

A Study on Programming for Children with Autism within Public Libraries  
Of the Greater Philadelphia Area

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the social and educational opportunities public libraries offer to children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and how the programs they offer can create educational relationships between the library and their visitors. Along with that, the challenges of conducting sensory-friendly programs will be identified.

In this study, twenty-eight public librarians from twenty-eight different libraries from greater Philadelphia and southern New Jersey were asked to take part in an in-person or telephone interview. During these interviews, librarians were asked if they conducted sensory-friendly programming for children with ASD, and why or why not. The data collected from the librarians' responses during the interviews were analyzed to see if any trends stood out. The analysis showed many public libraries want to conduct programming for children with autism, but there are many challenges that prevent them from pursuing the idea including time, staff, proper funds, and practical knowledge on the subject. Most of the librarians found these programs to be important for the library to show they are inclusive places, and for the children to grow socially and educationally.

## **Dedication**

To David,  
Thank you for being an inspiration in my life  
and for this thesis.

## **Acknowledgements**

This thesis would not have been possible without the constant help and guidance of my graduate advisor, Helen Shannon, PhD. I also want to thank my committee members Patricia Maunder and Paul Adorno for their assistance and presence through the process. Recognition is additionally extended to Minda Borun and Rande Blank who provided essential ideas and advice on who to select to be on my committee.

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## Nomenclature

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): This term represents the autism spectrum from low functioning to high functioning under the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-V. It follows the DSM-IV diagnoses of children with specific autism type disorders including Autistic Disorder, Asperger's Syndrome, Rett Syndrome, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder.<sup>1</sup>

Educational Relationships: This term describes the library becoming a “safe” and fun place for parents to bring their children with autism spectrum disorder to learn socially with strangers, grow educationally through increased literacy, and to learn how to use the library as a source of knowledge and information.

Sensory-Friendly Story Time: This library program engages participants through the use of story, music and movement. Programs offer educational, literacy and social opportunities for children of all ages with differing abilities, their siblings, parents/caregivers and their typically-developing peers. Programs often include:

- a safe and non-judgmental environment
- a schedule board for following along
- flannel board stories
- interactive book-based experiences
- gentle music
- a half-hour of playtime and socialization for the entire family<sup>2</sup>

Sensory-Friendly Movie Night: A special opportunity for individuals living with autism and others to enjoy their favorite films in a safe and accepting environment. In order to provide a more accepting and comfortable setting for individuals on the autism spectrum, the movie auditorium lights are turned slightly up (dim lights will remain on) and the sound turned slightly down. Because some have strict, special dietary needs, families are permitted to bring their own gluten-free, casein-free snacks from home. Additionally, audience members are welcome to get up and dance, walk, shout or sing.<sup>3</sup>

Universal Design: It is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> American Psychiatric Association, “Highlights of Changes from DSM-IV-TR to DSM-V,” May 2013, accessed November 14, 2017, <http://www.dsm5.org/Documents/changes%20from%20dsm-iv-tr%20to%20dsm-5.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Tricia Bohanon Twarogowski, “Program Model: Sensory-Friendly Storytime,” *Programming Librarian*, accessed December 5, 2017, <http://www.programminglibrarian.org/programs/sensory-friendly-storytime>.

<sup>3</sup> Autism Society, “Sensory Friendly Films,” *AutismSociety*, accessed December 5, 2017, <http://www.autism-society.org/get-involved/other-ways-to-get-involved/sensory-friendly-films/>.

<sup>4</sup> National Disability Authority, “What is Universal Design,” *NDA: National Disability Authority*, accessed December 14, 2017, <http://universaldesign.ie/What-is-Universal-Design/>.



## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Many times, the direction of a thesis will shift until the niche is found. Autism is one of those topics that can lead an individual in many unique directions. This thesis started with a focus on programming conducted by museums, and what effect they have on children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). From the beginning to now, the focus has shifted from the effectiveness of these programs in museums to their effectiveness in public libraries and how they can form educational relationships with their visitors through programming for children with ASD.

Autism spectrum disorder is something that has personally affected my life for the better. My uncle, who is only five years older than I am, has Asperger's Syndrome which has now been removed from the lexicon and referred to as high-functioning on the autism spectrum. There has always been a special connection between us, and there is never a silent moment when we are together. Watching my uncle graduate from high school, obtain his culinary degree, and work with him at an actual job has shown me his intelligence, passion, and determination. Even though he has accomplished those milestones, he did not have a community or somewhere to go that would allow him to feel comfortable and to learn besides school or his home. An internship at the American Swedish Historical Museum provided me the backbone, but my uncle provided me with the drive and reason to explore this topic further. Since he did not have the outside community or activities to participate in when he was growing up, I wanted to see what programs are starting to be formed for children on the autism spectrum in public libraries, which can be the centers of many communities.

Formerly, autism spectrum disorder represented five unique developmental disorders: Autistic Disorder, Asperger's Syndrome, Rett Syndrome, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder.<sup>5</sup> However, autism spectrum disorder, or ASD, is now characterized by low-end to high-end or low functioning to high functioning forms of autism. Since ASD manifests in so many different ways, it is difficult to ascribe blanket characteristics to these children.<sup>6</sup> Author Lesley J. Farmer believes, "If you know one child with autism, you know one child with autism."<sup>7</sup> This is a popular quote amongst most individuals who work with children who have ASD, along with individuals with other disabilities.<sup>8</sup> There are some things that children on the spectrum may struggle with such as social interaction, processing certain information, learning how to speak, and dealing with loud noises or bright lights. Even with these similarities, it is a disorder that cannot be easily approached through programming because each individual child may require different services.

Public libraries can become an outlet for children with autism through specialized programming. The primary reason why the switch was made in this thesis from a focus on museums to public libraries was a summer internship at the American Swedish Historical Museum in 2017. This internship provided an opportunity to enter libraries who are offering programs and to interview them and see if they did have any types of sensory-friendly activities.

Since libraries are members of the same non-profit community as museums, it seemed like it could be a smooth transition. Being able to focus on public libraries allows an insight into how museums can possibly form partnerships and be more inviting to visitors who may not be comfortable enough to enter museums compared to libraries. One group of individuals may be

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<sup>5</sup> Lesley S. J Farmer, *Library Services for Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorders*, (Chicago: ALA Editions, 2014). Xi.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., xi.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., xi.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., xi.

parents who have a child with autism. As members of the non-profit sector, libraries and museums should look towards the future, come together, and attempt to build stronger connections between themselves and their surrounding communities. Forming partnerships in communities could benefit museums because they can attempt to reach audiences that are common library visitors because of the free nature of libraries, as opposed to museums where typically visitors pay for admission tickets.

All of the data in this thesis was collected during a summer internship at the American Swedish Historical Museum in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania from June 2017 to August 2017. This summer internship consisted of implementing an outreach program for elementary-aged children at public libraries in the greater Philadelphia area and southern New Jersey. Either before or after the program at each respective library, a specific librarian was asked if they would be willing to complete a short interview to see if their library conducts programming for children with autism, and if not, whether they think offering those types of programs could create educational relationships for all visitors.

## **Research Problem**

There was one primary issue that presented itself during this thesis research. By definition, public libraries should reach out to all members of the community. However, are they engaging those on the autism spectrum? Many libraries may not be thinking about approaching the subject or taking the necessary steps to do so. Nevertheless, some may be considering implementing programming, but do not have necessary funds, space, or training available.

## **Research Question**

The combined paths of autism and public libraries led to the research question: “Can public librarians expand and improve their educational relationships with visitors by developing and implementing programs for children with ASD?” This research question will be explored through a variety of sources including scholarly articles, books, observations, and primarily, one-on-one interviews with library staff persons. Educational relationships are defined as the public library becoming a “safe space” or comfortable environment for children with autism to learn, for other visitors to learn from children with autism and their families, but also for the library to become a community space for parents.

The focus of this thesis attempts to look through the lens of public librarians to see if they conduct programming for children with ASD, and if so whether this can in turn help them improve educational relationships with visitors to the library. Approaching this subject from the librarians’ point of view is a unique one. Typically, when producing academic material related to autism, research is gathered from the autism community and it studies how effective the programming is from their point of view. Looking at this topic from a different perspective opens the door to seeing what programming has been tried and succeeded, and whether creating programming for children with autism is a possibility for other public libraries. Research has shown that the largest reasons why public libraries do not offer sensory-friendly experiences are funding, time, staff, practical knowledge, and their size, which coincides with what museums struggle with when they are attempting to implement these types of activities. This is why the research is helpful for museums and libraries because it introduces both to what can be done, and the challenges they would have to overcome in order to bring in a more diverse audience.

## **Research Hypothesis**

With any research question and thesis there is always a hypothesis that the researcher attempts to study through data collection. The hypothesis for this research is: Whether public libraries are creating and implementing programming for children with autism spectrum disorder or not, librarians think conducting these programs will create educational relationships between the library and their visitors.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Public libraries are focal points in communities across the country. They recognize there is a need, and they want to express to their communities that they are comfortable educational centers that can also be fun. One group of individuals that would benefit from increased access to public libraries is children with autism spectrum disorder, or ASD. Libraries and museums are members of the same community, and my experience obtaining a master's degree in museum education and conducting programs in libraries inspired me to see how they compare. Museums offer programs for children with ASD, however, they can be overwhelming places and are not always affordable. Public libraries are typically free and offer calmer environments where parents might feel comfortable bringing their children. Finding out if public libraries cater to children with ASD became the focus of this research because this author noted libraries recognized the need and have attempted to offer sensory-friendly activities for these children. However according to the research gathered, many public libraries are nervous to do so because of a lack of available resources, space, time, staff and/or practical knowledge they feel they need to conduct successful programs.

This thesis approaches the problem from the perspective of libraries and the librarians who work in them. Creating effective programs and activities within a comfortable environment for children with autism spectrum disorder can create stronger bonds between the community and library staff. Many individuals are attempting to create these unique outlets for children with ASD, but it depends on the library's willingness or ability to spend the money and take the time to create a suitable space.

## Public Libraries

Public libraries in the United States have many functions. They serve researchers, avid readers, the elderly, families, and many other community members. Most individuals are not aware of the amount of programming public libraries conduct on a weekly basis. There are a growing number of public libraries that are instituting successful educational programs, but many still struggle with consistent attendance. This may be due to the fact that many individuals do not think public libraries provide the same interactive learning and fun experiences compared to museums, or other cultural institutions. Also, there may be a belief that an individual has to act a certain way when they enter the door of a public library. It may be that potential visitors stay away because they are concerned that their children may act up. Public libraries are for everyone, and librarians do not want parents to feel embarrassed or anxious about bringing their children with autism to the library.

The initial source to be utilized in addressing those questions is titled *Public Libraries in the United States: Data, Trends, and State Profiles*, by Torrell Danielson. This book was published in 2013, and focuses on public libraries during the 2010 fiscal year.<sup>9</sup> Since it is based on fiscal data, the book provides quantitative data on services, programs, workforce, and other services provided by public libraries.<sup>10</sup>

According to research data of the United States, public libraries are a constant in our lives because nearly every town has one, but many people do not utilize them as the important resource they are. Public libraries are not only located within cities where there are larger populations. Just as there are museums practically any place one goes, there is a public library waiting to be visited. Danielson states, “In the fiscal year of 2010, there were 8,951 public

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<sup>9</sup> Torrell Danielson, *Public Libraries in the United States: Data, Trends, and State Profiles*, (New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., vii.

libraries in the 50 states and the District of Columbia with 17,078 public library branches and bookmobiles. This total translates to approximately 3.0 public libraries and 5.8 outlets for every 100,000 people.”<sup>11</sup> She continues, “In the fiscal year of 2010, there were 487 public libraries in cities, 2,055 in suburban areas, 2,222 in towns, and 4,187 in rural areas.”<sup>12</sup> Although there are a larger number of public libraries in rural areas, the public libraries “in cities serve almost three-quarters (72.5 percent) of the population.”<sup>13</sup> This trend is relevant especially for inner cities where parents are looking for potential educational outlets for their children. The libraries are offering an abundance of unique programming in order to educate and entertain a variety of children. In 2010 alone public libraries offered 3.75 million programs to the public, which amounts to an average of at least one program a day for every library system in the country.<sup>14</sup> The majority of these programs (61.5%) are designed for children because public libraries are trying to be the ones who provide free programming.<sup>15</sup>

These selections of data from Danielson’s book highlight some of the data that stretches through the entire read. The data within this book was collected from all fifty states and the District of Columbia in order to provide current national estimates and to examine trends from prior years.<sup>16</sup> This book provides a great balance point when it talks about programming and accessibility in public libraries because it is based on quantitative survey data, which is an excellent alternative to qualitative data on the subject. It is split into two chapters, with the first speaking about public library systems throughout the entire nation, and then the second chapter highlights individual state profiles and how public libraries are affecting their communities. The

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., vii.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., vii.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., vii.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., vii.



most important aspect of this book is showing how crucial and prevalent public libraries are in communities whether it is realized by the public, or not.

