



# Developing Comprehensive Community-based Support Frameworks

## Connect: Creating Opportunities for Neurodiverse Networks; Enhancing Connections & Thriving

Erica L. Lehman, Ph.D., BCBA

Swank Autism Center, Nemours/A.I. duPont Hospital for Children



### Background



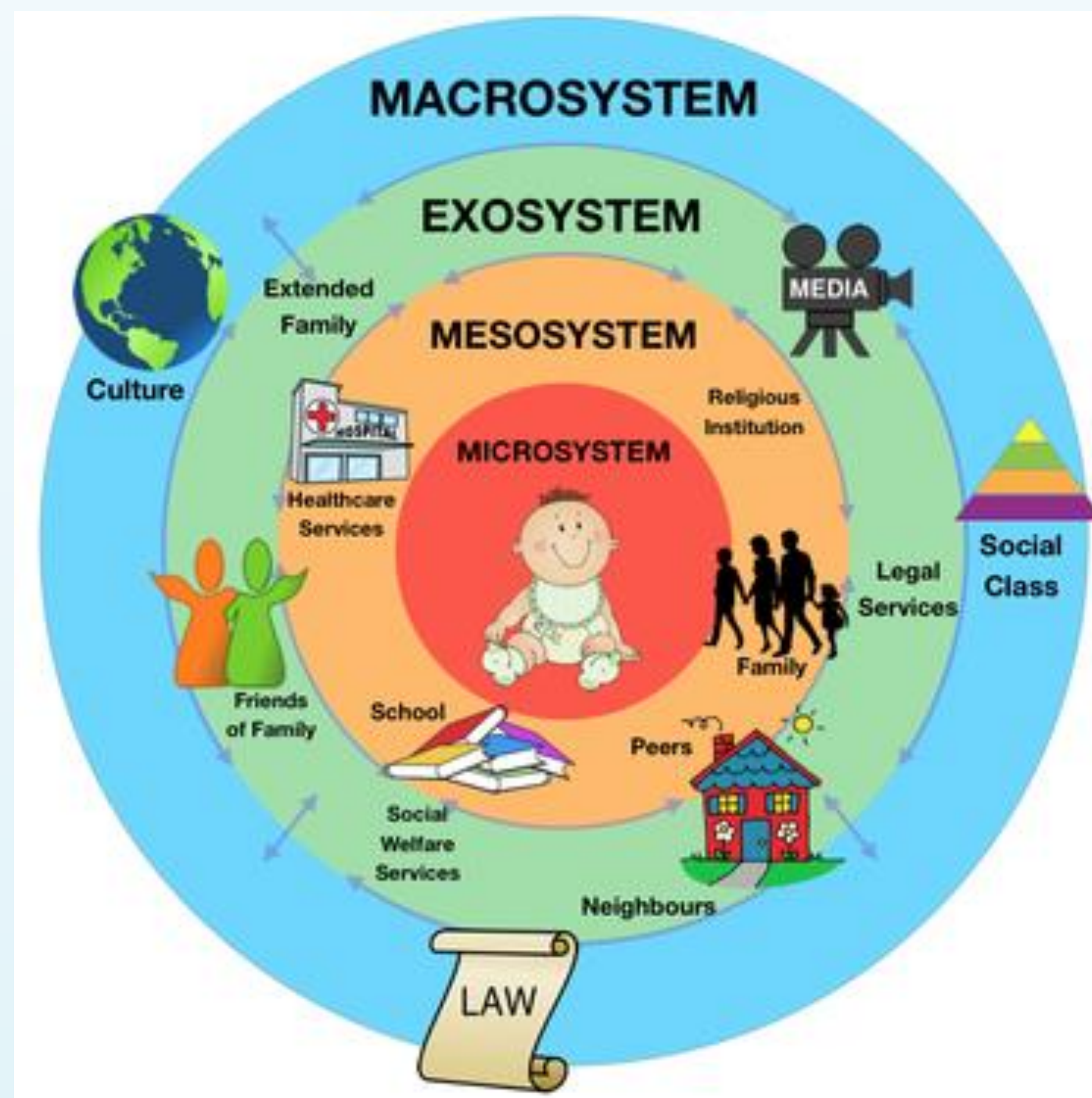
- There have been dramatic shifts in the field of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) over the past 20 years that have impacted theory, practice, and research, ultimately shifting understanding of ASD from deficits to treat to divergence to appreciate.
- It is well documented in the literature that parents of autistic children can experience more distress than parents of children who present with other developmental disabilities or meet criteria for other diagnoses.
- Supports can be rather disconnected and “pieced together”

### Method

- Review of literature on service gaps, family challenges and neurodiversity.
- Learning from autistic self advocates in:
  - Direct conversations
  - Podcasts
  - Facebook Groups
  - Invited Talk
  - Clinical Service Delivery
- Assessing need throughout the course of clinical care with children and families.

