



WORK IN PROGRESS EMPLOYMENT & COMMUNITY LIFE

BUILDING COMMUNITY Through Meaningful Participation & Engagement

Thursday, May 15, 2025



LISA DRENNAN | MERGE INCLUSION CONSULTING

FACE BOOK Post By Emily Colson 12/6/21

❤️ *This is Max, my beautiful son with autism. He works at the Juice Station. Tonight he is working extra long hours...no break...no dinner, not because he has to but because he wants to. Several hours ago his boss told him he could leave and finish his jobs tomorrow. Max said he wants to finish his jobs tonight.*

If you own a business and are struggling to find employees, I encourage you to think creatively. Thousands of individuals - who love to work - are just waiting for the opportunity.

If you're unsure, stop into the Juice Station and ask Max's boss, Marianne. And while you're there, pick up a banana smoothie. Thanks to Max, there is one waiting for you.



WHAT Inclusion Is (& Isn't)

- Principles of Inclusion
 - Models of Participation
-

WHY: The Importance of Inclusion & Belonging

- Disability History & Community
 - A Tale of Two Bridges
-

HOW: Cultivating Kite Catchers & Community

- Top Inclusion Strategies
 - 3 A's = A Vital Role
-



INTRODUCTIONS & Getting On The Same Page

INTRODUCING LISA DRENNAN

OVER 4 DECADES EXPERIENCE EMPOWERING INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES TO ACHIEVE THEIR ENRICHMENT GOALS & MEANINGFULLY BELONG IN THEIR COMMUNITY

NEW ENGLAND VILLAGE



MERGE FOUNDER



SOUTH SHORE YMCA



PRINCIPLES OF INCLUSION

MERGE INCLUSION PRINCIPLES



Organizational
Commitment



Meet People
Where They Are



Let's Get to
Success



Meaningful
Participation



Working Toward
Full Inclusion



Everyone Has a
Right to Belong

A RESOURCE TOOL FOR ATTENDEES
OF A MERGE TRAINING/CONFERENCE



INCLUSION PRINCIPLES

THESE PRINCIPLES SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS YOUR ORGANIZATION DEFINES, GROWS, DEVELOPS POLICIES, OR MAKES DECISIONS AROUND YOUR INCLUSION INITIATIVE.

REACH OUT TODAY TO LEARN MORE ABOUT INCLUSION TRAININGS AND CONSULTING THAT CAN HELP YOUR ORGANIZATION TO WELCOME, ENGAGE AND SUPPORT PERSONS WITH DIVERSE ABILITIES TO BE SUCCESSFUL WITHIN YOUR RECREATION OR CAMP PROGRAMS.



ORGANIZATIONAL
COMMITMENT

All stakeholders have a responsibility and role in ensuring that inclusive practices are used universally throughout your organization, and are given the resources to do so.



WORKING TOWARD
FULL INCLUSION

Supporting a person to be as independent as possible in the least restrictive environment. Adaptive or specialized programs are used as a gateway toward full inclusion, not the end of the road.



MEANINGFUL
PARTICIPATION

Opening our doors to diverse populations is a great first step, but not enough. We commit to the intentional work ensuring that every person is supported to meet their goals and to add value through their involvement.



LET'S GET
TO SUCCESS!

A change in perspective or approach. Instead of "no we can't" we think "how can we" make this work? Using "the team" to tap into all resources to explore how you can get to YES.



MEET PEOPLE
WHERE THEY ARE AT

We change the systems to support the person, by making accommodations and modifications. Understand that success is individualized and seek to learn about a person's goals and strengths.



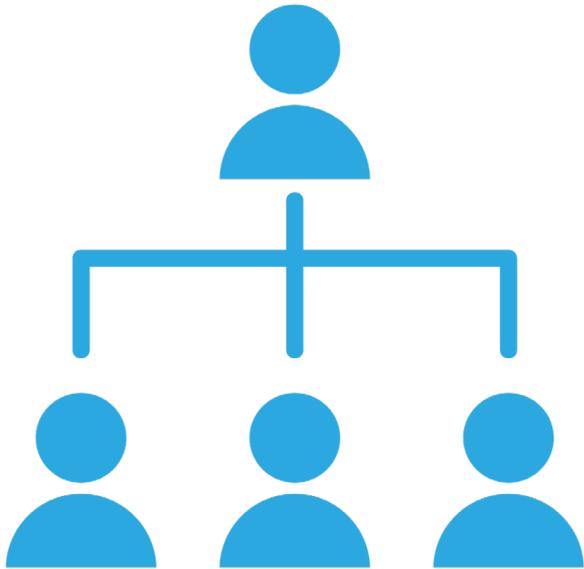
EVERYONE HAS A
RIGHT TO BELONG

To be welcomed, engaged and supported. There are many benefits and value added to opening your doors to diversity. The ADA ensures that people with disabilities have a legal right to participate.

