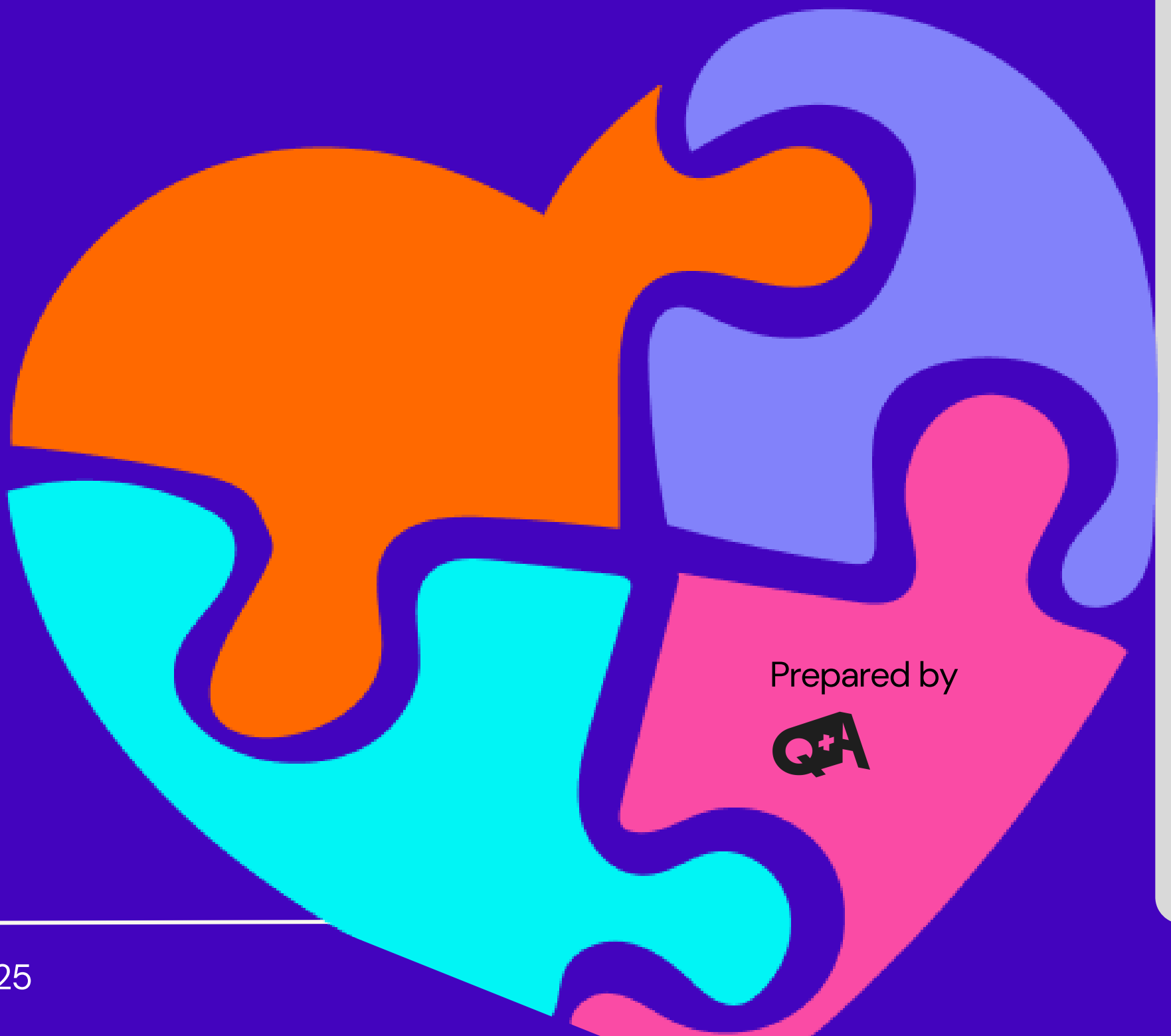

A PRACTICAL GUIDE

TO CREATE AUTISM- FRIENDLY EVENT



Prepared by



CONTENTS

2 Introduction

- 2 What is this research for?
- 2 Who is this research for?
- 2 What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

6 Why an Autism-Friendly Event

- 6 Expanding Audience Reach
- 6 Small Changes, Big Impact
- 6 Opportunity for Inclusive Branding

8 Case Study

- 8 S.F. Community Bus A at AIA Carnival

11 Next Steps

- 11 About Q Plus A Art Foundation
- 11 Want More Advice From Us?

3 What is Access and Inclusion

- 3 Autism - Friendly Event Initiative
- 3 What we did?
- 3 Who we asked?
- 4 What does the community tell us?
- 5 Access and Inclusion for the Autism Community
- 5 Barriers to Access and Inclusion

7 How To Create an Autism-Friendly Event

- 7 Support Sensory Differences
- 7 Provide Clear Communication and Predictability
- 7 Promote Autism Awareness

10 Checklists For An Autism-Friendly Event

- 10 A starting point for creating an autism-friendly event

INTRODUCTION

What is this research for?

