

Unity Forward

An insight and analysis document on the challenges that people with hidden differences has faced during the pandemic and beyond along with suggestions

Autism, ADHD, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and Social Anxiety

▼ **Plus Value Awareness**



Written by Keith Mckenzie



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This document is written by Keith Mckenzie creator of neurodiversity awareness projects, a qualified graphic designer and a participant of community projects



Unity Forward Introduction

2020 has been a year which has affected everyone around the world with the pandemic in many ways. As well as our restrictions as there been many adjustments that everyone needs to get used to.

Society has to also get used to how we function our lives differently. This ranges from how we generally cope, how we pay for buying items & the services we receive. Some of the changes which have occurred may be permanent and can be escalated beyond the pandemic.

Individuals living with hidden differences can face many challenges to adjust and, in some cases, affect their ability to function.

Based on the online feature "Unity Forward", this document provides an insight into several aspects everyone needs to consider and to make sure that people living with hidden differences are not disadvantaged.

The purpose of this project is to provide analysis and information with ground-level insight based on life challenges and issues that need to be addressed. The document encourages independent people living with hidden differences to maintain their place in society and to live with the full beyond the pandemic.

This document is not intended to cover every single issue but this document provides an overview of certain situations and circumstances that society needs to be aware of which enable a person with hidden differences not to be disadvantaged or be made to feel a burden or be shameful during these challenging times.

Please note this document is not a traditional report and focuses on objective insights and analysis. Focusing on the human aspects of people with hidden differences.

Hidden Differences & Changes

Hidden Difficulties summary

Hidden differences is a collective term used by this awareness initiative related to articulate and independent individuals who live with several difficulties which are not visually noticed to the eye. This is associated with autism (mild & moderate levels*),

ADHD, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and Social Anxiety. These kinds of difficulties can affect specific abilities when most people take them for granted. The examples include mind-related abilities and memory, physical and practical skills. Also, it can affect communication and interaction along with specific environments along with reading, writing & calculation.

Note:

* The information on this document does not apply to severe levels of autism as their difficulties are greater than mild & moderate. Also, the issues and approaches are different; therefore, it would not be appropriate to generalise across the Autistic spectrum.

The effects on general changes

The changes which have affected everyone can cause many challenges and obstacles for a person with hidden differences which can easily go unnoticed. If a person with differences has faced some sort of dispute or hostility, it can potentially lead to long-term mental health and can lead to depression. A person with differences who previously had strong social connections & positive creditability can face the opposite effect during the restrictions. This includes loneliness and long occasions without any interaction.

A long period of lacking social interaction can lead to a decline in social skills and interactions. It also affects relationships and the ability to relate to others. A lack of face-to-face interaction and surroundings can cause detrimental effects on basic skills and abilities.

The Pandemic & the new normal

Everyone had to adjust to the guidelines since the pandemic has occurred. From wearing masks, social distancing and the discouragement of hugging or having any close contacts. These and other changes can cause confusion and stress to some people with differences and can affect how they usually function. At certain locations, additional pressures can occur if other people nearby become impatient and have intolerant attitudes, especially towards hidden differences. This can lead to increasing pressures and mistreatment. Because the kind of difficulties may not be visually obvious, can be brought the worst out if they display any emotions or stress. This can lead to facing mistreatment and can be wrongly judged as misbehaved.

Any type of misunderstanding can lead to being told off, disciplined and unfairly getting into trouble. This can happen in any location anywhere including supermarkets, public transport, officials as public services & housing and other indoor locations.

New Normal

Many adjustments with different levels of actions and procedures have occurred to make ourselves and others safe. For some people, the provided guidelines to follow are too complicated or too much to remember. This can especially affect those who live with short-term memory difficulties and can be caught in situations they are not intended for. Some people can adapt and have developed strategies to manage. However, some people with hidden differences find it very difficult to understand and can face intolerance and hostility simply because they don't have enough know-how to adjust to the guidelines. Some of the official information containing restrictions on posters and social media has proved very challenging for some people with differences. It has been criticised that some of the information templates in posts have not presented as easy to digest or legible enough. Especially during the stricter restrictions during the end of 2020 and early and late 2021.

Short & long term hesitancy

A lot of fears and worries can occur during the pandemic period. Especially when specific occasions occur, such as birthdays, weddings, funerals and Christmas.