The data presented above approached the subject of how beneficial library programming is for children. Most of those experiences are performed within cities or suburbs, which are where larger subgroups of children live, especially compared to rural areas. Let us explore how public libraries are actually affecting large “Resilient” cities, which is a descriptive term used by Michael Dudley in his book, *Public Libraries and Resilient Cities*, through qualitative data compared to the quantitative data used by Danielson.<sup>17</sup> Many cities in the United States are considered resilient because they are trying to address problems such as economic issues, businesses leaving or shutting down, and the increasing number of low-income citizens. At the heart of this study, Philadelphia is viewed by this author as a resilient city who is trying to increase access and make strides culturally and economically.

Dudley’s book is another important resource. It was published in 2013, and each chapter is written by a different author who has knowledge on a particular aspect of libraries.<sup>18</sup> The topics include accessibility for everyone, outreach and community development, and making libraries a place for the people.<sup>19</sup> The purpose of the book is identified early with a quote by an American writer Jay Walljasper, “Libraries stand as a prime example of social capital, which more and more observers see as the secret sauce that makes the difference between a community that thrives and one that struggles.”<sup>20</sup> This is an interesting quote that identifies the integral role public libraries can play in the advancement of the cities where they reside. As the book continues, it starts to align with the research question for this thesis. Dudley highlights, “In a

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<sup>17</sup> Michael Dudley, *Public Libraries and Resilient Cities*, (Chicago: ALA Editions, 2013).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 1.

2009 paper, geographers Ruth Fincher and Kurt Iveson found that public libraries are a form of urban infrastructure that does not merely embrace diversity, but helps to distinguish different kinds of diversity.”<sup>21</sup>

Dudley states, “Resiliency pertains to a system’s inherent organic quality, allowing it, like a successful species or an enduring habitat in the natural world, to continue to maintain its primary functions even as its circumstances change.”<sup>22</sup> Cities are changing every single day and public libraries are constantly fighting to stay relevant in the eyes of their visitors and potential visitors. Public libraries, if used, are an outlet for the entire city. Most are free compared to museums, and they are welcoming places for everyone, from homeless people to the wealthy. Public libraries are a place of learning, relaxation, and a place to have fun based on the activities offered within them. Dudley explains, “The public library stands as a public institution, indeed one of the remaining public institutions that may be credibly seen as a force for reason, insight, wisdom, and inspiration.”<sup>23</sup> Dudley also adds that with the ability to inspire, public libraries have the ability to forge new communities amongst people, and are an extension of schooling that many children enjoy more because they are not just sitting around being spoken to.<sup>24</sup>

Even with this ability to inspire future generations, and the number of individuals who visit every day, libraries are in the midst of a great struggle. This struggle solely comes down to the financial burden which states and this nation as a whole have endured. Dudley makes it clear that libraries are closing, having hours shortened, funds slashed, staff reduced, programs eliminated, and collections purged because of the financial issues in the country and states.<sup>25</sup> However, even with this struggle of low funding, public libraries are doing everything they can

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 4.

to provide an inclusive environment for all visitors, not only attempting to provide an inclusive environment, but showing the library is a free and fun place to learn. Children with autism are included in those groups of diverse visitors that are brought to public libraries as part of a fuller community in order to learn.

Dudley's book differs from Danielson's because it is more focused on qualitative data. It is extremely important to have a balance between the two types of data in order to construct an effective argument. Since each chapter is written by a different author, it provides a chance to gain insight into the inner workings of public libraries through multiple lenses.

In order to have a well-rounded argument, there needs to be alternative arguments to provide a complete context involving the topic. An article within *Evidence Based Library & Information Practice* written by Ann Glusker titled, "Urban Public Libraries Do Not Meet Benchmarks for Web Accessibility by Individuals with Disabilities" provides such an opposite view. The study focused on the 127 library systems within the Urban Libraries Council; all of the libraries are located in the United States.<sup>26</sup> To test the libraries' online accessibility Glusker used an accessibility evaluation tool.<sup>27</sup> It found that no website was free from errors that might affect people with disabilities.<sup>28</sup> The errors included contrast errors, missing alternative text, missing form labels, and missing specific links or resources for persons with disabilities.<sup>29</sup> This article provides insight on the challenges libraries can have especially when it comes to accessibility through technology for children with autism.

Every public library upholds its promise to its community of being open to any visitor. The educational capabilities at each library may be different because of funding and staffing, but

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<sup>26</sup> Ann Glusker, *Urban Public Libraries Do Not Yet Meet Benchmarks for Web Accessibility by Individuals with Disabilities*, (Evidence Based Library & Information Practice 10, no. 2, 2015), 144-146.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

the message and mission remain the same. Although many libraries are struggling with funding, staff, and other organizational issues, they want to be a constant source of knowledge and informal education within the communities they serve.

## **Autism Spectrum Disorder**

The second topic to be highlighted in this thesis is how to create effective programming for children who have ASD. Now that the reader has a better understanding of public libraries, it is time to speak about the audience that will be the focus of this thesis.

Just as with any other cultural institution, there are some people who may feel anxious about entering them. Many kinds of individuals may feel nervous about entering public libraries, and parents with children who have autism are amongst them. A variety of factors contribute to these feelings that range from judgments passed on them by others because of their child, or not having a community that can relate to them and help them with their child.

The immediate focus of this section is to explain what autism spectrum disorder is, and give some characteristics of a child who may have ASD. Social-interaction difficulties, communication challenges and a tendency to engage in repetitive behaviors are the most common characteristics amongst children who have autism spectrum disorder.<sup>30</sup> However, each symptom and their severity vary widely across these three core areas.<sup>31</sup> Symptoms that may be mild challenges for someone on the high functioning end of the autism spectrum can be more severe for others.<sup>32</sup> These symptoms can also lead into other types of medical conditions and challenges including Sleep Disorders, Mood Disorders, Anxiety Disorders, OCD, ADHD, and

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<sup>30</sup> Autism Speaks, "Symptoms," *Autism Speaks*, accessed November 21, 2017, <https://www.autismspeaks.org/what-autism/symptoms>.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

even Seizures.<sup>33</sup> All of these unique characteristics, symptoms, and accompanying conditions and challenges have to be taken into account when libraries make the decision to offer sensory-friendly activities in the library.

The book, *Library Services for Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorders*, published in 2014 and written by Lesley S. J. Farmer, begins to highlight what types of activities libraries have attempted to implement for children with ASD.<sup>34</sup> The information Farmer's book provides on ASD has everything a library would need to create high-quality experiences, along with additional information on public libraries that are currently running successful programs. Farmer starts by looking at how children with ASD interact in learning environments, whether they are schools or libraries.<sup>35</sup> Then she highlights team management approaches to conducting sensory-friendly programming as it follows with universal design.<sup>36</sup> Next, Farmer begins to discuss successful methods of teaching children with ASD, and highlights some methods including maintaining a focus on reading.<sup>37</sup> One of the primary ways public libraries maintain a focus on reading for children with ASD is by conducting literacy programs.<sup>38</sup>

However, there are always challenges when it comes to creating programs for children with ASD. An article written by Lynn Akin and Donna MacKinney titled *Autism, Literacy, and Libraries* highlights what needs to be understood about ASD. The article focuses on three R's, which are Routine, Repetition, and Redundancy.<sup>39</sup> Akin and MacKinney focus on various types of programming, how they work, and how to properly implement them.<sup>40</sup> They do this by

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Lesley S. J. Farmer, *Library Services for Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorders*, (Chicago: ALA Editions, 2014).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 37-61.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 87-134.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 131-134.

<sup>39</sup> Lynn Akin and Donna MacKinney, "Autism, Literacy, and Libraries," *Children & Libraries: The Journal of the Association for Library Service to Children* 2, no. 2, (2004), 35-43.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

identifying successful program structures which include reading aloud, related readings, directive scaffolding, social stories, technology, peer tutoring, and music therapy.<sup>41</sup> The positive aspect of Akin and MacKinney's research is the listing of programs, while supplying important details on how to conduct them. One significant topic this article highlights is autism identification. Akin and MacKinney explain autism is a spectrum, and all children on the spectrum are different in speech abilities, developmental stages, and interests, which mean children on the spectrum, cannot be placed under a strict set of characteristics.<sup>42</sup>

The next book in this section entitled "Planning for Accessibility" was published in 1991 and written by Marianne Kotch Cassell. Cassell focuses on laws passed for individuals with disabilities, including The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.<sup>43</sup> The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 was the nation's first comprehensive civil rights law addressing the needs of people with disabilities by prohibiting discrimination in employment, public services, public accommodations, and telecommunications.<sup>44</sup> It is important to include The Americans with Disabilities Act because it has shaped how businesses needed to become more accessible in order to accommodate a diverse audience, visitor, or customer.

Public accommodations stand out in the definition of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. This occurs because when originally written it is not clear what exactly public accommodations were. According to the Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies (ASCLA), there are eight different ways in which public accommodations for

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>43</sup> Cassell, Marianne Kotch, and Montpelier, *Planning for Accessibility*, (Vermont State Department of Libraries, 1991).

<sup>44</sup> "The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990," *U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission*, accessed September 4, 2017, <https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/history/35th/1990s/ada.html>.

individuals with disabilities of any kind, apply to public libraries.<sup>45</sup> Before highlighting each one, these may be specific to libraries, but they coincide with what museums have to accommodate as well.

The ASCLA narrow the accommodations into their own subsections: Library Services, Facilities, Collections, Assistive Technology, Employment, Library Education that includes Training and Professional Development, American Library Association Conferences, and finally American Kinesiology Association Publications and Communications.<sup>46</sup> These sub-sections highlight how individuals with disabilities should have equal accessibility to the library and its materials with assistive technology or individuals to aid them while visiting the library, but also fair and equal employment opportunities, training opportunities for library staff to sensitize them to issues affecting people with disabilities, and allowing individuals with disabilities to partake in special events including American Library Association (ALA) conferences.<sup>47</sup>

### **What are Museums Doing?**

One institution public libraries can look at for inspiration when it comes to implementing programs for children with ASD are museums. Museums have been integral in the creation and implementation of programs for youths with disabilities. As members of the non-profit sector, museums and public libraries can come together to build stronger connections between themselves, and their surrounding communities.

An important book for this section is by Katie Stringer entitled *Programming for People with Special Needs: A Guide for Museums and Historic Sites*. This book covers education and

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<sup>45</sup> “Library Services for People with Disabilities Policy,” ASCLA: Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies, December 4, 2006, <http://www.ala.org/ascla/resources/libraryservices>.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

inclusion for individuals with intellectual and learning disabilities. Stringer highlights museums that have conducted successful programs for youths with intellectual disabilities. These programs include “Meet Me” from the Museum of Modern Art, (MoMA), and programs at the Transit Museum in Brooklyn for children with ASD.<sup>48</sup> Stringer makes it clear, “The purpose of this manual is to assist museums and historic sites in the process of creating inclusive sites of education and well-being for all visitors, especially those with disabilities or special needs.”<sup>49</sup> Stringer attempts to achieve this goal in each chapter. The first two chapters highlight the history of museums and a brief history of disabilities in the United States, along with laws and advocacy related to accessibility.<sup>50</sup> The third chapter focuses on how universal design can be utilized to create and implement sensory-friendly programming for certain exhibits.<sup>51</sup> Universal Design is a way of interacting with all types of visitors whether they are blind, have a physical or mental disability, or anything else that may affect their ability to effectively interact with the information displayed. Finally, chapter five includes a case study on best practices for creating museum programs for all visitors, especially those with special needs.<sup>52</sup> Stringer allows readers to gain an academic insight into the museum field by highlighting their attempts to being inclusive for people with disabilities.

The other primary source in this section is from a museum in Philadelphia that offers programs for children with ASD. The museum that was observed is the Franklin Institute. The program was “Sensory-Friendly Sunday” where parents register their children for their own time in the galleries. The Franklin Institute has taken many steps in creating a comfortable

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<sup>48</sup> Katie Stringer, *Programming for People with Special Needs : A Guide for Museums and Historic Sites*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014).

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., xi.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., xi.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., xii.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., xii.



environment for participants in the program. The first thing they do is turn off any multi-colored flashing lights, loud sudden noises, and cover certain computer interactives. In each gallery space there are volunteers from occupational therapy programs in Philadelphia. They interact with the participants, creating a dynamic learning environment. The Franklin Institute effectively structured Sensory-Friendly Sunday, which created a comfortable learning environment for the children and their parents. By implementing successful programs of this magnitude, parents may tell their friends and family about their positive experiences at The Franklin Institute, which can improve educational relationships between the museum and their visitors.

It is important to take advantage of the programs that are offered in Philadelphia, and to find out the benefits the staff has seen from conducting these programs. This was a valuable research observation while attending Sensory-Friendly Sunday at the Franklin Institute because it highlighted a successful program within a child-centered museum, and how some of those aspects of learning can be carried into public libraries.

