

From Awareness to Action: Creating a Culture Shift for Youth with Developmental Disabilities and Mental Health Needs

March 5, 2026

This work is supported by the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities through a grant from the U.S. Administration for Community Living (ACL), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Washington, D.C. 20201, with a 100% federal funding award totaling \$6,161,072. Council efforts are those of the grantee and do not necessarily represent the official views of nor are endorsed by ACL, HHS, or the U.S. government.

Opening Activity

Explorer
curious,
checking this
topic out

Learner
actively
gaining
knowledge

Practitioner
applying
skills, doing
the work

Teacher
expert, trainer
on topic

**Lived
Experience
Expert**
self-advocate,
family
member

Housekeeping Items

| 3



We are recording this webinar.
The recording and slides will be sent out to all registrants.



Please put your questions in the chat at any time.



There will be a survey at the end of this webinar.
We appreciate your time completing it.

Integral Care - Continuing Education

| 4

1.5 CEUs are available for:

- LMFT
- LMSW / LCSW
- LPC
- Texas Addiction Professionals (CFP and MHPS included)

You must complete this sign-in form and the evaluation at the end of the session to receive your CEU certificate.



<https://tinyurl.com/y8uvc875>

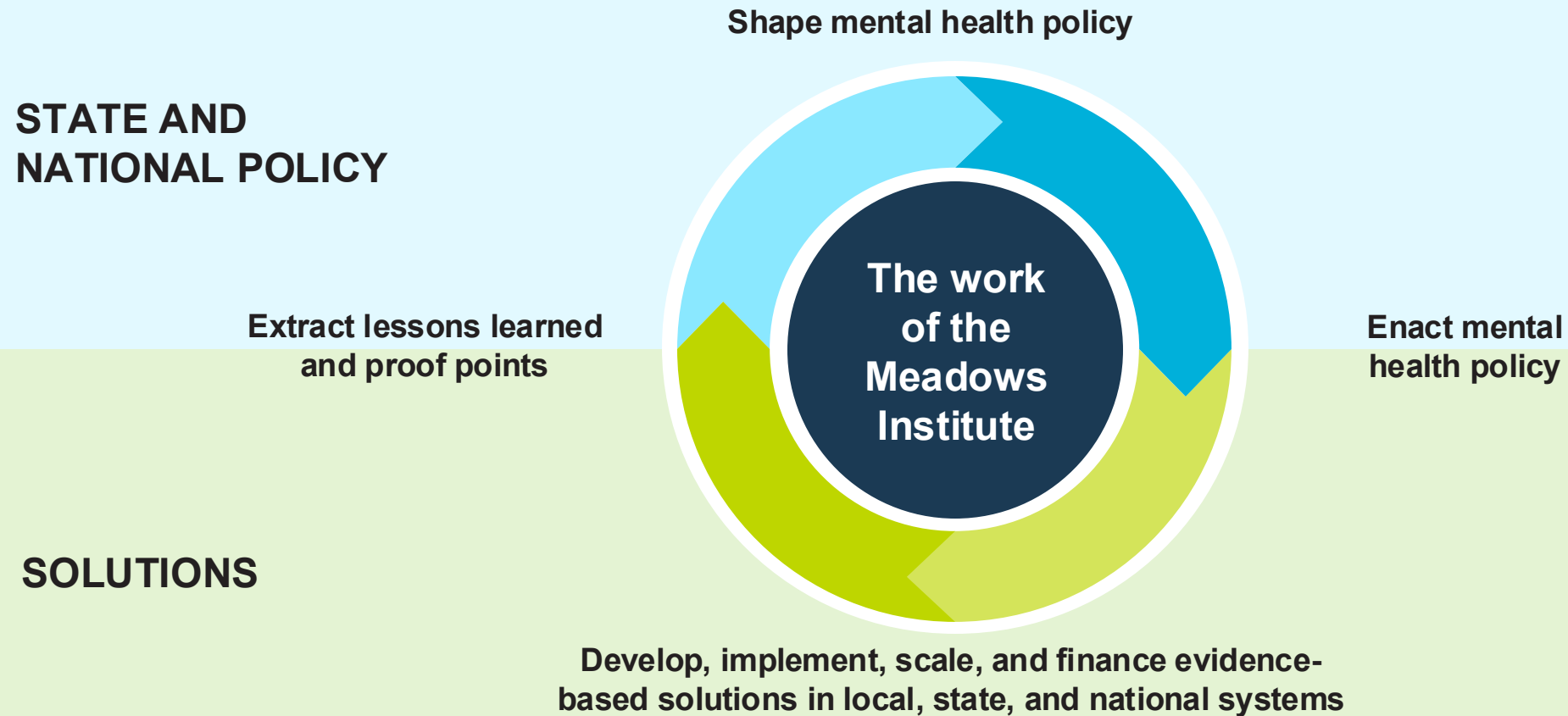
Agenda

| 5



Our Unique Value: Intersection of Policy & Programs

| 6



OUR VALUES

Collaboration and partnership

Data-driven and evidence-based

Innovation

Nonpartisanship

Stewardship

MEADOWS
MENTAL HEALTH
POLICY INSTITUTE

Presenters



Gary Bramlett, LMSW

Meadows Institute



Katie Mitten, LMSW

Meadows Institute



Laura Merola, LPC

Meadows Institute



Libby Banks

*MD/MPAff Candidate
2027*

*Autism Consortium of
Texas Leadership
Education in
Neurodevelopmental and
Related Disabilities (ACT
LEND) Fellow*



Katie Van Bodegom Smith

MSSW Candidate 2026

ACT LEND Fellow

American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) | 8

AAIDD promotes progressive policies, sound research, effective practices, and universal human rights for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

AAIDD's goals are to:

- Enhance the capacity of professionals who work with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- Promote the development of a society that fully includes individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- Sustain an effective, responsive, well managed, and responsibly-governed organization.

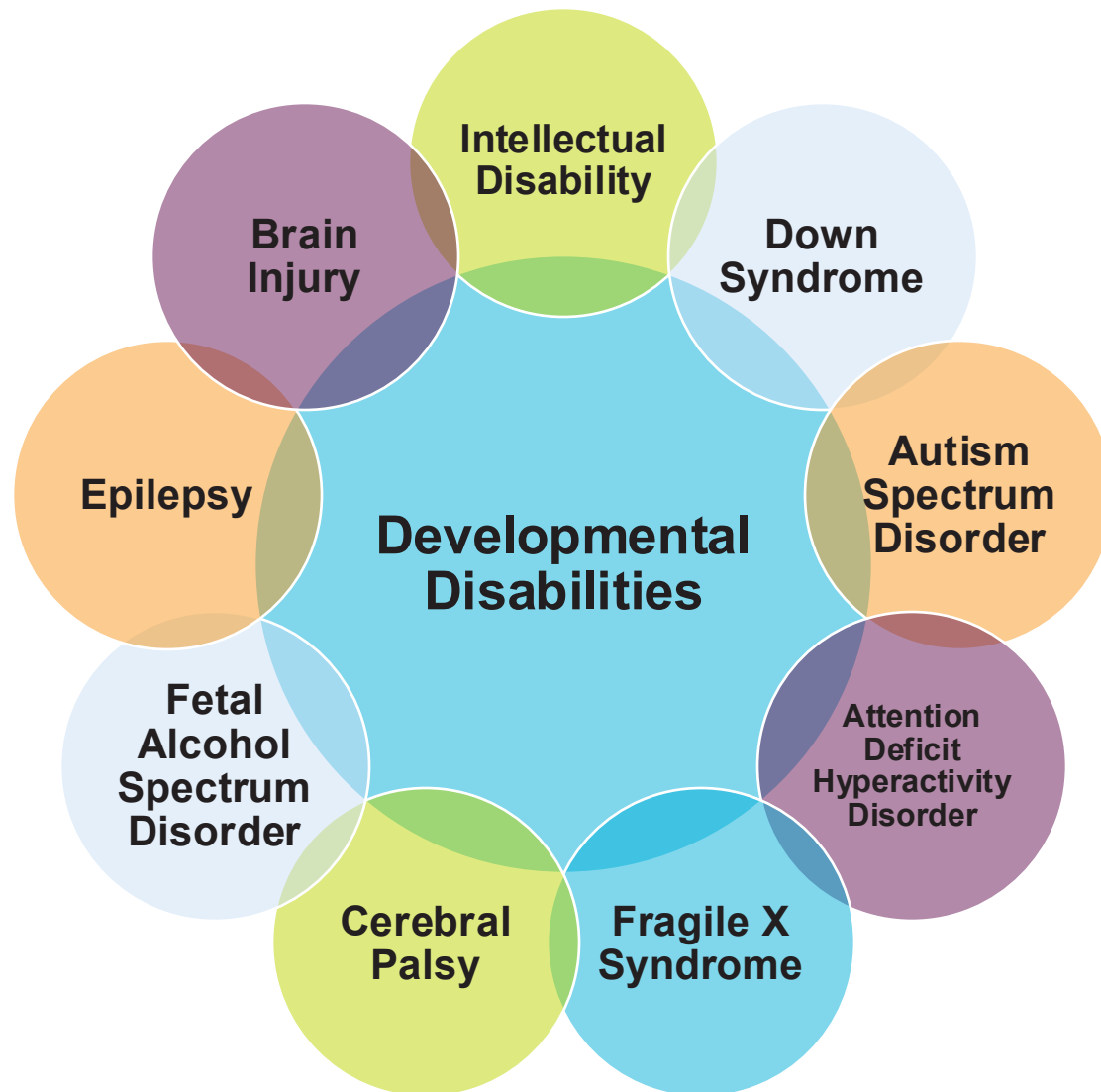
American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) | 9

