



# *Building Belonging Across All Minds*

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Presented by: Keegan Johnson

Community Integration Specialist & Peer  
Support Specialist

LAHC- Leaders Advancing & Helping  
Communities



# LAHC

LEADERS ADVANCING & HELPING COMMUNITIES





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Bachelors in Special Education- Learning Disabilities from Michigan State University

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Experience in creating inclusive mental health spaces in faith-based sites and schools.

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## *About Me*

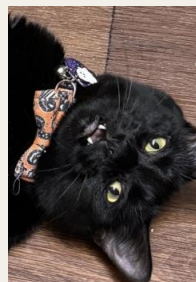
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Passionate about working alongside those with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) and advocating for mental health.

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Reside in Dearborn, MI with my lovely wife, two cats Argo & Raven, and my dog Walter.

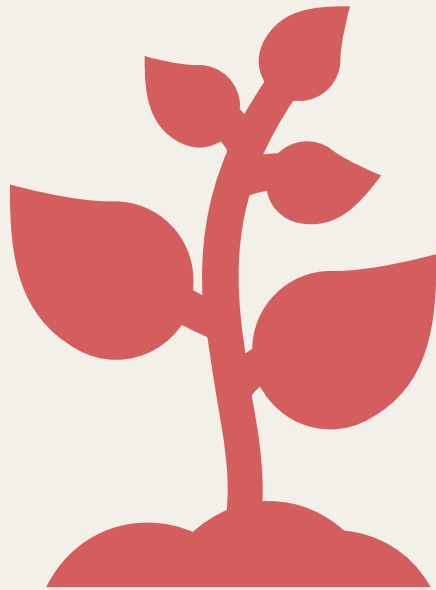
## *About LAHC*



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LAHC- Leaders Advancing and Helping Communities is a 501 (c) (3) Not for profit human services organization, with a mission to empower communities, one family at a time, by advancing the social, educational, health and economic well-being of Southeast Michigan residents. LAHC has been serving the community for over 40 years, currently reaching more than 80,000 people annually through its continuum of social services and community programs. To learn more about our work, please visit our website at [www.lahc.org](http://www.lahc.org)

# *Learning Objectives*



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1. Recognize the transformative impact of neurodiverse friendships by reflecting on the presenter's lived experience and identifying key elements that foster mutual growth and healing.
  2. Define neurodiversity and apply inclusive tools and strategies that affirm and uplift neurodiverse voices in youth-centered environments.
  3. Explore and implement youth-led engagement activities developed by LAHC- Leaders Advancing & Helping Communities, gaining hands-on experience in practices that empower neurodiverse youth.



# *My Story and My People*

## *Power of Mutual Support*

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Journey through depression & bipolar diagnosis

Individuals who helped me heal in a unique way

Inspiration for the work I do today- neurodiverse friendships





# *Lost in Transition*

## *Article by two parents with adult children with disabilities*



### **Authors:**

**Oanh Bui** is a Vietnamese cultural broker and a founder of the Circle of Vietnamese Parents. She lives in Boston, Massachusetts.

**Janet Sauer** was a special education professor and now is an early childhood teacher. She lives in the Boston area.

### **Highlights:**

- Decrease in social connection once leaving formal schooling(transition ages)
- Limited Social Support Services(transition ages)
- Employment & Natural Supports(Friendships) can help build belonging. People recognize & welcome you in their lives.

### **Suggestions:**

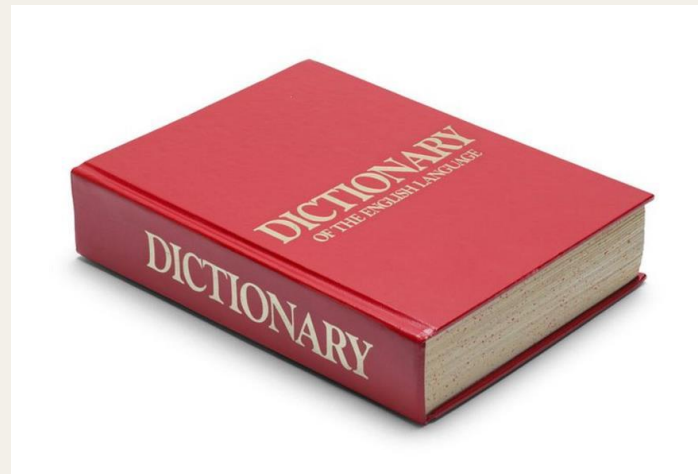
- Parent Support Networks: Listening & learning with other parents that are navigating different resources/systems as well as providing emotional support to each other.
- Enhanced Funding & Staffing: Ensures high quality care & high expectations.
- Asset based model: Fosters strengths & personalized care

