

Title: TUDSU Opposition to the Use of Puzzle Piece Symbolism in Relation to Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Student Council Notes:

The puzzle piece was first used by the National Autism Society (UK) in 1963. It was adopted by the organisation Autism Speaks which led to it being adopted as a universal ‘symbol’ for Autism.

Student Council Highlights:

Autism Speaks is an incredibly harmful organisation whose main aim is to ‘eradicate’ Autism as if it is a disease. They advocate for the use of harmful therapies such as ABA which aim to ‘normalise’ the behaviour of Autistic individuals through mechanisms of reward and punishment. The organisation frames Autism as a disease for which they will find the cure — this has been criticised by the Autism community as it creates stigma and fear of the disorder. Notably, in 2009 they released a TV campaign titled ‘I Am Autism’ which framed Autism as a lurking predator that “[works] faster than paediatric aids, cancer, and diabetes combined” which destroys marriages and will “rob you of your children and your dreams”.

Student Council Acknowledges:

The use of the ‘puzzle piece’ symbol has been criticised by those both within and outside the Autistic community for a number of reasons:

1. It suggests that Autistic individuals are missing a ‘piece’
2. It suggests that Autism is a puzzle which must be solved.
3. It infantilises Autistic people through the use of childlike imagery — Autistic children do, in fact, grow into Autistic adults.
4. Implies that Autistic don’t ‘fit in’.

Student Council Notes

The use of ‘puzzle piece’ imagery by the TUD SU Instagram page for Autism Awareness Day perpetuates harmful stereotypes and also promotes the work of harmful organisations such as Autism Speaks. It is essential that Autistic students feel that they are respected and accepted by our Union, and that the opposition of their community towards this symbol is recognised.

Student Council Mandates

The VP for Welfare & Equality to draft an open letter on behalf of TU Dublin Students’ Union opposing the use of the ‘puzzle piece’ symbol, as well as condemning the organisation Autism Speaks and those which support them.

This letter should be drafted by the VP Welfare & Equality in accordance with information provided by Ireland’s leading Autism charity AsIAm on their website.

This letter is to be published by end of Semester 1 of the 2024/25 Academic Year.

Student Council Further Mandates

The VP Communications and Media to produce a publication for Autism Awareness Day 2025 (April 2nd) which is informed by and inclusive of the work done by AsIAm and any adjacent organisation which represents and supports Autistic individuals in a respectful way that reflects the voice of their community.

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