel!
That graceful gift of glee
of twirling in time, holding space to
heal
to be the authentic, autistic me!

Hannah Snowdon

My name is Hannah, I am a 33 year old ADHD woman. I have a husband and a three year old. I am a teacher and cheerleader for neurodivergent people. I have always loved learning and the best part of my job is that I am constantly learning and being able to pass on that knowledge to my community. I am happiest when I am spending time with my family, playing the piano or learning a new hobby.

This is a photo I took at the top of Snowdon which is the highest mountain in Wales. I chose this photograph because it shows a few things. Firstly, that ADHD can feel like the hike up the mountain and at the same time feel like the euphoria experienced at the top of the mountain. The picture also shows a thin pathway, with a steep drop off, ADHD can also feel like I'm balancing on a thin path, holding everything together. The day we climbed Snowdon was a beautiful, clear day, which is rare for Snowdon. ADHD to me can be waiting for the fog to clear, but when it does, I can achieve more than I thought possible. The clear day also represents that the more I take care of myself and listen to my body and understand my ADHD, the less fog I have.





Hello my name is **Maisie**



I am 23 years old.

I am on the Autism Spectrum; I was diagnosed when I was sixteen years old, still in High school dealing with personal and outside struggles. When I was first diagnosed with Autism my brain was thinking is it over? It can't be just Autism because I felt there was more going on than what the lady had told me. Thinking well at least we know what was making her different!

PROBLEM SOLVED!


Just like most people who have heard the news, it can feel like a huge shock and your brain is just in total denial of who you are. It felt like a burden had been latched to me for being weird or strange, because that was the label that had been inserted onto me throughout school. Bullies always made us (neurodivergents) a prime target, they knew we would somehow be insecure about our differences and they did not accept that we were different.

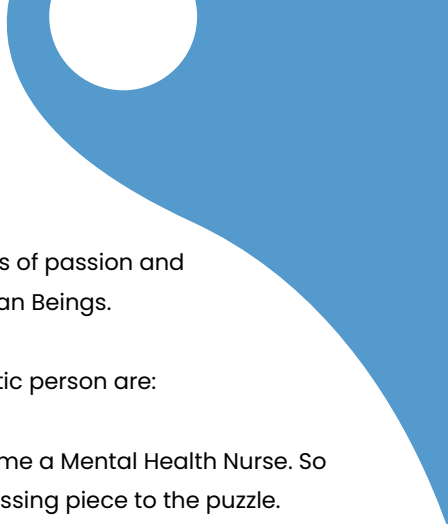

It feels like the world thinks that if something is wrong with a person they should deal with it themselves. Or the world tries to fix you without proper knowledge and awareness they could get from simply talking to young neurodivergent people.



Growing up today, even though I am an adult in my early 20's, I am still trying to understand what Autism is. Since last year I have been extremely grateful to have met an Advocate called Emma who runs Island of Misfits, This is an organisation for people who are Neurodivergent to find community. It also gives information to neurotypicals to help them understand and grab knowledge on what it means to be on Autistic. I wish people understood that not everyone is a smart neurodivergent character like Sheldon Cooper.

Everyone deals with struggles that I wish could be acknowledged more. Hollywood Media seems to base their autistic characters on one usual stereotype that ignores the fact that Autistic people are all unique and difference and can actually be good with social cues and understanding expression.





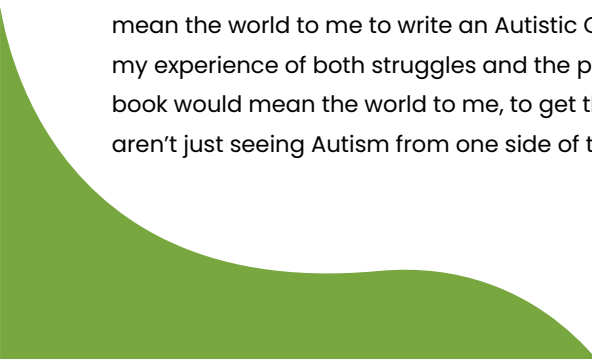
Autistic's are all unique, we all have different types of passion and struggles, that everyone can understand as Human Beings.

The things that make me proud of being an Autistic person are:

My Passion. I hope someday in the future to become a Mental Health Nurse. So then I can help those who feel like they are the missing piece to the puzzle. They have always wanted to feel whole, to fit into a society that accepts us and hears our voice.

