Autism Empowerment Podcast Transcript

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Episode 001: Introduction to Autism Empowerment and the Autism Empowerment Podcast

Hello! Today's episode is an introduction to Autism Empowerment, the organization, and Autism Empowerment, the podcast. You'll be meeting our co-founders and hosts, John and Karen Krejcha, learn a bit about our past, our present, and where we're heading in the future.

Welcome to the Autism Empowerment podcast, your source for Acceptance, Enrichment, Inspiration, and Empowerment in autistic and autism communities worldwide. Wherever you identify in your autism or autistic journey, Autism Empowerment is here to meet you along the way. We are an Autistic-led podcast, 501(c)3 nonprofit charity, and publisher of *Spectrum Life Magazine*.

John Krejcha: And we're off.

Karen Krejcha: And we're off. Well, technically, we're on. Cause we're on air. Hey John.

John: Hey, Karen, how are you doing today?

Karen: I am doing fabulous. It is great to be with you here in the studio.

John: It is so nice to be behind the mic again.

Karen: Yeah, it's been a long time coming. I am a little bit rusty. I must say…

John: way too long…

Karen: But I'm excited for today. So let's go ahead and get going.

John: Sounds good.

Karen: Hello to the people that are listening out there. Thank you so much for taking your time to join us. My name is Karen Krejcha…

John: and I am John Krejcha...

Karen: and John is my husband of over 28 years. My goodness. Together we are co-founders of a nonprofit organization called Autism Empowerment.

And we're excited to welcome everyone to the first episode of the new Autism Empowerment podcast.

John: Wait, stop. Did you say NEW? (laughter)

Karen: Wait, stop. Yes, I did. (laughter) Oh my goodness. Yeah.

John: So what did you mean about that?

Karen: So what did I mean about that? Autism Empowerment as an organization was founded back on June 3rd, 2011. So we're coming up on 10 years, and early on in our organization's history, we thought the idea of podcasting would be really neat, but we didn't do it in a podcast form.

Instead we did live radio. Technically it was a podcast cause you could listen to it afterward, but we did the shows live. One channel was called Autism Empowerment Radio, and that started in 2012 and went through December 8th, 2014. And we did another channel called Autism and Scouting Radio.

John: That's the one I did.

Karen: That's the one you did, and that started and ended around the same time, a little bit afterward. And between the two of them, we did about 135 shows, and then things got busy and we won't go into the details behind that. But, we'll talk about that maybe in the future. We're really excited because now is the time in our organization's journey for us to bring the podcast back.

John: So what is the format for today? How can we get this party started?

Karen: How can we get this party started? Okay. So our format today, it's going to be casual. We're going to do a Q and A, that's my thought. John, maybe you can handle the questions?

John: I’m glad to handle the questions.

Karen: Yeah. And I will try my best with the answers.

John: You’re gonna do a great job. I know that.

Karen: Well, we'll see (laughter), but we're going to keep it real. And we're going to be sharing information about Autism Empowerment (the organization), a little bit, about the nonprofit history, the mission, the vision, the values, who we are, how we got started...

And then, we'll talk a little bit about the programs and the services that the organization offers. And then, really, we're going to talk about the plans we have for the Autism Empowerment podcast because this is why people are listening in and all the goodness that we're planning to give weekly.

John: So that sounds great.

Karen: Yeah. In future shows, we're going to delve into some of our programs more deeply. And for those who may already be a little bit familiar with us, they may have come here from one of our key programs, which is Spectrum Life Magazine. So we'll talk about that a little bit today, but we're going to dive deep into that in our second episode.

John: That sounds wonderful. So how are we related to autism? Can you tell us that, Karen?

Karen: Yeah.

John: I’m sure you can.

Karen: So who are we, and why did we co-found Autism Empowerment?

John: Briefly though,

Karen: Briefly, hard to do.

John: Absolutely.

Karen: I will do my best. We have in our family two children that are on the spectrum. One is 14, and one is 21. And we also have me. I am an autistic adult… And our journey with autism started way back in 2008 when our youngest was diagnosed. So in our family, our youngest son was diagnosed when he was two. Our older child was diagnosed at age nine, and I was diagnosed after them. And that was in my early forties.