Membership starts as low as \$90 per year, is ideal for people who value the latest evidence, and includes the following benefits:

- Online access to academic journals focused on I/DD
- Free webinars
- Members-only webinar archive
- Network of top professionals around the country
- Electronic newsletters
- Conference & bookstore discounts
- Eligible to vote and hold office

Developmental Disabilities and Mental Health Challenges

Developmental Disabilities (DD)



Developmental Disabilities and Mental Health Challenges | 12

- An estimated **one-third** of people with a developmental disability also have mental health needs.¹
- This population experiences traumatic events at higher rates than the general population.
- How people with DD experience (cope with and process) traumatic events may be different from the general population.²
- **Diagnostic overshadowing**, where a mental health challenge is inaccurately attributed to a person's developmental disability, is common.³
- There are an insufficient number of providers who are well trained in MH *and* DD.

Exclusion from Mental Health Services

| 13

Exclusion through Policies and Practices

- Based on diagnosis or IQ score
- Requirements around "functional abilities" or ability to carry out activities of daily living independently

Exclusion based on Provider Limitations

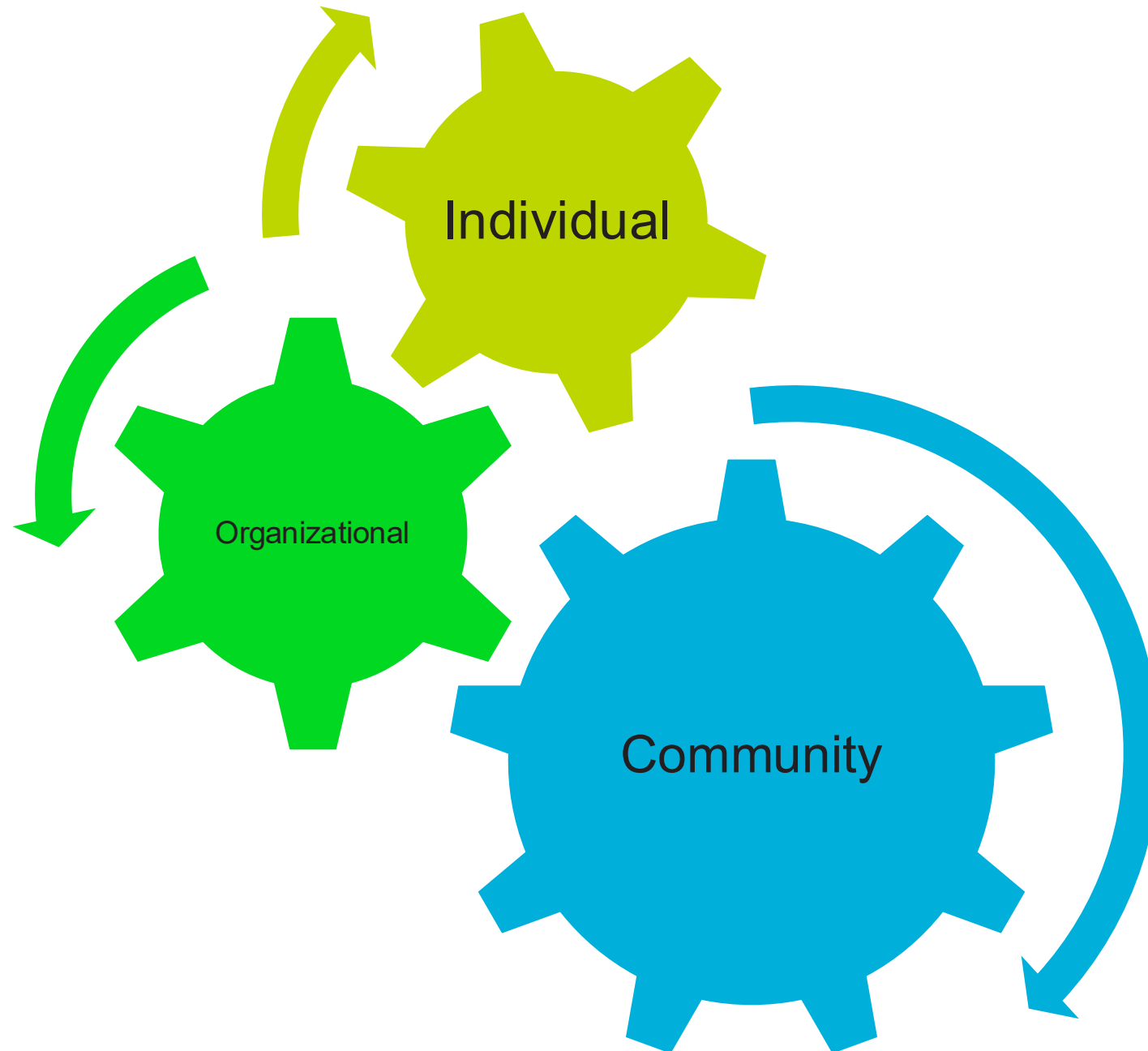
- Pointing to scope of practice concerns
- Limited expertise of staff
- Lack of appropriate resources

What does culture shift mean to you?

Answer in the chat!

Culture Shift

| 15

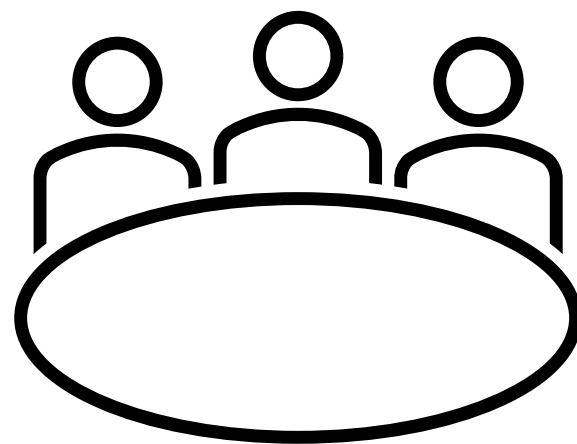


Engaging Families and People with Lived Expertise

- Acknowledge and build on family expertise and strengths
- Strategically and purposefully establish staff positions for people with lived expertise
- Partner with family-led, lived-experience groups and organizations



Language and Communication Considerations



An Example – Identity-First vs. Person-First Language

~~Down's kid~~

Child with
Down
Syndrome

~~Mentally ill
person~~

Person living
with a mental
health
condition

Autistic or
Autistic person

Person with
Autism

Default to person-first
language if preference
is not yet known.