LISA DRENNAN, FOUNDER | MERGE DIVERSE ABILITIES INCLUSION CONSULTING
lisadrennan@mergeconsulting.org | 781.724.1918 | www.mergeconsulting.org

**SUMMARY
HANDOUT MAY
BE ACCESSED
WITHIN THE
PRESENTATION
RESOURCES
ON THE
WEBSITE**

Inclusion Principle #1



Organizational Commitment

- **ALL** stakeholders have a responsibility and role
- **Resources** and **support** provided at all levels

Inclusion Principle #2



Meaningful Participation

- Not just physical proximity... instead focus on **participating together**
- Everyone has something of **value** to contribute

Inclusion Principle #3



**Meet People
Where They Are**

- We **change systems** to support the person
- By making **accommodations & modifications****

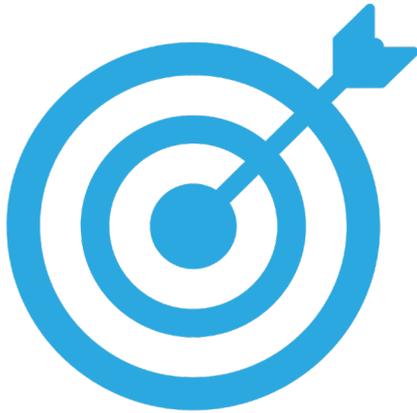
Inclusion Principle #4



**Working Toward
Full Inclusion**

- Supporting a person to be as **independent as possible** in the least restrictive environment
- Adaptive or specialized programs (or support) are used as a **gateway toward full inclusion** not the end of the road

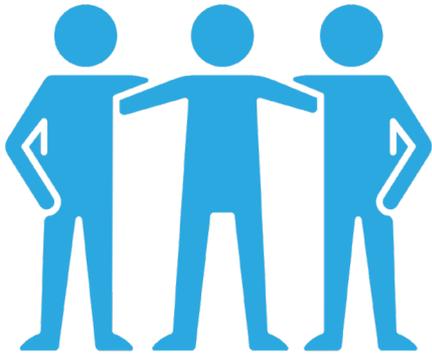
Inclusion Principle #5



**Let's Get To
Success**

- A **change** in perspective and approach
- Instead of **“no we can't”** think **“how can we”** make this work

Inclusion Principle #6



**Everyone Has A
Right To Belong**

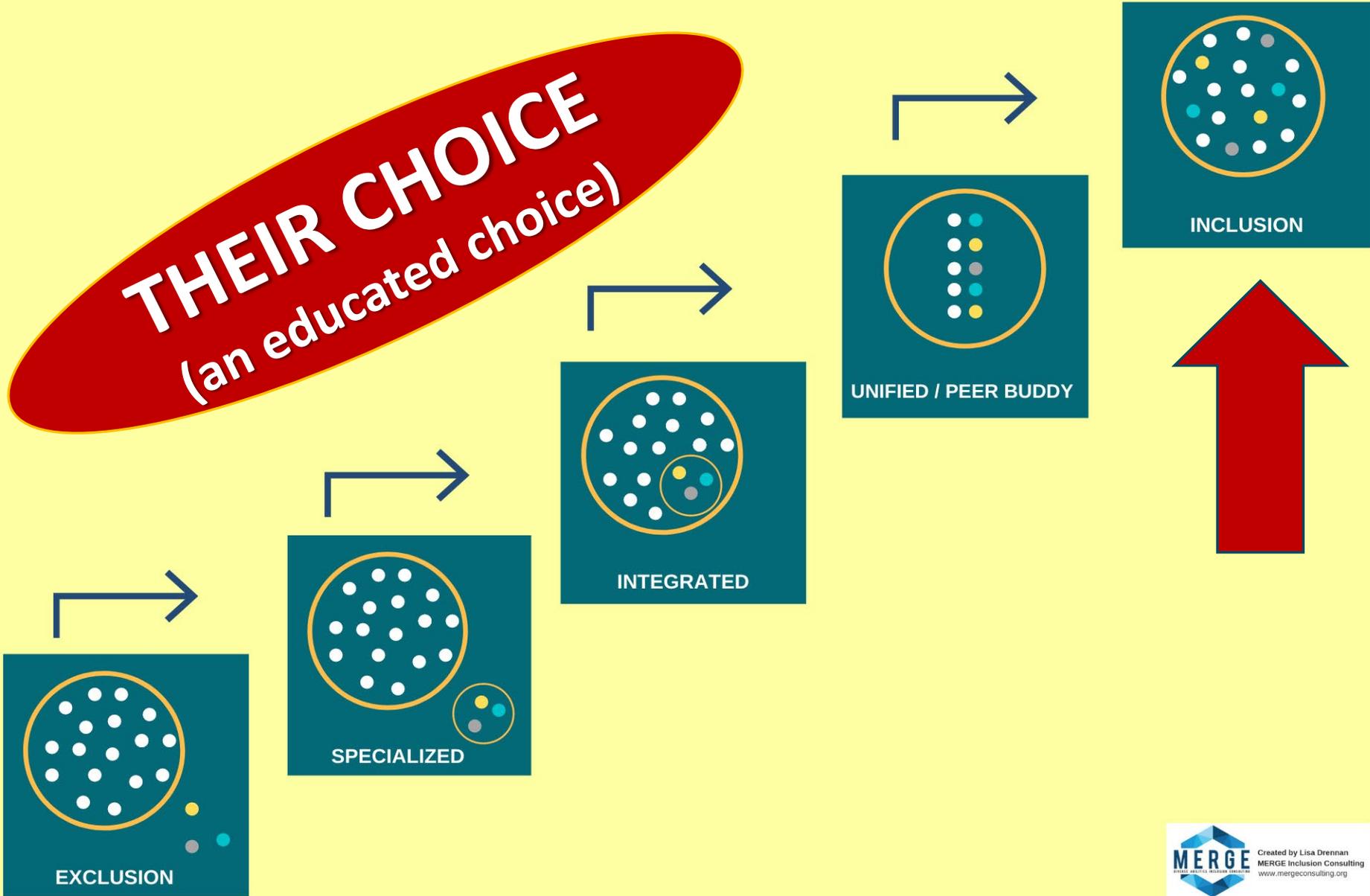
- To be **welcomed, engaged and supported**
- The **ADA ensures** that persons with disabilities have a legal right to participate

**Inclusion is
a way of thinking,
a way of being,
and a way of making
decisions about
helping everyone belong**





MODELS OF PARTICIPATION



MODELS OF PARTICIPATION

Inclusion is supporting all participants, instructors/staff and the system as a whole so that the full range of participation needs can be met. Focus is on development of good instructional strategies that will be of benefit to all learners. Attention is given toward overcoming barriers in the system that prevent it from meeting the range of differing levels of abilities.