John: And then we got a cat.

Karen: (laughs) and then we got a cat and John actually, you're the only person in our family, technically, who is not on the autism spectrum.

John: But I am neurodiverse. I am dyslexic and I have a lot of other kinds of quirks too.

Karen: Oh yeah. I mean, he's got the sensory stuff...

John: Totally got the sensory stuff. Absolutely.

Karen: Our family is neurodiverse, and we are excited to talk about these kinds of things because we need to talk a little about our history, but if we're talking about the present, we want people to know that we're all on a journey and our autism journey is going to look different than yours.

And so we created the organization because at the time our youngest son was diagnosed, we didn't know if he was going to be able to speak. He had met his developmental milestones up until about 18 months, and then he regressed.

So what that looked like is that he stopped speaking. And he started spinning, and he would wave backward instead of forward, and he would grunt and point. And so this was something way different than we saw with our older child. So we got very quickly onto the phone to try to see someone and see what could be going on with this.

John: And with, like you said, with our older one, it was very different. Our oldest was kind of like you.

Karen: Yes, kind of like me. (Ha!) So, the process, we could go into really great depth about this, and we may do our own personal story in a later broadcast.

John: That sounds like a great idea...

Karen: But I guess the key thing from that beginning journey was that when our youngest son was diagnosed, we were still very new and very raw and very open to all of this.

I'd done a lot of research online to kind of figure out what might be going on, where he was regressing. But when we actually sat in the room with the developmental pediatrician and the people who evaluated our son, we expected to get some sort of support, some sort of direction, some sort of help.

And instead, we kind of got... (Well...)

John: A pamphlet!

Karen: A pamphlet! Yeah, we got a pamphlet!

John: With a couple of numbers on it.

Karen: Congratulations. Here's a pamphlet, you know? (Laughter)

John: It's a baby pamphlet. (laughs)

Karen: (laughs) a baby pamphlet. And actually, I mean, the thing that stuck out to me was it was like, "Here's your information…" and **if** you have any questions, well, we can have a follow-up appointment in...

John: Six weeks!

Karen: Six weeks...

John: And six weeks at that time was a lifetime. I mean, that was just forever.

Karen: So obviously, they had given out an autism diagnosis to many kids in the past, so this was not new to them, but for someone that was new to the whole thing, we needed to have more. I was looking for more support. And John, I know it was kind of a shock to you.

John: It was a total shock to me because you kind of had a feeling going into at least, with our first child, that a diagnosis of something would come through. I did not. And because you were the Google queen at the time and you did a lot of research... and for me, I was just like, Well, what, what is this?

And then when we went for our second diagnosis with our older child and… it just was like I already knew what the diagnosis was going to be beforehand.

And then, when **you** went in, I was there as your support person. There wasn't even a question about that (laughter) I mean, you brought in so much documentation, I think, it was supposed to be like a what? Uh, 45-minute appointment?

Karen: Hey, that's a whole different story.

John: A whole different story…

Karen: Suffice it to say it is very different trying to get a diagnosis as an adult than it is as a child. And that's another show in and of itself too.

John: So, anyway, we were on this journey. We have our wonderful kids, a wonderful wife that needs support and love. And, really, we were looking for what...just some additional information out there, weren't we, Karen?

Karen: Well, back then, I was looking to connect with other people who were going through similar situations. I wanted to meet other parents... and I'm not a social let's get up and meet people type of person...

And I'm an introvert, and I have no desire to be in big crowds. But what I did want to get was information and to connect with people who might be experiencing similar things, and I wanted to be able to essentially help my children live their best life possible. And with our youngest child, who was more impacted, I wanted to see if there were any kind of strategies or different things that we could try to see if we could help him speak again.

Or if there were ways that we could help him with some of the things that he was going through, and with our older child's challenges as well.

