



A Brief History of Sensory-Friendly Programming at The Henry Ford

Contributed by Amy Louise Liedel, Senior Director of Guest Operations, The Henry Ford

For nearly 20 years, The Henry Ford has sought to provide safe, unique and engaging experiences for our members and guests on the autism spectrum and their families. It has been a long journey, with a slow start and a positive twist during a worldwide pandemic in 2020, an otherwise extremely challenging year. We are pleased to share with you a brief history of our efforts and an exciting announcement about opportunities for future visits to The Henry Ford.

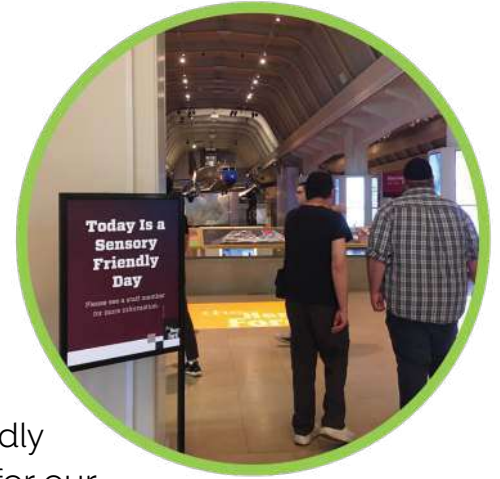
Early efforts at specialized programming began in 2000 with a partnership event with the Michigan Autism Society during one of our first Day Out With Thomas events and later with safety trainings led by the Autism Alliance of Michigan. Guest-facing staff and security personnel were trained on the impacts of autism spectrum disorder and sensory processing disorder (ASD/SPD) and given basic instruction on how to interact with caregivers and assist in keeping these guests safe while visiting. The focus was on improving service and engagement for guests with ASD/SPD who were already visiting, not necessarily on drawing more families and guests with ASD/SPD to our venues and programs.

By 2015, our desire to serve more guests with disabilities had evolved into concrete initiatives and plans with the addition of Caroline Braden, now our full-time accessibility specialist on the Guest Services Team. Caroline's background in museums and accessibility programming allowed us to build and deliver a broad range of services, programs and accommodations designed for guests with disabilities, both on-site and online. I personally have had the privilege of working with Caroline and many outstanding partners and colleagues who have contributed to the growth of accessibility programming over the years. Additionally, this work has been a personal passion, as my youngest child has been diagnosed with ASD.

cont.

At The Henry Ford, our current sensory-friendly programming began in 2016. Since then, we have had at least three or four sensory-friendly events a year. These events have included such offerings as pre-visit materials (i.e., social narratives), sensory-friendly maps, noise-canceling headphones and earplugs, quiet zones, and turning loud sounds down or off. We have also offered exclusive access times to some of our exhibits and events, such as our Hallowe'en in Greenfield Village event — one of our most popular sensory-friendly events the past few years.

Which brings us to our exciting news and the most positive twist in this story — a substantial grant that The Henry Ford received this past fall from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). This grant will enable us to significantly expand our current sensory-friendly programming to provide access to over 18,000 guests with ASD/SPD and their families within the funding period of three years.



To do this, The Henry Ford will increase the number of sensory-friendly events to 13-15 a year, including more access and accommodations for our special annual events. We will also develop and launch a new program for teens and young adults with ASD/SPD that will include activities aimed at social skill-building and networking. This programming will include not only the successful access and accommodations we have provided in the past but free admission as well, removing any unique economic and/or social barriers.



As an additional component of the grant, we are developing new training for staff in partnership with AAoM. This training, combined with the yearly safety training from AAoM, will be designed to broaden awareness and develop programmatic and service skills around the unique needs of those with ASD/SPD.

The timing of this grant during COVID-19 has made our delivery of sensory-friendly programming more complex. As safety is our No. 1 priority, The Henry Ford is operating at 25% of normal venue capacities, and some venues and programming are not available

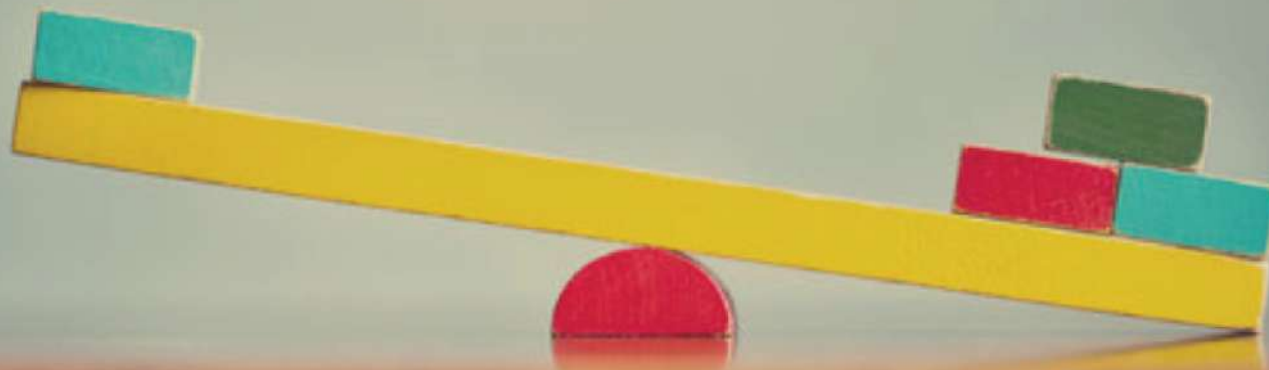
at all. IMLS, however, has been extremely flexible in allowing us to modify our on-site programming and move certain aspects to virtual programming. As a result, on-site sensory-friendly opportunities will be limited, and we are currently not taking any new registrations for these events. Stay connected to AAoM for virtual opportunities and on-site events in 2021.



