

*Under lockdown, a new tradition has spread from one Brunswick office to another: At day's end, a colleague sends a short essay to his or her working-from-home office mates. These are funny, sad, inspirational and philosophical notes, often sprinkled with favorite recipes and TV shows. They're as well-written as you'd expect, if you know Brunswick. The Review is selecting a few to share with a larger audience. On May 27, Gill Ackers, a Brunswick Partner and Chair of Autistica, the UK's leading autism research charity, sent this note to colleagues in Brunswick's London office.*

**"Regardless of ability, none are given equal opportunities." Brunswick Partner GILL ACKERS on the injustices those with autism face.**

to concentrate on external factors such as one's social position, influence, and popularity, wealth and standard of education. ... But internal factors may be even more crucial in assessing one's development as a human being. Honesty, sincerity, simplicity, humility, pure generosity, absence of vanity, readiness to serve others—qualities which are within easy reach of every soul—are the foundations of one's spiritual life."

It is those "internal factors" that we should seek to maintain as we begin the (slow) road to recovery.

Soon, I will be starting the next phase of my professional life and will be focused, at least in part, on autism research. As we prioritize the country's recovery, I don't want to return to where we were before for people with autism, I want to build back a whole lot better. If we are indeed all in this together, this is a time to make some changes that are genuinely inclusive.

I know very high-functioning autistic people who regard it as a gift, enabling them to see things differently, bring different perspectives, arrive at novel solutions by drawing inspiration from a dazzling variety of sources.

I know others with no speech, no self-care skills and a multitude of what are known as, in an awful phrase, co-morbidities, from epilepsy to depression to diabetes. Their families don't see autism as a gift. They fight for education, health and social care all their lives.

But regardless of ability, none are given equal opportunities and it is that fundamental injustice that I want to fight.

Autistica is on the verge of being able to publish eye-opening data about the challenges those with autism face, particularly around economic opportunity here in the UK. The figures, which are being peer-reviewed, demonstrate those with autism who are able to work disproportionately earn incomes well below the national average, despite having earned degrees or

their equivalents at rates higher than the national average. This data won't look any better in 2021 without a real effort on Autistica's part—and all of us, as well—to change it. ♦

## In This TOGETHER

**H**AVE BEEN STRUCK BY RECENT CONVERSATIONS with two people in very different situations, for whom the phrase "we are all in this together" has real meaning.

The first, an autistic man, told me this is the first time in his life that he feels normal. Anxiety, uncertainty, fear of social situations and desperate to establish and maintain routines and structures. That has been his life for the last 30 years and marked him out as "different." Now, almost everyone he speaks to feels the same.

The second recently lost her husband to the virus. "I woke up one morning and my life was turned upside down," she said. Now, almost everyone she speaks to feels the same.

Both found it weirdly comforting that they were not alone and that everyone else is trying to come to terms with profound changes to their daily lives and uncertainty about tomorrow.

People coming together with shared emotions and a stronger sense of community is one of the few bright spots of this madness. Few people epitomise grace and courage in adversity better than Nelson Mandela, who wrote in a letter to his wife from Kronstadt prison in 1975:

"In judging our progress as individuals, we tend



**Ellie, severely autistic but with amazing potential.**