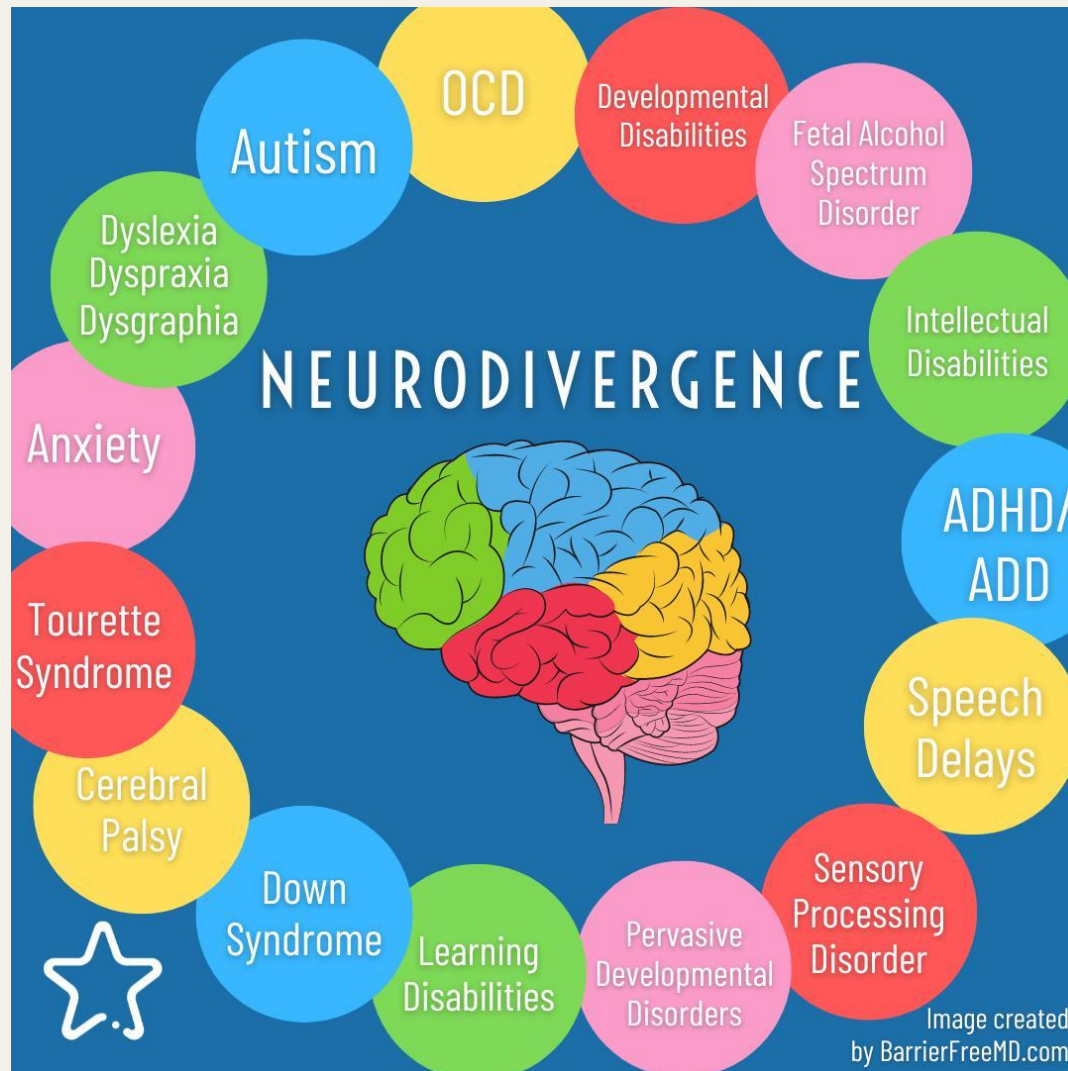


# *Neurodiversity*

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Describes natural variation in the human cognitive functioning. This framing aims to move from deficit to difference, and toward a social rather than medical model of understanding.

