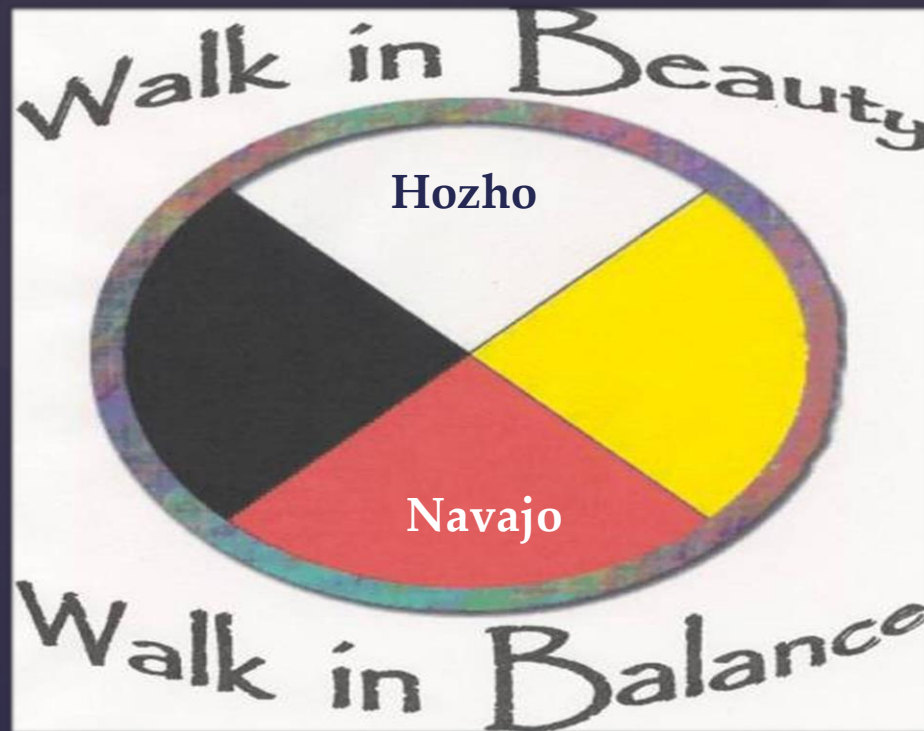


# Comparing Indigenous Approaches to Autism with Western Approaches to Autism

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## Research Questions & Agenda

### 1. Research Questions

- A. What are Indigenous approaches to Autism and Healing?
- B. How do these approaches explore [stories](#) in the healing process?
- C. Do popular, Western websites include Indigenous perspectives on Autism?

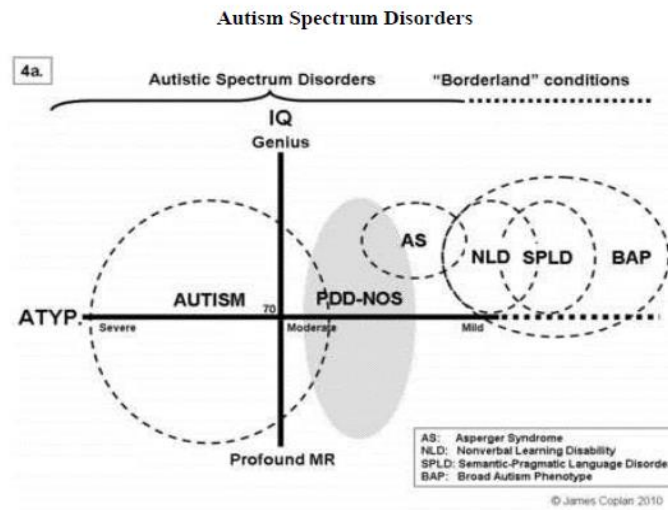
### 2. Literature Review that includes Indigenous and Western Perspectives on Autism.

How do different knowledge systems view Autism?

- A. The **Navajo** views Autism as a [beautiful difference](#) that the family of maternal mentors can help guide autistic relatives into developing their unique strengths.
- B. [Horse Boy World](#) helps children with ASD & their families with equestrian therapy views autism as a gateway to [healing](#) and nature.
- C. [Autism Society of Canada](#) & [Autism Speaks](#) websites view Autism as a **disorder** providing diverse & conflicting Western interventions.
- D. [Dogheirs.com](#) provides dog companionship linking homeless dogs to people with autism & dog training resources. [Surfershealing.com](#) is a free surf camp.

**Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)** are defined according to Raphael Bernier and Jennifer Gerdts, (2010) as:

An array of diagnoses, including Autistic Disorder, Asperger's Disorder, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder—Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS). Impaired social interactions are common among all 3 of the diagnoses, and is the core area of functioning impacted in ASD (p.1). Impairments in each of these areas occur along a spectrum from minimal to severe and categorical diagnoses involve defining a cut off (p. 3).

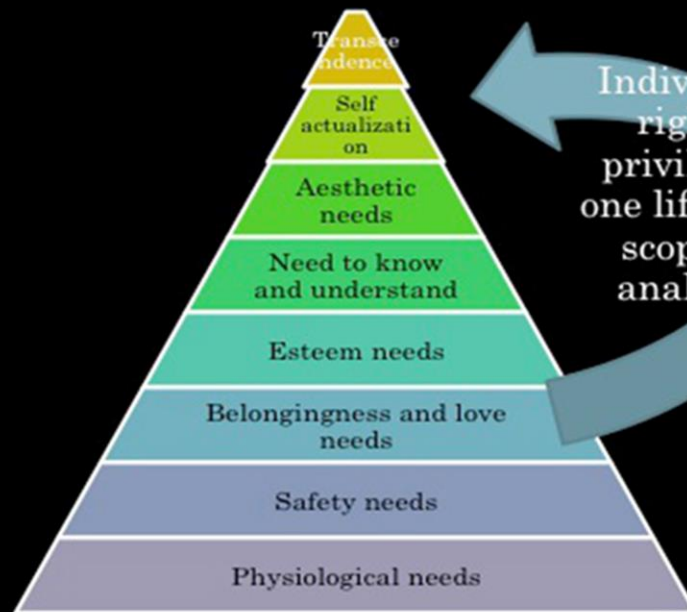


Taken From: Coplan, J. (2010). Making Sense of Autistic Spectrum Disorders: A critical review of fact, fiction, and speculation in the field of autism. *Psychology Today*. (06). Retrieved From: <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/making-sense-autistic-spectrum-disorders/201006/007-no-autism-epidemic-part-1>.



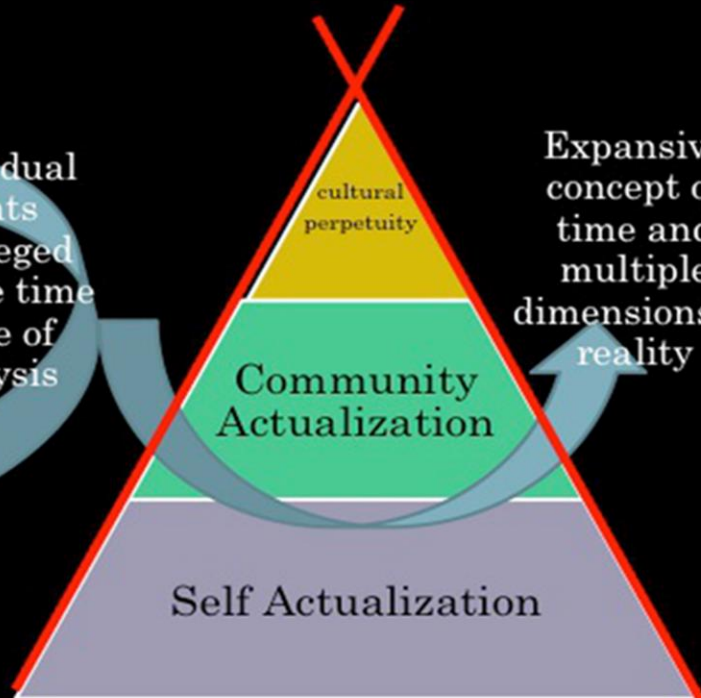
# MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS (INFORMED BY BLACKFOOT NATION (ALTA))