Instead Of...	Person-Centered or Person-First Language Would Be...
Developmentally disabled individual	Individual with developmental disabilities
My client	The person I support
Mentally impaired individual	Individual with intellectual disabilities
Low-Functioning	In need of support with _____
Non-verbal	Doesn't use words to communicate; Uses _____ to communicate
High-functioning	Capable of _____
Wheelchair bound	A person who uses a wheelchair

**Do you have an example of a time
when words were confusing or
potentially hurtful?**

Answer in the chat!

Promoting Inclusivity

| 21

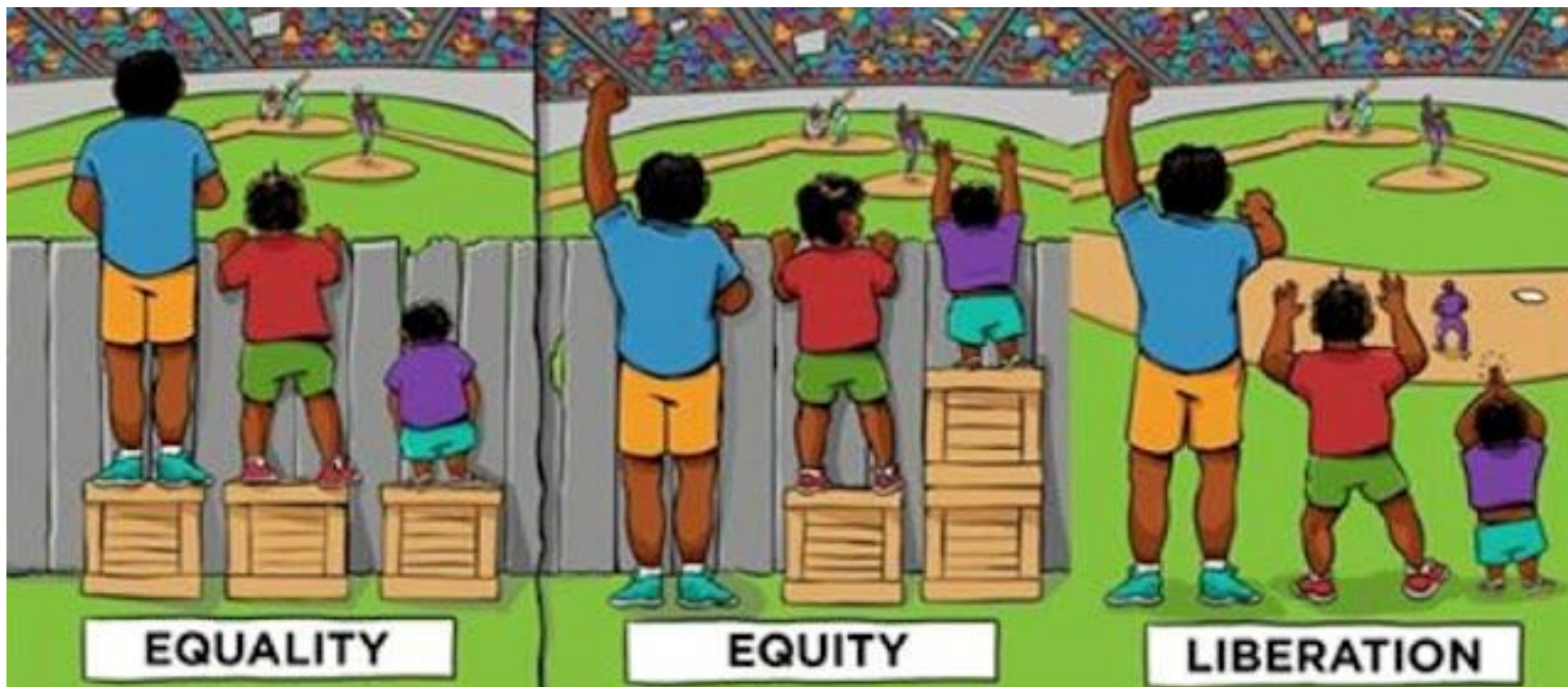


Photo credit and [the story](#) from the photo's creator Craig Froehle.