The system changes to meet the needs of ALL.



INCLUSION

UNIFIED / PEER BUDDY models joins people with and without disabilities to participate together in an activity. Typically there are equal number of persons with disabilities to nondisabled peers who are often engaged as volunteers in this role.



UNIFIED / PEER BUDDY

Integration is a process of placing participants with disabilities in existing activities. A focus is on giving the participants support so they can "fit in" to the existing system.



INTEGRATED

Specialized programs or "disability specific" programs are offered with instruction of participants provided in separate environments designed to respond to a particular or various impairments.



SPECIALIZED

Exclusion occurs when participants are directly or indirectly prevented from or denied access to an activity.



EXCLUSION



MERGE Diverse Abilities Inclusion Consulting | www.mergeconsulting.org

**SUMMARY
HANDOUT MAY
BE ACCESSED
WITHIN THE
PRESENTATION
RESOURCES
ON THE
WEBSITE**

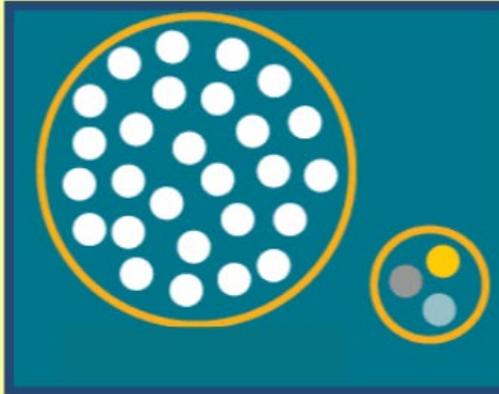
EXCLUSION MODEL

EXAMPLES | BENEFITS | BARRIERS



Exclusion occurs when participants are directly or indirectly prevented from or denied access to an activity.

INCLUSION IS NOT



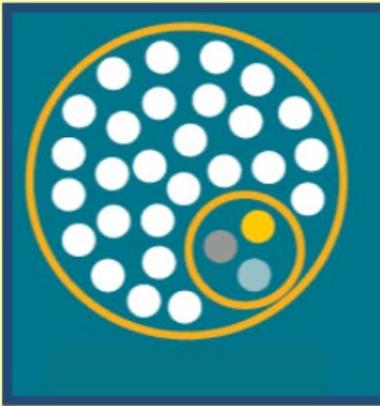
Specialized or "disability specific" programs are offered with instruction of participants provided in separate environments designed to respond to a particular or various impairments.

WHAT ARE EXAMPLES OF A SPECIALIZED OR ADAPTIVE PROGRAM OR SUPPORTS IN YOUR COMMUNITIES?

BENEFITS?

RESTRICTIONS?

INCLUSION IS NOT



Integration is a process of placing participants with disabilities in existing activities. A focus is on giving the participants support so they can "fit in" to the existing system.

WHAT ARE EXAMPLES OF AN **INTEGRATED** PROGRAM OR SUPPORTS IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

BENEFITS?

RESTRICTIONS?

INCLUSION IS NOT



UNIFIED / PEER BUDDY

UNIFIED / PEER BUDDY models joins people with and without disabilities to participate together in an activity. Typically there are equal number of persons with disabilities to nondisabled peers who are often engaged as volunteers in this role.

WHAT ARE EXAMPLES OF A UNIFIED OR PEER MENTOR PROGRAM OR SUPPORTS IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

BENEFITS?

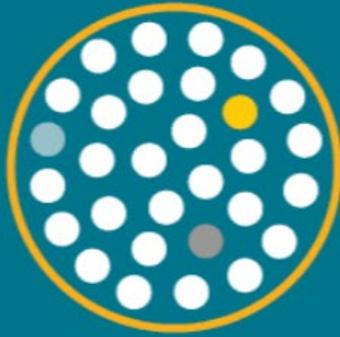
RESTRICTIONS?



INCLUSION IS ABOUT INTENTIONALLY PLANNING FOR THE SUCCESS OF ALL.



INCLUSION IS.....



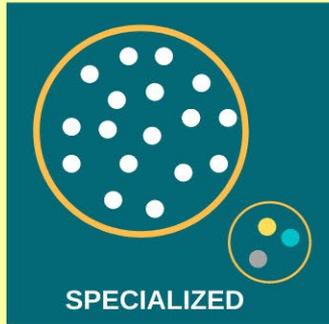
Inclusion is supporting all participants, instructors/staff and the system as a whole so that the full range of participation needs can be met. Focus is on development of good instructional strategies that will be of benefit to all learners. Attention is given toward overcoming barriers in the system that prevent it from meeting the range of differing levels of abilities.

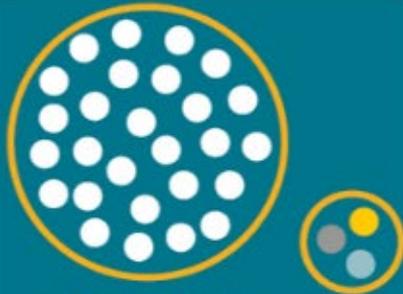
The system changes to meet the needs of ALL.