The Pandemic & the new normal

Afraid

This can lead to some people being uncomfortable taking part and attending specific gatherings which affect family or friends because of the fears of infection

Pressures

However, a person with differences can feel pressured if they prefer not to meet others or attend specific gatherings. Also, they can be wrongly accused of being indecisive, which makes them even feel more pressure to attend functions against their preferences to prevent feeling bad or letting others down.

During the pandemic period, great boundaries can occur against a person with hidden differences which can discredit them further if they cannot accept other people's requests to meet at places where they are uncomfortable, especially when they fear being at risk of being infected.

The changes before the pandemic

London was one of the major places in Britain that was ahead with the pace towards a cashless society. Certain locations operated with a mandatory credit or debit card payment. This has affected all types of payments, from public transport to places of leisure, restaurants, pubs & bars.

Before cashless payment was widespread a fast-food restaurant Burger King at one of London's railway terminals in Marylebone station back. Back in 2019 every customer at this location had no choice but to go straight to the payment screens to order a meal. This is on top of paying by card only the till.

Despite many places have now become automated and cashless many challenges and obstacles. Similar locations may not have any support mechanisms in place so if a person with differences was made to use the booking screens and if they are struggling to follow.

This lead could face hostility and impatient physical interventions by other customers nearby. Also, some people may be still very uncomfortable paying by card due to security concerns. This puts a great number of pressures on a person not to display their difficulties; otherwise, they would face negative confrontation and would be wrongly seen as a liability.

The Pandemic & the new normal

The changing effects of the pandemic

Since the pandemic has started with many restrictions, cashless payments have become widespread across the country. Some places in society now have compulsory credit or debit cards or phone payments. This was advised during the pandemic to prevent COVID-19 virus transmission.

The unrelated changes during the pandemic & beyond

The pandemic period has also been linked to other changes not related to the pandemic, which can cause an increasing amount of pressure and side effects on society's ability to function.

One example is when the major supermarket changed how they provide online delivery. Since April 2021, the major supermarkets have decided to ban carrier bags and larger tray liner bags, which contain groceries along with general carrier bags or particular items to divide from general delivery. These changes were made to reduce the use of plastics for climate change. However, this has caused a short-term disruptive effect for many including some people with differences. Before the changes took place, the use of large container bags helped many people to take grocery items into their homes effectively. Because these changes have occurred during the pandemic, it has caused the stress of some people to escalate. The author has observed a lack of additional support to help anyone manage the changes. This can make these changes very difficult for some people with differences and cause a disruptive effect to be efficient without being a burden to the delivery team. Stress and anxiety towards differences can be escalated if they feel intimidated or face an unfair amount of pressure, especially if a person with hidden differences additionally disinfects every delivered item as a precaution to stay safe.

As well as efficiency many businesses have also changed the way customers can make contacts during the pandemic & beyond. Some of the measures include removing the option of online messaging or emails. This leads to limiting contact to either telephone or conventional letters. The author has experienced the side effects when accessing customer services, which have led to higher waiting times and, in some cases, support or assistance rejection. This can affect anyone if the matter is too complicated for the staff.

Some people who live with hidden differences may not have the option of writing a written letter through the post. Especially if they cannot afford and maintain a printer. This is partly because the ink cartridges can be too expensive to maintain over a period of time. So overall, because of the reduction of contacting options, if someone has received a poor level of service, it can mean they have been ignored and forced to leave the matter unresolved.

There has been an increasing amount of chatbot messaging as an additional way of contacting customer services. However, unless the matter fits into general areas of customer matters, then the chatbot will not help further. For some people with hidden differences this can be made to be helpless if they struggle to navigate when using the chatbot system can lead to abandon seeking assistance or to contact on any concerns.

Attitudes & mindset

The pandemic has affected everyone's mindset and attitude with different, fears, worries and frustration with all the uncertainty. This has caused many challenges, especially for a person with hidden differences.

Attitudes before the pandemic

In recent years society has become more perceptive and very demanding to fit in and adjust against changing trends and expectations. An individual living with hidden differences and certain disabilities can face disrespectful attitudes based on the perceptions and be attacked based on characteristics as well as their intelligence. This is especially true when there is an exception to multitasking, which can be very challenging for some people. This can lead to a constant amount of ableist prejudice and discrimination, bullying and hatred.

