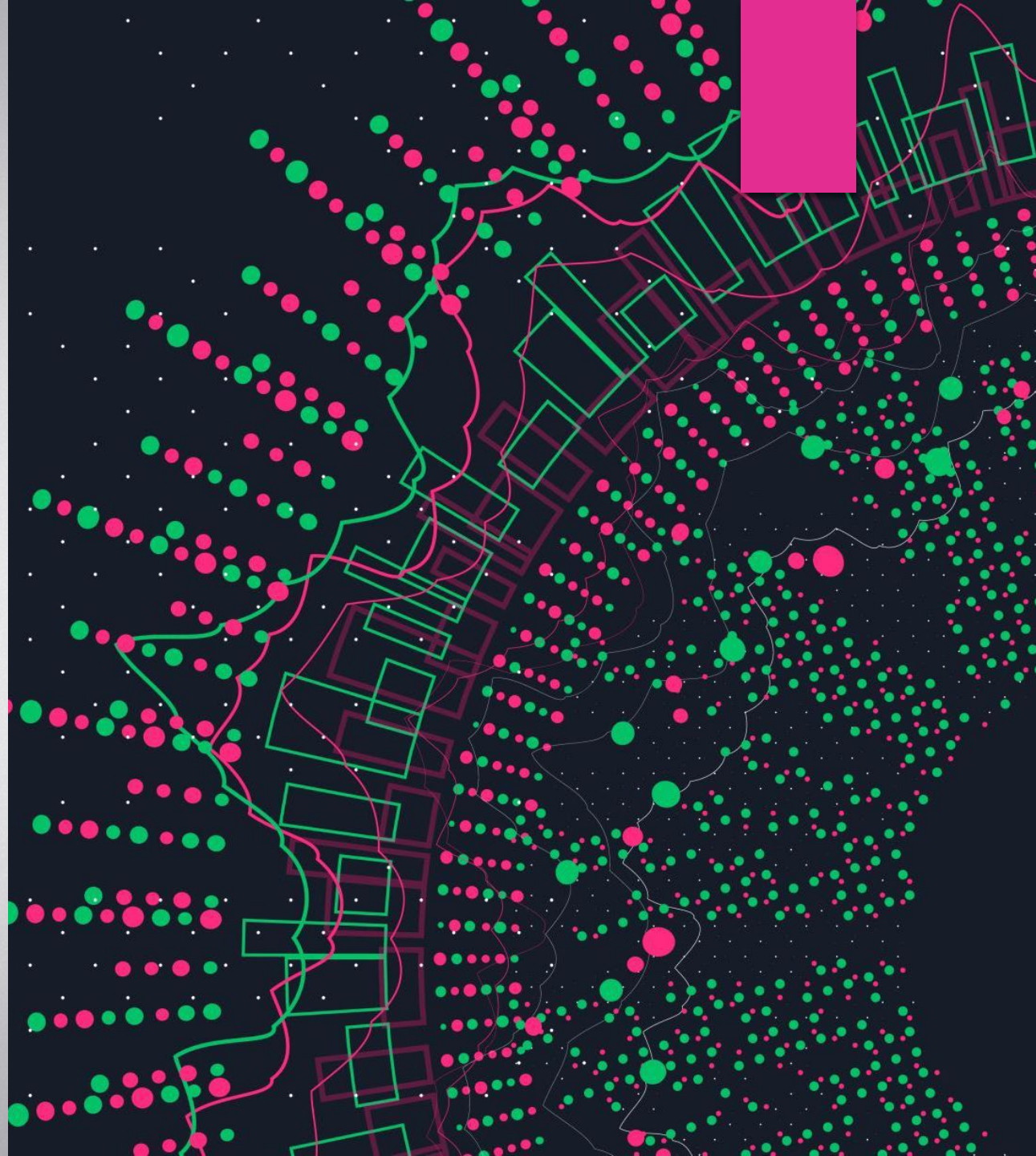
What Driving Provided to Me: An Autistic Perspective on Driving