### **Are programs conducted for children with autism creating educational relationships between the library, children, and visitors?**

Finally, this research will look at programs that libraries are currently implementing, some of the more effective types, and whether they are creating educational relationships. The first source used in this section is by Betsy Diamant-Cohen entitled *Children's Services: Partnerships for Success*. Cohen brings together eighteen different examples of successful outreach partnerships that can be adapted for the public library sector. The examples range from the United States and Canada, and they primarily focus on youth from elementary to middle

school.<sup>53</sup> The sole purpose of this book is to highlight successful program partnerships between libraries and their surrounding communities.<sup>54</sup> By interacting with their communities in new and exciting ways, a solid foundational relationship between libraries and their communities may be created.<sup>55</sup>

The primary chapter that is pertinent to this read is Chapter Four, “Children’s and Play Museums and Public Libraries.”<sup>56</sup> This book is unique because there are multiple case studies in each chapter, and they are all written in first-person. The topics covered in Chapter Four look at collaborations between multiple institutions, and early literacy programs which are popular programs that public libraries attempt to conduct.<sup>57</sup> The outline for the literacy program is as follows, “the workshop was based on a simple and easy-to-use book for community educators offering resources, ideas, and helpful hints about ways to use low-cost and recycled items to develop and present effective literacy programs and related activities based on broad themes”.<sup>58</sup> Cohen’s primary focus is how public libraries attempt to create relationships with their community members, whether they are educational or social. Cohen’s book also supports the thesis research in that public libraries strive to form relationships with visitors to create a comfortable place to learn and have fun.

A wide variety of articles that include studies or websites of public library programs for children with ASD are highlighted in this section of the literature review. They include “A Special Needs Approach” by Denice Adkins, Associate Professor from the School of Science &

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<sup>53</sup> Betsy Diamont-Cohen, and Association American Library, *Children's Services : Partnerships for Success*, (Chicago, IL: ALA Editions, 2010).

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 87-91.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 87.

Learning Technologies at the University of Missouri,<sup>59</sup> along with a qualitative study conducted by Dr. Tess Prendergast, professor of education at the University of British Columbia, titled “Seeking Early Literacy for All: An Investigation of Children’s Librarians and Parents of Young Children with Disabilities’ Experiences at the Public Library.” Adkin’s article is based on a study about how public libraries can start programming for children with disabilities. She sent a survey to 185 medium and large public libraries across the United States to gather data about programs they are conducting.<sup>60</sup> She ended up receiving thirty-nine responses, and also conducted interviews of six librarians from five different libraries to gather more data.<sup>61</sup> The study showed public libraries do not conduct programming for children with autism because of restrictions from administration, and cost of supplies.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, Adkin’s article supports the drive to conduct and implement sensory-friendly programming, while highlighting their multiple challenges.

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<sup>59</sup> Denice Adkins and Bobbie Bushman, "A Special Needs Approach." *Children & Libraries: The Journal Of The Association For Library Service To Children*, (2015), 28-33.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 32.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The primary research for this thesis came from a summer internship at the American Swedish Historical Museum in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, during which twenty-five out of the twenty-eight interviews were collected. The internship consisted of creating and implementing an educational program in public libraries for elementary and middle school-aged children in the greater Philadelphia area and southern New Jersey. The topics discussed in the program were renewable resources, and how people can use them to create a clean environment and how they can be used when it comes to sustainable architecture. The children were able to have a discussion on the topics where they answered questions; they could also draw pictures, and build their own environmentally conscious homes or structures. As previously stated, this provided an opportunity to visit libraries and conduct interviews, but an important aspect to know is that this program was not geared for children on the autism spectrum. If children on the spectrum came they were welcome to join, but this program was not designed as a sensory-friendly experience.

During these visits, a single children's librarian was asked to participate in a short interview. The interviews were constructed to find out if public libraries currently have or plan to create programming for children with ASD, and why or why not. Also, it asked them whether the programs they created or want to create can form educational relationships between the libraries and their visitors. If they have not or do not plan to run programs for children with ASD, they were asked what they think are the potential positives and difficulties of attempting to create and implement programming for these children. It is important to remember most of these libraries were pre-selected because they had chosen to participate in a children's outreach program from

the American Swedish Historical Museum. This program was designed for all children, not just those with ASD. As a result, the librarians may have been more pro-active than typical.

## **The Libraries**

Librarians from the greater Philadelphia area and New Jersey were interviewed. The twenty-eight libraries who participated, ordered alphabetically by what county and state they reside in, are:

<b>County</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Libraries</b>
Atlantic County	NJ	Atlantic County- Mays Landing
Bucks County	PA	The Free Library of New Hope and Solebury, Warminster Township Free Library
Burlington County	NJ	Pemberton Community Library, Westampton Branch
Camden County	NJ	Cherry Hill Public Library, M. Allen Vogelsson Regional Branch Library
Delaware County	PA	Glenolden Library, Lansdowne Public Library, Sharon Hill Public Library, Springfield Township Library, Tinicum Memorial Public Library
Lancaster County	PA	Ephrata Public Library, Lancaster Public Library
Mercer County	PA	Hightstown Memorial Branch Library
Montgomery County	PA	Abington Free Library, Elkins Park Free Library, Jenkintown Library, La Mott Branch, Lansdale Public Library, Royersford Free Public Library, William Jeanes Memorial Library, Wissahickon Valley Public Library, and one anonymous library

Philadelphia County	PA	Andorra Branch
Somerset County	PA	Franklin Township Public Library

The idea was to interview employees from libraries no matter if they conduct sensory-friendly programs or not, and the interview template had to reflect that mission. In order to effectively gather significant responses, the interview had three parts (See Appendix 1). The first question asked is, who the primary visitors to the library are. These answers were slightly skewed because many of the interviews were performed with the children's librarian, which typically facilitate programs for parents and their children. The second question of the first section asked if the libraries do conduct programs for children with autism. If they responded yes, they would have an additional seven questions to answer, and if they responded no, then the participant would have six additional questions to answer.

### **Expectations of Findings**

The expectation of findings for this thesis is that most public libraries are not conducting programming for children with autism; nevertheless the librarians believe educational relationships can be made through these sensory-friendly experiences.

### **Limitations to the Research**

As previously stated the public libraries where the interviews were gathered were primarily from the greater Philadelphia area. However, there are some outliers including Lancaster County, Burlington County (NJ), Ocean County (NJ), Somerset County (NJ), and Atlantic County (NJ). Overall, this thesis and the research it is based on focuses on a small pocket of two Mid-Atlantic States, and primarily Philadelphia. With the focus being centered on

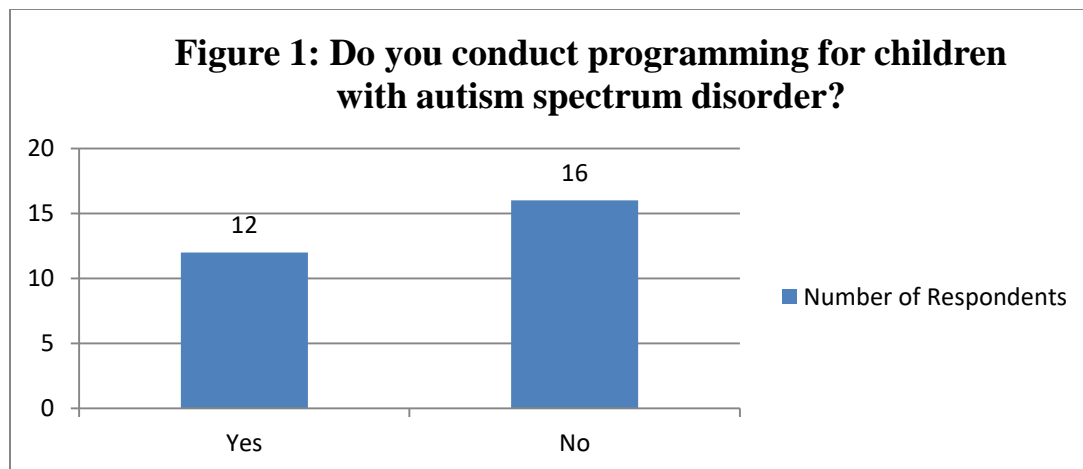
this area, a limitation is presented in the research. This data collected is not a representative sample of the United States as whole because the numbers could come out differently, and maybe more public libraries country-wide conduct sensory-friendly programs for children with autism than are implemented in this area. Along with the sample size not representing the entire United States, the sample size is also relatively small with only twenty-eight librarians each representing their own institution. Compared to the large number of public libraries just in the United States, twenty-eight do not provide an entire picture, but a small look into the field. The final limitation to the research is that most of the libraries selected for interviews took part in the American Swedish Historical Museum's summer outreach program. These libraries have taken necessary steps when it comes to offering programs for a variety of individuals.

## **Chapter 4: Data Analysis**

Before analyzing the data, it would be helpful to revisit the research question and hypothesis. The research question is: “Can public librarians expand and improve their educational relationships with visitors by developing and implementing programs for children with ASD?” To clarify, educational relationships are defined as the public library becoming a “safe space” or comfortable environment to learn for children with autism, but also for other visitors to learn from children with autism and their families. The research hypothesis is: Whether public libraries are creating and implementing programming for children with autism spectrum disorder or not, librarians think conducting these programs will create educational relationships between the library and their visitors. Creating educational relationships between the library and their visitors explores if the library conducting programs for children with ASD provides a platform for visitors to learn from strangers who are similar or different.

As seen in Figure 1 below, out of the twenty-eight libraries represented in the research, sixteen (57.14%) stated they do not conduct programming for children with autism, and twelve (42.86%) do (See Appendix 3, Question 2). The percentages show sensory-friendly programs have started to become prominent in public libraries, and the research highlighted that it is a noticed need, which coincides with public libraries’ missions to be inclusive institutions.





The two counties most represented in the data were Delaware County (five libraries) and Montgomery County (nine libraries). Through the course of interviews, three librarians cited their county library system as the starting block to creating programs for children on the spectrum. One of these librarians specifically indicated that Montgomery County introduced sensory-friendly activities to them. However, out of the nine libraries that were interviewed from Montgomery County, only three conduct sensory-friendly programs.

Then, out of the five librarians interviewed from Delaware County not one offers educational experiences for children with ASD. Even though these are two prominent counties in the suburbs of Philadelphia, there are few opportunities for children with autism to participate in sensory-friendly programs at their local libraries. This researcher believes that may have occurred because the libraries may not have enough funding, staff, practical knowledge, or time in order to conduct programs for these children, but this situation can also highlight that some educational decisions are made on the county, not library, level.

The rest of the counties only had one to two libraries represented in the research. For example, Chester County had two libraries represented in the research, Coatesville and Tredyffrin, and they both conduct programming for children with autism. Bucks County also had two representatives with Warminster being the library that does offer specialty educational

programs. Lancaster County, Pennsylvania mirrored Chester County with two libraries that conduct programs for children on the spectrum as well.

Another county that had two libraries implement programming for children on the spectrum is Burlington County, New Jersey. Both libraries from this county offer ASD programs, and the county has even gone so far as to create a full calendar outlining all of the sensory-friendly activities they will have over a course of a couple months. This was extremely impressive to see a county system so dedicated to offering programming for visitors not on the spectrum, but also for parents and their children who are on the spectrum.

### **Socio-Economic Status & Median Household Income**

There are many challenges that affect a library's ability to offer special experiences for children with autism. One way these challenges can be seen is by looking through the lens of socioeconomic status (SES), Median Household Income, and a library's budget.

**Table 1**

<b>Median Household Income*</b>	<b>Number of Sampled Libraries within Income Range</b>	<b>Number of Sampled Libraries within Income Range that Conduct ASD Programming</b>	<b>Percentages of Libraries within Income Range that Conduct ASD Programming</b>
\$40,000- \$50,000	3	1	33%
\$51,000- \$60,000	4	1	25%
\$61,000- \$70,000	7	6	86%
\$71,000- \$80,000	5	1	20%
\$81,000- \$90,000	5	1	20%
\$91,000- \$100,000	1	0	0%
\$101,000- \$110,000	0	0	0%
\$111,000 and higher	3	2	67%

\*Based on zip code of library<sup>63</sup>

<sup>63</sup> United States Census Bureau, "American Fact Finder," *United States Census Bureau*, accessed November 27, 2017, [https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community\\_facts.xhtml?src=bkmk#](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml?src=bkmk#).

The socioeconomic status (SES) of a community is a major variable that can affect how the community decides to allocate its financial resources. For instance, a community's SES may impact how its libraries choose to spend their funds when it comes to events or programming. SES can be measured by a variety of factors, including but not limited to, income, education, and unemployment rate.<sup>64</sup> For the purposes of the current research, the SES of a library will be defined as the median household income for the zip code in which the library is located, and that can be seen in Table 1 above. It is important to note that the zip code does not embody the entirety of a library's visitors, but it does provide a general idea of the community's financial state.

Among the 28 libraries sampled, the lowest median household incomes were within the \$40,000 to \$50,000 range, while the highest were within the \$111,000 and higher range (See Appendix 2). According to the most recent census information, the median household income within the United States is \$59,039.<sup>65</sup> Thus, when comparing the current sample to this statistic, the majority of libraries (75%) had household incomes above the national median.