REFLECT ON WHEN SOMEONE YOU SUPPORT HAS PARTICIPATED IN AN INCLUSION MODEL.

WHAT TYPE OF SETTING, ACTIVITY OR GROUP WAS IT?

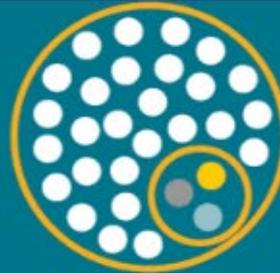
THEIR CHOICE (an educated choice)





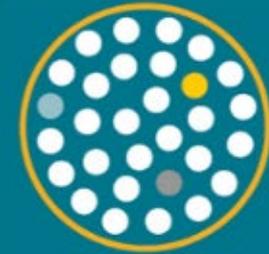
SEGREGATION

Specialized or "disability specific" programs are offered with instruction of participants provided in separate environments designed to respond to a particular or various impairments.



INTEGRATION

Integration is a process of placing participants with disabilities in existing activities with the support of their staff or family member. A focus is on giving the participants support so they can "fit in" to the existing system.



INCLUSION

Inclusion is supporting individuals with disabilities and community members so that the full range of participation needs can be met for people with disabilities to participate side-by-side with their non-disabled peers. Attention is given toward overcoming barriers in the system that prevent it from meeting the range of differing levels of abilities.

LET'S EXPLORE COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION SCENARIOS WHICH MODEL ARE THEY?

Sue Works At BITTY & BEAU's Special Needs Coffee Shop

Tim Works At A Local Starbucks

Group home staff brings 3 individuals to church (they alternate between 3 different faiths)

Bobby Joins The Church Choir Where He is a member

James Joins A Bowling League With A Coworker From Starbucks

Elaine Attends Bowling At Alley Kat Lanes (for students accessing special education)

John Signs Up For the Arc Sponsored "Drums Alive" Class At A Local YMCA

Staff Bring 2 Individuals To The Volunteer Time At The Local Food Bank

Asha and Jamie join the water aerobics class at the town pool

A Job Coach Bring 3 Individuals To Their Job At CVS Assisting Them With Their Tasks

✓ Bitty & Beau's Coffee Shop

✓ Church With Staff

✓ Working At Starbucks

✓ Alley Kat Lane Bowling

✓ Volunteering At The Food Bank

✓ Member of The Church Choir

✓ YMCA Drum's Alive

✓ Typical Bowling League

✓ Class at the town pool

✓ Job Coach At CVS

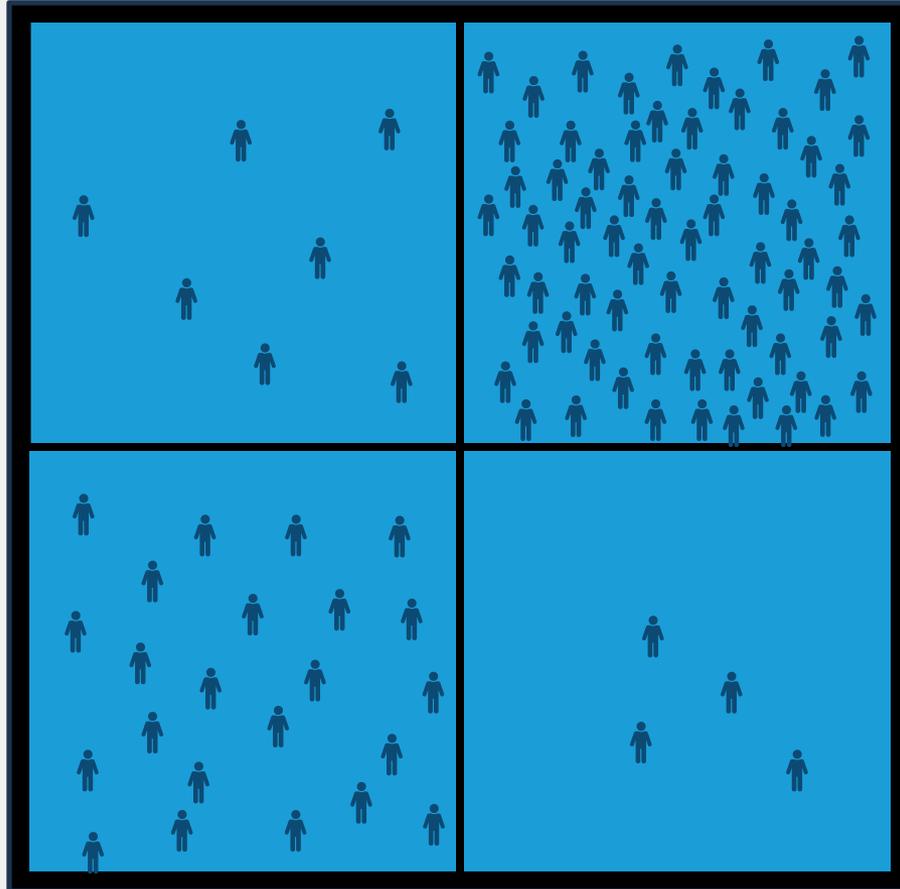


Disability History & Community

AN IMAGE OF NON-BELONGING

“Who Is In My Life” Relationship Map

Family Members
Avg: 7%



Other People with Disabilities
Avg: 65%

Paid Human Service Professionals
Avg: 23%

Friends or other Citizens
Avg: >5%

DISABILITY HISTORY



Despite decades of advancement in disability rights and efforts, there are still aspects of our societies that continue to be inaccessible to people with disabilities