I won't get deep into what those are. But essentially, Autism Empowerment came about because when we were looking around trying to find that support and the organizations that would look at things from a positive lens, a positive trajectory, the sky's the limit type of thing, we had a little bit of trouble with that. A lot of what we were seeing was gloom and doom.

John: I can understand that. I totally felt that.

Karen: And a lot of it was misery loves company type of thing. Granted, an autism journey Isn't easy. There are challenges. There are times that are really tough. We get that. We experienced that.

John: Yeah, every day.

Karen: But yeah, but at the same time, what we were looking for is an opportunity to be able to meet our challenges, accept them for where we're at in the present moment, and then be able to move forward. Look, just because your child gets an autism diagnosis doesn't mean that they're not going to live a fabulous life. It just is going to look different than what you probably expected when you first had a certain vision for your child.

John: Absolutely.

Karen: And for us, we kind of had an epiphany when we were doing a lot of research. We went back to an autism conference nationally in Illinois in 2009. And I had an opportunity to meet other autistic adults.

And it was the first time that I really had felt in a very long time, comfortable around other adults. And I realized it was because I was around people that had similar neurology.

John: And they also had the lights turned down.

Karen: Yeah, there were some sensory accommodations. Yes. And people weren't wearing heavy loads of perfume. People were just being themselves, and they were being accepted for who they were.

John: They were letting their light shine, in essence.

Karen: Yeah, essentially. And that was a big thing, right? For us, we wanted to keep the momentum going. We didn't feel like we wanted to wait for some other organization to pop up that would serve the needs that we had and that we felt other people had. We felt called to create an organization that would be positive, that would work through challenges together in an enriching and empowering way, and show people that… hey, we get it, you know? Things are going to be okay. We just kind of need to look at things from a little bit different perspective.

John: I think, it was interesting for me, having the conversations, coming back, driving back across the country with kids and you and all of us in the car. When we talked about you having a calling, you really felt called to start Autism Empowerment.

Karen: I did feel called. I don't use that lightly...

John: I know you don't…

Karen: because I had never had a calling before and I really felt God has given me some gifts and some strengths, and I am meant to use these for a purpose.

And I wasn't quite sure what that was going to look like and certainly where it would take me, but I really felt driven. And that was really important because you were right there along with me when I said, Hey, I think that there are a lot of people out there that could benefit from an organization that looks at autism from an acceptance lens.

John: And a different point of view.

Karen: A different point of view, yeah. And a lot of organizations at that time, and even actually to a degree now, were primarily led by parents of children on the spectrum, which is fine. I mean, there's a lot to be said about that, but they weren't necessarily including autistic viewpoints in their development of programs or in their leadership.

And for us, it was really authentic to have autistic voices at the table. If you're going to want to know how to work through a sensory issue that your child is having, it's really helpful to have the perspective of someone who has experienced that themselves.

John: Can I interject here? Just a bit?

Karen: Yeah, sure. Go ahead.

John: So it's interesting to me because authenticity seems to be a theme that you'll find running through not only this conversation but a lot of our conversations that we have.

And I remember having the conversation with you about, well, do you get a diagnosis? Do you need a diagnosis? You know, you're 40-blank...

Karen You're old. (laugh)

John: You’re old. (laugh) And you said, I do need to have that diagnosis because I want to be able if I'm going to be the head of an organization... you wanted to have that authenticity.

And I think that is what is important. When we were trying to create the leadership for the organization and volunteers, I think that was a really big key for a lot of those conversations early on.

Karen: John, that's an important point. It was very important for me to get that diagnosis. I knew, and a lot of people go through a self-diagnosis, and that's fine if that works for them, and they know that they're able to get information that will help them grow and move on from there. (I'm talking about adults who are diagnosed later in life.)

But for me, knowing that we wanted to have an organization and for me, knowing my two children were on the spectrum, I thought to be a better parent for them and to be more authentic for myself, having that diagnosis was helpful. And so, again, it's a little bit different process for an adult to get it than for children, but once I actually went through the hoops and loops to actually get it, it was a pretty simple process.

John: And like you said, that’s another show in and of itself.