## Western Perspective



## First Nations Perspective

Individual rights privileged one life time scope of analysis



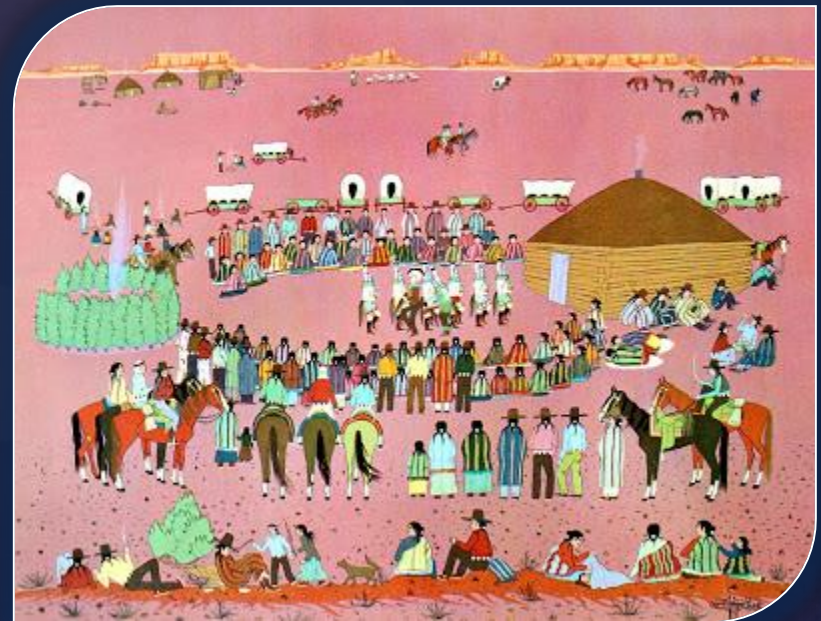
Expansive concept of time and multiple dimensions of reality

Huitt, 2004; Blackstock, 2008; Wadsworth,

West: Bottom to Top: 1 way linear  
Food & shelter 1<sup>st</sup> priority  
Career = Self Actualization, top priority  
Individualism, profit builds wealth & health insurance.

First Nations: Triangle = Tipi. Being blessed with basic needs & giving thanks for them by helping my community learning in a continuing circle builds security, safety & health.

The Navajo traditionally view the differences in Autistic relatives as beautiful and help them live in harmony through learning from many relatives through their philosophy of Hozho. This serves the needs of Autistic people better than the Western notion of ‘progress’ through science and technology” (Kapp, 2011, p. 583). Navajos care for their elderly and disabled within their own cultural community (Kapp, 2011, p. 583) .



Parents who cope well with Autistic children make cognitive and lifestyle changes, such as placing less importance on their careers and materialism and more importance on their role as parents and the enjoyment of family and community social interactions (Luther, Canham, and Young Cureton 2005) (Kapp, 2011, p. 591).

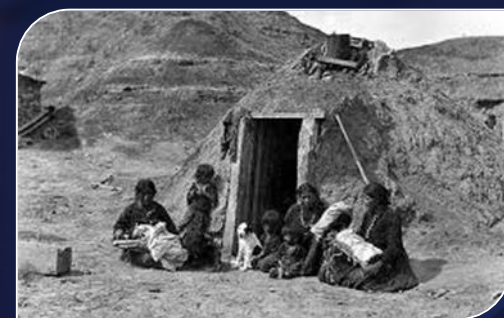


Navajo families live together with their relatives and their clans share the responsibility of fulfilling roles such as tending to local farms, caring for the sick, disabled, or elderly.

Navajo clans of distant or no blood relation teach the young morality, and responsibility within the clan and community (Frankland et al. 2004).