Right now, I am currently working as a Support Worker and I absolutely love it, I enjoy getting to meet people who are different to me, and I can get to learn on a different level through forming a relationship with them, so I can get to understand what they have.

Another passion of mine which has been going strong since I was little, is Art. Ever since I was little, whenever I felt my brain was getting a little too much, or I felt I needed to take a break from the world outside, I would get down to my paper and would absolutely dump everything that was in my very own mind onto the paper. Whether it was painting, or simply drawing a character in a journal, art has always been there. I draw the same character in my journal, I imagine he can come to life and I forever hold that character in my creative head, thanks to Autism.



Because I have been keeping my relationship with Autism private, it would mean the world to me to write an Autistic Character, through my lens, using my experience of both struggles and the positives of being Autistic. To write a book would mean the world to me, to get the whole thing out there, so we aren't just seeing Autism from one side of the story.



Erik

Neurodivergent

My name is Erik, I am a 23 year old neurodiverse man and live in Tauranga. I love the outdoors and I like to tinker with cars and I also like hanging with people.

I was diagnosed with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder in 2016, which I inherited. During the first year I found it very hard to deal with because my Dad didn't understand what OCD was at first, because he was from a generation that didn't understand or talk about mental health. Fast forward a few years and through my own faith journey, I started to learn how to control my OCD and not let it have authority over me.

I do still struggle with it daily, but as long as I keep my thoughts on heavenly things and allow God to lead and guide me, I can take control of it.

I'm also a part of a young adult neurodivergent discussion group called Island of Misfits. It's a group where we can come together and have community, eat together and have discussions about the big picture of life. It's really cool how we get many different viewpoints and people are free to share their worldviews! Island of Misfits meets every second Saturday from 2pm til 4pm.

Bridget Butterflies

I am Bridget I am 21 years old. I have a chromosomal micro deletion on 17 q12 and I am apart of Island of Misfits. I am a Christian and I love animals and children.



It's not easy to be yourself sometimes, finding your wings is hard work. Like a butterfly coming out of the chrysalis - but look how beautiful and perfect all butterflies are.

Anonymous



A short story

I have written a short story about how much being undiagnosed with autism affected me and stunted my growth throughout my childhood.

I was always a shy kid, but this never concerned anyone because they all assumed I'd grow out of it. But I never did, in fact, my shyness got worse as I got older. I was always labelled as sensitive and dramatic, leaving me feeling invalidated about myself.

I struggled greatly in primary school and would have constant meetings with teachers, deans, principles and deputy principals explaining to them all how much I found school difficult. All they said was that I was fine and there was nothing they could do. I was even banned from the sick bay at one point for being sick too much. I would wish and wish to get sick so I wouldn't have to go to school. I'd even try and inflict harm on myself so I'd get a day off. Having a sick day was the best day ever and are still my fondest memories from that time.

Intermediate was no better except my classmates began to notice my differences. They would call me weird and exclude me. I had friends, but I always struggled to maintain healthy relationships with them because I couldn't understand myself, and why I couldn't be like them. I was diagnosed with social anxiety and a severe panic disorder at 14.



But I always felt like there had to be something more. It couldn't be this life debilitating. And then one day, I came across a video on social media and felt connected to it. I started to research about autism and I felt as if I was reading a book about myself. I knew from then I was autistic, and went on to seek a diagnosis that took me almost 2 years to obtain.

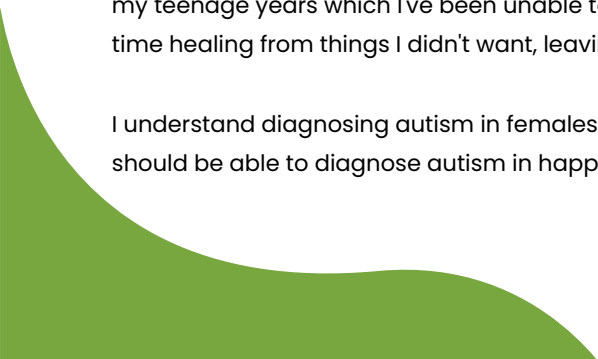
I was in college as I was seeking this diagnosis, and because I didn't have an official diagnosis I wasn't provided with the accommodations I needed. I had lots of meetings again and again discussing a school plan to try and make school easy for me. But it was so complicated.