Karen: Yeah. I learned the secret handshake. It’s kind of funny because at that time, I had run across a website called WrongPlanet.net, and it was funny because I'd always felt like I was different. I was quirky. I was not the norm. I felt like growing up that I was probably from a different planet, and it was just amazing to me to see a community of people out there who had grown up feeling similarly.

And so community is super important for us. And that was something that we wanted to help build, both with people who identify as Autistic or Aspie or on the spectrum (or however, whatever lingo they want to use) but also with their parents because parents and caregivers are incredibly important.

They're a big part of the journey and also to be able to reach out to providers and educators and to bring community together so that there's inclusion and everybody's meaningfully included and being able to work towards living their best life possible.

John: That's fantastic. There's so much that we could unpack about all of these different things… and we want to give you, the audience, bits of crumbs. So you'll come back, and you'll want to be hearing what we're having to say, because we really want to be able to share our journey with you and meet you along the way.

So first, as far as the organization goes, you said the organization has been around, or almost 10 years. When we were putting it together, what were some of the ideas, like the big ideas? I know we have a mission and vision, and I'm sure you'll probably give that to us at some point, but what are some of the big ideas you wanted to share and why you wanted the organization to thrive?

Karen: Okay. So I think John, what would be helpful is to let people know that before founding this organization, I was writing in journals and I was writing in blogs and I was writing, writing, writing.

John: Prolific writer, actually. If you go to any training with her, she'll be the one taking notes.

Karen: I will be the one taking notes. That's true.

John: That's not a secret, by the way.

Karen: Not a secret. Anyway, I was writing a lot, and in my journals that I was writing, I came upon a bunch of different words that I thought would be good foundational words for what we wanted the organization to be.

John: Kind of like pillars? You mean?

Karen: like pillars, like foundational pillars. If you're having a house built you need

John: Side beams?

Karen: Side beams, all kinds of structure. So we have four foundational pillars of our organization and they are Accept, Enrich, Inspire, and Empower.

So all of these words, they're not just buzzwords or lingo to us or jargon. They're important words that are built into all of the programs that we offer and all of the things that we do.

And when we think about people in our community that we want to serve and that we want to have, reach out and be part of this connected community, we think, okay, how can we promote autism acceptance? How can we use enrichment... education to be able to help people?

What are some inspirational stories or accomplishments that people have had? And how can we empower people? Because we don't want to just give people answers. We want to help empower people to have the tools, the strategies, and the resources to be able to better their lives themselves. Right? So those are those four pillars.

And so those helped us develop our mission. John and I came from a for-profit world. We'd had a business that we had owned together, an online collectibles business that we had run for about 15 years, and in the nonprofit world, you're supposed to have this mission and vision and values and all these good things… and that’s fine.

So our mission as an organization is that we're devoted to promoting a culture of acceptance, enrichment, inspiration, and empowerment in the lives of children, teens, and adults on the autism spectrum, as well as their families.

So what does that look like? An overarching vision is that we work toward an inclusive society that accepts and respects all youth and adults on the autism spectrum and empowers each person to reach their highest potential and live their most awesome life possible. Right?

John: I like that. Everyone needs to live an awesome life, I think.

Karen: Yeah. And what that looks like in practice and what that really means to break down is that we, as an organization, aim to serve people of all ages and ability levels.

We recognize that the spectrum is diverse, and it intersects with many other identities, whether that be geographical, race, ethnicity, income level, gender… Autism goes across all categories. And so we believe that we can best work toward our vision of an inclusive society when we draw upon the gifts, the strengths, the talents, and perspectives of a diverse range of leaders that have viewpoints that are coming from different life experiences and cultural backgrounds.

So what that means is that we support the inclusion and right of all people to contribute and participate meaningfully in society, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, disability, comorbidities, diagnosis, income, age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation… We support the inclusion and right of everyone.

John: Because once you start to exclude someone, then you have no right to say you're inclusive… You have to authentically include everybody.