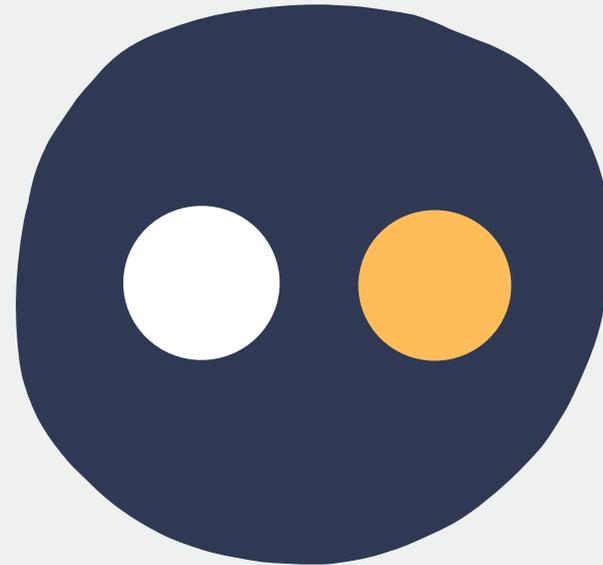
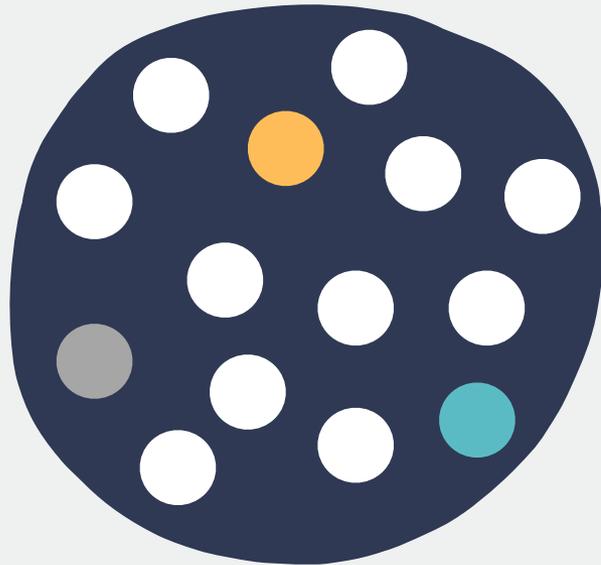
People with disabilities may be **in** our community,
but no always members **of** our community.



“

True inclusion
begins when
people can
**stop being
guests in
their own
communities.**
- Unknown