Although one might predict that libraries from communities with higher incomes would have a wider range of programming (i.e., programs for children with disabilities, such as ASD) due to greater financial flexibility, this was not necessarily the case among the libraries sampled. The income range with the highest percentage of libraries conducting ASD programming was the \$61,000 to \$70,000 range (86%) followed by the \$111,000 and higher range (67%). These two percentages in isolation may suggest that ASD programming is more common among libraries from zip codes with middle-class or wealthy household incomes. However, the rest of the data

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<sup>64</sup> American Psychological Association, "Socioeconomic Status," *American Psychological Association*, accessed November 27, 2017, <http://www.apa.org/topics/socioeconomic-status/>.

<sup>65</sup> Tanza Loudanback, "Middle-class Americans made more money last year than ever before," *Business Insider Inc.*, accessed November 27, 2017, <http://www.businessinsider.com/us-census-median-income-2017-9>.

indicates that this may not be true. For instance, the third highest percentage of libraries conducting ASD programming has the lowest median income range, \$40,000 to 50,000. Therefore, it is likely that other factors besides SES alone affect a library's ability or decision to have programs for children with disabilities such as ASD.

## **Library Budgets and Their Effects on Programming**

As seen previously in the data analysis section, the libraries that do conduct sensory-friendly programs for children with ASD not only have the funding to do so, but also have the staff, time and practical knowledge needed in order to create these educational experiences. The libraries that do not offer sensory-friendly activities, in contrast, often struggle in the areas of funding, staff, and practical knowledge. With that being said, the SES of a community and the amount of funding a library has are important in determining whether libraries are able to broaden their activities and offer a wider variety of experiences for visitors, such as ASD or sensory-friendly programs.

**Table 2**

<b>Library</b>	<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>End of Year Balance</b>
Ephrata	\$905, 696	\$870, 783	\$34, 913
<b>Lancaster</b>	<b>\$1, 918, 558</b>	<b>\$2, 083, 596</b>	<b>(\$165, 038)</b>
New Hope & Solebury	\$611, 139	\$401, 787	\$209, 352
<b>Warminster</b>	<b>\$590, 918</b>	<b>\$672, 921</b>	<b>(\$82, 003)</b>
Abington	\$2, 636, 154	\$2, 564, 966	\$71, 188
Wissahickon	\$1, 290, 267	\$1, 240, 961	\$49, 306
<b>Jenkintown</b>	<b>\$337, 242</b>	<b>\$447, 397</b>	<b>(\$110, 155)</b>
<b>Coatesville</b>	<b>\$312, 045</b>	<b>\$338, 418</b>	<b>(\$26, 573)</b>
Tredyffrin	\$1, 534, 677	\$1, 419, 587	\$115, 090
Glenolden	\$92, 863	\$88, 691	\$4, 172
<b>Lansdowne</b>	<b>\$546, 426</b>	<b>\$556, 722</b>	<b>(\$10, 296)</b>
<b>Sharon Hill</b>	<b>\$103, 613</b>	<b>\$105, 691</b>	<b>(\$2, 078)</b>
Tinicum	\$128, 636	\$125, 071	\$3, 565
Springfield	\$828, 006	\$828, 006	\$0.00 (Balanced)

<b>William Jeanes</b>	<b>\$819, 161</b>	<b>\$872, 427</b>	<b>(\$53, 266)</b>
<b>Lansdale</b>	<b>\$504, 567</b>	<b>\$682, 590</b>	<b>(\$178, 023)</b>
*Cheltenham Township	\$1, 935, 201	\$1, 854, 363	\$80, 838
*Free Library of Philadelphia	\$92, 721, 320	\$87, 259, 502	\$5, 461, 818
*Montgomery & Norristown	\$4, 897, 052	\$4, 797, 472	\$99, 580
<b>Cherry Hill</b>	<b>\$3, 201, 168</b>	<b>\$3, 274, 425</b>	<b>(\$73, 257)</b>
Franklin Township	\$455, 449	\$424, 416	\$31, 103
*Burlington County	\$11, 034, 800	\$10, 360, 027	\$674, 773
<b>*Atlantic County</b>	<b>\$7, 159, 549</b>	<b>\$7, 494, 911</b>	<b>(\$335, 362)</b>
*Mercer County	\$13, 788, 567	\$13, 788, 567	\$0.00 (Balanced)
*Camden County	\$10, 964, 067	\$9, 866, 643	\$1, 097, 424

\*Representing the library system some libraries that were interviewed belong to and no asterisk signifies individual libraries, and libraries in bold had a budget deficit.<sup>66</sup>

As can be seen in Table 2 above there are ten libraries, or systems that are operating on deficits, according to the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). Half of these are currently conducting programs for children with ASD. This could be so because the offerings fulfill the library's mission of being inclusive. Through the interview process of the librarians, only two, Warminster Public Library and Coatesville Public Library, made it known that they either received county aid or a grant to conduct ASD programs. This is surprising to see that only two out of the five libraries functioning on a deficit decided to apply for extra aid so they could fulfill their mission, and educate individuals with ASD.

Two of the other five libraries open to the public while working under a deficit stated that they attempted to conduct programs, but were unsuccessful because of a lack of attendance, lack of confidence, or a lack of practical knowledge. Out of the five libraries that operate on a deficit and do not conduct sensory-friendly programs, only one highlighted their budget as the reason why they do not offer those specific types of experiences. Overall, one librarian emphasized

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<sup>66</sup> Institute of Museum and Library Services, "Library Systems: FY 2015 Public Libraries Survey (Administrative Entities Data)," *Institute of Museum and Library Services*, accessed November 28, 2017.

budget concerns as a reason why programs were not being offered, compared to having confidence and overall practical knowledge.

It would make sense if libraries operating on positive budgets stated their primary reasons for not conducting sensory-friendly programs was a lack of confidence and practical knowledge. However, this was not the case. During the interview process of librarians, five stated they require adequate staff and funding to offer experiences for children with ASD. According to the interview data acquired, libraries who are operating on positive budgets are acknowledging funding and staff as challenges for them in offering services, but only one library that is working on a deficit highlights funding as a challenge.

Warminster and Coatesville, referred to previously, are part of the sub-group above which highlights their communities as being middle-class (\$61,000- \$70,000) in terms of median household income. Even though they are operating on a deficit, they are members of certain communities that may be pushing for inclusive programming and are willing to help with funding needs. This is also present in the median household sub-group of \$111,000 and higher. There are two libraries that offer sensory-friendly experiences, however one of those libraries, William Jeanes Public Library is currently operating under a deficit. Those were the sub-groups that had the highest percentages when it came to conducting programs for children with autism according to their median household range. Within the \$40,000- \$50,000 and \$81,000- \$90,000 median household income sub-groups, they each have one library that conducts ASD based programs. The other similarity between these two is both the libraries currently operate under a deficit.

These connections being made between the libraries, the median household income, and their budgets show that money does not always control what a library decides to do. Even if they

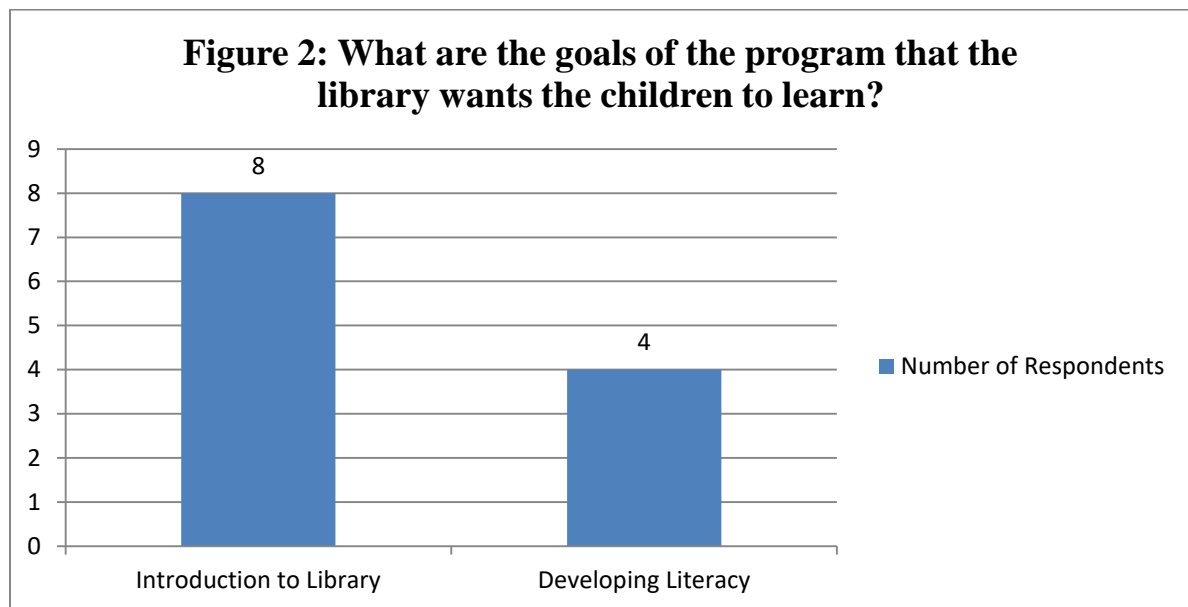
are functioning under a deficit, libraries are willing to follow their mission and provide as many visitors as they can with an enriching educational experience. When it comes to providing services or experiences for children with ASD, libraries are more concerned with having confidence and practical knowledge on the subject of autism and the activities that are associated with the spectrum disorder, compared to worrying about funds available at the time. These data also highlight that even if a library is located in low-income or wealthy communities, they can struggle with having positive budgets and keeping themselves from operating on a deficit.

### **Data from One on One Interviews**

One constant theme from visiting these libraries was their sizes. Some were large and could serve broader communities, and others were small and limited in what they could offer in terms of educational activities for their visitors. During the course of the interviews, librarians highlighted that they were unable to offer sensory-friendly programs because they lacked funds, practical knowledge, staff, or time. Some had attempted to implement programs, but they failed mainly from a lack of consistent attendance.

As a place of community and acceptance, public libraries are beginning to make strides in recognizing the present needs of children with ASD, and turning the library into a comfortable place for parents and their children to come, have fun, and learn. The goal of every library is to be inclusive and inviting to everyone. From reviewing the data, only a certain percentage of public libraries are placing programming for children with autism near the top of their list, and that can be attributed by the challenges presented when having to implement those types of specialty activities.

As previously stated, twelve of the librarians indicated that they do in fact conduct programming for children with autism. Each library had goals they wanted to achieve during the specific educational experiences. In the data, represented by Figure 2 below, 66.67% or eight out of the twelve librarians stated they want children on the spectrum to have an “Introduction to the Library” and realize the library is a safe and comfortable place to visit (See Appendix 3, Question 2a).



By creating a comfortable space, children with autism can have a typical library experience with their parents or caretakers. Typical library experiences include using the library to find a book, participating in activities, and interacting with strangers. A library, similar to a museum, can create impactful sensory-friendly programs, but if their visitors do not feel comfortable visiting the institution, libraries will have a difficult time bringing in that sub-group of parents and children. Typically, when it comes to programming for children on the spectrum, some libraries have built a relationship with the autism community and have proven it can be a safe and comfortable environment for their children to learn, play, and interact. According to



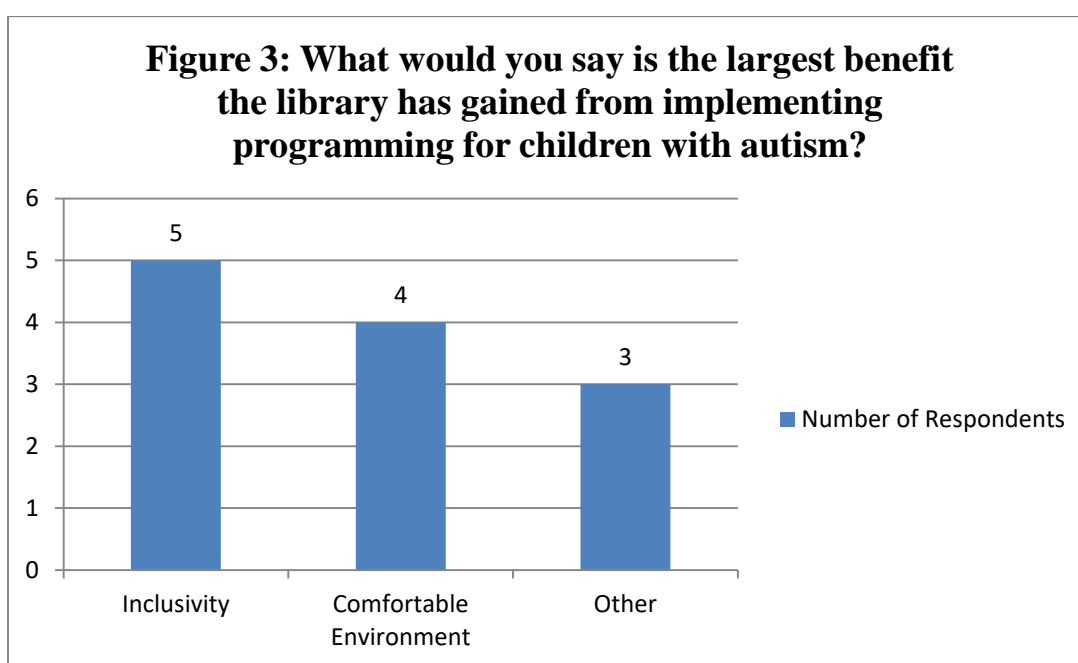
some of the interviews, those relationships were built through schools the children attended, and partnering with unique organizations dedicated to aiding individuals with autism.

