

Their Voice: Autism conference is back and packed with helpful tidbits

By Monica Villar - Special to the Daily Herald | Apr 17, 2022



Several years ago, the team at ScenicView Academy realized a need in the autism community for an event that would not only bring individuals in the spectrum but also families and resources together, with no idea what the response would be. The response was favorable and now AutCon has become an annual event that many people look forward to. This year, the event has been scheduled for May 13-14 at ScenicView Academy, a very sensory-friendly environment.

The 2022 “unconventional convention for adults with autism” proves to be better than ever. “We’re thrilled to have best-selling author Mette Harrison as our keynote speaker” reports Kari Bushman, alumni-community relations at ScenicView. Harrison will be presenting “Everything good in my life came from my autism.” Harrison was diagnosed with autism in 2017 at the age of 46. For Harrison, the diagnosis brought clarity, pain and self-understanding. As a lifelong writer, she began writing about autism. She holds a Ph.D. from Princeton University in Germanic languages and literature, is a nationally ranked triathlete and national bestselling writer of the “Bishop’s Wife,” “The Prodigal Daughter” and more.

Sessions include “Transitioning to Adult Healthcare” presented by Stephanie Sund, MSN, RN, from Intermountain Healthcare; “Getting Unstuck” by Jared Stewart, M.Ed., BCBA, LBA; “Mental and Emotional Flexibility in a Changing Environment” by Elliot Francis; and “Quick Snacks for the Quidditch Match,” which describes snacks that are easy to make so you can get on with more important things. In his session “Autism & Muscle Tension,” Christian Swenson will assist those who experience tense shoulders or walk on their toes, or feel like their body is holding on and it can’t let go. His presentation will heavily reference the work of Peter Levine and his “Somatic Experiencing,” and Christian will explore the relationship between autism and muscle tension. “You’re allowed to loosen. You’re allowed to tighten. It’s like a pendulum, and it can get you unstuck.”

Finally, a session that will be very helpful to many is “Tools for Looking Your Best.” Folks on the spectrum often struggle with personal hygiene, sometimes because they don’t know what to do. In this hands-on workshop, hair and skin care professionals will show you the principles, practices and products for good skin care, make-up application, hair care, and also gender-affirming hair and make-up.

As always, there are several great group discussions including panels for “Autistic Professionals,” “Marriage and the Spectrum,” “Reddit in Real Life,” “LGBTQ” and a panel with veterans including Jared Stewart, Sarah Heuser, Josh Olivas and more. This panel is usually very heartfelt, informative, downright funny and will answer any questions posed to them.

Activities include an escape room, cosplay exhibit, picnic with puppies (each day at lunchtime, Canine Companions will be bringing their service dogs-in-training for attendees to play with during an outdoor picnic, and attendees can learn about how to get a service animal of their own), Dungeons & Dragons one shots, and knitting and crocheting.