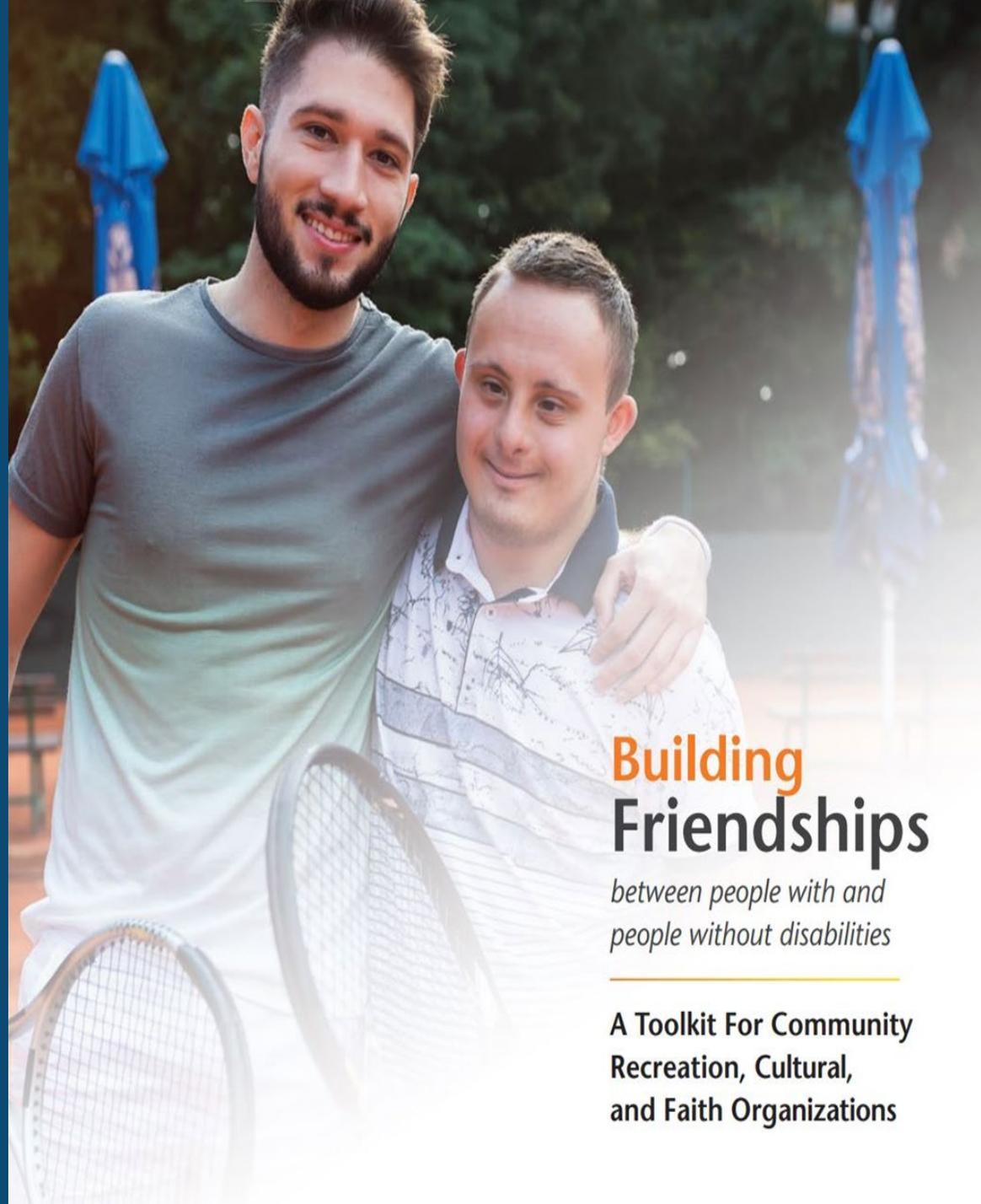
MODELS OF PARTICIPATION



Inclusion is a pathway to **friendship**



Announcing The Building Friendships Toolkit



Building Friendships

*between people with and
people without disabilities*

**A Toolkit For Community
Recreation, Cultural,
and Faith Organizations**



A TALE OF TWO BRIDGES

Community Inclusion

A Tale of Two Bridges

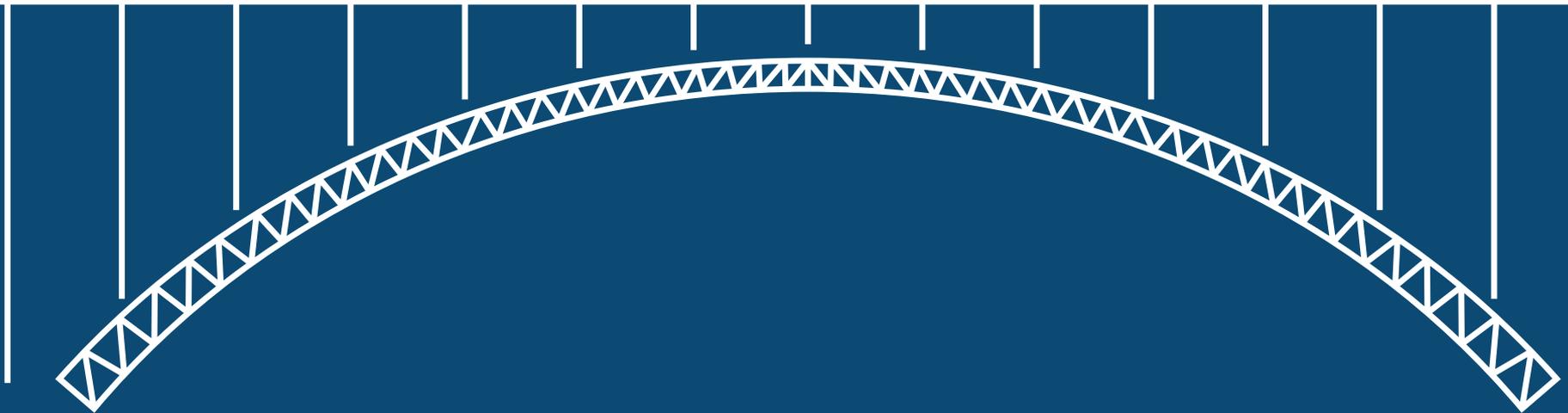
A parable shared by Jack Yates



BRIDGE ONE

Building the first suspension bridge across the **Niagara Gorge** in 1846 required out-of-the-box thinking.

This bridge, designed to carry a railroad between Canada and the U.S., faced a major challenge: how to get the first cable across the gorge.