For the children, this comfortable environment allows them to learn educationally and socially. Increasing their literacy is a goal for many librarians conducting sensory-friendly programming. One librarian stated three unique goals, “increase literacy, provide an educational space, and make parents feel welcomed.” Figure 2 also highlights, four or 33.33% of the librarians indicated “Developing Literacy” was the primary goal of their program (See Appendix 3, Question 2a). Many children on the spectrum have a difficult time learning how to speak and write. By having programs like Sensory-Friendly Story Time, these children can strengthen their abilities to use all of their senses to improve their literacy. If public libraries are able to accomplish this while school is out for the summer, it will only help the children when they go back or enter school because they have already started learning some steps in how to write and speak.

Another struggle many children on the spectrum have is the ability to interact socially with strangers. Programs like Sensory-Friendly Story Time and Sensory-Friendly Movie Nights, allow children on the spectrum to communicate with others who are similar to them. This is important because once they feel comfortable interacting with individuals similar to them, they may feel comfortable enough to socialize with a variety of strangers. Social interaction is a significant goal librarians set when they create sensory-friendly programs. The largest impact these programs can have is providing these children with the confidence and ability to speak in general, but also communicate with their peers in a productive and positive manner. By introducing the children and their parents to the library, it allows the children to grow in

educational and social ways that may have not been accomplished by just only attending school or staying home.

These programs benefit the parents just as much as the children. Many parents who have children with autism struggle with finding places where they can bring their child and finding a community of parents who have children on the spectrum that can be a support system. A public library can become that central location where parents have a place, besides their home, where they feel comfortable bringing their children with autism.

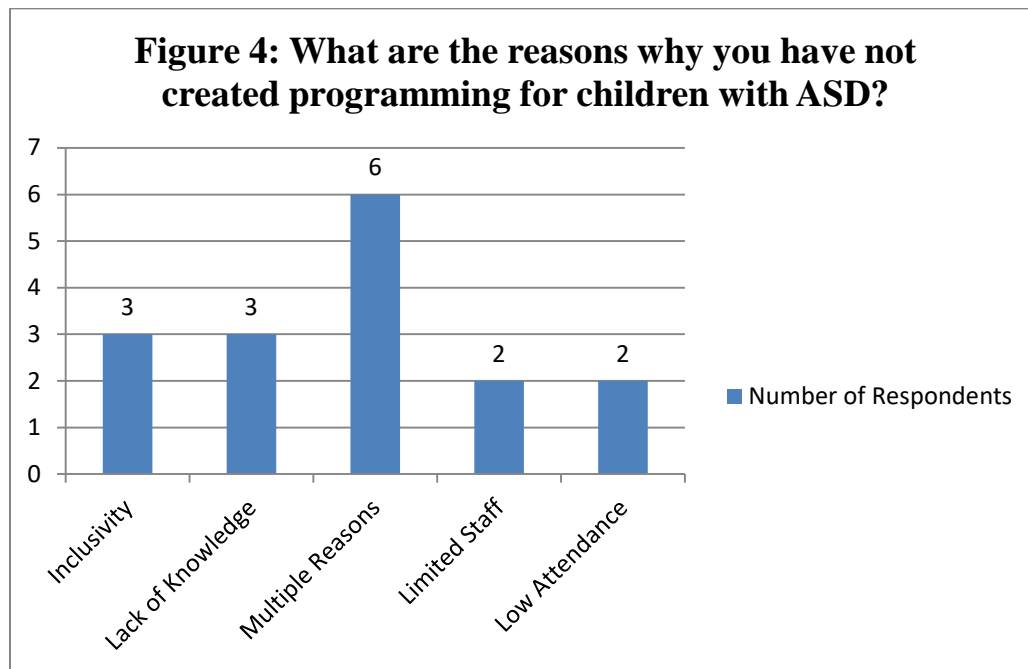


Four or 33.33% of the librarians who responded “Yes” to conducting programming cited one of the largest benefits the library has gained is the “Comfortable Environment” they have created for the families (See Appendix 3, Question 6a). In many ways, parents feel embarrassed, but it is not because their child has autism. It is embarrassment of how others might view them and their child, especially if their child starts acting up. To avoid any of that embarrassment, parents will keep their children at home.

Nowadays, public libraries are becoming community centers where diverse groups of individuals walk through their doors every day for a variety of reasons. Their point of existence is to serve the entire community, not just a segment of it. By the library developing a relationship with parents through programming, they are able to convince parents that the library is an all-inclusive space where anyone can come, learn, and have fun. This push to make the library an all-inclusive environment was also highlighted in the data for librarians who did conduct sensory-friendly programs. When asked what they see as benefits to implementing programming for children with autism, five out of twelve or 41.67% highlighted being an inclusive environment as the primary benefit (See Appendix 3, Question 6a). No matter if a library does or does not conduct a certain type of programming, their end goal is to be an inclusive, learning environment. Not only are the children gaining confidence in themselves to socially interact with others, but also their parents gain confidence in bringing their children out into the public and not caring how others feel about their child.

Nevertheless, there are challenges that present themselves to public libraries who attempt to provide sensory-friendly experiences. The comparison has been made between public libraries and museums because they operate in similar ways. Most public libraries and museums are members of the non-profit sector. Based on their size they may struggle with many issues that coincide with one another. Those common issues are lack of visitation or attendance, funding, staffing, and time. These are all important variables in any job, but more so for members of the non-profit sector. Visitation or attendance, funding, staffing, and time need to be aligned almost perfectly in order for a museum or public library to create and implement impactful programs for the general public.

Just as there are small and large museums, there are small and large public libraries. Typically, the larger the institution means the larger the population entering its doors on a daily basis. For many libraries, there are an abundance of reasons why they do not conduct programming for children with ASD (See Figure 4).

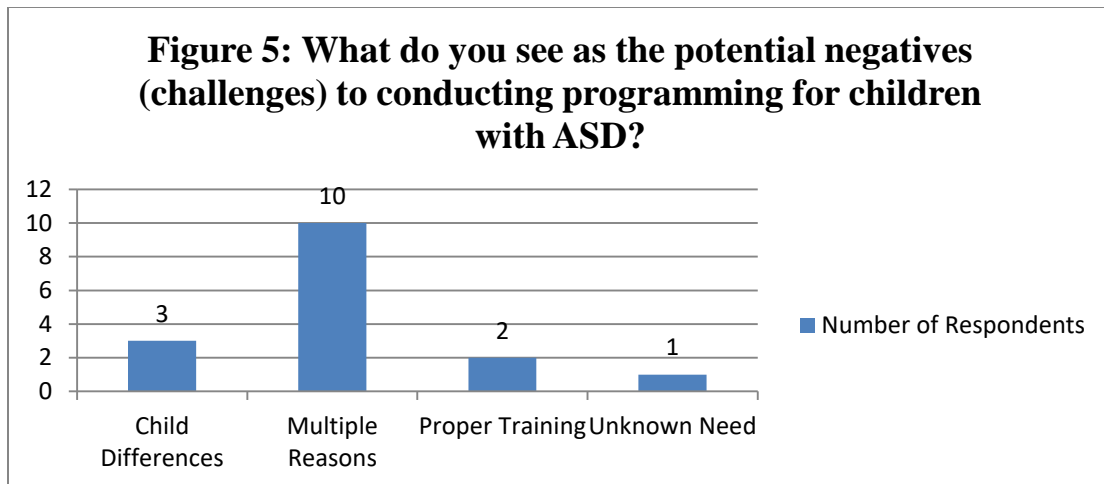


Lack of attendance was highlighted as a reason why public libraries do not offer specialty educational experiences. As mentioned previously, sixteen librarians answered “No” when asked if they conduct programs for children on the spectrum. When asked why they do not conduct programs, two librarians (12.50%) cited “Low Attendance” as a reason why they scrapped their offerings. Six librarians (37.50%) cited “Multiple Reasons” why they do not conduct sensory-friendly programs, and a common answer that appeared was lack of attendance (See Appendix 3, Question 1b). This data shows even though more public libraries in the survey do not conduct programming for children with autism, many have attempted to implement it. A lack of consistent attendance made the program less desirable to continue providing.

Low attendance is a huge struggle many small public libraries deal with, but there are other variables that prevent libraries from conducting sensory-friendly programs, and one of those is funding. Most times when public libraries want to offer unique activities or events, they attempt to receive a grant from a multitude of organizations. Those grants provide necessary funds to buy materials and pay staff. Along with grants, county aid may be sought, which is money the county will allocate to libraries that need it the most. Without necessary funding, many libraries are unable to conduct programs for children with autism because they cannot afford the correct materials.

Lack of funds also shines a light on staffing. Larger museums and libraries that have solid endowments or revenue coming in are able to conduct programming and support more employees. The more employees an institution has allows a higher quantity of programming the library can create and conduct. Many libraries have one staff person per department, so that individual can only do so much. Two of the sixteen librarians (12.50%) cited that a “Limited Staff” kept them from conducting programming for children with autism. Staffing also appeared in answers with “Multiple Reasons” as to why those specific libraries did not offer sensory-friendly experiences. Not only is it difficult to have a staff of one creating all of the programs, it is more difficult when that individual does not have the proper practical knowledge on ASD. Three of the sixteen librarians (18.75%) listed a “Lack of Knowledge “on the subject as the primary reason why they do not conduct sensory-friendly programs (See Appendix 3, Question 1b).

As Figure 4 highlighted the reasons why libraries do not create programming for children with autism, Figure 5 is focused on the challenges libraries can face when doing so.



Two librarians (12.50%) cited “Proper Training” as the primary challenge to creating these types of programs, and ten (62.50%) listed “Multiple Reasons” why it would be challenging. One of the primary reasons was a lack of practical knowledge on the subject. The need for practical knowledge can be identified through one librarian’s quote which states libraries, “have to be prepared because each person with autism is different.” An institution can have a small staff or large staff, but the most important tool they need is practical knowledge on how to perform the programs and work with children who are on the spectrum. Three of the librarians, or 18.75%, cited “Child Differences” as a negative or challenge to conducting programming for children with autism (See Appendix 3, Question 4b). “Child Differences” refers to the librarians highlighting that every child with autism is different, and that needs to be known and recognized before any program could be implemented.

With any program there is a certain amount of time that goes into its creation. Depending on the size and number of activities involved, there may be a larger or smaller amount of time that was solely dedicated to the creation of the event or program. One person does not have enough time to take the necessary steps towards creating a new type of program, especially if they do not have the necessary practical knowledge. Every small detail needs to be thought out

because every child on the spectrum is unique, just like every other person. There are common traits amongst children with autism that cause higher stimulation, including loud noises or bright lights. However, there are a number of other things that can cause stimulation and knowing to handle the situation, but also being able to provide a sensory-friendly environment is a difficult task to take on especially if the librarians are working mostly by themselves.

Even with these challenges as the reasons why certain libraries cannot conduct programming for children with autism, most librarians that answered that they do not offer them would eventually want to.

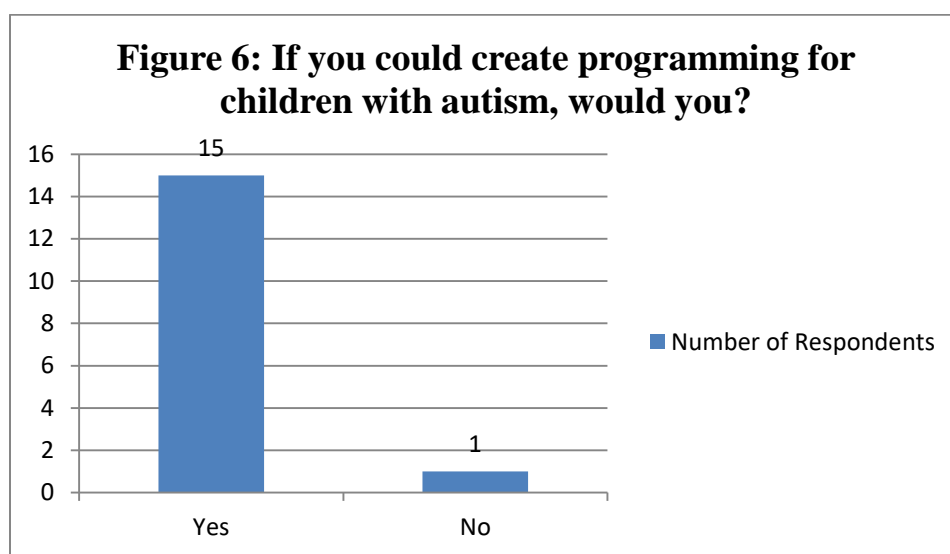
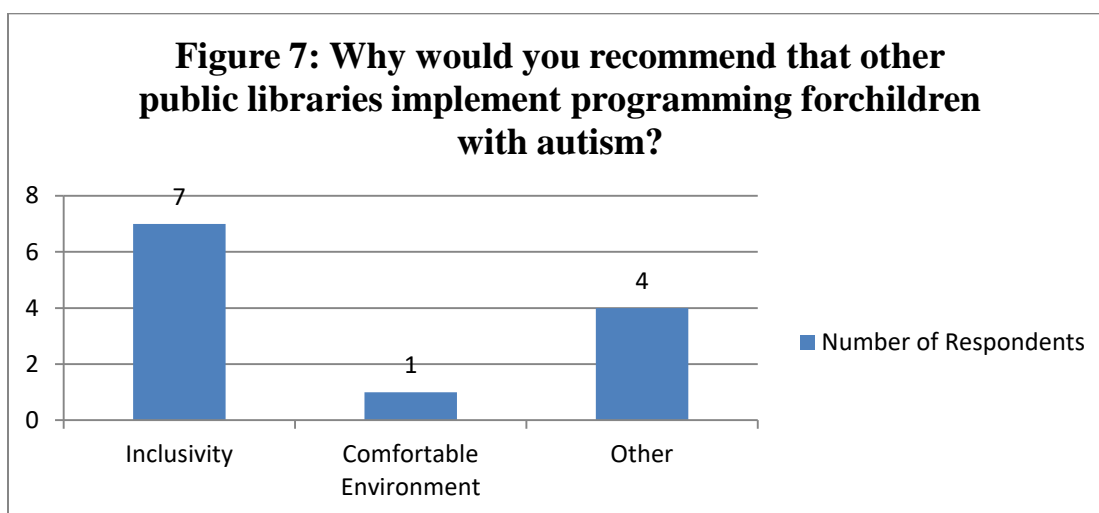