This resulted in one big final meeting where I wrote a letter to the teachers and other adults. It took me 12 years and an emotional breakdown in front of everyone to convince them that I was not fit for their rules. That I couldn't function under them, and it did me more harm than good. There's this quote that this situation reminded me of:

"I shouldn't have to reach crisis for you to believe my distress."

I feel this really resonates with my situation, as I feel I shouldn't have had to break down in front of everyone for them to take me seriously. Because of this I am now doing online school which I love. My grades are even better than before and I'm completing work faster than I would at public school. Being undiagnosed caused me so much harm during my childhood, and it cost me my teenage years which I've been unable to live as I've had to spend all my time healing from things I didn't want, leaving me behind my peers.

I understand diagnosing autism in females is more difficult, but I feel like we should be able to diagnose autism in happy, non-distressed children.





Emma Masks

Masks

I've tried to hide for so long
Living in a world where people tell you to "be yourself"
Only not like that

Always, performing, perfecting, putting on an act
Surely they won't know who I "truly" am, I think, as I try to cover up those parts of
myself I wish
weren't there
Only losing myself in the process
Who am I really? Under these layers of striving and pleasing
Under these layers of trying to blend in

I was diagnosed with autism at 4 years old
I thought it was something to hide, something broken
A people oriented person, extroverted and passionate
I thought there's no way I could fit that label...

Society squeezing me into a tiny box
My younger self hoping so desperately that someday I'll fit,
someday I'll be worthy
Someday I'll be enough
If I just cover up those scars
So no one can see them
Patch them up,
Perfectionism

Don't put a toe out of line
Don't make it out like you don't have it all together

Identity

Who am I
Am just a mistake, chance?
Why am I like this? Is it just an accident

I've worn this mask for so long I forget who I am without it
Any glimpse of under the mask and I layer on another one
Don't do this, do that
How could you do that, you were so stupid
Come on, you should have known that!
I'm only as good as my worst critic... and that's myself
Measuring myself by an impossible standard
That nobody can truly reach

Who can free me from this cycle
Of self hatred and shame
Making me want to run away and hide
Surely they can't see
Surely they can't know
The darkness that lies within me
Surely they won't accept me if they see

I'm held captive by these masks

They become an identity
I'm fine, I tell myself
I don't struggle with that any more

Stuck in a pit of self condemnation
And Shame
Trying desperately to find a way out
But not knowing how...
Only plunging further in
Who can free my from this cycle
I don't want to hide any more
I don't want to be trapped by these lies and shame
I'm sick of performing and trying to be enough

And then a hand reaches out from inside the pit
He pulls me out and he takes my mask of
And he says "darling, you are enough"
You are worthy
Darling, take off your mask,
Don't try to hide yourself

Take off your mask
Stop your striving and shame
You are loved just as you are
Brokenness, quirks and all
You don't have to be perfect

Because I already am



You are one of a kind
A masterpiece, a work of art
Beautifully broken

Did you know
That some of the things you try so desperately to hide
Are some of your greatest strengths
Or your most powerful stories
Making your light shine brighter

He told me, darling take off your mask
You belong, you are welcome here
You are more than enough
A child of God
Autistic, whole and loved





William Adhd

My name is William, I have ADHD and I live with my wife and son (who also have it!). Our house looks like it was just burgled. . . But it's how we keep track of things! I am an artist and musician, who uses the power of ADHD to push myself into weird, random places most don't think of.

I imagine my ADHD as a vibrant, chaotic art piece bursting with colours and shapes, each part seemingly disconnected yet harmoniously chaotic. At first glance, it appears messy and overwhelming, much like the scattered thoughts and impulses of someone with ADHD. However, looking closer, you can see the intricate beauty and creativity within this seemingly disorganised masterpiece. Just as my mind juggles multiple ideas and tries to make sense of the world, this artwork mirrors the intricate dance of thoughts, emotions, and energies that define my ADHD experience. It challenges the viewer to look beyond the surface, encouraging a deeper understanding and appreciation of the unique brilliance that ADHD can bring to the world..

