

Preface

Neal Christensen, Ph.D.
Elements Wilderness Program

I have been curious about human behavior since I was very young. I recall asking questions about why people did what they did, and thought about why I did things too. As a youngster I discovered I had a penchant for science and later learned I could study human behavior in college. I pursued a major in psychology and then followed with a master's degree and a doctoral degree in Counseling Psychology. Throughout my early years in college and graduate school, I found myself working with adolescents and young adults across a variety of settings. This developmental period of life continues to be my focus, as well as the myriad of topics with which they struggle and aspire. Undoubtedly, these early experiences influenced my professional path as well as the clientele with whom I have chosen to work. My journey as a psychologist has led me on a fascinating career path, from working with adolescents in remote wilderness settings to serving in the role as guest editor for the Journal of Therapeutic Schools and Programs.

This year's edition of the JTSP focuses on the topic of Neurodiversity. This topic is wide ranging and covers a variety of areas. The authors of the articles of this year's edition cover a multitude of topics on neurodiversity, though certainly not exhaustive. Before I address the articles in this year's edition, I want to speak about the importance of this topic. Difference is at the core of diversity, and diversity is something important to celebrate. Diversity in a species leads to strength and longevity. It's through these differences that people discover new and alternative ways of seeing and doing things. When treating adolescents who experience neurological differences, I find that it is precisely these differences that help them become resilient and persistent in the world in which they live. When misunderstood, people can be unappreciated and mistreated. This has been an unfortunate pattern in human history, and one we as a culture are witnessing in current times. It is our duty as professionals, as well as citizens, that we challenge ourselves to do better and change the future by not repeating the past. This is done through the work of learning and education, conversation, and discussion. In the recent past there have been terrible tragedies playing out in our country and across the world. Unfortunately, tragedy is not limited to the last few

years. However, these tragedies have generated energy within communities to make important societal changes by embracing diversity, equity, and inclusion in various social demographics. The same movement is important as we work with people who experience neurological differences.

Our professional ethics state that we must strive to treat people benevolently and avoid malfeasance. In the pursuit of professional practice, we must strive to understand things we may not so that we may serve those we treat to live better lives. Neurological differences need to be recognized and understood and individuals with these differences need to be nurtured. Neurodiverse individuals deserve empathy and compassion. Several people come to mind who have made an indelible mark on society and in their respective areas of practice including Dan Ackroyd, Temple Grandin, and Elon Musk. These individuals happen to be on the autism spectrum. Each of these individuals have been pioneers in their respective fields of practice. Each of these individuals have contributed greatly not only in spite of what has been considered a disorder, but because of their syndrome. Each had a gift they gave, though if written off for being eccentric or weird, or allowed to waste away for a belief that these individuals did not have anything to offer, our world would be less for it. Neurodiversity is something to be celebrated and seen for what gifts it has to offer. It is also our responsibility to help people with neurological differences to see their gifts too so they may contribute to the world we all share.

Many of the articles in this edition explore the topic of neurodiversity including two different and yet complementary articles on autism in females and the female phenotype, autism and OCD, and pathological (extreme) demand avoidance. Each of these articles offer new and helpful perspectives on neurodevelopmental conditions, and extend the knowledge base for diagnosticians, clinicians, educators, administrators and supporting staff within the NATSAP community. Other articles go beyond the topic of neurodiversity and explore topics including technology and digital media overuse and family engagement. We know compulsive behaviors such as substance use, video gaming or viewing pornography are ways individuals attempt to cope and get certain needs met. Though these behaviors may be harmful and not without consequence, it is important to understand the individual and the need in which they are attempting to meet, thereby helping them find more adaptive ways of meeting their needs. We know the importance and impact family has for and upon the individuals with whom we work. It is equally important that we continue to see our clients within the context in which they live and grow. It is through the exploration of

family engagement that we learn how to support the individuals we treat by engaging those who surround and support our clients. Families come to the NATSAP community seeking help for their loved ones, and it is our duty to serve the individuals and families with benevolence and kindness, professionalism and expertise, and from a space of empiricism.

I want to express my deep gratitude for the Chief Editor, Dr. Ellen Behrens, and Editorial Manager, Ali Kelleher, for all they have done to support me as I served in the role of Guest Editor of the Journal of Therapeutic Schools and Programs. Each of them provided me guidance and support from beginning to end. Their consultation and oversight of this project has been appreciated, and without them this experience would have been far more challenging as a first-time editor. I also want to recognize and give thanks to the many people who reviewed these scientific articles with care and a keen eye for science and professionalism for the mental health community. These peer reviewers played a key role in evaluating and providing important feedback to the manuscripts each read and evaluated. They helped each author elevate and improve the articles contained in this edition.

I learned from my early experience in adventure education to cherish individuals' strengths and contributions, and through collaboration and teamwork the end result is far better. It has been my pleasure for nearly two decades to work with the many clients I have been entrusted with by their families and organizations by which I have been employed. It has been the community, the colleagues whom I have worked alongside, that challenged me and helped me see, learn, and grow as person and a professional. It is the community of colleagues, families, and neurodiverse individuals whom I am truly grateful for. I hope you as the reader of this year's edition is inspired look deeper into yourself, continue learning about differences in humans, and work collaboratively within you teams.

Neal Christensen, Ph.D.
Guest Editor - JTSP
Licensed Psychologist
Elements Wilderness Program
Owner and Clinical Director