Unfortunately, there are still old-fashioned attitudes towards certain people with hidden differences that they should face hard-lined intolerance or should not be seen in society. These outdated attitudes from individuals who don't have any contacts and insight into how a person with hidden differences lives with and tends to be judged through negative examples and stereotypes. These extreme intolerant attitudes tend to have unrealistic expectations with the language of "cotton wool" protection with outdated hardened approaches with false assumptions of growing out of their difficulties.

Also, obstacles and boundaries can get in the way of many life opportunities for some people's differences due to a lack of concise knowledge of specific conditions and difficulties beyond generalisation. This ranges from education, employment and personal matters such as dating & meeting new people.

The emotional effects on communities

Stressed and uneasy mindsets can cause sensitive side effects and emotional distress in families, friendships & other relationships which last a very long time.

This could lead to situations with some people with differences who struggle with social situations, which could face a greater amount of intolerance and destructive criticism and be quickly discredited over a misunderstanding. They may not be aware of what they say, which could trigger a sensitive mindset in others.

Attitudes & mindset

Social attitudes during the pandemic

The pressures of the pandemic, along with the restrictions and the guidelines, can affect how everyone judges and treats each other. The demands of what everyone is required to do can lead to impatience, and responses may not fully understand or are struggling to comply with expectations.

The pandemic can cause strain on attitudes towards others, including those hidden differences with receiving some intolerance & negative presumptions. In addition through no fault of their own, a person with hidden differences can face hostility in local communities and neighbourhoods.

In 2020 a family of horrifying and offensive video trends appears on the social media platform TikTok on mocking and ridiculing autistic people. This kind of backwards prejudice can encourage discrimination and trivialising attitudes when an autistic person is visible in society.

Attitudes in society

Attitudes can occur towards differences based on presumptions. This makes many people to be more judgemental of how they appear and would disregard the difficulties they live with. Some people with hidden differences and other invisible disabilities can face daily life very stressful and can lead to disrespectful attitudes against their intelligence and their place in society. To adjust to changes which they don't understand. Hostility attitudes on entitlement in disability-related facilities can lead to discrimination against hidden differences

Pressures to have faster abilities

One of the side effects of the pandemic can lead to expectations to have faster abilities and to adjust quickly to any changes which they don't understand. This can be a nightmare for hidden differences and other invisible disabilities and can lead to situations when they face disrespect and hostility from other people nearby.

Covid mask Exception during the pandemic

Some people can be allowed specific facilities for health and well-being reasons, even if the matter is not visible. However, there have been some situations where a person with hidden differences & invisible disabilities has faced hostility and disrespectful attitudes when they are entitled to the exemption of not wearing a COVID-19 protection mask or when they are allowed to access priority car parks for disabilities. Some situations have caused emotional distress and been made to be excluded from society.

Attitudes & mindset

Retail environments

Retail is one of many environments where staff can be pressurised related to performance-related requirements. This can mean customers are pressured to be quicker and more decisive in choosing items and to move physically quicker in handling, packing & purchase items and to move quickly. This can make situations very impossible for some people with hidden differences that they may take longer to cope with and manage. Because of this, it can lead to a greater amount of intolerance and disrespectful attitude by either the staff or other customers nearby who may be noticed. Because these environments are not required to make special allowances for hidden differences, they can face characteristics and attitudes against them as an irritant, a nuisance or be unfairly seen as inconsiderate. This means that high amount stress can occur and be very damaging for a person with hidden differences ability to be confident to have a shopping experience without disrespectful attitudes or made to be shameful

Transportation

There have been some worrying developments on public transport where a person with hidden differences along with invisible disabilities face hostility against their place in society. As mentioned elsewhere people with differences can be challenged and confronted if they're seen with an exemption badge from wearing a covid mask when their difficulties are not visually obvious.

There have been some news articles including an autistic adult who was punched in his face twice at a railway station when waiting for a train. Another example of how incidents can occur through perceptions or unrelated circumstances which provoke them to mistreat a person with differences.