Figure 6 shows fifteen out of sixteen librarians (93.75%) answered “Yes” to a question on whether or not they would create programming for children with autism if they could (See Appendix 3, Question 3b). The response rate shows that even if a library cannot do it because of a lack of attendance from previous attempts, lack of funding, lack of staff, or a shortage of time, they would still create and implement sensory-friendly programs because they believe the library is a place that should be enjoyed by everyone. As one librarian stated to conducting programming, “Yes, because it is a need, and to show them the library is a comfortable place for parents to connect.” One constant thread that runs through this data is the insistence of public

libraries to show they are all-inclusive environments that are comfortable places for parents to bring their children whether they are on the spectrum, or not.

This is highlighted by the responses from eleven of the twelve librarians who do conduct sensory-friendly programs when they were asked if they recommend other public libraries do the same. Figure 7 below shows seven (58.33%) of them highlighted the importance of it making the library an all-inclusive environment, and four (33.33%) acknowledged “Other” reasons including “something simple can make a difference” and before offering these specific programs the library’s “need practical knowledge.” It is important for parents and children to learn and gain a supporting community they may have never realized was there (See Appendix 3, Question 5a).



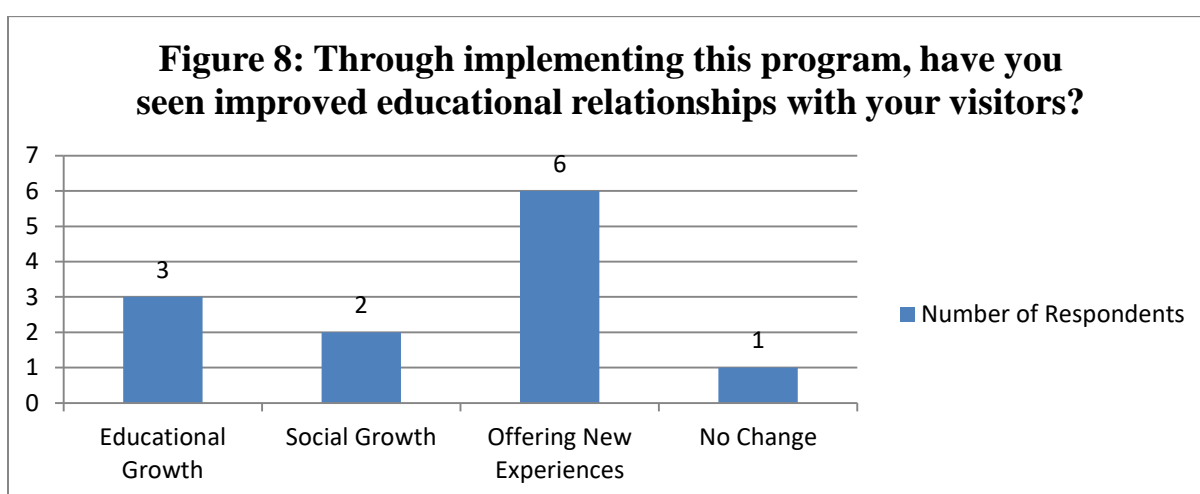
There are positives to conducting sensory-friendly programming, but there are also many challenges. As stated above, those challenges prevent many libraries from implementing the programs even if they would want to create them. However, how does this data support or go against the main focus of this thesis which questions whether public libraries are creating and implementing programming for children with autism spectrum disorder or not? Librarians responses confirmed that conducting these programs would create educational relationships



between the library and their visitors. This question was asked of every librarian interviewed, and it did not matter if they answered “Yes” or “No” to Question #1 (See Appendix 3).

Data is presented here to establish whether the hypothesis and research question can be answered: ‘Can public librarians expand and improve their educational relationships with visitors by developing and implementing programs for children with ASD?’ has been answered

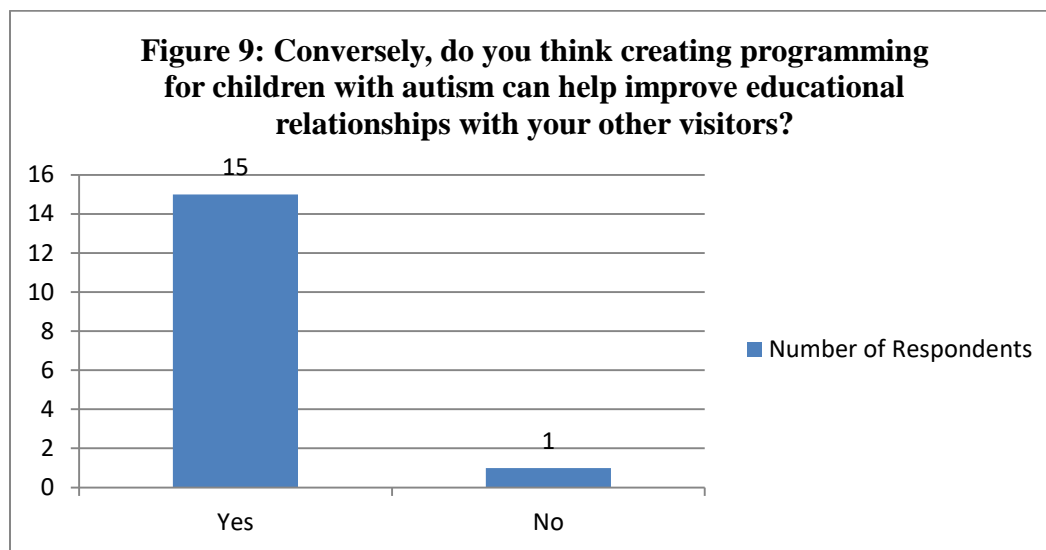
Figure 8 focuses on librarians who answered “Yes” to conducting programs for children with autism.



Six of out twelve librarians (50.00%) stated “Offering New Experiences” as a reason why educational relationships are formed. Once the family is introduced to the library, they are able to use the abundance of resources within to learn about new things, and it allows the families to interact with new people. Two of the eleven librarians (16.67%) cite “Social Growth” as a notable educational relationship being formed. Those librarians noticed children were very quiet and nervous the first time they participated in a sensory-friendly program at the library, but as time went on those children would become leaders to help new children coming to the library. Three of the eleven librarians (25.00%) stated that “Educational Growth” of some type was noticed as the child or children progressed through the series of programs. Whether it was

developing their literacy skills or counting at a faster rate, these librarians noticed an increase in educational achievement. Only one of the twelve librarians or 8.33% stated that they did not see any type of educational relationship being formed (See Appendix 3, Question 4a). One quote that stood out from the interviews was, “Yes, some children could not sit still, would not talk or listen, but as they continued through the programs they now see improvement in many of those areas of learning.”

This same question was asked of the librarians who answered “No” to conducting programs for children with autism and the results might be a little surprising.



According to the data in Figure 9, fifteen out of the sixteen librarians (93.75%) answered “Yes” to being asked if creating programming for children with autism would improve educational relationships between the library and their other visitors. Suggestions for improving educational relationships were described for librarians as providing a safe space for parents and their children with autism to come and learn at the library, not only from the librarians on staff, but also from other children visiting the library.

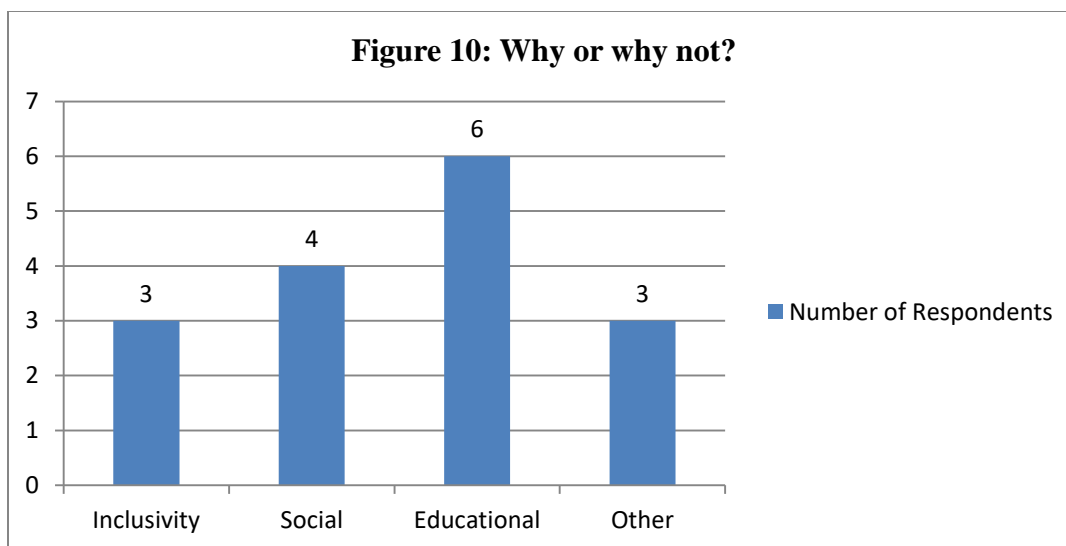


Figure 10 shows, four out of fifteen (25.00%) identified “Social” reasons why educational relationships within the library setting would improve. Librarians noted that it would allow visitors who are not on the spectrum, whether they be children or adults, to learn from the parents and children who deal with autism on a daily basis. Creating an environment where people can learn from one another can reduce the instinct of intolerance, and increase the amount of understanding between individuals who are different. This creates an inclusive environment, which three out of the fifteen (18.75%) librarians noted as a way these programs can improve educational relationships (See Appendix 3, Question 5b).

95% of the librarians interviewed thought conducting autism-based programming in their libraries would improve educational relationships with all of their visitors, whether they conducted the specific programming or not. Implementing sensory-friendly programming can create an inclusive environment that supports children with or without autism. This inclusive environment also allows adults to learn and fully understand what autism is, and create social relationships with parents who have children with autism. Learning does not have to be through a textbook, computer, or an informational packet. Learning can be done by observing, experiencing, and speaking to individuals who are different from one’s own self, taking those

new things they have learned and applying it to the rest of one's life. Not only do public libraries, and especially the librarians, want to create an inclusive comfortable environment for children on the spectrum and their parents, but they also want their other visitors to learn how to accept and understand other people for who they are, and realize just because they are different does not mean they cannot enjoy a full life.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusions**

The data show that the research question and hypothesis were confirmed: that through conducting programming for children with autism, educational relationships can be formed between the librarians and their visitors. This does not take away from the fact that it is extremely difficult for many public libraries to conduct this type of programming. As was shown, many variables enter the playing field when thinking about the creation and implementation of sensory-friendly activities. Libraries are concerned about program attendance; whether they have the funding to purchase necessary supplies and hire staff with the knowledge to conduct the programs, and finally the time to implement it.

Although offering sensory-friendly experiences are difficult for many libraries, they acknowledge the benefits that come from them, primarily, providing a place where families that have children with autism can feel comfortable and safe. Once a comfortable environment is formed, these children may take advantage of the library in ways they may have never done previously. Increasing their literacy and growing socially are just two of the benefits the children can gain from the experiences. Parents can also become part of a supportive community that may help them with any issues they encounter. As more individuals start to use the library as a source of knowledge, the library will most likely gain recognition as an inclusive space where anyone can come in and learn something new, or form unique relationships.