ANDREW ARBOE



Andrew Arboe

- Over five years of professional autism work for the following companies:

1. Autism Families Connecticut
2. Plainville Community Schools
3. Autism Service & Resource Connecticut
4. Planning Across the Spectrum
5. The Next Street: Driving Schools
6. Driving with Autism
7. Anderson Center for Autism
8. FOCUS Center for Autism

Agenda

1. Pre-License

2. Post License and my Advocacy

3. What Driving Gave to Me Overall?

Past Transportation Methods I used in 2017/2018

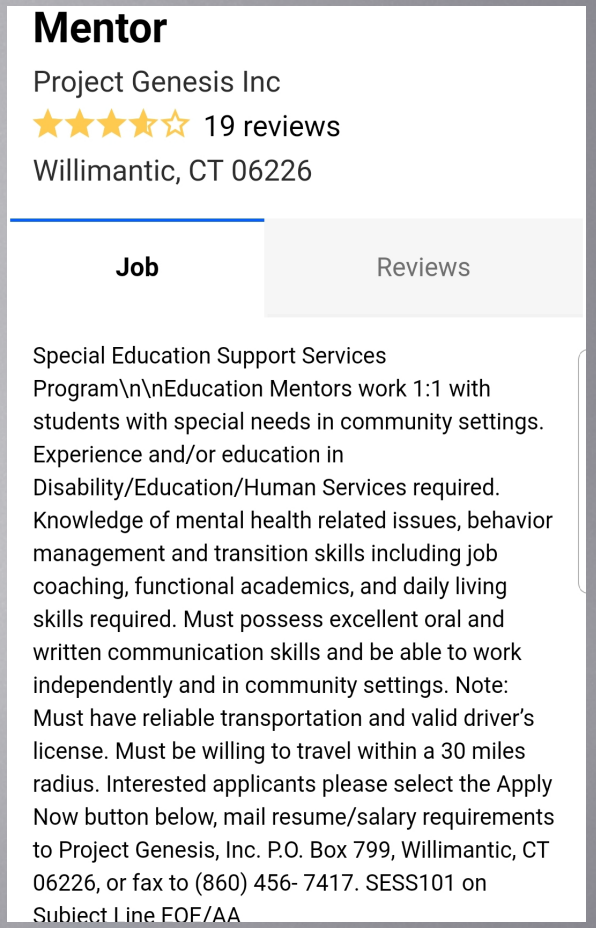
- I used these following options during my non driving days:

1. Public transit(work and college)
2. Uber (college and weekend outings)
3. Rides from others
4. Trains

My Need for Driving

- My college degree required me to drive. Jobs like mentoring/ life skills/ therapy required a certain milage for outreach.

- I needed driving to achieve a higher quality of life.



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The First Challenge: Anxiety

- The first challenge was anxiety from both myself and my dad's.
- My dad was super anxious about me driving because of my autism. He was rightfully so because autism does impact core characteristics that makes driving possible like **executive functioning** and **sensory processing**.
- One problem which unintendedly came up was my self-awareness of my dad's anxiety, which doubled my own anxiety on the wheel.

Executive Functioning

- Executive functioning deals with the split-second decision-making skills.
- Time management is part of this too along with memory.
- Examples include timing a lane change, while eyeing if any cars are nearby. Another is speeding up as you go through a highway entrance ramp, while eyeing cars on your left.

Lack of Resources during 2017-2018

- There was few studies during the time I was learning to drive.
- Most written content on the topic were mostly by parents and/or organizations nationwide.
- The state of Connecticut had many special education & autism conferences and workshops focused on public transportation more than driving. I never saw anything that stood out for any talk on autism and driving.

Attending a Driving School

- I went to a regular driving school locally over at The Next Street. I almost disclosed my autism over there, but I chose not to. I wanted to be in a regular classroom.