Sunflower badge & lanyard

A specially made visual identification which encourage the general public to be accommodating towards people with hidden differences and invisible disabilities. However there have been negative political trends which undermines and trivialising people with hidden differences and invisible disabilities. Sadly this has lead negative stigma with various news articles of people with hidden differences and invisible disabilities facing hostility when seen in society

Attitudes & mindset

The effects on accessing services

During the pandemic, many places have been closed due to a lack of face-to-face contact and changes in how everyone is accessing several types of services. This affects local authorities housing services, banking, and finances.

This can be extra stressful for some people with hidden differences. Especially when the phone lines are in heavy demand and expected to switch to access services online. This can lead to situations where if there is a problem with the service they are receiving and cannot get through they can be made to give up & be stuck with situations unresolved.

Also, there is an expectation to adjust to access services online. This can lead to complicated challenges for hidden differences in accessing multiple online accounts from different organisations & services. If a person with hidden differences became stressed, including accessing accounts including typing their password correctly. This kind of situation when their online account could be locked out or temporarily disrupted and can face intolerant responses if the support teams by the phone may not understand that a person with hidden differences is not a form of laziness or disorganisation.

Covid Passport

The the eye of the author, there have been was unfair prejudice for everyone to access the same services and facilities.

In late 2021 there was a requirement of a covid passport if any one wanted to attend enclosed environments. To access this passport people had to apply online. For those who do have have specific identification such as (Diving Licence and a Passport for travelling abroad) have to contact the local health centre and local G.P services. The author has faced negative barriers and the local health services refuse to assist on this matter. Instead the author had to contact the local NHS Clinical Commissioning Group to assist.

Hidden differences & the pandemic

The perception of ignoring hidden differences & disabilities

A lot of voices from those with hidden differences & all disabilities on social media have felt that they have been ignored or undervalued. This is especially when during the pandemic with variety of different voices, feelings and insights from different members of society. Unfortunately this can make a person with differences feel that they are an insignificant citizen of society.

They have been disturbing news articles during the pandemic period with a no resuscitation order in hospitals for individuals with learning disabilities which and those living in the autistic spectrum and other hidden differences. This implies that those with any sort of difficulties can be seen as an undervalued members of society are not treated with the same dignity as other members of society.

Hidden differences & the pandemic

News stories and representation

During the pandemic, a lot of social issues have been addressed particularly those facing sexism, racism, LGBT, physical disability, and particular disabilities which are visually noticeable.

On issues affecting hidden differences, there have been mixed stories with extremely harmful and extreme examples of discrimination against hidden differences. However, there was not enough that affects the other levels of prejudice discrimination which can lead to dangerous levels that could harm a person's life. However, other types of prejudice are also not noticed it is likely that a person with hidden differences would be disbelieved and would be blamed based on the difficulties they live with.

Mental health, loneliness, depression and abuse have been addressed across different areas of society. However, it is not recognised that it also applies to those with hidden differences. Sadly their experiences of the examples mentioned would also be dismissed and underestimated.

How a person with hidden differences is represented can vary and be inconsistent. During the pandemic, there have been several stories about how a person with dyslexia can be a possible advantage to businesses, communities and society with their positive attributes.

Other positive factors during the lockdowns onwards there have been many people with hidden differences have been proactive by providing information guidance and support in various ways on social media, online blogs, websites, social media and podcast & video casts.

Some people with differences also had the opportunity to connect with others through video conferencing websites and apps. Also, many awareness and community support groups address ground-level issues it does not have greater exposure in the same way other members of society do on news and media. This means that society lacks insight and context of a person with hidden differences which means they can be wrongly judged by perceptions and stereotypes.

On some occasions, there are some voices from hidden differences of autism, ADHD, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and Social Anxiety on their experiences of their difficulties along with featuring achievers linked with Neurodiversity. However, there is a lack of representative voices from independent people with hidden differences on issues on issues and life challenges not just only on their difficulties but also their representation on society issues. In addition because of general association with the autistic spectrum can mean those with mild levels are less likely to be well represented. The autistic spectrum can face complicated misrepresentation.

Issues affecting the autistic spectrum are mostly represented by parent's voices or issues associated with a learning disability such as health and social care matters. In addition limited representation is also limited to those living at residential or care homes. There is a lack of recognition of those living independently with autism. Sadly autistic people have been stigmatised further with two high profile autistic criminal offenders in late 2021. Although this does not represent law-abiding autistic people can still be wrongly judged.