When it comes to funding for the libraries highlighted in this study, operating under a deficit was not always a deterrent from conducting programs for children with autism. For some libraries funding was not the primary issue instead it was having confidence and practical knowledge about autism. However, libraries that do not offer those types of experiences and

operate on a positive budget, highlight funding as one of the main reasons they do not have sensory-friendly activities. This may happen for a variety of reasons, but they may not have enough money allocated to their educational funds and that can prevent them from conducting programs. For the most part, middle-class and upper-class neighborhoods based on their median household income had libraries that were more inclined to conduct programs for children with ASD. This study also highlighted that a library can exist within a community with a high median household income, but it does not prevent the library from operating under a deficit. What those numbers showed is that it all depends on the library, and what they can financially achieve while following their mission. Some libraries that were interviewed may view the extra expenses as essential to the mission of their institution, while others most likely realize it supports their mission but they do not want to risk functioning under a deficit. Practical knowledge, staff, time, space, and attendance numbers are extremely important, if not more important, than funding for libraries when it comes to offering sensory-friendly programs.

Overall, most of the librarians thought sensory-friendly programming should exist because the library is for everyone and they want every person, no matter who they are, to feel comfortable walking into the library, learning something new, and interacting with others. Most importantly, libraries want their communities to realize that they are there for anyone as a source of positive activities. This study finally highlights how it is possible that museums and libraries can learn from one another, and eventually, in the future, form more partnerships to affect larger populations of people.

## **Chapter 6: Applications to the Field & Implications for Further Research**

When it comes to public libraries and their programming for children with autism there are multiple applications that would help everyone. Museums and public libraries are both members of the non-profit sector, and are attempting to provide similar educational and social experiences. Typically, museums tend to have more available funds from private sources, than public libraries. One way museums could help public libraries who are struggling to implement programs for children with autism is to form a partnership. These partnerships can help both the museum and library with visitation from new people, and it shows that an entire community is committed to becoming all-inclusive rather than staying as individual institutions. When non-profits work together it helps everyone, especially the libraries which may struggle with affording materials. The museum may be able to help supply the library with materials to conduct the programming, or with experienced staff members. Then they can trade on and off performing different programs at each other's institutions. Even rewarding individuals who visit both places with a prize of a discount coupon, or another prize would give them more incentive to visit both institutions and use all of the resources available. For parents who have children with autism, it would allow them to have two locations they feel comfortable bringing their children for programs or for a regular visit.

Public libraries who do conduct programs for children with autism tend to persist with certain types including Sensory-Friendly Story Time and Sensory Movie Nights. Those are great programs where educational and social knowledge can be acquired, but diversifying their selections might be helpful in the future. Now most public libraries do not have the same amount of space as many museums do. With that added space, more activities are able to occur. One

thing public libraries can learn from museum programming is diversification. Within museum programs there are multiple activities occurring. When it comes to Sensory-Friendly Sundays at the Franklin Institute, they have small scientific experiments at a station. This helps the children engage with the museum, and learn something new. By trying new activities, public libraries might be able to bring in more consistent attendance numbers. When things are the same, all of the time people become bored, and if parents does not see the purpose in the program for their children they will not bring them anymore. It is this researcher's recommendation that libraries that are currently conducting programs for children with autism, and even ones who are not, should look at museums and the unique activities and experiences they try to provide and attempt to incorporate them into their own library setting. Offering a wider variety of activities and programs can gain more attention, and regular attendance at more public libraries.

Especially in larger cities like Philadelphia museums that offer sensory-friendly programs and have more resources available can bring their skills and knowledge to libraries and train their staff. By doing this act of sharing knowledge, more libraries might feel confident offering these specific types of experiences for children with ASD. Another possibility through partnerships between libraries and museums could be discounted tickets. Libraries can have a reading program where children have to read a certain amount of books and in return their family would receive discounted tickets to a specific museum. This is beneficial because many individuals, who may use libraries because of their free nature, would have a chance to visit museums.

### **Implications for Future Research**

During any major research project there are often different or more unique avenues that the researcher may have wanted to explore. However, there is not always the time and ability to



conduct this research as it relates to the research hypothesis and question. For this thesis, there are multiple possibilities that could help take this research further.

The first implication for future research would be able to conduct empirical research: an actual program for children with autism within public libraries to clearly observe and document how much work is required to create and implement a successful program for children on the autistic spectrum. It would allow for immediate engagement with the participants, to see if these programs actually do create some type of educational relationship.

Creating and implementing a program for children on the spectrum, interviews of parents and possibly the children themselves would be beneficial to the study. Conducting a program is one thing, but that does not allow the individual conducting the program to hear everyone's opinions, and to ask if they thought it was a success. Interviewing the parents would be extremely beneficial because they know their child better than anyone, and would be able to comment on whether it is something they would do again. Hearing the voice of individuals directly within the autism community would bolster evidence for this thesis if they agreed with librarians who thought these programs created educational relationships. Parents could also provide insight on how these programs have affected their children educationally and socially.

Another way to add to the thesis would be to observe a sensory-friendly program being conducted within a public library. This thesis does provide information on an observation from the Franklin Institute's Sensory-Friendly Sunday program; it does not have an observation from one in a library because of time and permission barriers. By watching the children and how they are interacting with the program, one can gather excellent data because it is easy to see something happening and documenting it. Observing parents would be important to see how comfortable they are with the program, and if they are building a community with other parents.

The observation of a program and interviewing of participants would be an excellent combination to confirm the hypothesis made in this study and provide concrete data as evidence.

The next implication maintains a focus on individuals with autism. The current thesis is focused on children with autism, the programming public libraries conduct for them, and if those programs create educational relationships. Research and interviews could be extended longitudinally to teens and adults who have autism to find out whether they had participated in sensory-friendly programming at a public library, and if so, how it impacted their lives in educational ways. Also, if they continue to visit that library or other libraries now because of the programs they used to attend? Conversely, for teens or adults who have not participated in sensory-friendly programs at a public library, do they ever visit public libraries and if so, how often? Conducting this type of research could lead to learning whether lifelong relationships with particular public libraries are formed and whether individuals with autism feel more comfortable going to different places because of the relationships they made while visiting public libraries.

The most important thing to realize about the applications and implications of this study is how they suggest partnerships between organizations. Museum and libraries have an excellent opportunity to come together and affect communities in positive ways. Highlighting some of the struggles and benefits libraries have gained while attempting to offer sensory-friendly experiences for children with ASD, this research can spark conversations about cross-training between museums and libraries as to what they can do to help each other when it comes to specialty programming, and different activities all together.

The primary claim to take away from this study is that money is not everything. If a library wants to conduct a certain type of program they will allocate resources to achieve their goals and follow their mission. The more pressing challenges that impact libraries when it comes to

offering sensory-friendly experiences are practical knowledge and their amount of staff. Overall, it depends on the library. Whether they are operating on appositive budget or under a deficit, each library makes decisions that are right for their institution. If this means conducting sensory-friendly programs, then they will offer these experiences no matter what their financial situation may be because if they have the practical knowledge on ASD and the available staff it makes it easier to offer a variety of enriching programs.

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## **Appendix 1: Research Instrument**

1. How would you describe the primary visitors to the library?
2. Do you conduct programming for children with autism spectrum disorder?

### **If Yes, to Question #2**

1. What is the program called, and what do the participants do during the program?
2. What are the goals of the program that the library wants the children to learn?
3. Why did your library decide to conduct programming for children with autism?
4. Through implementing this program, have you seen improved educational relationships with your visitors? If yes, please describe these relationships.
5. Would you recommend that other public libraries implement programming for children with autism?
6. What would you say is the largest benefit the library has gained from implementing programming for children with autism?
7. Before you offered programming had any community members approached the library about creating programming for children with autism?

### **If No, to Question #2**

1. What are the reasons why you have not created programming for children with ASD?
2. Has the topic been brought up during staff meetings?
3. If you could create programming for children with autism, would you and why or why not?

4. What do you see as the potential positives or negatives to conducting programming for children with ASD?
5. Do you think creating programming for children with autism can conversely help improve educational relationships with your other visitors?
6. Have any community members approached the library about creating programming for children with autism?



**Appendix 2:**  
**Data of Individual Library Communities**  
**Median Household Incomes**

<b>Libraries Interviewed</b>	<b>Do they conduct programs for children with autism spectrum disorder?</b>	<b>Median Household Income of communities surrounding museum</b>
Lansdale Public Library	No	\$76, 933
Lansdowne Public Library	No	\$52, 856
Tredyffrin Public Library	Yes	\$118, 801
Warminster Township Free Library	Yes	\$68, 155
Royersford Free Public Library	No	\$77, 392
Tinicum Memorial Public Library	No	\$47, 671
Wissahickon Valley Public Library Blue Bell Branch	No	\$112, 137
M. Allen Vogelsson Regional Branch Library	No	\$78, 568
Elkins Park Free Library	Yes	\$66, 237
Sharon Hill Public Library	No	\$45, 053
Cherry Hill Public Library	Yes	\$87, 929
Franklin Township Public Library	No	\$78, 534
Pemberton Community Library	Yes	\$64, 170
The Free Library of New Hope and Solebury	No	\$100, 865
Glenolden Library	No	\$55, 753
Atlantic County- Mays Landing Branch	No	\$60, 058
La Mott Branch Library	Yes	\$66, 237
Ephrata Public Library	Yes	\$55, 921
Springfield Township Library	No	\$84, 057
William Jeanes Memorial Library	Yes	\$112, 457
Jenkintown Library	No	\$83, 369
Hightstown Memorial Branch Library	No	\$86, 652
Andorra Branch Free Library of Philadelphia	Yes	\$61, 144
Anonymous	No	\$84, 256
Abington Free Library	No	\$69, 212
Lancaster Public Library	Yes	\$44, 879

Coatesville Area Public Library	Yes	\$66, 619
Burlington County Library System Westampton	Yes	\$75, 176

## **Appendix 3: Data from Interviews**

### **1. How would you describe the primary visitors to the library?**

- Diverse age, ethnicity, library is for everyone, homeless to teachers
- Primarily parents and their children
- Babies up to 12, majority is parents and nannies with young children
- Elderly Population, families with young kids, school-aged and younger
- Early Childhood (0-5), parents, and small senior population
- Wide Range, babies to elderly
- Very Diverse
- Diverse in age, race, religion, parents and other caretakers, nannies
- Families with young children, middle class educated, elder patrons, diverse overall
- Kids, families, diverse, elementary, seniors
- Children and Families
- Toddlers and Preschoolers, Families, Seniors, Juniors and Teens
- Large variety
- Younger children, preschoolers, families, older people 55 and older
- Local, adults over children
- Families, lower income
- Use computers, diverse
- Varied, privileged and underprivileged families, moms and kids, elderly
- 2-8 years old, Children section
- Middle-Upper class, diverse, variety of ages, families, elderly
- 2/3 elderly, 1/3 children
- Preschoolers and a parent (mom, grandma, nanny, grandpa) school aged kids during the school year
- Parents with children that are younger than school aged, elementary

-Diverse

-Families with children, babies to 5th or 6th graders, teachers and educators

-Parents and Children

-Parents and Children

-Parents and Children, Infants all the way up

**2. Do you conduct programming for children with autism spectrum disorder?**

-No

-No

-Yes, low attendance

-Yes

-No

-No

-No

-No, tried playing on the spectrum

-Yes

-No, science with the summer but separate session

-Yes

-No

-Yes, overall special needs

-No

-No

-No

-Yes

-Yes

-No

-Yes

-No

-No

-Yes

-No

-No

-Yes

-Yes

-Yes

**1a. What is the program called, and what do the participants do during the program?**

-Sensory Story Time, participate in different activities that utilize different senses

-Turtle Dance Music, local performer, movement based activities

-Sensory Story Time, once a month, not well attended, and open to everyone. 3 or 4 kids, schedule board with Velcro, remove cards as program goes, 3 stories, flannel board or other objects to interact with, instruments, hitting all senses, balance beams with bumps, music and bubbles. Turtle Dance Music, Mr. Mat

-Sensory Story Time, Special Needs Story

-Sensory-Friendly Movie Time, lights dimmed; Sensory-Friendly Story time, fidget toys, sensory stations similar to common practices

-Sensory Story Time, body parts made out of felt and make a body

-Sensory Exploration Workshop, Sensory Play Lab- Tactile Path, sensations to connect mind and body, Sensory Family Movie Night- Set up chairs, watch movie, do not make popcorn, bring own snacks or something that makes them feel comfortable, not all light off, lowered volume, and children are able to freely walk around

-Sensory Story Time, weekly program 3 and up, structured timeline, definite space to sit, limit size, early morning 10:15

-Individual public school classes come. Sensory Story time, wooden block party, arts and crafts, introductions to library, and Movie Time

-Sensory Story Time

- Story Time and more, read stories, sing songs, read felt books, and fidget spinners
- Sensory Story Time and Sensory Movie Time on Saturdays once a month

**2a. What are the goals of the program that the library wants the children to learn?**

- Expand offerings, more inclusive program
- Introduce kids to the library, safe environment
- Do everything to help develop early literacy skills, singing, talking
- Increase literacy, provide an educational space, make a parents feel welcomed
- Library is a safe place, parents feel welcome
- STEM, experience all the areas within STEM
- Parental community, IU13, parents with speakers helping with kids, have a place for kids to feel comfortable, teach sign language as another form of communication
- Kids to have a typical experience in a library like every kid can. Fostering positive relationships with the library
- Make the library more approachable, comfortable place
- Offer something to parents that did not feel comfortable coming to regular story time. Revive the autism resource center
- Welcome at library and have place to come
- Bring literacy into children's lives however possible