- The school helped me developed some sort of confidence for driving local roads. My memory of basic driving steps were stored more, meaning that I got more used to the executive functioning aspect of driving.

- I saw that I could pull off obtaining a license. I needed more time to replace my anxiety.

The Next Issue

The main problem even before going to Next Street was my own schedule. Back in 2017-2018, I worked part time in two jobs and attended community college. I had little time to practice on the weekdays, especially with my dad who works full time in construction.

I only had time to practice on the weekends. Not a lot to work with.

I realized that I needed to create a drivers' routine to get experience!

Places I used for my Routine

- Video Game Store Outings
- Special Education/Autism events
- Active centers with social outings and places nearby
- My weekend job with Autism Families Connecticut

Road Test on October 30th, 2018

I did everything I needed to do with practicing. Now the main challenges was calming any nerves I had.

I used a memory of my feelings towards a video game's final boss where it required me to be calm to beat it perfectly.

After remembering that memory, my inspector called me over to do the test. Upon my arrival, I went to a calm state and just did what I needed.

I passed!

Two Things Afterwards

- I felt a sense of relief on getting my license.
- I was able to make full of my degree without worrying of transportation limitations.
- I drove on local roads to get routine in my drives.
- Starting small before I tackle longer trips, aka the highways.

First Step of Advocating

- I created a PowerPoint I intended to share with special education departments and autism/disability organizations.
- If no one else was advocating, I might as well give it a try. At least it would be some sort of voice out there talking about driving.
- After completing it, I was able to put it on my state's DSS autism page as a resource.

July 23rd, 2019

- I did my first ever presentation with Connecticut Family Support Network.
- I was super stoked doing the presentation for the first time. Being able to gauge people's reactions to my experience.
- 30 plus people showed up, including three companies.
- I felt the fire during speaking, and it was a success.

Timeline after July 2019

Fall 2019-March 2021: I went to a partnership with The Next Street to help with their autism program called "Driving with Autism Spectrum Disorder". I helped them in the launch of their program and enjoyed the various reactions towards it and overall experience.

2020/2021: I wrote publications for Autism Spectrum News.

2020-2021: During my time with Planning Across the Spectrum, I engaged in online consultations nationwide and talked to various parents and new drivers.

2021: I spoke in multiple conferences like the World Autism Conference and Autism Society of Greater Phoenix.

Timeline Cont.

- Dec 2021 to Nov 2022: I launched **Driving with Autism** to create a webinar series for families to help them with driver readiness.
- Nov 10th, 2022: I spoke about my experiences for the Hudson Valley Autism Conference by YAI in New York.
- I was introduced to ADED, and I wrote an article for them during November 2022.
- **I will be a keynote speaker for the Autism Connections conference in Springfield, Mass on April 27th, 2023!**

What Driving Gave to Me?

Confidence

- Driving is a source of potential that I can seize and be at my best.
- It enhances my work and often draws people towards it because they can relate to my experience. People **want** to achieve great work and social opportunities.
- I can use most of my special interests in relation of driving. For example, video game music or old Hollywood radio shows playing as I drive.

4.5 Years of Traveling!

Work

- Conference and resource fairs in Mass
- Meeting nearby autism organizations in the New England area
- Drove in the states of CT, MA, RI, and upstate NY.