Post Pandemic

One of the side effects of the pandemic and stress could lead to hidden differences being wrongly seen as disorganised and being wrongly categorised as a downgrade compared to others. This can lead to staff not wanting to deal with some people with differences. This kind of rejection can escalate judgment trying to get rid of a person with hidden differences, even if they received a poor level of service. For example, a person with hidden differences can be an easy target if their phone call is cut off prematurely or causing shame accusing a person's difficulties as a burden when accessing customer service on the phone. During the pandemic, a lot of social issues have been addressed, particularly those related to sexism, racism and LGBT. However, on matters affecting hidden differences & all tend to be not noticeable or ignored.

Public Transport

There may be an expectation for passengers to have quicker abilities and to speed up their abilities and mindsets due to the increasing number of passengers after the restrictions end. This ranges from being able to operate ticket machines efficiently to managing ticket barriers, particular tickets and products efficiently.

Also, there's a possibility of pressure to move around quickly and be able to navigate through crowded passengers on stations within passenger concourses and use

stairs and escalators without struggling. This can lead to conflict in situations where a person with differences could face hostility and physical interventions which could cause stress anxiety and psychological despair.

Banking & financial services

With the closing of bank branches, digital banking has accelerated sooner than expected. This can mean people expected to use banking limited to mobile apps, online or banking via phone only. This has been added without giving the supportive space for a person with hidden differences to fully understand without pressure, it will be impossible for some people to adjust to potential changes. Some people with differences will be reluctant to change or adjust due to security risks and the fears of how the strain for those with short-term memory challenges.

Public authorities

The pressures that occurred during the pandemic may continue due to increasing pressures of efficiency and productivity. This can mean it may find it difficult for some people with hidden differences to access many services. For example, public authorities adopt similar procedures for providing advice. For example, in certain places, the service Citizens Advice is not available as a face-to-face contact with compulsory access through phone & online only. This can lead to some people with hidden differences decline accessing these services if waiting too long on the phone a long wait occurs and not what if any support mechanism is provided.

Post Pandemic

Relationships & inclusivity

Any challenging mindsets can affect a relative a friend or someone in the community can affect their relationship with a person with hidden differences.

Any pressures and demands can affect any relationships a person with difference shave. This can lead to a person with hidden differences being automatically underestimated anything they share to others based on their life challenges struggles or concerns.If a person with differences faces pressures within relationships to return to normal quickly if they are not confident people can lead to conflict against them and various mental health challenges. If discrimination, bullying and hatred occur towards a person with differences before the pandemic can lead to greater disputes against coping at home, work, education and communities. Especially if that a person with differences doesn't have supportive surroundings.

Any psychological and emotional side effects of a person with differences can faces escalating amount of discrimination and mistreatment can lead to a dispute which can damage a person with differences while being and self-worth. Ultimately can lead to many life opportunities taken away in the long term.

Post Pandemic

The danger of sidelining differences

Further changes of the effects of the new normal could be accelerated. If any changes do not consider how it can affect those with hidden differences can cause damaging side effects to some people with hidden differences.

The Negative side effect since the pandemic including greater risk of facing rejections, exclusion & isolation. This can cause a long term harm to a person's well-being.

Overall a person with hidden differences could face further disrespect and could receive an escalating amount intolerance and wrongly face disciplines and sanctions at public places. The changing society could mean make it harder for some people with differences to access life opportunities which range from employment, education and their passions they may have. This will determine how accommodating and inclusive business, communities, governments and public authorities will become beyond the pandemic.

This can mean it to be even harder for a person with differences to navigate society with stability. Inevitably this could lead to certain individuals with difficulties are excluded not by choice for their stability and self-worth.

What needs to change

Everyone needs to relook how we can make sure everyone can be at their best regardless of anyone's ability, disabilities or difficulties. We need to improve representative voices from hidden differences and all disabilities in every corner of society based on lived experiences and insight. This is important to make sure that every corner of society (from businesses, public authorities, governments and transport public services) does not cause negative situations with a person with hidden differences and all disabilities become an unfair disadvantage.