Training and Education

| 22



- Understand DD and Mental Health (MH) basics
- Learn and use trauma-informed, neurodiversity affirming practices
- Reflect on assumptions, language, & biases



- Cross-system training and skill building
- Cross-departmental staffings
- Mandatory and ongoing training



- Engage local coalitions and lived experience groups to provide public workshops
- Create shared resources for DD/MH

Policies and Practices

| 23

		
Individual	“My hands are tied”	Use discretion and flexibility to increase accessibility
	Stay silent when you notice barriers	Advocate when policies create barriers
	Assume others will speak up	Be a champion in your family, workplace, community
Organization	Looks/sounds good on paper	“Walk the Talk”: Ensure practices are functionally aligned with any policies about inclusion and accessibility
	Have one-size-fits-all rules	Think through key barrier points and adjust
	Avoid meaningful accountability	Create systems of accountability
Community	Fragmented advocacy work	Coordinated advocacy
	Funding that reinforces silos	Funding supports and incentivizes integration

Activity

Individual Change Activity: Unlearn and Reframe

| 25

- Unlearn: A personal assumption, default response, or way of interpreting behavior related to developmental disabilities and/or mental health.
- Reframe with: A new mindset, question, or approach
- Example:
 - Unlearn: “Escalation equals noncompliance”
 - Reframe: "Escalation equals communication"
 - How this applies: “In my job in child welfare, when a child becomes escalated, I won’t assume they are being defiant, but rather step back and ask what they’re trying to communicate.”

Individual Change Activity: Unlearn and Reframe

| 26

Now it's your turn! Try coming up with a reframe for these common misconceptions and share in the chat:

People with DD cannot have mental health challenges

Individual Change Activity: Unlearn and Reframe

| 27

Now it's your turn! Try coming up with a reframe for these common misconceptions and share in the chat:

Mental health struggles are a sign of weakness

Individual Change Activity: Unlearn and Reframe

| 28

Now it's your turn! Try coming up with a reframe for these common misconceptions and share in the chat:

Nonverbal equals unintelligent

Individual Change Activity: Unlearn and Reframe

| 29

What is another misconception you have noticed, and how would you suggest reframing it?

Organizational/System Activity

| 30

We will walk through a scenario step by step. For each step, we are asking you to:

1. Tell us what stands out in the scenario.
2. Point out barriers and breakdowns.
3. Share ways to make the process, experience, and/or environment more accessible and inclusive.