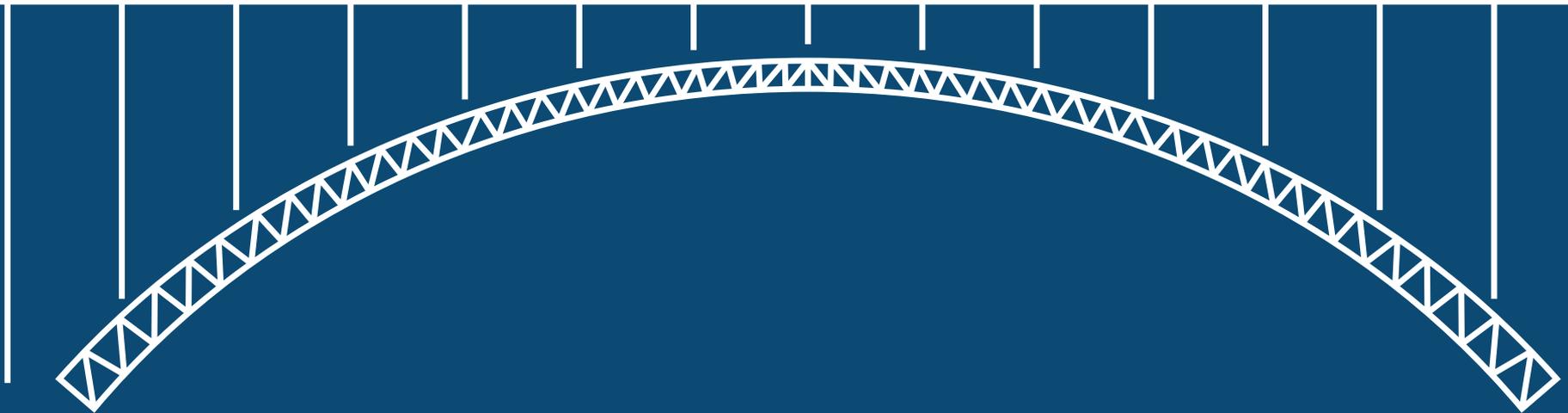
BRIDGE TWO

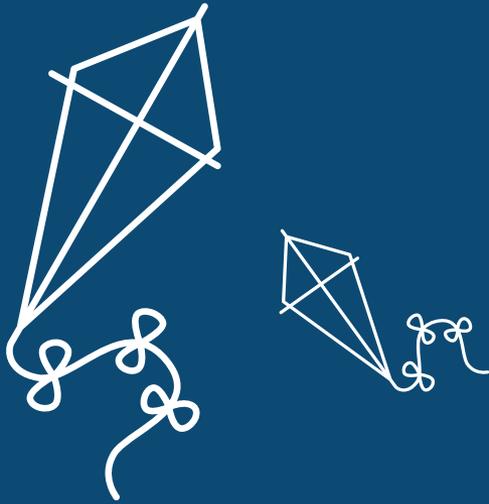
The **Brooklyn Bridge** by comparison, had it easy—engineers ferried the first cable across the East River.



BRIDGE ONE

But in Niagara, with steep cliffs and raging waters, a boat crossing was impossible. Many doubted a bridge could be built at all.

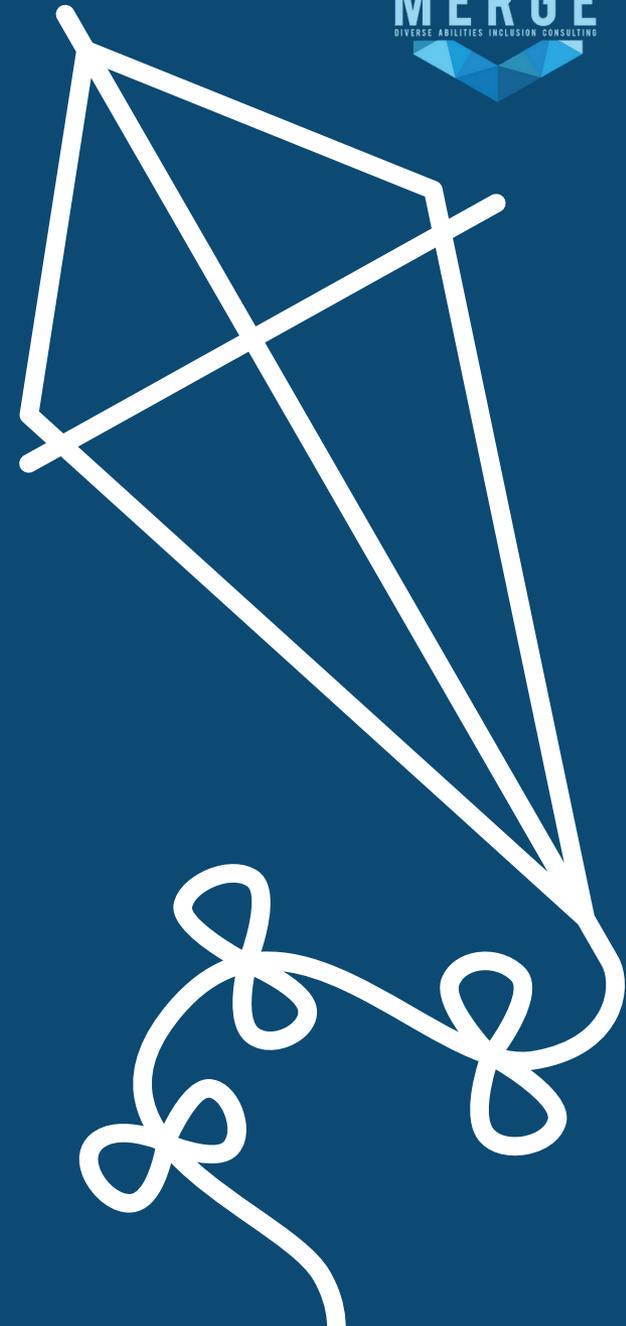




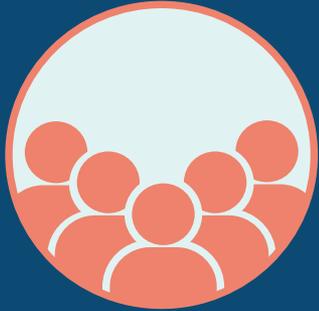
The answer? **A kite-flying contest.**

The winning kite, carried by a strong west wind, reached the opposite shore, where a waiting crew caught it.

They then used the kite string to pull across a stronger line, repeating the process over and over until a steel cable four feet thick spanned the gorge—strong enough to support the railroad.



CONNECTING OUR WORK



Individuals with disabilities,
their families, and
agencies supporting
them toward inclusion



**Employers, Recreation and
community program
providers**
who may lack the experience
or expertise to support
individuals with disabilities in
their programs

HOW DO WE BRIDGE THE GAP?



We work to bridge divides between people historically segregated in service systems and their communities.

True bridge-building **isn't one-sided**; it requires foundations on both shores. To succeed, we must engage allies on the other side —**ready to catch the kites we fly.**

CONNECT THE BANKS



Community Inclusion



We must build strong foundations on both sides, find **allies** to **catch our kites**, and remember that even the largest bridges start with a single thread of connection.



Who are our kite catchers,
and how can we **build and
strengthen** our connections
with them?



TOP BEST PRACTICE

Top Best Practices

TOWARD
COMMUNITY
INCLUSION



Involve The Individual You Support

ENSURE THEIR VOICE IS HEARD

By engaging a person-centered planning focus

WHAT MAKES THEM SHINE

Their interests, their purpose, their gifts, what they can share?