In addition an improvement of the encouragement and reassurance approach when it comes to encouraging any major changes in receiving services and to avoiding pressures and alienation. We must modify our attitudes and to enable a person with hidden differences and all disabilities to be more inclusive that means listening to hidden differences much better. We must pay more attention to specific issues with the lives of hidden differences without simplistic presumptions. This means lived experiences & insights must be listened to, considered and taken seriously from the eyes of hidden differences and all disabilities and not restricted to judging differences through perceptions or stereotypes. Also not to make excuses on what cannot be possible and look at the potential of positive development.

How society judges, respond and treat hidden differences and all disabilities must be improved. This includes seeing a person beyond how they appear and not judging difficulties and disabilities based on characteristics disorganisation or laziness.

What needs to change

Access and entitlement

We must respect hidden differences and all disabilities entitlement to their dignity and basic human rights. Even though they may appear different it is not an accepting excuse for anyone to disrespect or undervalue a person with differences if they are displaying any sort of feelings including if they are happy, excited, upset or angry. This includes stopping being perceptive or confrontational towards hidden differences for the wrong reasons.

Any changes that occur which affect accessing services and facilities must have improved support & assistance mechanisms so a person would difference does not get blamed or face hostility with unfair intolerance against their presence or their place in society. Any services provided remotely through phone and online should improve support facilities that do not cause a person with differences to suffer.

A person with differences and all disabilities shouldn't be made to justify themselves because of other people's inaccurate judgements. So everyone needs to widen their responses on how we judge a variety of types of people. For Hidden differences & other invisible disabilities, everyone needs to stop making inaccurate perceptions and use them to disrespect them or to harm their place in Society.

Also, we must do better in confronting and challenging prejudice, discrimination and hatred attitudes towards differences. This means friends, family and members and the general public needs to support differences by speaking up and standing up for them which situation is challenging against them. This means creating a culture of resilience so to make sure those with hidden differences aren't constantly being singled out or penalised for existing.

What needs to change

Representative voices

To prevent misrepresentation we must improve representative voices from persons with hidden differences and all disabilities. However, the representation does not focus on their difficulties and how life affects them but also issues regarding specific society issues which affect many people's experiences. Also, all disabilities and those with hidden differences need to be represented better as inclusive members of society, such as customers, consumers, voters, and community participants, in any subjects & issues they are passionate about or have expertise in. Any positive achievement and activities from a person with hidden differences and all disabilities must have greater exposure to combat negative perceptions. We must not make it harder for consumers and service users with all disabilities and those with hidden differences if they have received a poor level of service. They need to be valued in the same way as every other customer.

Changing presumptions

Society must be discouraged from simplifying issues affecting it and differences only as a health and social care matter especially when they don't have any knowledge of ground-level insight. For those with hidden differences and all disabilities, everyone must listen to them better which means their rights and their voices should be equally heard and listened to. This means we must break the traditional approach of ignoring unique voices that don't fit into the majority. For example, if a person with hidden differences has faced an amount of abuse, discrimination and hatred, they should not be marginalised and helpless by making them insignificant because the matter doesn't fit into the majority of social issues.

Looking forward.

We must not make anyone with hidden differences feel ignored or undervalued. A reminder that their difficulties are not a choice or form of characteristics. This means we need to reach out to those with hidden differences and become welcoming and inviting.

Also, they need to be supported and encouraged regardless of their difficulties but not to forget there are limitations and implications. This means society needs to be more accommodating and be more encouraging and much more inclusive. This means communities must be more resilient against prejudice, discrimination and hatred attitudes. In summary, improving patience enables encouragement as well as valuing a person with differences.

What needs to change

How the improvements should be done

Businesses, communities and all public services need to improve representative voices regularly, including hidden differences, to prevent harmful effects. Representative voices from the ground level are essential for local authorities and businesses. All levels of society need to improve educational information based on lived experiences from differences. Not only on the difficulties but also challenges and obstacles but also the positive aspects including examples of attributes, strengths and achievers. This also applies to staff and organisations who may not have direct differences but are likely to see hidden differences in society.

In environments, if a person with hidden differences and all disabilities as a participant, volunteer, employee or student then customised levels of understanding of concise information are needed for employers, education, community groups, social environments and other varying roles with a joined-up approach. This makes greater understanding and efficient solutions to get the best out of hidden differences.