This guide offers insights and suggestions to enhance inclusivity for the autism community at events. With 1 in 68 children in Hong Kong affected by Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), the numbers are on the rise; creating autism-friendly environments is essential. Autism-friendly events open doors to new opportunities for families affected by autism and other neurodivergent special needs. This guide will help you create events that celebrate diversity, foster community engagement, and ensure full participation for all.

Who is this research for?

This guide is designed for anyone involved in the event industry. It aims to enhance your understanding of how to support the autism community and provide suggestions for making events more inclusive.

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Autism Spectrum Disorder (commonly referred to as autism) is a neurodevelopmental condition characterized by a diverse range of challenges and developmental differences in social communication, cognition, emotion, behavior, and sensory processing. The term "spectrum" reflects the wide variability in how individuals with autism experience the world, highlighting that each person's lived experience is unique.

Often referred to as an "invisible" disorder, autism cannot be identified by appearance alone. Individuals with autism can be of any age, gender, or race. It is also important to note that approximately 70% of individuals with autism may have co-occurring intellectual disabilities.

WHAT IS ACCESS AND INCLUSION?

Access and Inclusion is designed to create environments that are welcoming, accommodating, and accessible to all individuals, ensuring that everyone can fully participate in and enjoy the experiences offered.

Accessibility refers to the thoughtful design and implementation of environments, products, and services that enable all individuals to engage without barriers.

Inclusion is the practice of fostering a culture where every person—regardless of their differences—feels valued, respected, and supported within a community.

Autism – Friendly Event Initiative

The research team conducted a community engagement initiative to gain insight into the barriers to access and inclusion within the event industry for the autism community in Hong Kong. Gathering feedback directly from the autism community was essential to understanding their unique experiences, challenges, barriers, urgency, and aspirations for enhancing accessibility and inclusion at events.

Who we asked?

All participants are caregivers, including parents, social workers, and teachers of autistic individuals. All individuals identified as being on the autism spectrum, with over 70% having mild to moderate intellectual disabilities. Additionally, more than 30% have been diagnosed with other disabilities such as ADHD and Down syndrome.

What we did?

To investigate experiences, challenges, opinions, and suggestions, we conducted various community engagement activities, including:

- 175 questionnaires
- 103 in-depth one-on-one interviews

What does the community tell us?

“ Sometimes autistic individuals experience meltdowns in public events due to loud noises or crowded spaces. As a parent, it was incredibly challenging for me to find a quiet space to help him calm down. My only option was to take him to a public toilet where people would question us about what we were doing there. This situation often leaves me feeling helpless. ”

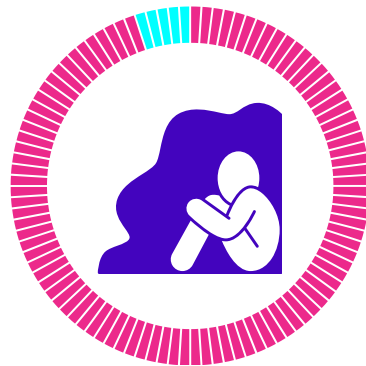
“ In fact, staff may mistakenly associate children with autism with those who have other intellectual disabilities due to a lack of training and understanding. When an individual who appears typical behaves inappropriately, they often perceive it as deliberate misbehavior and may call the police without considering that autism could play a role. Support options are limited; we have not sought help from staff because they are unable to offer necessary assistance. ”

“ In reality, we encounter discrimination, particularly when my autistic teenager shows unusual behaviors like hand-flapping or speaking continuously. People often stare at us and label us as 'crazy.' In those moments, we feel compelled to escape from the situation and avoid public events. ”

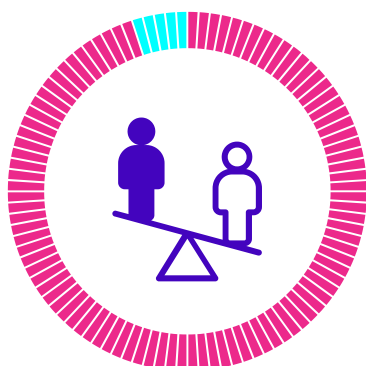
Access and Inclusion for the Autism Community



reported feeling frequently misunderstood in social situations.



of respondents indicated that public events generally do not cater to the needs of the autism community.

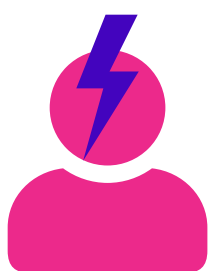


shared that they have experienced varying degrees of discrimination at public events.

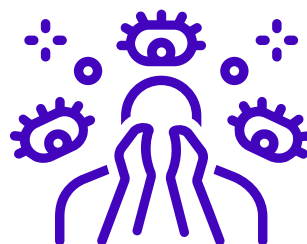


believe that staff at public events are not adequately trained to address these needs.

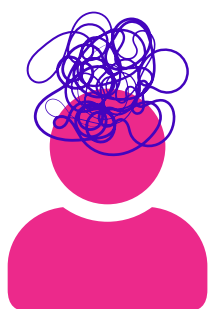
Barriers to Access and Inclusion



Sensory Stimuli such as loud sounds, flashing lights and crowds.