Recreational

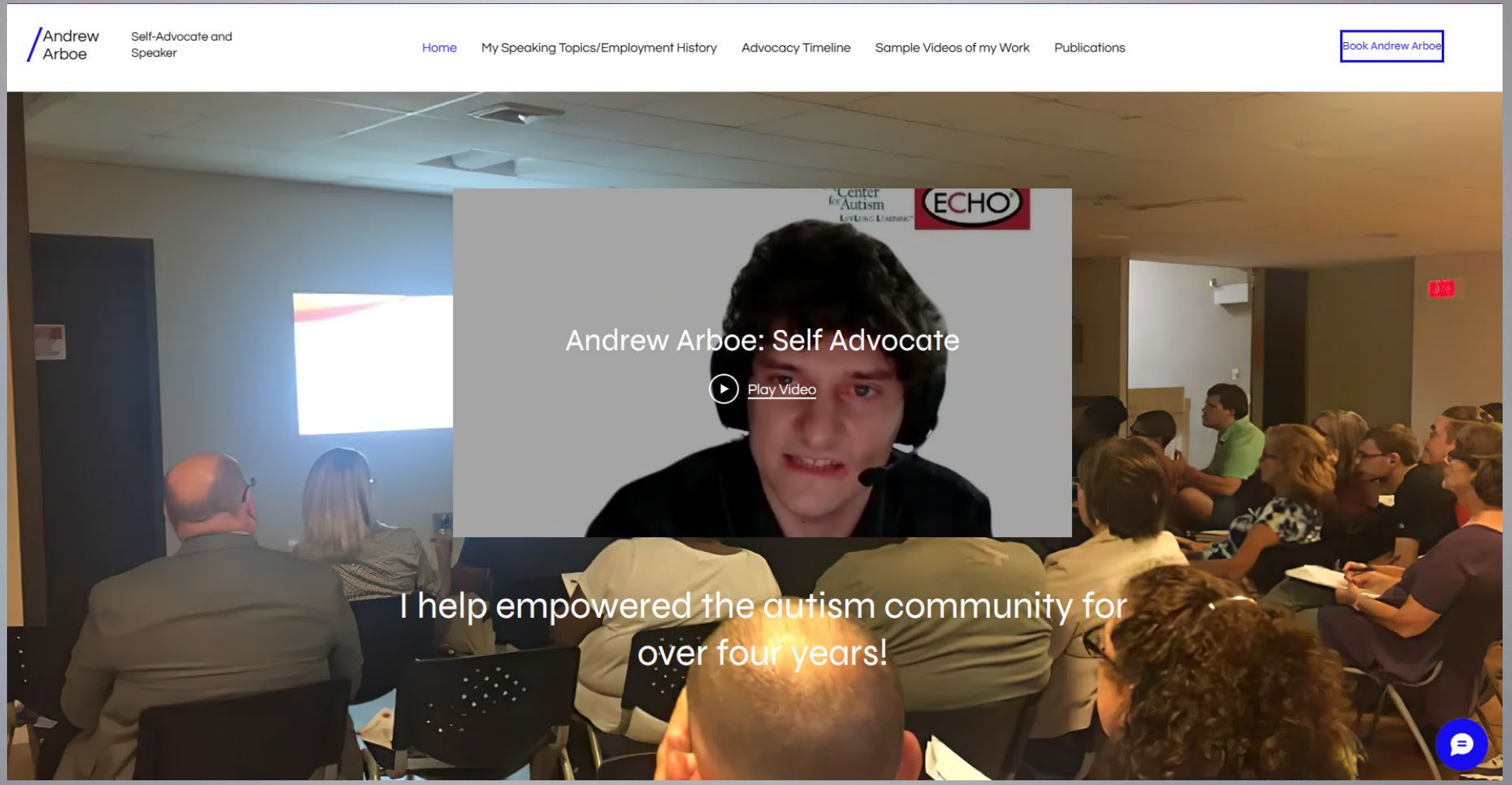
- The Big E
- Foxwoods
- Double feature for a B movie (The Room) over at Worcester, Mass
- Saw several Studio Ghibli films on the big screen
- Drove to Watertown, Mass for a restaurant owned by Jon Taffer (Bar Rescue).

Driving Gave Me a Voice!

- Being able to listen to your inner voice and not let anyone stop you.
- Taking in charge of your life and selecting the transportation option you want to make!
- Keep constantly growing each day.

Where can you find me?

You can find me on my website: https://arboea.wixsite.com



THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING MY PRESENTATION!

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