They (their dreams) drive this process.
As we go through this process, we want to help those involved with the **focus person** see the **total** person, recognize his or her **desires** and **interests**, and discover completely **new ways** of thinking about the future of the person."

— *Beth Mount & Kay Zwernik*



Working With Kite Catchers – Info Sharing

INFO SHARING

Sharing about support needs *

STRENGTHS FOCUSED

Go ahead and brag! Their strengths, talents, interests

GOOD COMMUNICATION PRACTICE

Discuss confidentiality
Share on a need-to-know basis only



Provide Effective Support

SET UP FOR SUCCESS

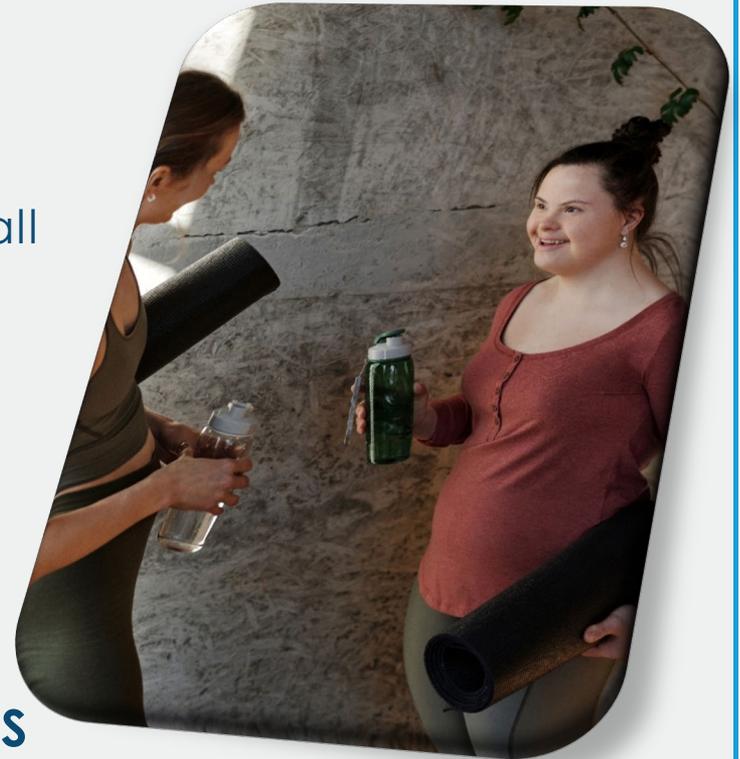
Being prepared leads to success for all
Ask for schedules or expectations

BE ENGAGED & RESPONSIVE

Build independence -“Aid & Fade”
Available for problem solving

FACILITATE SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

Ensure before and after activity/work time
Model techniques to increase interactions
with peers



BE A TRIPLE A



ADVOCATE



ALLY



AMBASSADOR

DISABILITY ETIQUETTE LANGUAGE GUIDE

WORDS MATTER: Learning and using acceptable, empowering words with a focus on positive attributes and strengths, can show respect to people with disabilities.

WORDS TO LOSE

WORDS TO LIVE BY

the handicapped/disabled ➔ persons with a disability*

she is mentally ill/emotionally disturbed ➔ she has a mental health condition*

the

confined

stricken with

SP

differently abled/han

*Person First Language
Exception preference
older teen language -

MERGE www.mergeconsulting.org

DISABILITY ETIQUETTE GUIDELINES

Building Inclusive Communities Together



Disability etiquette is a set of guidelines dealing specifically with how to interact with a person who has a disability. The focus of these principles is based on treating people with respect. A basic understanding of these principles can help make community members feel more comfortable when interacting with peers with disabilities. And remember if you are not sure JUST ASK!



Speak directly to a person with a disability, not to their companion, staff, aide, or family member.

Be age appropriate when you speak with an adult with a disability, as you would any other adult.

Ask before you help a person with a disability.

Avoid negative words that imply tragedy, such as afflicted with, suffers, victim, or unfortunate.

Avoid cute euphemisms such as being physically challenged, inconvenienced or differently abled.

When communicating about a person, equally important, ask yourself if the disability is even relevant and needs to be mentioned when referring to individuals.

Look past the disability get to know someone by asking questions.

Do not make assumptions about what a person can or cannot do = *presume competence*.

Avoid portraying a person with disability as inspirational simply because they live with disability. Implying a person is courageous or superhuman for doing everyday things can be patronizing.

Use person first language to tell what a person HAS, not what a person IS. An objective way of acknowledging and communicating about disabilities. "A child with Epilepsy" rather than "The epileptic child".

LISA DRENNAN, FOUNDER | MERGE DIVERSE ABILITIES INCLUSION CONSULTING
lisadrennan@mergeconsulting.org | 781.724.1918 | www.mergeconsulting.org

BONUS: SUMMARY HANDOUTS IN YOUR RESOURCE FOLDER



I WANT TO LIVE IN A WORLD
WHERE PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES
BEAR LABELS LIKE
FRIEND, LEADER, COWORKER,
TEACHER, AND PARTNER,
MORE THAN SPECIAL, INSPIRING,
ANGELIC, OR SWEET

-BEHTAN MCKINNEY FOX



MERGE Diverse Abilities Inclusion Consulting | www.mergeconsulting.org

WRAP UP AND REFLECTION



SCAN ME

REFLECT AND CONSIDER.....

- Your “AHA” Moment
- Your Takeaway
- What will you implement?
- What will you share?





THANK YOU! SHARE THE LOVE

Lisa Drennan
Founder of MERGE Inclusion Consulting

781.724.1918
lisadrennan@mergeconsulting.org
mergeconsulting.org