In closing, we would like to thank all of the amazing staff at AAoM for their guidance and support throughout this journey, and we are proud to receive their Seal of Approval endorsement. We look forward to seeing you soon at The Henry Ford.

Racial Disparity in Diagnosis

Contributed by AAOM Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee



“I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”

Although this was a dream outlined by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1963, the reality of this vision is still a work in progress. As we look at the staggering number of children being diagnosed with autism (1:54) per the [CDC](#), the racial disparity is present per data presented. Based on research by the [University of Pennsylvania](#), African American boys are 5 times more likely to be diagnosed with a behavioral disorder, instead of autism, unlike their white counterparts. Children of color are also less likely to receive mental health services for comorbidities associated with autism. These disparities may be the result of differences in seeking help, advocacy, support, and clinician behaviors per the [Journal of The American Academy Child & Adolescent Psychiatry](#).

There is no quick fix answer to the disparity of racial diagnosis, treatment and early detection. There are some [early warning signs](#) that families can identify and address with their pediatrician for further assessment. If your child is school-aged, contact the [Michigan Alliance for Families](#) or [Michigan Department of Education \(MDE\)](#) for additional tips and resources surrounding the [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#), behavioral interventions, and school certification. Families can also seek mental health support for caregivers and patients through [Psychology Today. Find a Therapist](#). As always, the [Autism Alliance of Michigan](#) is here to support you and help you navigate.

cont.

Though the work of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. lives on, it is our turn to be advocates for the fate of our children. By being vigilant and bold we can decrease the racial disparity in early detection, diagnosis and treatment and increase the possibility of positive outcomes.

Resources:

[African American and Latino Children are often overlooked when it comes to Autism](#)

[Data and Statistics on Autism Disorder](#)

[Race Differences in the Age at Diagnosis Among Medicaid-Eligible Children With Autism](#)

Direct Support Professionals Recognition

Direct Support Professionals (DSP) assist those who are most vulnerable in our society. They add to the quality of their lives in both large and small ways; with acts of care, kindness and dedication. Autism Alliance of Michigan is highlighting just some of those professionals who go above and beyond to provide excellent service throughout our state. Each DSP received a fifty dollar gift card as recognition for their hard work and dedication.

Mid Michigan Industries recognizes

Alexis Evers

She is a stand out. This is for a couple different reasons. She is my youngest staff that came to work here just over a year ago. In the last year, Alexis has gone up and above to train herself to be better than she was the day before. She has a great work ethic and will pick up shifts whenever I have asked, whether it be in a group, to do the van route or be the aid for the bus. This last summer when we were all off from work and in lock down, we offered staff to take a training to become ABA trained and Alexis jumped at the opportunity and was done with this training within a couple weeks. She did all of this all while taking college classes too. She is now working with two kiddos who are autistic and doing her normal DSP work here for 40 hours a week. For being pretty fresh out of high school I really appreciate her work ethic and commitment to our persons served and her coworkers. It is hard to find many like her. She is my deserving DSP staff.

Upcoming Community Events



- **February 17:** [Parent Connect Call-Topic: Overview of Children’s Special Health Care Services, Family Center for Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs, and the Children with Special Needs Fund](#)
- **February 18:** [The After I’m Gone Program](#) - Getting the most out of Mental Health Services
- **February 19:** [Behavior is Communication](#)
- **February 19:** [Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder during the Pandemic \(Live-Online\)](#)
- **February 24:** [Mediation Across the Ages – A Generational Diversity Communication Training \(ONLINE!\)](#)
- **February 25:** [Making Sense of SSI and SSDI](#)
- **February 26:** [Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder during the Pandemic \(Live-Online\)](#)
- **March 4:** [The After I’m Gone Program](#) - Social Security
- **March 5:** [#StayHome & #Stay Creative – FREE Virtual Art Lesson](#)
- **March 6:** [Sensory Integration Workshop](#)
- **March 8 - March 11:** [Independent Facilitation Training](#)
- **March 9:** [Rethinking Guardianship: Facilitating Lifelong Self-Determination](#)
- **March 15 - May 28:** [OUCARES PRE-EMPLOYMENT SKILLS TRAINING for Adults with Autism \(Aspergers, HFA, PDD-NOS\)](#)
- **March 17:** [The Essence of Respect – Three-Day Training](#)
- **March 18:** [Behavior Intervention in a Virtual World with Special Education Mediation Services](#)

AAoM CEO, Dr. Colleen Allen, joins Gov. Whitmer’s commission on COVID-19 vaccine education, co-chaired by AAoM Board Member, former Lt. Governor Brian Calley. Gov. Whitmer says, “The best thing we can do right now is to work together to see all of our communities through to the other side of this pandemic.” Find out more [here](#).



Upcoming AAoM Events



2021 Navigating Autism Today Virtual Conference

Friday, March 19th, 2021
9:00AM-3:45PM

Register at aaomconference.org



Free Virtual

CAREGIVER BOOTCAMP

Funded by the Karen Colina Wilson Foundation, presented to the Downriver Community

To register email trainings@aaomi.org

WEEKDAY SERIES 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

- February 4, 2021
- February 11, 2021
- February 18, 2021
- February 25, 2021

ALL DAY BOOTCAMP 8:00 AM - 4:00 PM

March 13, 2021

WEEKDAY SERIES 4:00 PM - 6:00 PM

- April 1, 2021
- April 8, 2021
- April 15, 2021
- April 22, 2021

