



# Spellbinding **NETWORKS** SPIN WORKSHOP 2025

# Desired Outcomes for This Workshop

Participants will learn/become aware of/practice:

- ★ The benefits of creating **social supports and friendship circles** for students with disabilities--boosting self-esteem, reducing feelings of isolation, improving social skills, etc.
- ★ The importance of **inclusive practices and mentors** in creating a sense of belonging and opportunities for personal growth and positive social connections
- ★ Tips for families on what they can do **at home and in the community** to support their child's social development
- ★ Where to go online or in the community for **more information** about building positive social networks for students with disabilities.

Benjamin Chu,  
Ph.D

SPIN Advisor, Mentor,  
and Mentee



## Personal Background

- Born in Worcester, Massachusetts
- Diagnosed with Autism Spectrum disorder at 1 year and 11 months
- Received his Bachelors in Science at UHM in Family Consumer Sciences
- Received his Master's in Science and PhD in Health Economics
- Worked at the summer fun program at Wesley United Methodist Church for 12 years
- Taught courses in Economics and Data science at UHM
- Worked as a Social Science Research Analyst at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (Part C and D Star Ratings Quality Bonus Payment Program)
- Currently works as a Health Economist with BerryDunn





## Health Economics

RESEARCH ARTICLE

### Who did the ACA Medicaid expansion impact? Estimating the probability of being a complier

Benjamin C. Chu

First published: 03 April 2023 | <https://doi.org/10.1002/hec.4682> |

JEL classification: I13, I30 | Citations: 1

The views presented are those of the author. This paper also uses data from the American Community Survey (ACS) and can be obtained directly from the Census Bureau File Transfer Protocol (FTP) site (<https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/data/pums/>). I thank Timothy Halliday, Teresa Molina, Dylan Moore, Sang Hyop Lee, Ruben Juarez, Victoria Fan and participants at the UH Mānoa Applied Microeconomics Seminar for excellent comments and feedback that have contributed to the progress of this paper.

[Correction added on 5 May 2023, after first online publication: The term 'AT' has been expanded to 'always takers' throughout the article in this version.]

Read the full text

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# Why Social Support Matters?

## Boosts Self-Esteem and Confidence

Children with autism who have even one close peer relationship report higher levels of self-worth and a stronger sense of identity

## Reduces Isolation and Loneliness

Structured social support helps break that isolation and promotes feelings of belonging.



## Improve Communication and Social Skills

Repeated peer interaction allows students to practice turn-taking, eye contact, emotional regulation, and conversational skills in natural, motivating contexts

## Supports Mental Health and Reduces Anxiety

Social connectedness is a protective factor, and children with strong peer ties are more resilient to stress and social challenges

# Inclusive Practices That Build Belonging



**Autistic individuals  
have always defied the  
low expectations placed  
upon them. They deserve  
to be seen for their talents,  
their aspirations, and  
their humanity.**

**Seema Flower**

# Tina King

## SPIN Advisor and Mom

Special Education Advisory Council, SPIN  
Advisor, Advocate





# Connecting

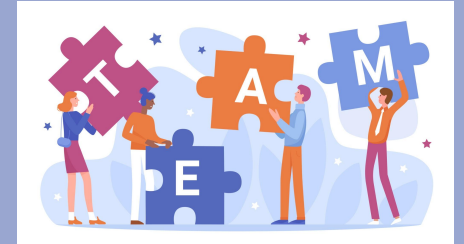
## Vision/Goals

Where do I begin?

Who are my child's support system?

What happens when hope begins to wane?

- Remember the Who and Why
- What can be done better?
- What's available?
- What can be created?
- What are the needs?
- What does the student need/want?
- What are the students interests?
- Who can make it happen?





# Advocacy

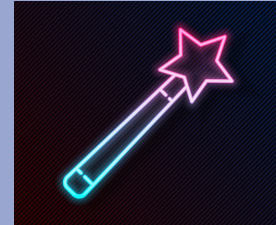


## Build a Team (Village)

- Student
- Team (IEP/Program)
- Community/Programs

## Action Steps

- Communication
- Plan
- Support
- Advocate



***Don't Give Up! Celebrate progress, wins big & small!***

# Encourage

- Self Advocacy
- Opportunities
- Persistence
- Support
- Solutions
- Teamwork
- Appreciate
- Independence



Celebrate!





# Zach King

## Senior, Kapolei HS

Self-Advocate (Individual w/ASD/ADHD),  
Amazing Young Man



# Mentors that made Impact

- Mr. Dufford, Freshman year - former World History teacher, Care Coordinator, currently SPED Dept Head at Kapolei High School
  - Created an comfortable, accepting, inclusive class environment. Encouraged and supported growth.
- Mr. Lagrimas, former Language Arts Teacher, TA Class, Care Coordinator
  - Enjoyed LA, encouraged/supported self advocacy, personal growth. Advocated for more inclusive & general education classes.
- Ms. Sumile, Modern History of Hawaii Teacher, confidant,
  - Provided counsel/safe space, encouragement, academic & personal growth.
- Ms. Amparo, Drama Teacher, TA Class
  - Created a social network of friendships through Drama Classes & Productions. A culture of creativity, acceptance, opportunity, a safe space of encouragement & inclusivity.
- Ms. Mohammed, former Science Teacher, Care Coordinator
  - Supported personal and academic, social emotional, and personal support & growth. Supporter of inclusive environments.
  -
- Mr. Chun, Ready to Work Program, Founder
  - Provided a class & work opportunity paid internship, encouragement, and network.