Karen: Well, that's the ideal, that's the vision we're working towards, and we recognize that. Long way to go, right? But that is the vision we're working towards. And we know that there's a lot of divisiveness in society today, and it's also fairly divisive within autism communities. And we don't like that. We aim to be a positive influence. We want to listen to understand.

And so that kind of talks a little bit about our culture of inclusion and acceptance, and we believe that in order to be authentic, that we have to have leadership that represents authenticity.

So everybody that is on our board of directors or in key leadership roles either identifies as autistic or is the parent or caregiver of somebody who is on the spectrum. And in some cases, both... because we truly believe that it's important to have diverse viewpoints at that table.

So we wouldn't really be Autism Empowerment as an authentic organization unless our leadership was that way.

John: Oh, that makes total sense to me. Absolutely. I mean, I know there's a lot to unpack there and I know we want to try to keep on going. I'm sure down the road, we can unpack a lot more of this stuff in individual types of podcasts.

And I think there's just so much great greatness to be able to share with our audience about where we want to be and how we can all become part of a solution.

So that's kind of where we were, or when we started. Can you talk to us a little bit about where we are now? I know, there's COVID-19 that has been a challenge, and…where is Autism Empowerment serving, and how are they providing service in importance to our community?

Karen: Okay. So if I understand your question correctly, you would like me to give an overview of some of our programs and services? What do we offer, right? When we're not doing the podcasts?

John: Yeah. And then we can talk a little bit about the podcast because I know that's, I know that's really important to talk about that.

Karen: So when we're not doing the podcast as an organization, and this has changed quite a bit in the last year. Right now that we're recording, this is January 2021, and we've (Autism Empowerment) been around for almost nine and a half years or so.

As an organization, we've created programs that serve adults, teens, youth, parents, both autistic-led, as well as parent-led different types of things. What we have done in the past is that we have had local support groups, we've had social clubs, social activities...

We have an Autism Serves Kids Care Club volunteerism program, which is actually a...

John: Nationally recognized…

Karen: Nationally recognized and awarded. We believe volunteerism is super important, and we believe that everybody who has strengths and gifts to share with the world should have the opportunity to do so… and our program…

Well, I won't go into great depth on that now. One neat thing about this is that we're going to have show notes, and we're going to have a transcript, and we're going to have a website that has different links. So you'll get to learn a lot more about us.

John: Yeah, I think that show or having a show just on the Autism Serves Kids Care Club, I think it would be a great show in and of itself as well, down the road.

Karen: Yeah. So just really briefly, I'm going to put out that website link: **www.autismempowermentpodcast.org**, because that's going to have links to the different programs that we have, and so you'll be able to connect after the show on that.

One of our biggest programs is our Spectrum Life Magazine.

John: Cause you had mentioned that earlier before. So talk to us about that.

Karen: In 2012, I was invited to be on the Editorial Advisory Board for a publication called Spectrums Magazine. It was to be the first magazine focusing on the autism community in the Southwest Washington and Portland, Oregon Metro area.

So I was the autistic advisor, and then there was the owner, Courtney Frietag. She was a parent of a child on the spectrum. And then there were advisors in the educational field, legal field, all different types of things. And so she started that magazine. It came out from 2013 to 2015, and then due to life circumstances, she needed to be able to sell that magazine or to move forward because their family was planning a move.

And so she came to us at Autism Empowerment and asked if we wanted to keep the magazine going. And of course, we did because it was an excellent resource for the community. A lot of people really loved it and enjoyed it. And John, you and I sat together at the kitchen table with her, and we thought, well,

John: it was a no brainer for me, honestly.

Karen: Well, we thought, how hard could it be? (Laughs) How hard can it be to run a magazine? (Laughs)

John: And our Board was totally all on board as well.

Karen: One thing that you'll learn over time as you listen to us is that we're very passionate people.

John: Absolutely!

Karen: And we just go for things. I mean, we've certainly made a lot of mistakes over the years, as we learn and we jump into things because we're super excited...

John: Because I think we're all lifelong learners,

Karen: We are lifelong learners, but we're just jazzed. We want to help so much. We care so much that if someone came to us in the beginning years of our organization and said, can you do this?

