



## Creative Intervention

# Acceptance V. Inclusion: Reframing the Approach to Helping Individuals with Disabilities in Social Settings

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River Christie-White is an Indigenous youth from Oneida Nation of the Thames who uses his cultural dance styles and teachings to promote inclusion. He is the founder of Hoops for Hope, an organization that promotes anti-bullying, suicide prevention, cultural and disability inclusion (versus acceptance). River has won many awards for his work to build inclusive communities across Turtle Island and has presented on many platforms.

Click on the link below to see River's hoop dance performance at the 2018 Chippewa of the Thames Pow Wow: <https://youtu.be/s5OnybJlPLE>

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Before I get into the nitty-gritty of this piece, I want to thank the guest editors for allowing me to be part of this special issue of *Studies in Social Justice* on Autism\_Media\_Social Justice, and I would like to introduce myself. My name is River Christie-White, and I am a musician studying Professional Music at XU (formerly known as Ryerson University). I am in my first year. I am also the founder of an organization I started about seven years ago called Hoops for Hope.<sup>1</sup> I created the organization to address the lack of understanding and resources within my local community for those with disabilities, especially ones as complex as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). At the age of two and a half, I was diagnosed with what was called

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<sup>1</sup> Learn about Hoops for Hope at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/673378056087485/media>

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Asperger's Syndrome,<sup>2</sup> and my understanding of autism has helped me develop services alongside the community and my colleagues.

My main point in this piece is how as a community we have used acceptance and inclusion interchangeably when they mean very different things. Many people advocate for the acceptance of those with disabilities, but acceptance only goes so far. I argue that we should start pushing for inclusion rather than general acceptance, the reason being that you can accept someone within a space without ever having to include them. Unfortunately, not many support programs offer ways to help truly include people with disabilities in most activities. This is especially apparent within the education sector and job support. There are many people with disabilities I have encountered throughout the years who have gone through job support programs that have got them jobs or helped them gain the knowledge necessary to enter post-secondary education, but failed to then help with support and accommodations, leaving many of them to leave those positions or be neglected. This is compounded by people's misunderstanding of how to approach people with disabilities, which leaves employers and educators with little useful knowledge of how to support their employee or student. By focusing on inclusion, our community can take these programs to the next step, not only helping with finding a job, or accessing post-secondary education, but making sure that disabled and autistic people are fully supported and thriving within those institutions.

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<sup>2</sup> Asperger's Syndrome has since been removed from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* in its fifth edition (*DSM-5*).