



TACKLE BOX

CORRECTION

We would like to take a moment and apologize for the use of the puzzle symbol in association with Autism Acceptance month in last April's edition of the Tackle Box. At the time we were unaware of the negative connotations associated with the symbol and how many individuals from the autistic community view it. We do our best to be respectful of the communities and topics covered in our newsletters, but sometimes we fall short.

This instance provides an excellent illustration of not only how understanding enhances with exposure but how sometimes during our journey to become more inclusive we stumble. All we can do is pick ourselves up, correct our path, apologize for our mistakes and continue to move forward. Know we are trying our very best and will remain accountable when mistakes are made.

DISPELLING MYTHS: EMBRACING AUTISTIC VOICES

It seems lately every time you turn on the news someone is talking about the spurious link between Autism Spectrum Disorder (here after autism) and vaccines, which provides one of the best examples of how once misinformation has taken root in the public psyche it can be almost impossible to dislodge. Although, Wakefield et al.'s (1998) study has been debunked and withdrawn from publication (due to issues with study design) his work is still used by anti-vaccination organizations and individuals to spread fear and mistrust (1). Millions of dollars and hours have been spent on spreading truthful information about vaccines in an effort to undo the damage that Wakefield et al.'s studies have done (2).

The fact that some parents are more afraid of having an autistic child than they are of losing them to a preventable disease speaks volumes about the fear and misunderstanding surrounding this neurodevelopmental disorder. April is Autism Awareness month, which seems like an excellent opportunity to highlight how the community is embracing self-advocacy and working to dispel misinformation and misconception. Since it was first described in 1943 diagnostic criteria and understanding of autism have changed significantly (3). Early awareness campaigns, in the 1990's and 2000's, presented autism as a tragic disease that tore apart families and ruined the lives of children (4,8). Large non-profit organizations ran campaigns that represented the disorder as a disease requiring "fixing", spreading hurtful misconceptions about the reality of living with autism (4,5,8,9).



Autism Speaks is a large and well-funded organization, meaning its use of the puzzle piece has ultimately led it to be adopted as the symbol for autism. The puzzle piece was chosen to represent autism as a mystery to be solved or suggest that autistic people are missing some key component, which is deeply offensive and misrepresentative (4,5,7). Autistic people find the puzzle piece a reminder of the public campaigns that framed the disorder as a tragic disease. Due to these negative associations many within the autistic community are pushing to use the infinity symbol with a rainbow gradient instead (4,5,8,9).

Within the autistic community there has been a growing movement to debunk misinformation and provide accurate representation. Many within the autistic community feel unheard by Autism Speaks as this non-profit continues to use the puzzle piece symbol; conveys information that supports misconceptions; condones therapies (i.e., Applied Behavior Analysis or ABA) that many patients have found traumatizing; and lacks autistic representation within the organization's leadership (4,5,6,7,8,9). For these reasons many autistic individuals are promoting Autistic Self-Advocacy Network and the Autism Society of America, as these autistic run support organizations build community and advocate for policies that promote accessibility and inclusion (9). In an effort to disprove misinformation and misconception self-advocates have used #AskingAutistics and #ActuallyAutistic on social media (7,9).

It's critical that when promoting information, policies/symbols that individuals from within the community are given a chance to participate and shape decisions, as they are the ones with a true understanding of what the impact will be. Fortunately, many brave individuals from within the community are not only willing to share, through social media, what it is truly like living with autism but they're also willing to fight for accessibility. As allies it's important to uplift their voices and listen to their requests, as these actions promote inclusion and help to spread representative information about what living with autism really means.



References

[BrainWaveWatch](#)

1. [The history behind an enduring public health falsehood — that vaccines cause autism: NPR](#)
2. [Vaccines and Autism: Children's Hospital of Philadelphia](#)
3. [History of Autism: When Was Autism First Diagnosed?: Total Care Therapy](#)
4. [Autism no puzzle, nothing wrong with us - Altogether Autism](#)
5. [Autism Speaks adopts all of the language of diversity. But its actions don't match up: The Washington Post](#)
6. [Autistic Self Advocacy Network breaks with Sesame Street over Autism Speaks ties: The Washington Post](#)
7. [The History of the Puzzle Piece \(a Controversial Symbol for Autism and Autistic People\), ABA, Conversion Therapy, & Autism Speaks: NeuroDivergent Rebel's](#)
8. [Autism Speaks is the Largest Autism Organization — So Why Don't Autistic People Like it?: Medium](#)
9. [The Autist Papers: The problem with Autism Speaks – Massachusetts Daily Collegian](#)
10. [Do puzzle pieces and autism puzzle piece logos evoke negative associations? - National Library of Median](#)



AWARNESS MONTH & DAYS

- Arab-American Heritage Month
 - Arab Cuisine: 50 Cookbooks to Try
 - Exploring Michigan's Arab American Cultures- Pure Michigan
- Autism Acceptance Month & Day (2nd)
 - Event can be found on:
 - Autism Alliance of Michigan
 - Eventbrite
 - Resources
 - Autism Grown Up
 - Autism Alliance of Michigan
 - Michigan Autism Services & Screenings | Center for Autism (hopenetwork.org)
 - Autism Support of Michigan (autism-mi.org)
 - Resources | Autism | Henry Ford Health - Detroit, MI
- Deaf History Month
 - Resources
 - Home - (deafhhs.org)
 - Division on Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing (michigan.gov)
 - Deaf and Hard of Hearing - Michigan Alliance for Families
- Earth Month
- National Child Abuse Prevention Month
 - Resources
 - Michigan In-State Resources - MiPSAC
 - Child Abuse and Child Neglect Prevention – Michigan Child Fatality Review and Prevention (mifrp.org)
- Paralyzed Veterans Awareness Month
 - Resources
 - Resources for Veterans (Directory) (michigan.gov)
 - Michigan's Disabled American Veterans | Services, Resources & Support (mi-dav.org)
 - Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency
- Sexual Assault Awareness Month
 - Resources
 - National Sexual Assault Hotline: Confidential 24/7 Support : 800-656-HOPE (4673)
 - Michigan | National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC)
 - Michigan Sexual Assault & Abuse - Confidential 24/7 Support :
 - Call: 1-855-864-2374
 - Text: 1-866-238-1454
 - Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Resources & Information | Congresswoman Debbie Dingell (house.gov)
 - Michigan Resources – SIGMA PSI ZETA
- Lesbian Visibility Week (22-26) & Day (26th)
- Tartan Day (Scottish Heritage Day) – 6th
- Earth Day – 22nd