John: We're like, yes!

Karen: Let's give it a shot. Let's try!

John: It can't be that hard!

Karen: It can't be that hard! Or, hey, let's do this, let's help the community. We're just really called to doing those things, and yeah! As awesome as that is, and as much as we still have that servant attitude, we recognize that over time that will... 1) Burn you out.

John: Absolutely. (laughs)

Karen: 2) You won't have the time and bandwidth...

John: Or you'll be up until midnight

Karen: And 3) it's not financially sustainable, and you realize as you're going along, wait a moment. This somehow has to pay for itself, but we can't work for free forever (laughs), or can we? But anyway, enough about that. So anyway, we acquired the magazine, put out our first issue under the Autism Empowerment umbrella in 2016, and we changed the name a couple of years later to Spectrum Life Magazine because we thought it felt more along with our branding serving the whole life of people that are on the spectrum. And now we're still having the magazine going here in 2021. In fact, our winter issue, which was pushed back from 2020, just came out on January 19th. (Available at https://www.spectrumlife.org/currentissue).

John: So that sounds exciting. Our next episode that we're going to do is talking about the magazine a lot more in-depth and that kind of stuff, but can you tell us about what sections are within the magazine so people can understand. What would they find in there? Yeah.

Karen: Yeah, so this isn't a big ad for the magazine. The magazine is free, so I want to get that out right now if you go to SpectrumLife.org. We'll put the link in the show notes. The magazine is really a positive resource.

And even though it's an online and print magazine that's physically delivered in the Portland Metro and Southwest Washington area, we have subscribers from all over the country. We mail to all sorts of different places. The vast majority of the content that's within each issue is applicable to anyone across the country.

And we have two or three articles in each issue that tend to be more locally focused. We might be for example, interviewing a local occupational therapist or something along those lines, or an agency that deals with disability services for a particular region. That might be an example of a local thing, but each issue of our magazine is broken down into different sections.

The first is Advocacy. The second is Lifespan. Then we go to Recreation, Education, Health and Wellness and then finally Therapy. And we usually have two or three articles in each section. We also have a couple of special features. We have an Ask Spectrum Life feature, where people can send in their questions.

And we also, each issue, have a Stories from the Spectrum, Autism from an Autistic Perspective piece. So we do a blend of things from different perspectives. It's an autistic-led publication. I do serve as Editor. John is on the Editorial Advisory Board, but we also have an Editorial Advisory Board that consists of educators and different professionals. And we have columnists that are in professional fields in law and education, medical, and so forth. So we try to have a variety of different things within that magazine that will appeal to a broader audience of either parents of children on the spectrum or adults on the spectrum, or people who serve people that are on the spectrum.

And so our podcast is actually going to be somewhat similar to that in the respect that we'll be talking a lot about things that are in those categories. We're going to have a lot of specific episodes that are about a certain topic rather than just kind of giving this big general overview type of thing.

We'll talk about a specific thing. And so we're going to have ties, and we're also going to, for example, if we have an article that's in the magazine with somebody say we're interviewing someone in the magazine, well, you only have a limited amount of space in a magazine. The podcast is a perfect venue to then have a conversation with them afterward or to do an update. And to answer listener questions, reader questions and...

John: That was a great segue because that was actually going to be one of my questions.

Karen: Well, then let me let you ask it.

John: Now that you've talked about the magazine and some of the other programs, we have the podcast to talk about. Could you just take a few minutes? Because I think we want to try to wrap it up pretty soon here, but just talk about the podcast, where it is now and where do you see it going, and how people can get more involved.

Karen: Yeah. So our plans here for the podcast are to, in the beginning, to publish at least two episodes a week. We're going to start out by releasing new episodes on Mondays and Thursdays. So we want you to subscribe so that you can have those episodes arrive out on Monday and Thursday.

John: Because there's going to be a lot of awesomeness in there.

Karen: Yeah. There’s going to be a lot of different types of things. And we're going to have interviews; we're going to interview a lot of different people from autism communities.