Lisa AuDHD



Finding out I have ADHD as an adult has been the best and worst thing. It has given me a sense of understanding of myself and the way my brain works, and a realisation that I have always felt like an actor in my own life, always pretending to be what I thought I was meant to be and always feeling like I was a misfit. I have become very good at pretending and you would probably never know I am even doing it! I have always felt like I was too much, too dramatic, too emotional, just too much of everything and not enough of the good things. Knowing I have ADHD has allowed me to be kinder to myself and understand the ways I work and what my brain needs to function as best it can. It has led me to some meaningful and honest friendships and a greater sense of empathy and understanding for others who are neurodiverse. It has allowed me to learn about accommodations I can make that make it easier to cope in life, and helped me to stop doing things that only serve other people at the expense of myself.

However, with the diagnosis has also come an overwhelming sense of self consciousness. When I was diagnosed, I was told that I had 'aspergers traits' also, which came as a major shock but now makes full sense to me. As a professionally successful female who would probably have fallen into the gifted category at school, I thought there was no way I could have ADHD or ASD, but once I truly understood what these things meant, I realised it had been there all along, hiding in plain sight in the shadows of depression and anxiety and being the 'difficult child' of my family. And once I knew what I had, I realised how much I acted every single day just to get by and how much effort that is for me, how tired it makes me just to exist. But now I know I am doing it, I have become so self conscious. I used to just mask without realising, now I am so aware of the ways I mask every single day and I am always wondering if anyone can tell, if anyone will pick it and call me out. Why that would even be a bad thing, I'm not sure.



I don't feel safe yet to share my diagnosis with most people. I have settled comfortably in my own mind as 'AuDHD' and those in my inner circle know me as such, but not the rest of the world. I still carry around a lot of shame about it that I don't really understand. I wish I could be more proud of it and embrace it, as I see in others I know who have it, but I feel like once I start sharing it, I can not take that back. I hope one day society as a whole will feel a safe enough place for me to do so, or maybe it's more that true acceptance of myself will make that feel safe.

The other challenge is not being able to take medication due to side effects and health reasons. This was a slap in the face because when I took medication, it REALLY helped. For the first time in my life, my head went quiet. I could hear the fan in the bathroom and I realised I had never noticed it before due to the constant thoughts, songs and buzzing in my head. So I now sit in this challenging space of knowing I have ADHD, knowing there's something that helps to treat it, but not being able to have that- so I am trying to learn what else helps instead. It's a strange and frustrating place to be.

Sometimes having ADHD makes me feel wonderfully capable, creative and special, and other times it makes me feel broken. Sometimes I hate myself and I hate my brain. Other times, I love what I bring to the world and feel like me being me makes a difference to others. It's a rollercoaster just feeling all those things on any given day, at different times of the day! Sometimes I feel so overwhelmed with thoughts that I think my brain will explode.

ADHD is exhausting, frustrating, and like walking around with weights on your feet every day- it's just harder, it's more effort, it's a lot. But it is who I am, it is how my brain is, and I am learning how to find positive ways to live with and accommodate that.



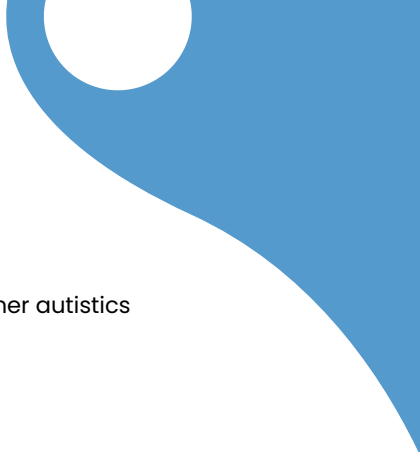

Emma Labels

I have a confession to make
I thought I 'wasn't like the others'
Being diagnosed with autism from a young age, I felt labelled
I felt like it was something to hide, something broken
A people oriented person, extroverted and passionate
I thought there's no way I could fit that label

I've overcome things, learnt how to cope
I can socialise well
I'm not like the others, I thought
I'm different

I've been blind to the fact that even though a label might
not define me,
It still effects me
It's still a part of me
And labels, though they may seem like a bad thing
Might not be a bad thing after all

Maybe labels just bring about understanding
And a sense that we're not alone
And that maybe I do have more in common with other
autistics than I thought I did...
And maybe that's not such a bad thing



Maybe labels just bring about understanding
And a sense that we're not alone
And that maybe I do have more in common with other autistics
than I thought I did...
And maybe that's not such a bad thing

Maybe I just didn't understand our uniqueness
Or that there could be others like me


Autism isn't something to overcome
Or fix
And I'm not the only one who doesn't fit into stereotypes
Few people do.