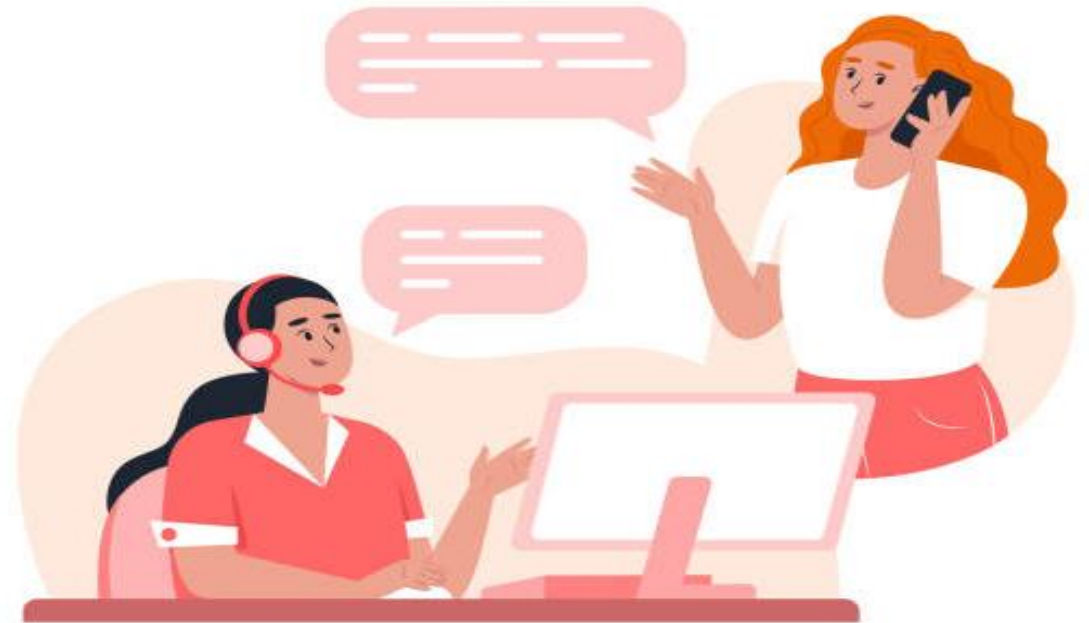
Organizational/System Activity

| 31

The mother of a 19-year-old calls the LMHA/LIDDA hotline to get services for her son, James. She reports that he has been diagnosed with depression, anxiety, and level 2 autism.

The hotline worker tells her that because her son is an adult he'll need to call the hotline himself, or he or both of them can come in on intake drop-in days: Monday, Wednesday, or Friday starting at 8am.

The clinic is across town from where they live and the worker could not say how long they might have to wait.



Organizational/System Activity

| 32

The mother talks to James and he does not want to call because he is not comfortable talking on the phone.

He is nervous about seeing someone in person, but agrees to go to the drop-in intake with his mom.

They wake up at 6 a.m. to get ready and drive across town in traffic. They arrive at the clinic at 8:30 a.m. and are told there is a 1.5 hour wait.

The clinic waiting area is loud, bright, and crowded.



Organizational/System Activity

| 33

After waiting nearly 2 hours, James and his mother are called back for an intake.

The intake therapist is a woman, and James asks if there is a man available. The therapist says there is not.

In front of his mother, the therapist asks James if he will sign a consent for his mother to be present at the intake. James agrees.

The intake takes approximately 2 hours without breaks. The therapist asks a lot of questions from a list and asks James to fill out paperwork.



Commit to Action

In the chat, add one action you plan to take in the next 30-90 days. | 35

Individual

- Build a particular skill
- Question to ask differently
- Register for a training

Organizational

- Identify a policy or practice to review and develop recommended change
- Introduce a new training to your team
- Pilot a new process to better meet the needs of diverse clients

Community

- Explore a new partnership
- Elevate data or a story
- Identify a policy or funding lever to influence

American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) | 36

Membership starts as low as \$90 per year. Ideal for people who value the latest evidence and includes:

- Online access to academic journals focused on I/DD
- Free live webinars and archive
- Network of top professionals around the country
- Conference discounts
 - AAIDD 150th Annual Meeting in Chicago
 - AAIDD-TX Chapter 50th Annual Convention in Corpus Christi



Integral Care - Continuing Education

| 37

1.5 CEUs are available for:

- LMFT
- LMSW / LCSW
- LPC
- Texas Addiction Professionals (CFP and MHPS included)

You must complete this sign-in form and the evaluation at the end of the session to receive your CEU certificate.



<https://tinyurl.com/2j9k65kh>



Integral Care

MEADOWS
MENTAL HEALTH
POLICY INSTITUTE

Q & A

Katie Mitten, LMSW

Director of Cross System Integration

kmitten@mmhpi.org

Laura Merola, LPC

Director of Child and Family Policy

lmerola@mmhpi.org

Feedback requested!

| 38



Thank You!

MEADOWS
MENTAL HEALTH
POLICY INSTITUTE

PASO *del* NORTE CENTER
Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute

 **THE HACKETT CENTER**
FOR MENTAL HEALTH

TRAUMA & GRIEF CENTER
Meadows Institute

Meadows Institute | **DALLAS**

Meadows Institute | **PANHANDLE**

References

| 40

1. Administration for Community Living. (2022, September 30). *ACL launches center to improve support for people who have both intellectual and developmental disabilities and mental health disabilities.*
<https://acl.gov/news-and-events/announcements/acl-launches-center-improve-support-people-who-have-both-intellectual>
2. National Child Traumatic Stress Network. (n.d.). *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.*
<https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/populations-at-risk/intellectual-and-developmental-disabilities>
3. ScienceDirect. (n.d.). *Diagnostic Overshadowing.*
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/psychology/diagnostic-overshadowing>