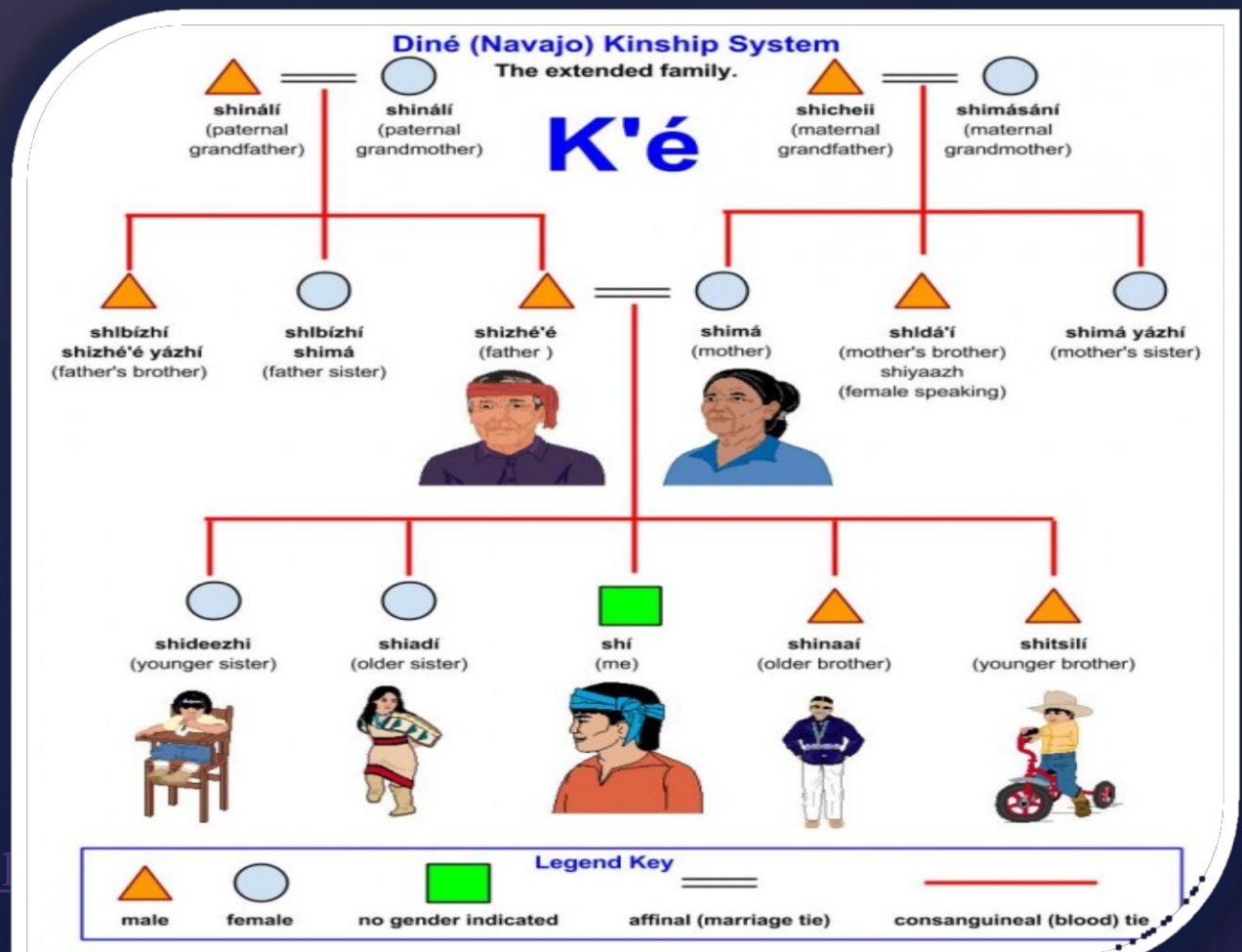


### Navajo Healing Chant



## The main attributes of Navajo kinship are:

1. The basic term k'é refers to solidarity, love, compassion, kindness, friendliness, generosity, & peacefulness.
2. Matrilineal — descent is traced through one's mother
3. Matrilocal — husbands go to reside with wife's family, giving older females authority in running the household and controlling property.





In Deanne Durrett's *American Indian Lives: Healers*, Navajo medicine men perform chants (prayers in song) to bring patients back in balance and harmony with the universe.

- Each Navajo medicine singer knows 35+ chants. One chant may contain 500 songs.
- Medicine men use certain designs for sand paintings to be used with the chant which is designed for a specific illness.
- The patient sits or lays on the sand painting during the ceremony.
- Power is absorbed from the sacred objects depicted in the sand painting.
- Each sand painting must be destroyed before sunset.

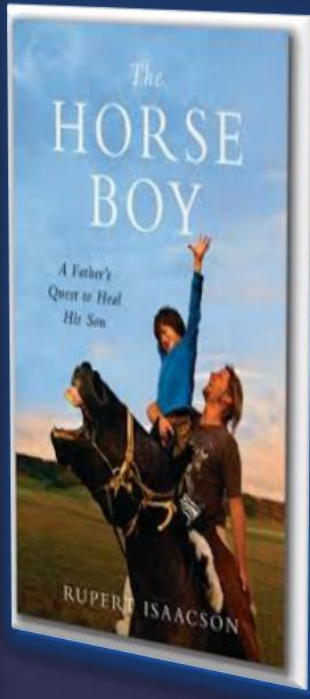
[Navajo healing song](#)





## Western medicine views neural differences as disorders

Rupert Isaacson sees the mysterious connection children with autism share with animals as a gateway into a family healing journey through adventures with animals.