Managing Public Challenges as the public often misjudges behaviors associated with autism.



Elevated Anxiety under unpredictable social situations and environments.



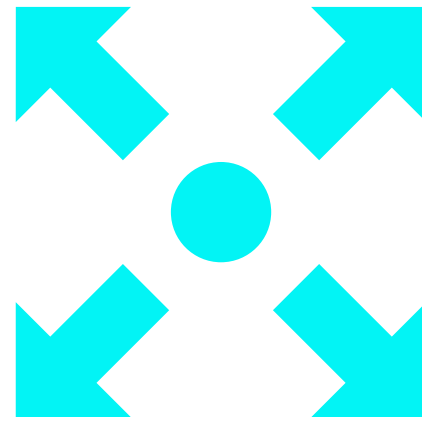
Unpredictable Emotional Outbursts

WHY

AN AUTISM-FRIENDLY EVENT?

Expanding Audience Reach

With the rising prevalence of ASD affecting 1 in 68 children in Hong Kong, inclusivity attracts a broader audience—including individuals with disabilities and their families—fostering diverse perspectives. Positive experiences can lead to increased word-of-mouth marketing and greater visibility for upcoming events.



Small Changes Big Impact

We found that small adjustments at events can significantly enhance experiences for all patrons, leading to increased participation and satisfaction while fostering a more inclusive atmosphere.

Opportunity for Inclusive Branding

An inclusive establishment boosts its brand reputation by aligning with consumer values. This commitment fosters stronger community ties and leads to a more engaged workforce—promoting long-term success and sustainability.



HOW TO CREATE AN AUTISM-FRIENDLY EVENT?

Support Sensory Differences

- ✔ Create designated areas where sensory adjustments can be made. *e.g. altering lighting and sound levels*
- ✔ Provide a silent room where participants can go if they feel overwhelmed.
- ✔ Offer sensory kits that allow participants to manage their sensory experiences independently. *e.g. noise-canceling headphones, fidget toys*

Provide Clear Communication & Predictability

- ✔ Share detailed information about the event schedule, social situations, activities, and potential sensory triggers in advance through various channels.
- ✔ Use visual signage with appropriate color contrast and font size for easy navigation.

Promote Autism Awareness

- ✔ Announce that the event is autism-friendly so participants are aware of available support.
- ✔ Train staff and volunteers on autism awareness and sensory sensitivities.
- ✔ Create designated areas featuring elements related to autism.
- ✔ Gather feedback from the autism community.

CASE STUDY

S.F. Community Bus A at AIA Carnival

The "S.F. Community Bus A," Hong Kong's first art bus tailored for the autism community, was launched at the AIA Carnival to promote inclusion. The "A" signifies autism, accessibility, art, and all—highlighting its mission to support accessibility for the autism community and foster inclusivity through art.

► For further information, visit <https://qplusa.org/busa/busa.html>



Accessible and Sensory Support

- Thoughtful design choices regarding colors & lighting & noise levels.
- Provide autism-friendly tools such as social story, sensory map and self kits.
- A silent room designed with padding and soundproofing features.
- Opportunities for relaxed art creation.



Clear Communication

- The website provides information on quiet vs. busy days.
- Visual information aids navigation.
- Clear signage throughout the venue.
- Public relations efforts spread awareness.



Inclusivity Awareness

- NGO pre-visits for staff training.
- Autism content based exhibition.
- Over 30 inclusive programs promoting neurodiversity inclusion.
- Free access programs for individuals within the autism community.
- Donation campaigns supporting initiatives.



CHECKLISTS FOR AN AUTISM-FRIENDLY EVENT

Accessible and Sensory Support :

- Have you identified areas of your event that might cause sensory challenges?
- Is there a silent space/room available?
- Do you have autism-friendly event information such as social stories and sensory maps?

Clear Communication :

- Does your website/ leaflets provide information on quiet and busy days/ times?
- Is there sufficient visual information and clear signage at your event?
- Are autism-friendly event details available online or at your event?

Inclusivity Awareness :

- Are there specific initiatives aimed at neurodiverse communities?
- Do your staff know how to respond if someone identifies as autistic?
- Have you organized training sessions on autism awareness for your staff?
- Is there an autism ambassador present at your event?
- Do you have mechanisms in place for collecting feedback from the autism community?

NEXT STEPS

About Q Plus A Art Foundation

In partnership with the autism community, we conduct research, provide accessibility resources, and curate social programs aimed at creating public environments that are welcoming and inclusive for neurodiverse individuals.

Want More Advice From Us?

Q Plus A Art Foundation is committed to enhancing inclusivity at your events for the autism community. We offer consultancy services including training sessions, inclusive workshops, and customized accessibility solutions. Reach out to us today!

Email: info@qplusa.org
Website: <https://www.qplusa.org>
Facebook: Q+A Art Foundation
Instagram: [@qplusa_art_foundation](https://www.instagram.com/qplusa_art_foundation)

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