PROMOTING INCLUSIVITY IN THE OUTDOORS: THE MISSION OF BLACK FOLKS CAMP TOO



Black Folks Camp Too, founded by Earl B. Hunter, Jr., is a marketing-driven business dedicated to promoting inclusivity and diversity in the outdoor industry by making it easier, more interesting, and fun for Black people to go camping and enjoy the outdoors. The idea for Black Folks Camp Too originated from a three-month-long trans-United States-Canada father-son

camping trip, during which they only encountered one other Black family. From that moment, Earl was on a mission to expand marketing efforts around camping to be more inclusive of the African American community. The Unity Blaze Certification program is central to their mission and is designed to empower outdoor professionals and organizations to create a more welcoming and inclusive industry. Only after completing the Unity Blaze Certification are individuals, vendors, and organizations allowed to share their information on Black Folks Camp Too's interactive list of resources. Additionally, the organization offers resources such as internship opportunities, industry career information, outdoor education through "Outside 101," and initiatives like "The HBCU Initiative" to engage and support historically Black colleges and universities. Organizations like Black Folks Camp Too are critical as they work to address societal disparities, in this instance, those unique to the African American community, helping us move towards a more inclusive and diverse world.

ALLY CONER: *A Hand, not a Handout*



Women often face the challenge of balancing multiple responsibilities, as they are frequently expected to juggle not only their professional duties but also a larger share of childcare and household tasks. There can come a point in life where a person can no longer manage all their responsibilities and feels overwhelmed by the weight of everything. It can be difficult to ask for help due to the fear of judgment or ineligibility for support programs. This is where Hot Mess Express steps in. This women-led nationwide nonprofit organization offers a judgment-free fresh start by providing free cleaning and organizing services for women struggling with overwhelming household situations. Local affiliated groups, often organized on Facebook, provide community support by cleaning and organizing homes, doing laundry, and

stocking groceries. This approach offers a "hand and not a handout," providing practical support, a sense of community, and empowerment for individuals. Currently, there are five affiliates in the lower part of the state but interested individuals or groups can apply through the Hot Mess Express website. Organizations like this are important as they build a sense of community while offering judgment-free support to those in need. At some point in our lives, we can all use a helping hand to get through a rough spot.

FEATURED ARTIST: SAMANTHA TWOCROW



Samantha TwoCrow is a nationally recognized bead artist who grew up in Leelanau County as a member of Peshawbestown's Grand Traverse Band of Odawa and Ojibwe Indians. Her beautifully detailed work has won awards at the Santa Fe Indian Market (the world's largest and most prestigious juried Native American art market) and is held by the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian. Samantha, who learned beading from her mother, grew up surrounded by art and indigenous culture. Her grandfather taught her how to traditionally harvest black ash, birch bark, deer hides, copper, and porcupine quills for basket making and beading. Samatha's work can be found through the newsletter and on Instagram at [sam2crow](https://www.instagram.com/sam2crow).



Though her work as a bead artist is critical to preserving and perpetuating indigenous cultural heritage, her role as Suttons Bay Public Schools' Indian Education Director is perhaps even more important. As the daughter of an Indian boarding school survivor, Samantha's own experience in public schools was far from ideal. In middle school, when she transferred to Northport Public Schools, she was placed in a "special education class" despite never needing additional support before. In the 1990s, it was common for many public schools to have "special ed" classrooms specifically for Native students and students of color. These classrooms were not viewed as places where students could get help with learning disabilities but rather were used as a tool to segregate non-white children from the

larger student body. As Indian Education Director, Samantha fights to break the generational cycle in academics by ensuring that Native American students have access to a quality education (2). In recognition of her hard work and status as an indigenous role model she was awarded the 2024 Michigan Lottery's Educator of the Year (3). Through her practice of traditional art and her work in education, Samantha ensures that current and future generations of Native children stay connected with their cultural heritage while receiving the support they need to thrive.

References

1. Indigenous Artist Samantha TwoCrow: Beads of Life, MyNorth.com
2. Anishinaabeg Like Me: Voices from People of Color in Leelanau County – Glen Arbor Sun
3. Samantha TwoCrow - Michigan Lottery's 2024 Educator of the Year Award, Fox 47 News

We understand that times have been challenging recently, and uncertainty abounds. It's natural to feel a bit overwhelmed, which is why prioritizing self-care and leaning on our support systems is crucial. Remember, you are not alone!

As always, feel free to reach out if you'd like to get involved or if you have any items to share. You can contact us at mifishcastafs@gmail.com, or you may reach out to us anonymously.

Warm Wishes -

Kyle Brumm (he/him), Dana Castle (she/her), Lydia Doerr (she/her), Tracy Galarowicz (she/her), Kynzie House (she/her), Maggie Haite (they/them), Taylor Skiles (she/her), Kathleen Quebedeaux (she/her)