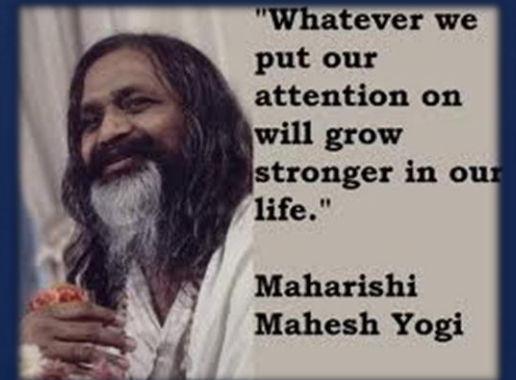
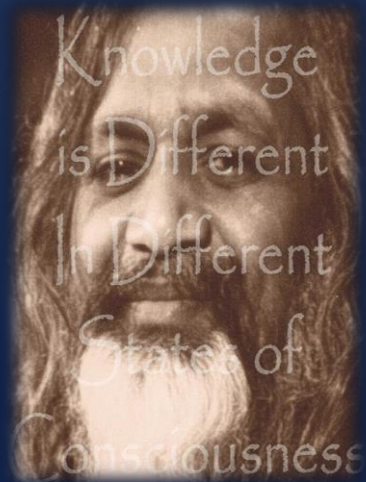
Isaacson runs a horse riding camp for children with autism and a resource website. He claims that while his camp does not cure autism, it does help children with autism to overcome extreme tantrums, incontinence, while learning to communicate and socialize with their peers. <https://horseboyworld.com/horse-boy-foundation/foundation-home>.

The *Autism Society of Canada* website shares Mrs. Yvonne Kurtz's success story of, teaching her son Adam transcendental meditation to help him cope with his symptoms of Asperger's Syndrome.

Transcendental Meditation originated from His Holiness Maharishi Mahesh Yogi of India. His teachings could benefit people with Autism and the general population in coping with stress. Western approaches must learn the philosophy of Transcendental Meditation to live it.

Focusing on Autistic strengths makes a person stronger!

Western medicine focusing on Autistic weaknesses makes a person weaker!





## Healing Stories from:



Iris is a 4 yr. old on the autism spectrum. She struggles with communicating with others, but expresses herself through art. This kitten is always at Iris's side, bathes with her and sleeps in her arms. She named her Thula after one of her favourite African lullabies called 'Thula, Thula' meaning peace and tranquillity in Zulu.



Linda Hickey believes her son with autism Jonny rescued Xena from her pain and Xena rescued him from his autistic pain. "These 2 were destined to be together — to save each other at a level that humans just can't understand." Pet adoption of abandoned dogs and service dog training accessed at [dogheirs.com](http://dogheirs.com).



Xena had a 1% chance  
of survival

<http://www.dogheirs.com/tamara/posts/4635-powerful-bond-saves-dog-and-autistic-boy#gtUFgoaWpQ2XA0J3.99>





Western nations attempt to ‘cure’ Autistic people by changing their differences draw similarities to past Western efforts to ‘improve’ and ‘civilize’ Indigenous peoples through ethnocide. The cross-cultural analysis reveals Navajo epistemology with positive implications for people with autism suffering in Western society.

The need to raise people’s “quality of life through changing the social environment for intercultural survival” in a globalized hegemonic world rekindles the value of sharing stories across intersections of culture, nature, disability, art, & songs (Kapp, 2011, p. 591).



## Haber, M. Using Ocean Therapy and Surfing to Treat Adolescent Autism. Beautiful Son Hawaii Autism Foundation

Many teens with Autism dislike Western medical interventions & want to connect with nature in outdoor sports. Reconnecting with nature enables them to reconnect with their families through moments of joy instead of moments of stress.

Children with autism are at peace in the ocean feeling the sensations of the waves on their skin and the power of the ocean swells which differs from regular, everyday experiences  
(Haber, 2011).

Surfers Healing are professional surfers teaching surfing to children with autism for free providing free surf boards and equipment.