Businesses, local authorities and public services for the general public (face-to-face or remotely) are likely to have limited contact with hidden differences and all disabilities. So providing a family with concise information and guidance would be beneficial and what factors to watch out for whether the person with hidden differences and invisible disabilities has disclosed their difficulties or not.

To prevent misrepresentation in how hidden differences and all disabilities are projected, an improvement of representative voices of lived experiences and insight is needed for news & media. This is very important to prevent perceptive judgements which can damage a person with hidden differences and all disabilities placed in society.

Families and friends of hidden differences can also benefit from a concise understanding based on ground-level experience and not limited to generalised information. This would reduce potential frustrations or concerns.

We need to widen how we design and present information and documents. This includes a layer of legible information without presenting it in a way that respects hidden differences in intelligence levels. This means avoiding the easy-read style materials which are mainly developed for learning disabilities.



About Plus Value Awareness

The Plus Value Awareness initiative is developed by Project Director Keith Mckenzie. The website presents a family of awareness projects, campaigns and potential services in the future. The aim is to enable a smarter sense of value for independent young people and adults with invisible related difficulties

This is approached within 5 key areas: dignity, integration with inclusion, participation, well represented and responsibility with adjustment.

Launched in 2015 Plus Value Awareness was based on variety of awareness projects by the Project Director since 2000

This means this initiative highlights the human aspects rather than medical or perceptions. In the future to transform Plus Value Awareness as part of the Social Enterprise concept to provide a family of services for businesses, organisations and public services with a family of products to be available for all. In addition to developing a family of social mission activities which will benefit local communities.

Find out more on Plus Value Awareness online by visiting <https://plusvalue.dudaone.com>

About Unity Forward

Unity Forward was created in 2020 as a information and encouragement feature. It contained as series of short messages and guidance to value hidden differences. This was broken into categories such as morale, accomplishment, considerate, sense of belonging, Mindset, Allowances, well-being and stability. Also the feature includes a webpage which induces helpline and information websites for those who require assistance or listening support.

The Project Director decided to create Unity Forward as a response from several voices of hidden differences who felt they was ignored and undervalued during the pandemic.

The earlier version of this documents was published in June 2021 and was featured on Anna Kennedy Online of the UK's leading and respected awareness campaigners



About the author

This document was written by Keith Mckenzie project director of Plus Value Awareness.

Over the past two decades, Keith has developed a variety of awareness projects, campaigns and activities. His projects have been involved with many awareness and support organisations across the UK and have participated in several presentation talks at different events around two decades.

Outside awareness, Keith has been involved in the behind-the-scenes of a unique music project, which includes filming and other behind-the-scenes assistance with developing video documentaries and music events that involve music artists DJs and producers.

Also, Keith is a participant in salsa dancing classes in the community as an assistant along with volunteering and a participant in a salsa dancing conventions Motion city & Latinmotion's NYE Fest based at Birmingham's NEC.

Keith has a background in art & design and has been involved in and many projects related to Graphic design, selected photography and visual art.

In 2022, Keith become a featured community participant and was part of video campaign for Birmingham City Council to showcase the city legacy since hosted the Commonwealth Games

In 2023, Keith participated in an awareness campaign by visiting for supporting the annual events Autism Dance Day (by Anna Kennedy OBE) and International Dance Day (by The Dance Committee of ITI). To coincide supporting both events an awareness information project was launched to encourage inclusivity at dancing related environments for dancers with Neurodiversity, Invisible Disabilities and those who have experienced anxiety

Also Keith took part in a transport Health & Safety meeting organised by Transport for West Midlands to provide lived experiences and suggestion in front of public transport safety teams on Buses, Trains & Trams

In the same year Keith has participated in the public consultation in Birmingham by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and published two insight & analysis documents as part of the consultation

Find out more on developments and achievement by visiting his website
keithmckenzie.weebly.com

Unity Forward

Useful Links online

Plus Value Awareness website

Titled "Plus Value Awareness". the website projects a variety of projects on valuing hidden differences

<https://plusvalue.dudaone.com>

"Unity Forward" online index

The information and encouragement feature

<https://plusvalue.dudaone.com/unityforward>

Developed by
Keith Mckenzie for

▼ **Plus Value Awareness**



<https://plusvalue.dudaone.com>