### Findings

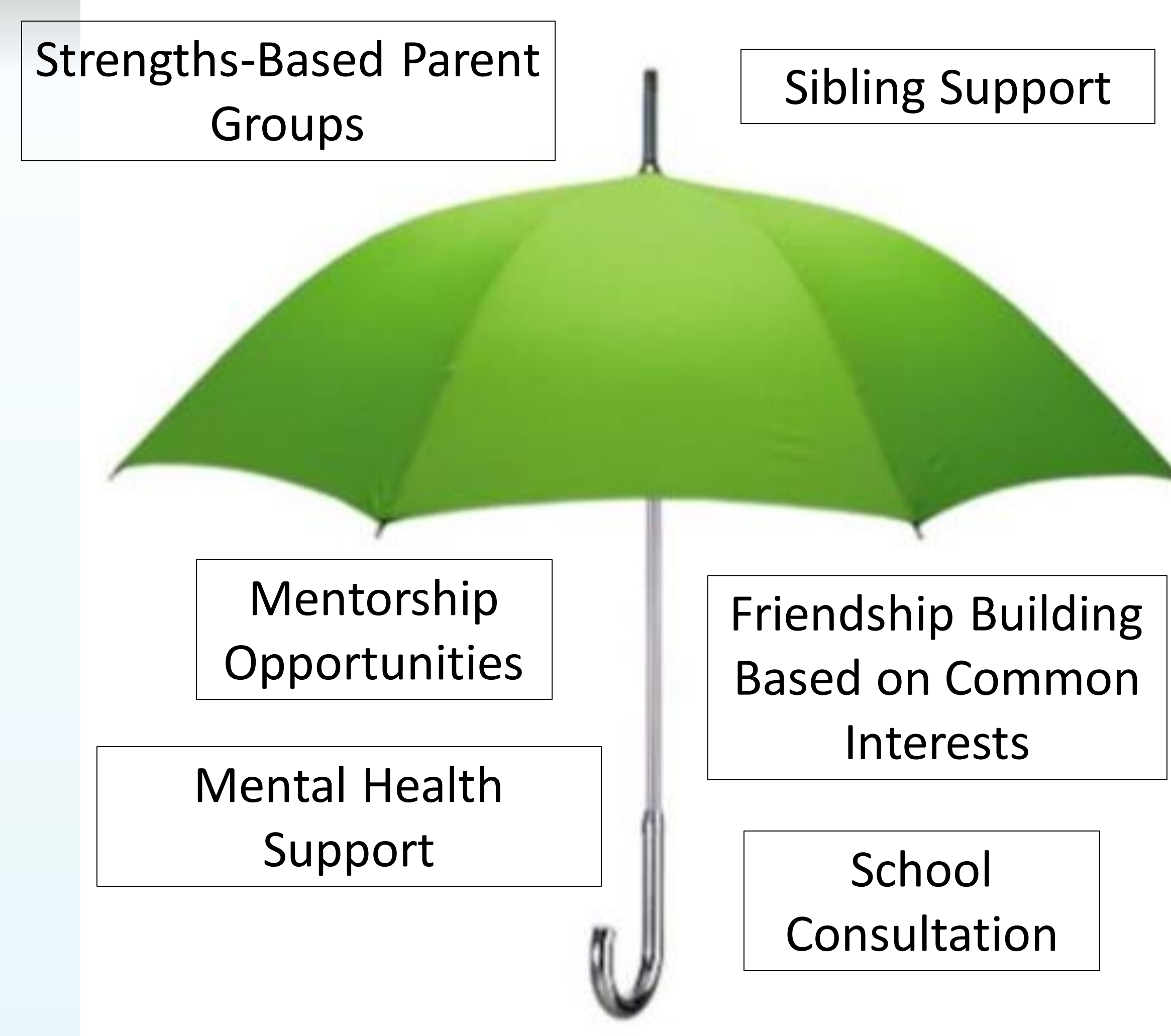
- Many ASD-related services are deficit-focused.
- Autistic children often struggle to connect with and build relationships with like-minded peers
- Comorbid mental health concerns may be exacerbated by later age in diagnosis and a dearth of strength-based support.



### Project Goals

- Learn about community needs and develop model of integrated programming and supports
- Explore what a comprehensive suite of services could look like.
- Consider what triaging through tiers of services could look like.
- Consider how this type of programming can be self-sustaining and ensure that autistic voices are front and center.

### Connect: Suite of Services



- **Strengths-Based Parent Groups-** Process groups designed to build relationships.
- **Sibling Support-** Psychoeducation, skill building, and processing.
- **Mentorship Opportunities-** Pairing autistic adolescents with younger autistic children
- **Mental Health Support-** Connection to family-based therapy for anxiety, depression, and social support as desired.
- **Friendship Building/Peer Connections Based on Common Interests-** Self-sustaining match program based on common interests and consent to share information.
- **School Consultation-** IEP review, discussing educational process, pointing families towards education and advocacy resources, etc.

### Possible Next Steps



- Subscription-based phone Application:
  - Message Boards
  - Survey Completion
  - Contact info exchange for friendship Matching

### Recommendations

- Focus groups or another form of feedback-seeking would be important to pursue before developing this type of programming.
- In a clinical setting, partnering with community organization may facilitate this type of support.
- Assessing community need is critical before developing this type of programming.

### Reflections

- My LEND Leadership project integrates my previous research, clinical, and services experiences in that it involves family-centered, strengths-based support. Additionally, cultural humility and interdisciplinary care could be integrated to the extent possible during the course of program development an implementation, especially if an App/message board was integrated.