But no matter how many things I overcome
We have more in common than I've been led to believe
I'm still autistic
I always have been
And that's okay

It's time I started accepting that's the way God made me
Instead of pretending I'm less autistic, in order to feel normal

There's no such thing as more or less autistic
It's just how good you get at hiding it
Ignoring it
Pretending it's not there

Autism isn't something to overcome
It's part of who I am
This is me, autistic and proud.
A child of God
Autistic and loved





Chapter two

Overcoming shame

The next few pages are a collection of neurodivergent ideas and voices, sharing how to overcome the shame and stigma that can come with being neurodivergent.

Neurodivergent Q&A



Emilio

Share your journey

I was diagnosed with Autism when I was 3 Years Old.

Have you ever felt like a fish trying to climb a tree?

When I went to Intermediate School in 2018. I never used to talk and people would ask me why I didn't talk.

Who are your cheerleaders?

My friends and family are important to me.

What is unique about you?

I have a lot of unique interests. I really like plants, fungi and animals.

What helps you to accept your unique self?

When I meet people who have been through the same things as me.

Anon.

Share your journey

Told I had anxiety and was just shy until I was diagnosed autistic in 2023.

Have you ever felt like a fish trying to climb a tree?

Forced to go to public school and being told I'd do badly at online school. Forced to do things like swimming etc by others .

What accomodations do you find helpful?

Noise Cancelling headphones, fidget toys, fidget ring, sensory lights, quiet place, communication cards, weighted blanket.

What are the beautiful and unique parts about you?

High sense of justice.

Tamara Grant



Share your journey

I have Autism, Dyslexia and I advocate about neurodivergence across the country through the company I founded - Xabilities.

Have you ever felt like a fish trying to climb a tree?

Throughout my education in the mainstream school system.

Who are your cheerleaders?

The disability and mental health community.

What helps you to accept your unique self?

Once I left the mainstream systems and found my unique, diverse ways to live.

What are some accommodations that support you?

- Chocolate and green tea gives me dopamine
- I use apple airtags to keep track of everything- walle, phone, keys
- I access disability support networks

What are the beautiful and unique parts of you?

I am diverse and that is my humanity
I live in my authenticity, which is a goal for most but a must for me, due to a lack of accessibility

Hannah Devery



Share your journey

I am a Mummy, wife and teacher. I was diagnosed in 2022 with ADHD at age 32. I am passionate about supporting neurodivergent children and the adults surrounding them.

Have you ever felt like a fish trying to climb a tree?

When I first started university. It was the first time in my life I did not have my family supporting me and providing my routine and structure.

Who are your cheerleaders?

My amazing husband and my friends. The neurodivergent community I am now becoming part of.

What helps you to accept your unique self?

Being around other neurodivergent people who are unapologetically themselves. Being kind to myself and allowing myself small accommodations I might have thought were silly or unnecessary before.

What are some accommodations that support you?

For kitchenware: If it can't go in the dishwasher, get one that can. Laundry: Use the dryer, at least then you have dry clothes Work: Noise cancelling headphones for open plan spaces. Accepting that a messy house does not mean I am worth less.

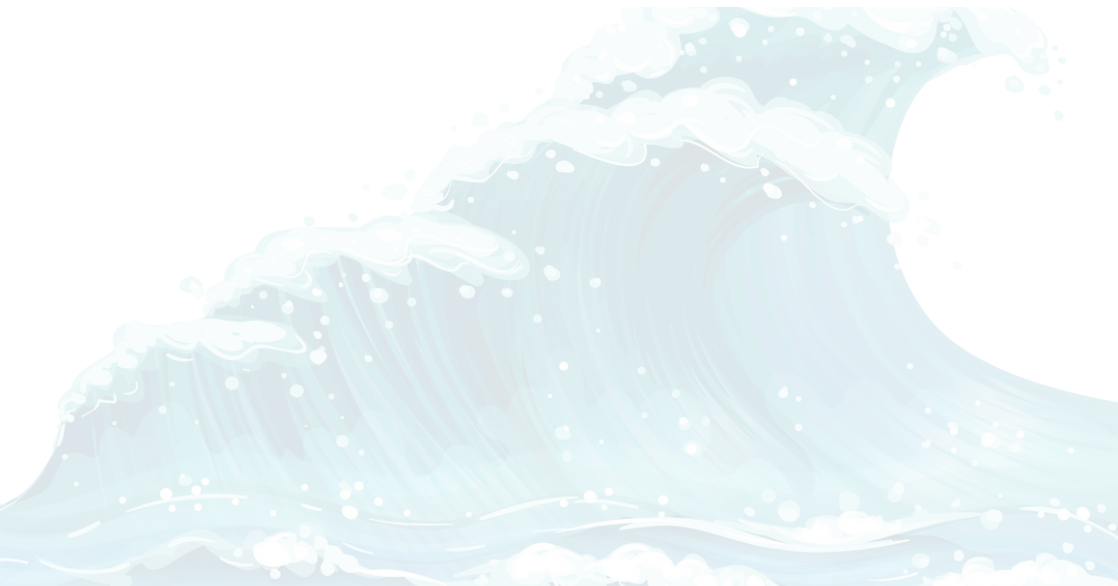
What are the beautiful and unique parts of you?