We're also going to, and this is what's going to be kind of neat, John… we told you before that we had old shows, right? So we did about 135 shows and a number of those, even though they were a number of years ago, they're evergreen content like "Safety Skills for Asperger Women" (book) or autistic burnout, or how can I deal when my child's been bullied...

John: The autism grief cycle…

Karen: Yeah, the autism grief cycle… IEPs, topics that are really timeless and keep recurring whether you're new to the journey or new to diagnosis, those types of topics, as well as…

John: housing.

Karen: Yeah. Housing, employment… There's a lot of important categories. In addition to the interviews that we're going to bring in from the past, we're also going to have series. Housing is a huge one where we want to have a series that talks about the escalating housing insecurity for people in the intellectual and developmental disabilities communities.

Many people in the autism community have co-conditions, other disabilities and our organization partners a lot with other organizations. We are parts of lots of coalitions. We've served in a lot of different legislative advocacy forums and engaged in different advocacy work. So we're going to be bringing topics from our allies in there as well.

John: So for the listener out there that has someone who is very young, three, four-years-old. Why should they care about housing or employment when that's so far away?

Karen: You know that's a good question, John, because to be fair when we were first dealing with being new to diagnosis, the last thing on our mind was thinking about housing.

We recognize that not every show is going to be applicable for every person and so we will be very clear in our descriptions on what topics we're going to be talking about for a particular episode. That being said, we want people to subscribe because it's important for parents also to be thinking down the road.

John: Absolutely.

Karen: So when your kid is in preschool, you want to be thinking about elementary school. When they're in elementary school, you want to be thinking about middle school and high school. When they're in middle school, you want to be thinking about high school and transition and all of these types of things because we want to have high trajectories for our kids.

John: Absolutely.

Karen: We don't know yet. We don't know what's going to happen, but we want to embrace the whole...

John: the whole journey!

Karen: Yeah, the whole journey. And so, it may not be applicable for somebody who has had their diagnosis for 20 years to listen to "new to diagnosis" shows or for people new to diagnosis, listening to, a housing show… but at the same time, we want to offer a variety of different things that are going to be available.

And the thing is that I think it's really essential to know that we want to meet you where you're at in your journey.

John: Absolutely. And I think there's just so much that we can be able to provide people, and we're so looking forward to being able to talk about all of these topics, all of the time, in different places.

Really, I'm so excited about this new podcast. And I'm so glad that you're the host, and I am your co-host. So I'm looking really forward to this journey in podcasting again with you.

Karen: Yeah. I mean, I feel a little bit rusty. I have to say that I could be more concise. We know honestly that things are going to get better over time. And that's actually something that's important for our listeners to know. It's really hard some days, and in the beginning, it can just feel so overwhelming, but things do get better over time!

John: And we're here to meet you along the way.

Karen: Yeah, we are. And we really appreciate you taking the time to be here with us. It's really cool to be able to have an opportunity to have a venue where you can come, and you can feel connected. For us, we have a saying in Autism Empowerment; one of our mottos is content plus community equals connection because one of the biggest things that we hear is that people feel lonely.

They feel isolated. They feel alone. Their children feel alone. They feel alone as parents, and we want to break that isolation and loneliness because we know what it feels like. We've been there. Sometimes we are there, and especially in this last year with COVID and the pandemic, a lot of us have been more isolated than ever.

And so we're going to be talking about those things too. Without giving away any spoilers, our third show is actually gonna be about my journey with COVID-19, and I won't talk about that now, but we're going to talk about real-life issues. That's important to us.

We can go deep, but, for now, I want to just say thank you for taking the time to hang out with us and to let you know that you've been listening to the Autism Empowerment podcast.

And we're so excited that you're here. If you want to get connected with our community, as well as all of the great support and content that we have planned for the future, we invite you to hit the subscribe button and visit **www.autismempowermentpodcast.org** for show notes for transcripts, for social media details, and links, for you to be able to access free copies of Spectrum Life Magazine and more. So thank you again.

John: Thank you.

Karen: And wherever you are in your autism journey, we're here to meet you along the way.