**3a. Why did your library decide to conduct programming for children with autism?**

- Ms. Shawna, it was her idea and had background in special education, and a patron request
- Money from the county, went so well want to do it again
- Patrons with children on spectrum, exposure at conference
- Designed it off a program I started at NJLA
- Web and R, section on Sensory Stories, conduct it once a month for a couple of years during the school year
- Montgomery County, Cheltenham Township introduced the programming
- There was a need, and parents were expressing that
- Want programming for everyone, need to meet

- Attract autism groups, saw the needs and accommodated them
- Give parents somewhere to feel comfortable bringing their children to and providing them with help
- Knew there was a need and received a grant to meet the need
- Saw a need and wanted to meet it

**4a. Through implementing this program, have you seen improved educational relationships with your visitors?**

- Yes happy with it, children seemed to appreciate it because it filled a void that they normally do not have fulfilled and had fun
- Not much difference, parents already familiar
- Yes, growing comfortable, more special education
- Yes, have to offer on Saturday, more consistent, have seen improvement from consistent visitors
- Use the library and understand the collection more, offering other information not known
- They progressively grew, yes, learning about themselves and the world around them
- Yes, kids are participating more and learning
- Montgomery County Unit uses this space. It is an inclusive environment. Kids help each other through the program
- Yes, teachers and libraries can help one another, to help students through programming
- Yes, it has been minor. More connections for educators and parents
- Yes, providing comfortable environment to help them learn socially and educationally. Learn from one another
- Yes, some children could not sit still, would not talk or listen, but as they continued through the programs they now see improvement in many of those areas of learning

**5a. Why would you recommend that other public libraries implement programming for children with autism?**

- Yes, great way to reach out and provide inclusive programming for all patrons
- Yes, library is for everyone

- Yes, important for families to have comfortable environment
- Yes, goal is to service everyone
- Absolutely
- Yes, a group of individuals that need to be served
- Yes, even something simple can make a difference
- Yes, if they have practical knowledge, it is not just something you can do
- Yes, there is a need that should be met, social growth
- Yes, they are a part of every community and serve the whole community
- Yes, public libraries serve everyone, create inclusive environment
- Yes, because they typically get fazed out of programming, but they want them to be involved in the library

**6a. What would you say is the largest benefits the library has gained from implementing programming for children with autism?**

- To say we offer well-rounded programs, and reaching out to the entire community in order to understand them and help them
- Making connections, having an individual who has knowledge and can conduct valuable programming
- Perceive us as a place that includes children with autism, responses to the library
- The reputation of being a welcoming place
- More circulation of selective material
- Pays a vital role in community life, being welcome to everyone, benefit from them coming and having a reputation of being inclusive and open for everyone
- Staff has gained an awareness
- Increasing the diversity of people who use the library, inclusive, being recognized as a major resource
- Students are happy to be in the library, comfortable
- More people coming in, helping people that could not find help elsewhere
- Making people happy, introduce them to the library, comfortable environment



-New patronage, and being all welcoming

**7a. Before you offered programming, had any community members approached the library about creating programming for children with autism?**

-Yes, patron request

-No

-No

-Yes, inclusivity for regular programs

-No

-No

-Yes

-Yes

-No

-No

-No

-Yes

**1b. What are the reasons why you have not created programming for children with ASD?**

-To be inclusive, not just for those children, have all children work together

-Not enough knowledge to create necessary programming for this group of visitors

-Lacked staff, space, and funding

-Not been on radar that it is needed for demographic, be as inclusive as possible

-Lack of practical knowledge, not enough confidence

-Attendance issues, more training and knowledge

-Parents haven't approached us, school brings children with autism and other special needs, not clear open lines of communication

-Limited Staff

-Inclusion not exclusion, they already had autism group

- Trouble getting kids without disabilities in, not on radar for programming
- Timing, Children's Library split between two part timers. Just now feel confident enough
- Tried for special needs children, parents approached, Sensory-Friendly Story Time, did it for a year once a month. Lack of attendance, good group of 5 or 6 kids, but started to diminish
- Two or Three years tried, lack of attendance, and the most children they had were 3
- Do not have enough resources, training, and confidence to conduct proper programming for them. Do not know how much of a need there is, and funding
- Did not occur to me to create programming, limited staff, lack of training
- More support, work with someone who has experience with children who have autism

**2b. Has the topic been brought up during staff meetings?**

- No
- Yes, attempted program, no one attended, inclusiveness
- Yes, in trainings with township
- No
- No, but county wide meetings do bring up the topic
- Yes
- No
- No, tough to have everyone together at the same time because of low permanent staffing
- Yes
- No
- Yes, tried early opening but did not work, reached out to local group
- No, not until new building
- Yes
- No
- Yes

-Yes

**3b. If you could create programming for children with autism, would you and why or why not?**

-Introduce the library to children with autism do they know what to expect, and feel comfortable

-Yes, Sensory Story Time, make families feel welcome and form a community with other parents

-Yes, but would want full time staff

-Yes, well aware of high numbers, beneficial inclusion

-Yes, because it is a need, and to show them the library is a comfortable place doe parents to connect

-Yes, more comfortable hiring someone to run it, better for parents

-Yes, it is popular

-Yes, funding and there is a need for it

-If there was a special request I would do it, make it inclusionary

-Yes, socialization, accessible to everyone

-Here to serve the community, serving the families, provides parents a safe place to visit, inclusive

-Serves the whole community, reach out to all facets, make individuals feel welcomed here

-No, not enough training and not enough time

-Yes, it would be beneficial for those children to have another outlet and comfortable, building a community

-Yes, if I had resources and training to conduct it

-Yes, need to have enough money to buy materials and a refresher course

**4b. What do you see as the potential positives or negatives (challenges) to conducting programming for children with ASD?**

- (Negatives) Have to be prepared because each person with autism is different. (Positives) Making the library more inclusive

- (Negatives) Not having practical knowledge, and want the reason why they are conducting programming. (Positives) Create a community atmosphere between and for moms with children who have autism

- (Negatives) Choking hazards, knowing how to handle the children. (Positives) Library open for

everyone, inclusion

- (Negatives) Staff needs proper training. (Positives) More focused on their needs and how they learn, small groups so more benefits
- (Negatives) Lack of practical knowledge, volume of speech. (Positives) Showing the library as a welcome place for kids and parents
- (Negatives) Practical knowledge, handling parents and kids, time to put towards it. (Positives) Support everyone in the community, inclusive
- (Negatives) Don't know how many have autism, locate the individuals in the community. (Positives) Diverse programming, would be inclusive
- (Negatives) Proper Training, funding, space for program. (Positives) Meet the needs, total inclusive space
- (Negatives) Something cannot appeal everything, nobody has much practical knowledge, trial and error. (Positives) Library becomes a place for the community and is educational
- (Negatives) Getting and keeping their attention through a program. (Positives) Socialization
- (Negatives) Lack of knowledge, lack of quiet space, becoming more of a community center, supplies budget. (Positives) Make people happy and welcome, gain confidence in social ways, comfortable with visiting the library, prep for education
- (Negatives) Scheduling, dealing with small numbers, hard to get a good day, practical knowledge of staff. (Positives) Feel welcomed, using the library, interact with new people learn from one another non-special and special children
- (Negatives) Finding someone with proper training. (Positives) more inclusive community
- (Negatives) Timing, training, funding. (Positives) Reach out to a different community
- (Negatives) Practical knowledge, training. (Positives) Offer something to benefit more people in the community
- (Negatives) identifying the market, space, staff comfortability, implementing programs, time. (Positives) Families who might otherwise not come, fulfill life-long learning habit, providing an environment

**5b. Conversely do you think creating programming for children with autism can help improve educational relationships with your other visitors? Why or why not?**

-Yes

-Yes, because the parents especially are gaining knowledge from somewhere for their children, and it would create a comfortable inclusive environment

-Yes, kids need to be exposed to diversity, building self-confidence

- Yes, parents would feel welcomed, and create an inclusive environment
- Yes, Ruttenberg Autism Center, educate public about this topic
- Yes, more opportunity for more people, shows them the library is inclusive
- Yes, some people do not understand autism, or know what it is
- Yes, promote understanding of the disorder in the community
- Helping people realize the truth and not resting on previous ideas of how children with autism act, and the spectrum as a whole
- I do not think it will affect regular visitors
- Yes, gain an ability to learn from one another
- Yes, it benefits kids and adults to learn from others not like themselves. Books are mirrors and windows
- Yes, seeing how other people learn and react is beneficial
- Yes, there is a certain perception, by interacting with people different and they can learn, positive interactions to change perceptions
- Yes, benefits both sides because they can interact, social interaction
- Yes, children to learn from one another, social interaction

**6b. Have any community members approached the library about creating programming for children with autism?**

- No, because the programs we offer are pretty general, which make them inclusive to everyone
- No
- Yes, community group, local school but communication was not clear
- No
- No, just Ruttenberg
- Yes, mom of a child with special needs
- No
- No
- No
- No

-No

-Yes, set up original program

-No

-No

-No

-No

## **Appendix 4: Data Codes Definitions**

### **Question #2**

Code- Yes: Refers to the public librarians who confirmed that their library conducts programming for children with autism.

Code- No: Refers to the public librarians who confirmed that their library conducts programming for children with autism.

### **Question #2a**

Code- Introduction to Library: Refers to librarians wanting to make the library a comfortable place for parents to bring their children with autism, and to learn how to use the library for educational and social purposes.

Code- Develop Literacy: Refers to librarians believing bringing literacy into the children's lives was the primary goal of the program.

### **Question #6a**

Code- Comfortable Environment: Refers to the librarians viewing the largest benefit to creating the program is to make the library into a safe and comfortable place for parents to come, and bring their children with autism. Whether this is specifically for programming or having a place to interact with other families who deal with autism on a continuous basis.

Code- Inclusivity: Refers to the librarians viewing the largest benefit from creating the program was the fact it made the library look and become an all inclusive environment that is for everyone.

### **Question #4ba**

Code- Inclusivity: Refers to the librarians viewing the largest positive from creating the program was the fact it made the library look and become an all inclusive environment that is for everyone.

#### **Question #1b**

Code- Low Attendance: Refers to the library cancelling or not conducting programming for children with autism because of previous attempts that resulted in low attendance, and caused them to stop.

Code- Multiple Reasons: Refers to librarians citing a variety of answers to why they do not conduct programming for children with autism including space, funding, staff, time, confidence, failed attempts, lack of training, and not having knowledge on who in their community has autism.

Code- Limited Staff: Refers to librarians citing low staffing as a primary reason why they do not conduct programming for children with autism.

Code- Lack of Knowledge: Refers to librarians citing a lack of practical knowledge when it comes to autism, and how to properly conduct programming for children that are on the spectrum.

#### **Question #4b**

Code- Proper Training: Refers to librarians citing a lack of practical knowledge as a negative or challenge when it comes to autism, and how to properly conduct programming for children that are on the spectrum.

Code- Multiple Reasons: Refers to librarians citing multiple reasons as negatives or challenges to conducting programming for children with autism including preparation,



choking hazards, lack of knowledge, volume of speech, time, space, funding, small numbers, knowing the market.

Code- Child Differences: Refers to librarians citing that each child that has autism is different and is unique, which is important to realize and prepare for before programming could be implemented.

### **Question #3b**

Code- Yes: Refers to the librarian responding yes to if they would want to conduct programming for children with autism if they had the ability to do so.

### **Question #5a**

Code- Inclusivity: Refers to the librarians who stated being an all-inclusive environment is a reason why other public libraries should consider and try to conduct programming for children with autism.

Code- Other: Refers to the librarians who stated more broad reasons as to why other public libraries should consider and try to conduct programming for children with autism including something simple can make a difference, need to have practical knowledge, and the library is a part of the community and should serve the entire community.

### **Question #4a**

Code- Offering New Experiences: Refers to librarians indicating that visitors can realize all of the different things they can do at the library including programming, reading, learn socially through strangers, and it fills a void in their lives.

Code- Social Growth: Refers to librarians citing social growth as an example of educational relationships being formed, and this includes children with autism interacting

with one another, parents interacting with one another, and strangers learning from one another socially.

Code- Educational Growth: Refers to librarians citing educational growth as an example of educational relationships being formed, and this includes learning through programming, and using the library as a source of knowledge.

Code- No Change: Refers to librarians citing no change with educational relationships would be seen or was seen from conducting programming for children with autism.

#### **Question #5b**

Code- Yes: Refers to librarians stating that they think educational relationships would be formed through conducting programming for children with autism.

#### **Question #5ba**

Code- Educational: Refers to librarians citing educational growth as an example of educational relationships being formed, and this includes learning through programming, and using the library as a source of knowledge.

Code- Social: Refers to librarians citing social growth as an example of educational relationships being formed, and this includes children with autism interacting with one another, parents interacting with one another, and strangers learning from one another socially.

Code- Inclusivity: Refers to the librarians who stated being an all-inclusive environment is an important aspect that can be form educational relationships through programming for children with autism.

