

Superheroes on the Spectrum, Activate!

By Vicky McGrath

One of the interesting things about my autism is that even though I've had a 25-year career and own my own business, in some areas I am quite emotionally immature. In fact, my 16-year-old daughter even says that she is more mature than me! As an example, I am still a big fan of many Disney movies, superhero movies like *Guardians of the Galaxy*, *X-Men* and *Avengers*, and the Harry Potter series. I can watch these movies repeatedly. Fortunately, my daughter enjoys watching these movies with me, but my husband doesn't like to watch any movie twice and doesn't like the *Harry Potter* movies at all.

While superheroes in movies usually have amazing superpowers going for them, such as the power of strength, invisibility, and telecommunication that they control at will, it occurred to me while listening to the speakers of the Au-Some Conference 2020, that they also had superpowers! I listened in amazement as each speaker talked about their gifts, resilience, and adaptability. What struck me most was everyone had unique talents that made them who they are. If only these superpowers could be what autism is known for and not as a disability or a deficit!

What is it about superheroes that capture my attention? For me, it is the characteristics of determination, courage, and persistence to achieve the greater good in the face of apparently unsurmountable challenges. While in daily life, I may not be working with a team of intergalactic warriors, I see these characteristics as strengths in myself and others with autism and I recognize and appreciate how these strengths can build self-esteem, help us contribute our gifts and encourage a positive mindset.

It's an opportunity for you to think about your gifts and talents. If you are energized and elevated by music, share this as a gift with others. If your talent is sports, how can you inspire others to take up the joy and challenge of sports? When riding your bicycle, if you relish and revel in the freedom it gives you, how can you contribute to freedom for others?

If we can see ourselves as superheroes, contributing our gifts, talents, and strengths even just to win the battle of autism stigma and overcome social barriers and constructs, this is a great outcome! And if you face failure and unlikely odds, let this be guidance to try another way. Even Harry Potter had to learn each and every spell and enchantment at a disadvantage – starting from eleven years old when many of his peers had known their gifts from birth. So, shine on autism superheroes! Do not yield to your fear of failure: you are up to the challenge of elevating awareness through your talents and gifts.

What superpowers do you have to share with the world?

About the Author

Vicky McGrath is a 51-year old wife, mom and business owner and was diagnosed with ASD at 50 years old.

She has an undergraduate degree from Trent University and a master's degree from Cambridge University. Vicky spent 20 years in the government sector in the environmental field before making the jump to business ownership. Currently, she is owner of a private home care company, caring for elderly clients in the safety of their own homes.

Vicky is also a runner and triathlete, having completed several marathons, half marathons and triathlons including half Ironman and 3 full Ironman triathlons. It was during a long training ride in 2006, before her (not to be) third Ironman that Vicky crashed her bicycle, broke some ribs, punctured her lung and sustained a concussion and launched her path of self-discovery, resulting in the ASD diagnosis in 2019.



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