I love deeply and care about the people around me

I am passionate and hard working

I love to learn new things

I can pick up most hobbies really fast, as long as I don't have to throw and catch...





Emma Joy Cox

Roses

I really struggled with shame growing up, I was diagnosed really young... around 4...

I love people and relationships so having a label that said I supposedly "couldn't relate to others" was absolutely crushing for me.

I was walking around at the rose garden one day (I think I was around 22), so overwhelmed by all the things I had to work on... and then suddenly I looked at the roses around me and a thought popped into my head. I believe in God and I believe he spoke to me in that moment.

These roses... they live wholehearted lives. They have thorns and they have beauty. No one walks past a beautiful bed of roses and says, "Oh yuck look at those thorns, they look horrible."

They are too awe struck by the beauty to notice the thorns- the wonderfully colourful petals and fragrant smells.

Sometimes we can focus so much on our thorns (weaknesses). We obsess over them, we try to cover them up and we feel so much suffocating shame about them.

We focus on the thorns so much, thinking that they're all everyone can see (because that's all we can see).

But when we actually look around, when we get close enough to people and actually open up our lives to others... we realize we're not alone. They have thorns too. We all have thorns.

When we try to cover up our thorns, we miss the beauty. We're just a bunch of scared people living these fake lives and trying to convince the world that we have it all together when really all that means is it stops us from real connection and joy.

The most beautiful thing in the world is being able to say:

"You know what... I have thorns and I have beauty. And I am enough".

Being open and vulnerable with each other. Opening up your life to people who see all your thorns and love you, and not having to hide from people anymore. That's what real community is actually about. It's uncomfortable and vulnerable.

It's a bunch of broken people who know they don't have it all together and they can support each other in their weaknesses.

Living authentic,
open lives...
the thorns...
the beauty...
all of it.



Emma Fox

I know I've spent far too long trying to cover up my thorns and focus on them so much. I want to:

live like a rose.

Be vulnerable with people

Be open with people

Because they're not even looking at your thorns half as much as you are

We are enough.

We all have thorns

We all have beauty

It takes courage to be our WHOLE selves, no holding back.

But that's when you get the whole rose.

Just like Roses don't cover up their thorns in order to show their beauty, we don't have to have shame about our limitations.

The thing is, autism isn't just the thorns, it's the whole rose.

There is beauty and there is hard stuff- just like anything.

It's time I stopped living in so much shame for who I am and started living in authenticity.

Hiding our stuff from the world doesn't protect us from rejection, it just makes us lonely... fake and sad.

There is beauty in letting the world see who you are- all the thorns, all the beauty...

Being open, vulnerable and free.

Making mistakes but supporting each other together.

I want to live like a rose ❤️



Island of Misfits Event

What are your petals and thorns?

During an Island of Misfits event, Emma shared her 'Rose' poem. We then shared our own strengths and struggles.

The next few pages show what we feel our 'petals,' or strengths are as neurodivergents, and what we feel our 'thorns,' or struggles are.

It is important to remember that everyone has petals and thorns and that our thorns often make us even more incredible and resilient humans

High sense of justice, with greater empathy for people who are treated differently

Sense of awe and wonder

Good sense of direction or ability to visualise

Strong connections to animals

Get straight into talking about life and the 'deep stuff'

Accepting community

Talk about multiple topics at once

Autistic joy
Glimmers

Petals

Thorns

Messy!