DVR - Lanakila Pacific  
(Paid Internship)

# Opportunities

Ready to Work Program

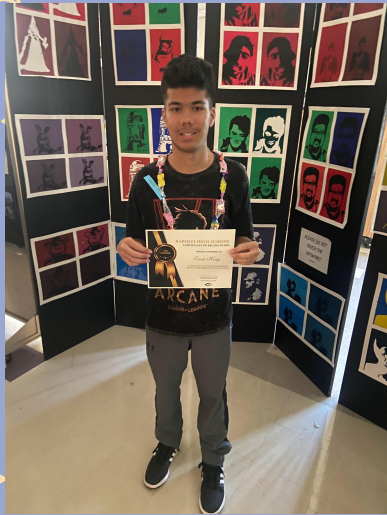




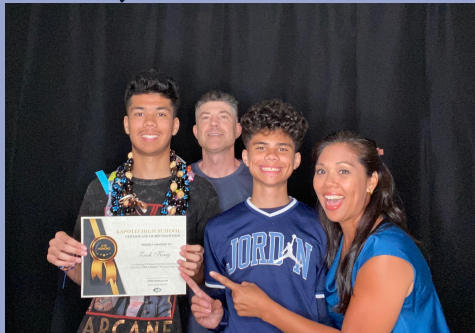
# Memorable Moments



# Achievement



Career & Technology  
Education Honors (Film &  
Media)



Graduation!  
Class of 2025



Honor Roll

Kapolei High School  
Hurricane of the Month





# Shelby Hastings

## Inclusive Practices Educator







# Importance of Friendship

"There has been considerable research showing the importance of childhood friendships for later development, with the long-term outcomes of having a good friend cutting across social-emotional development and academic performance at school."





# Potential Barriers and Supports



- Communication differences
- Sensory sensitivities
- Social skill development
- Limited opportunities for interaction
- Public misconceptions



Peer Support  
and Mentoring

Environmental  
Modifications

Social Skills  
Instruction

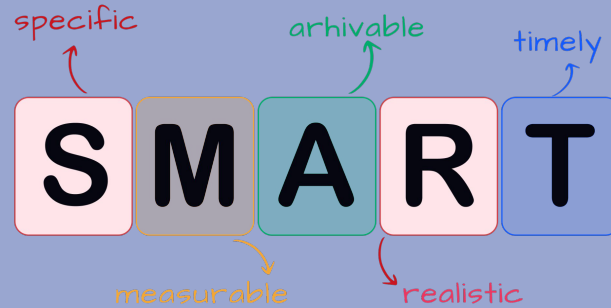


Structured Social  
Opportunities

Adult Support and  
Facilitation

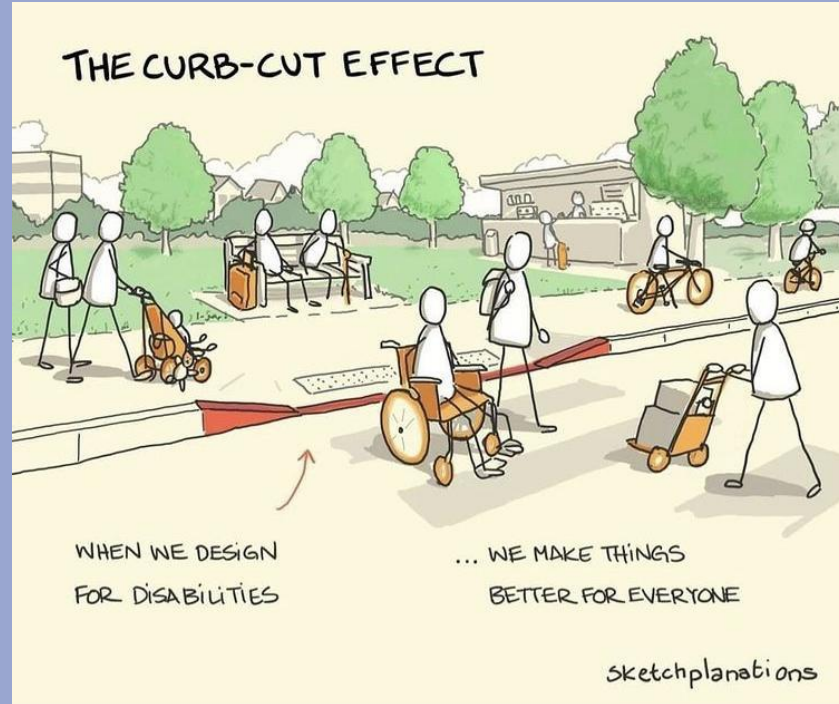
Communication  
Supports

# Structured Goals for IEP



- ★ Initiating Interactions
- ★ Maintaining Conversations
- ★ Understanding Social Cues
- ★ Participating in Group Activities
- ★ Developing Empathy and Perspective-Taking
- ★ Conflict Resolution

# Inclusion Conclusion



“Inclusion is not a strategy to help people fit into the systems and structures which exist in our societies; it is about transforming those systems and structures to make it better for everyone.” — Diane Richler



# Mahalo nui loa

Do you have any questions?

Stick around for a Q and A / Talk  
Story

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