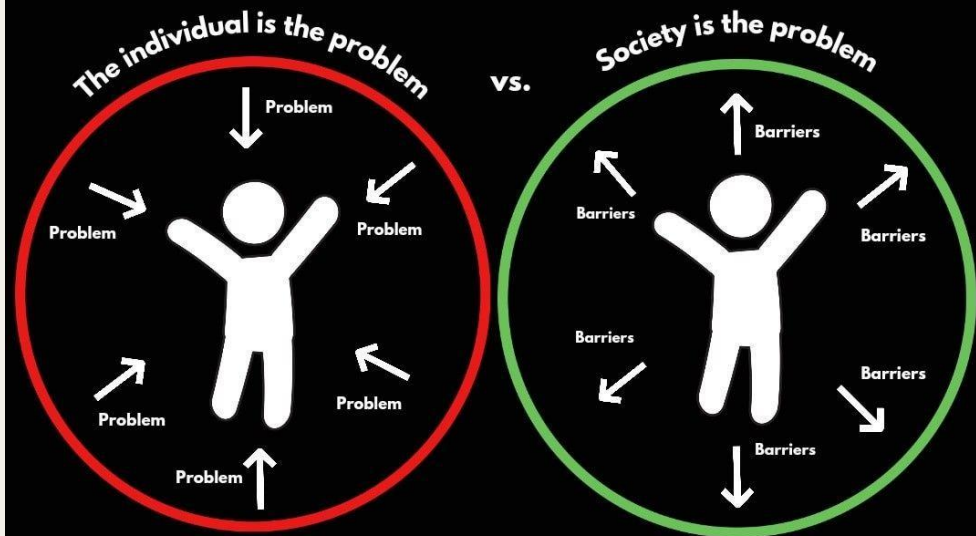




# *Medical vs. Social Model*

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## Changing The Disability Narritive: Medical Model vs. Social Model



The medical model looks at what is "wrong" with the person, and their weaknesses, not what the person NEEDS.

The social model does not focus on the challenges, instead, it gives equal attention to what the person can do and their strengths.

# Ableism

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**Definition:** Discrimination in favor of nondisabled people.

Category	Example
<b>Attitudinal Ableism</b>	Assuming disabled people are less capable or dependent.
<b>Institutional Ableism</b>	Lack of wheelchair-accessible entrances in public buildings.
<b>Linguistic Ableism</b>	Using phrases like "That's so lame" to describe something negative.
<b>Social Ableism</b>	Ignoring a disabled person and speaking only to their caregiver.
<b>Employment Ableism</b>	Refusing to hire someone because of their disability.
<b>Educational Ableism</b>	Denying a student access to assistive technology in the classroom.

*Any more examples of ableism?*



# *Change the World, Not your child*

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“When we allow children to develop in their own time frame, in their own ways, and allow them to be their own unique selves along the way, we are telling our children that who they are is valuable. When we choose acceptance and love over fear, we are teaching our children they can make this world a better place. They already have, just by being who they are.” - Lei Wiley-Mydske (*Sincerely your autistic child*)



Neurodiversity

# *Affirming & Lifting Neurodiverse Voices*

Strategy	Practical Example(s)
<b>Identifying Interests &amp; Strengths-</b> finding places in the community/schools where those interests & strengths can be explored	You listen to a youth member speak frequently about computers/video games- you identify a community club that meets weekly to have them explore. You find natural supports for them, and they develop strong friendships.
<b>Being in community with other neurodivergent people-</b> sharing lived experiences. Finding mentors with the same disability/being a mentor.	You are an Autistic Young Adult on a college campus. You find community by joining an online Autism Support Group to share your experiences.
<b>Advocating or Self- Advocating</b> for rights, accommodations, employment, education, and leadership roles.	You join an advocacy group; Self Advocates of Michigan, Michigan Disability Rights Coalition, and get involved in events. Becoming a Peer Mentor(IDD).
<b>Being a Safe Place for neurodivergent individuals to be themselves</b>	Honoring sensory needs, practicing radical acceptance, listening without judgment, celebrating unique communication styles, offering flexible participation options, and fostering environments where difference is seen as strength.

# *Reflection Time*

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In your professional and/or personal life how can you affirm & empower neurodivergent youth voices?





## *Current Projects at LAHC*

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**Circles of Hope:** An inclusive & social recreation peer group for High School students. Includes setting personal mental health goals, interactive leisure activities to practice coping strategies, & guided discussions. Students can also opt in to be an advocate to play a more active leadership role with the group. This program is hosted monthly at our site in Dearborn, MI.


**Community Companions Program:** Youth with and without disabilities supporting each other's social and emotional wellness. This program is done both in schools and in the community.

Resilient Imaginative Compassionate

## *Activity #1*

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Organized Creative Nurturing

- Gather in small groups 4-6. You will receive a poster with an infinity symbol representing neurodiversity.
  - Each team member will decorate inside the symbol
  - On one side of the loop you will write words that finish this prompt "I appreciate my mind because it is..." it's okay if you write a word more than once it just means that word really represents your group 😊
  - On the other side of the loop you will each decorate a section however you choose... Examples- patterns that make you happy, symbols that mean a lot to you, colors you currently feel like, etc.
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# Activity #2- Home Poem 😊

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NAME: \_\_\_\_\_



Directions: We all need help at various times in our life. We all are the helpers at times in our lives. Take this time to reflect on when others have helped you and when you have helped others. Reflect in gratitude on these experiences and others when you have felt joy and connected to others and the world around you. Reflect on the places you have felt at "home".

**Write Your First Name**

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**List 3 people that have supported you**

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**Identify one positive word that describes you:**

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**List 3 people who you have supported**

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**List three hobbies that bring you joy**

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**List 3 places that you enjoy being(not your HOME)\***

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**Home**

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# References

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## *Check out our Socials 😊*

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For updated information, follow us on social media



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