Sometimes get too hyperfocused

Too many ideas

Organisation and memory

Struggle to get started

Get frustrated at myself
"Why am I like this?"

Struggle to be independent

Creativity
Very creative ideas
for accommodations

Ability to multitask

Ability to stay calm
in high stress
situations

Hyperfocus!

Can get an extraordinary
amount of work done in a
short timeframe

Spidey sense for
neurodivergence

High attention to detail

Curious and caring

Good long term/ random fact.
memory

Can be organised

Petals

Thorns

Procrastination (fear
avoidance)

Struggle with directions- get lost
easily

Anxiety

Bad short term memory

Anxieties

Hypersensitive to touch,
taste, sound

Suck at communication

Auditory processing is hard

Struggles with change or the
anticipation of change

Island of Misfits Event

Handy Accommodations

- Body doubling and having company to get boring or mundane tasks done
- Make things into a game e.g. race the microwave/kettle
- Keeping your eftpos card or drivers license on your keyring
- Doom baskets around the house to shove things in
- Always use a fanny pack so as not to lose things
- Pill container on keyring with spare medication
- Daily schedule on phone, written in before bed
- Giant key ring to not lose keys
- Set lots of alarms, always, then check the alarm
- Google keep/ post its to keep track of work
- Noise cancelling headphones and loop ear plugs
- Weighted blanket for sleep
- Fidget ring for meetings
- Fidgets for regulation



Island of Misfits Event

Things we wish other people knew

- Our needs are NOT preferences, they are REAL needs
- When I'm fidgeting I'm paying attention- it actually helps me to pay attention
- If I am not giving eye contact I am still listening, in fact I can listen better without eye contact
- If I do not have any facial expressions, it doesn't mean I'm unhappy, I'm just relaxed
- I genuinely forget things, I'm not being demanding or naughty or avoidant
- If I take medication, I will likely feel extra tired in the afternoon
- I am highly empathetic and feel rejection deeply
- I can be organised and motivated and/or messy and procrastinate there's no one size fits all for how neurodivergent people are.
- Being autistic doesn't mean I can't build deep and meaningful relationships! Just because I might struggle to fit in doesn't mean i don't want friends or can't be social.





Chapter three

Neurodivergent Supports

Being neurodivergent can be lonely at times.

We often do not know where to go to find support or make connections with our fellow neurospicy friends.

The next few pages have some pages to find support and connection both in Tauranga and New Zealand wide.

Tauranga Supports



Island of Misfits Community

for: Neurodivergent Teens and young adults

Mission Statement: Island of Misfits creates safe spaces for meaningful conversations about life, faith and worldviews, where neurodivergent or marginalized young adults can find belonging, purpose and hope regardless of their differences. We aim to help young adults grow holistically (spiritually, emotionally, socially etc), in an accepting and diverse community so that they can reach their full potential.

email: emma.cox@steiger.org, Fb- Island of Misfits Community, Instagram- @islandofmisfits.tauranga



Paragons Social Group:

Paragonsocial@gmail.com



ADHD Tauranga Support Group



ADHD Tauranga Support Group

Search the name above in Facebook to find the group

TaurangaSupports



Parent to Parent

<https://parent2parent.org.nz/>



Spectrum Connections

<https://spectrumconnections.weebly.com/>



Sonic Cinema

Sensory movie screenings

<https://cultcinemaclub.com/sonic-cinema/>



STEAM-ED

STEAM-ED is an education provider for children, exploring science, technology, engineering, art, mathematics (STEAM) outside of the current schooling system.

We welcome children with learning differences such as ASD, ADHD and dyslexia. STEAM-ED is passionate about being accessible to all children, our educators have a wealth of experience working with neurodiverse youth and are passionate about supporting them in their learning.

Nationwide Supports



ADHD
New Zealand

ADHD NZ

<https://www.adhd.org.nz>



Altogether Autism

<https://www.altogetherautism.org.nz>



Autism NZ

<https://www.autismnz.org.nz>



Parent to Parent

<https://parent2parent.org.nz/>

Kylee & Co

Kylee and Co

Disability equipment

www.kyeeandco.nz

Nationwide Supports



The Neurocollective

[https://www.stacimclean.co.nz/
neurocollectivenz@gmail.com](https://www.stacimclean.co.nz/neurocollectivenz@gmail.com)



Xabilities

<https://www.xabilities.com>