

Tribal Website Login Update

We have changed the way Tribal members can log into the Member Area. If you have not already updated your password, you will be prompted to reset it when attempting to log into the Member Area on the Tribal website.

This update is due to a setting with our web hosting provider that cannot be disabled. The notice you see when attempting to log into the Member Area is legit and in order to access the Member Area you must click the "Reset Password" button when prompted.

A reset password link will be sent to the email address we have on file for you through Enrollment. If you do not have an email address on file or you used your email address for multiple Tribal members, you may not have a login on the website. You can request a login by using the "Request Login" form on the website. For a majority of Tribal members, your login is already active on the Tribal website, but you will need to reset your password.

Siletz Farm doubles fresh food production, shares with community

This fall the Siletz Farm produced 6,818 pounds of fresh food that was distributed to our communities, double what we did last year!

We also saw a whopping 585 visitors to our farm these past few months and are excited to continue sharing space with our community in 2025.

If you would like to receive event updates from the Siletz Farm, please email jamesm@ctsi.nsn.us or follow the Siletz Community Health Clinic on Facebook.

For more information about the Siletz Tribal Arts and Heritage Society, visit siletzartsheritagesociety.org.

Social supports and health: Building resilience while striving to meet needs

By Nancy Ludwig, MS, RDN, LD,
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As part of my role as a consultant nutritionist to Siletz Tribal Head Start, I offer information for families and the community. Last month I wondered, how can we create relationships and activities as a means to build resilient community while addressing the needs of the world today? This month, I call attention to the link between social supports and health while also raising the questions of how we can identify, articulate and meet our health needs when social supports are lacking.

Stephen Braren, Ph.D., a neuroscientist and psychologist, writes about social connections as they relate to physical health, mental health and basic human needs in a newsletter called *The Creature Times*. He is part of a collective of scientists, creatives and activists united by a vision of a world of togetherness. A link for the organization and newsletters is referenced below.

When it comes to physical health, we are all familiar with the most commonly cited contributing factors: exercise, diet and nutrition, sleep, tobacco use or alcohol consumption. Attention has been slowly shifting to social determinants of health, such as social connections and relationships.

In May 2023, the U.S. surgeon general issued a national advisory calling attention to the "epidemic" of loneliness and social isolation as a public health concern. Social connection has finally come to light following numerous studies demonstrating the profound impact that it has on our health. This includes our physical health and even how long we live.

Interestingly, it appears that humans evolved larger brains because social connections are vital for our survival. These social connections provide advantages. There is strength and safety in numbers. Being connected to groups or traditional extended multigenerational families helps support parents to raise children, promote survival, increases quality of life and health. Ideally, Tribal connection provides social support and safety. Likewise, Head Start attempts to connect families with identified support services.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw not only how important social connection is for everyone regardless of age, but we also came to realize the dangers of social isolation. Additionally, we saw that our most vulnerable faced higher instances of social isolation.

This lack of reliable connectedness to social support networks and services emerged as a strong contributor to health inequities. Social determinants of health and connectedness are well-documented, even outside of the pandemic (World Health Organization link below).

The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) offered a webinar in November called Understanding Autism in Indigenous Communities. I hope there will be a replay at some point at the link shared below.

In this webinar, the national autism coordinator of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and director of the Office of National Autism Coordination (ONAC), Susan Daniels, Ph.D., hosted a conversation with clinical psychologist and parent, Crystal Hernandez, Psy.D., MBA (Cherokee); advocate Jim Warne, MS (Oglala Lakota [Sioux] Nation); and autistic self-advocate Jules Edwards (Anishinaabe) to talk about the intersection of their American Indian heritage with their professional and lived experiences with autism.

They discuss needs across Indigenous communities in the U.S. and recent projects and initiatives to increase outreach and provide resources to help American Indians with autism and other developmental disabilities.

As we realize the importance of social connectedness for all individuals, it seems we need to include social connectedness through the lens of neurodiversity (link to information below). Do individual differences in brain function lead to differences in the needs or desires for social connections? To begin to answer this question, we look to the social connectedness needs of individuals on the autism spectrum.

A common misunderstanding about autistic individuals is that they lack ability for social connections and therefore don't want or need connection. The bottom line is that

many autistic individuals desire social connections, but oftentimes face difficulties forging friendships due to differences in their social presentation styles.

In fact, research is increasingly revealing that the difficulties autistic individuals face with social connection stem in part from non-autistics' negative impressions of autistic social presentation styles and a subsequent reluctance to socially engage with individuals on the autism spectrum.

Social connectedness is born out of an individual's unique social needs and the opportunity to regularly meet those needs through their social network. For many, the main disadvantage of living with a disability is less about themselves and more about society's response to them. This response often comes in the form of unwelcoming reception in terms of social attitudes and institutional norms that promote exclusion.

Changing how we talk about disability can also change how we think about it. The social model of disability makes an important distinction between impairments and disabilities.

Impairments can be thought of as the functional limitations an individual might face (i.e., not being able to walk). Disabilities, on the other hand, are the disadvantages imposed on individuals by a society that views and treats impairments as abnormal, hence worthy of exclusion.

It has become painfully clear to me that those of us with invisible disabilities such as autism lack social connection and this is often accompanied with health complications. Who knows which comes first? Either way, social supports are important.

I spend a great deal of time and effort on these universal questions:

- What do I need (not just want)?
- How do I communicate my needs successfully?
- How do I get my needs met (when I can't do it alone)?

I will add another perspective as well and ask the questions, how do we support our children, friends and community to know and understand their needs? How do we hear what others wish to communicate about their needs? And how can we support or advocate for our children and

loved ones to have their needs met? Especially when we often can't meet them alone.

Needs might be medical. Needs might be relational. Needs might be for safety, food or basic shelter. These needs might also be about diet or nutritional issues.

The needs of one person are often not the same as the other. In those cases, needs must be identified and communicated to someone who is willing and able to listen and respond. This requires social connection.

In the realm of understanding another person, reflective listening, paraphrasing and expressing genuine curiosity are helpful tools to confirm understanding. Respect for each other's differences and a willingness to understand different perspectives are crucial for connection.

Unfortunately, I have more questions than answers. How can we all support each other in the pursuit of basic care and dignity? How can we live in a supportive world and community where our needs can be identified, communicated and met?

I believe we need to be aware of the divide and move toward building bridges for social connection. Misunderstanding may be at the root of social isolation and lack of connection.

Please know that Siletz Tribal Head Start offers support for nutritional consultation at no cost to Head Start families. This usually occurs over the telephone. If you have concerns about your Head Start child's nutrition or family nutrition concerns, please contact your teacher or the director and ask to speak to the nutritionist. We want to support your children and families.

Supporting information

- <https://www.thesocialcreatures.org/thecreaturetimes/>
- <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>
- <https://www.who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health>
- <https://autismawarenesscentre.com/un-adopts-new-goals-disabilities/>
- <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/news/events/2024/webinar-understanding-autism-in-indigenous-communities>