Go to [www.surfershealing.com](http://www.surfershealing.com)

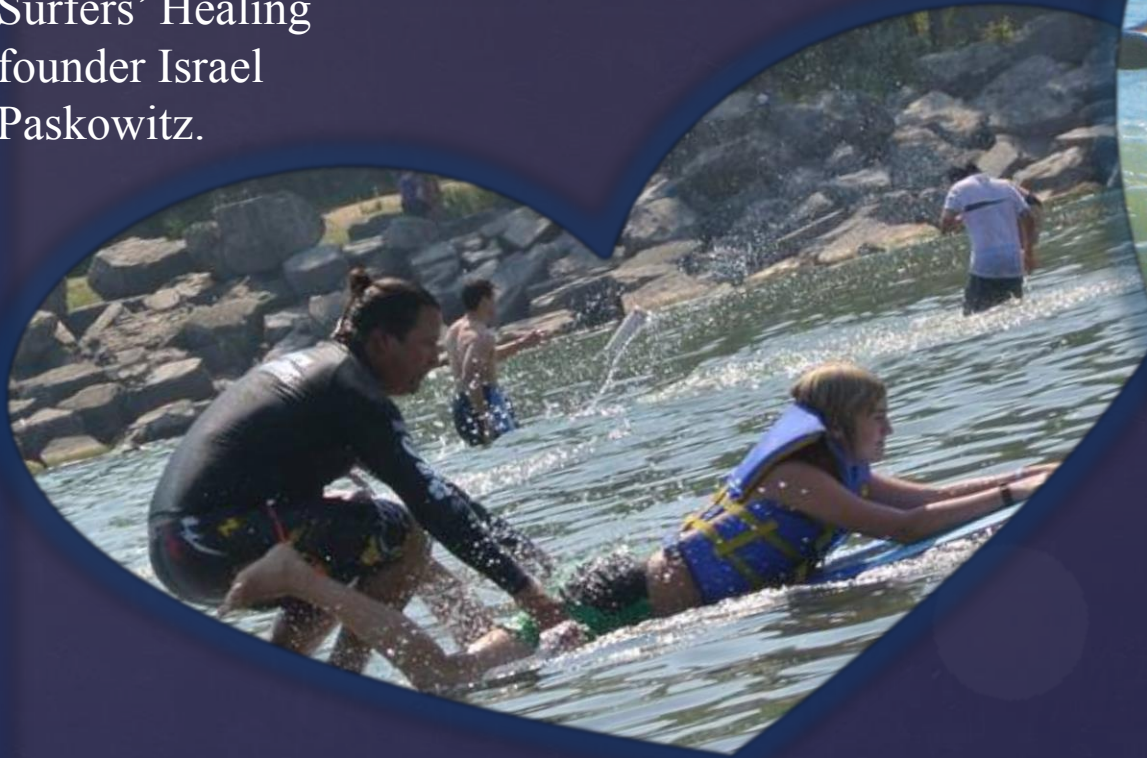


Surfers Healing





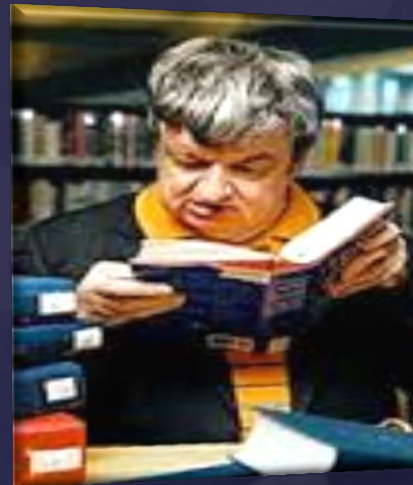
13-year-old  
Logan Fair with  
Surfers' Healing  
founder Israel  
Paskowitz.



Instead of viewing autism through the Western medical model as a disorder,  
I use the Navajo view of autism as walking in the beauty of nature to walk with similar  
transformative Autism organizations to teach society that people with autism are a source  
of social capital and not a social burden.

The World Health Organization (WHO) supports librarians through “E-learning approaches, and innovative models for engaging people with autism to share their valuable experiences in a variety of digital mediums ” (Ki-moo, 2014, para. 11) .

Librarians can challenge society’s stereotypes of autism by helping people impacted by Autism to share their stories through creating online digital stories, digital library collections and websites.




“I may be the star but you are the heavens” (Hoffman, 1986, p. 61).

Dedicated to Kim Peek The *Real Rain Man* :1951-2009





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