

UHLS Youth Services Advisory Council

September 12, 2025 | 10:00–12:00 | In-person at Colonie Town Library

Attendance

- Attendance (14): Mary Fellows (UHLS), Caroline Purdy (UHLS), Beth Rienti (MVLS), Lisa Fesmire (VOOR), Vy Hoang (GUIL), Meagan Salisbury (GRAF), Diana Hurlbunt (SCPL, MVLS), Tai Filippelli (COLN), Rose Stuart (COLN), Rebecca Young (MID MVLS), Ann-Marie Helldorfer (COLN), Melanie Sheldon (CASL), Jenni Vinci (GUIL), Bryana Wachovicz (GUIL)
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Welcome & Introductions

- Mary introduced Caroline Purdy, new YFS System Support Associate at UHLS
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Current Research on Neurodiversity (Mary)

- **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD):**
 - Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability caused by differences in the brain.
- The latest data on Autism Spectrum Disorder from Center for Disease Control (May 2025) is:
 - 1 in 31 children identified with ASD
 - Occurs across all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups
 - 3x more common in boys than girls
- Researchers at Princeton University and the Simons Foundation analyzed data from over 5,000 children. Their new study released in July found four clinically and biologically distinct subtypes of autism.
- **4 subtypes (with potential for more in future):**
 - **Broadly Affected (~10%)**
 - Extreme and wide-ranging challenges - social and communication difficulties, repetitive behaviors
 - Developmental delays
 - Co-occurring psychiatric conditions - anxiety, depression, mood dysregulation, ADHD, OCD
 - **Moderate Challenges (~34%)**
 - Show core autism-related behaviors, but less strongly = 1 smaller apple
 - Generally no developmental delays
 - Usually do not experience co-occurring psychiatric conditions
 - **Social and Behavioral (~37%)**
 - Core autism traits: social challenges, repetitive behaviors
 - Generally no developmental delays
 - Often experience co-occurring psychiatric conditions
 - **Mixed (~19%)**
 - Differences in display of core autism traits
 - Developmental delays

- Usually do not experience co-occurring psychiatric conditions
 - **Why this matters:**
 - Demonstrates multiple biological pathways for autism (different genetic mutations)
 - Identifying subtype may help families understand symptoms, treatments, and future planning
 - **Multilingual Environments:**
 - Links between multilingual households and enhanced cognitive control
 - Benefits: improved communication skills, reduced behavioral/emotional regulation challenges, stronger problem-solving and inhibition abilities
 - A **social story** is a narrative made to illustrate certain situations and problems and how people deal with them.
 - **Actionable Support Strategies:**
 - Pair verbal instructions with visual cues to enhance understanding
 - Create predictable daily routines using color-coded timelines
 - Introduce multiple languages through music and interactive games
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Colonie Town Library's Sensory Room

- **Overview on Sensory Regulation:** Ann-Marie (COLN) presented on sensory regulation
- ◆ **Types of sensory systems:**
 - Vestibular (balance/spatial awareness)
 - Proprioceptive (body position/force)
 - Interoception (internal physiological signals)
- ◆ Dysregulation of these systems can lead to sensory overload, stress, anxiety, behavioral responses
- ◆ Their sensory room was created to help young patrons regulate in different ways that work for them
- **Types of Sensory Rooms:**
 - ◆ Sensory modulation rooms (calming panic)
 - ◆ Sensory integration rooms (movement equipment)
 - ◆ Snoezelen rooms (choice-based sensory input)
- **Implementation at COLN:**
 - ◆ Temporary set-ups were tested for storage/space concerns
 - ◆ Setup: ~1 hour solo, 30 minutes with help
 - ◆ Collaboration with [Bring on the Spectrum \(BOTS\)](#) for design
 - ◆ Always available resources at COLN, no sign up required: bubble towers, outdoor sensory boards
 - ◆ Weekly sensory space program (1 day/week)
 - 30-minute sessions, capped at 6 children (with adult)
 - 15-minute cleaning/reset between sessions
- ◆ **Then, the session moved into the sensory room, where we learned more about the space:**
 - **When patrons first arrive:** Hand sanitizer is provided, then directed to the feelings check in - happy, confused, upset, social story: "at the end of the time, if I am feeling differently, I can move the piece before I leave the room"
 - **Social narratives** -(photos, item explanations, how the item might make them feel, how to use them) available to patrons in advance to help families prepare their child for what to expect, also displayed throughout the sensory room
 - **Examples featured in Colonie's sensory room:**
 - "I can watch the jellyfish slowly move in the lamp to calm myself. I might find myself feeling relaxed or focused"

- “If I need a break from the room, I can go in the tent with a fidget or a book”
- As they enter the room: “This room is to help with calming my body. When I go into the calming space it will be dark and there will be several things that light up. I can borrow headphones if I want to block out some sound. There are many different things to do in this space and I can choose what to do”
- “The library staff will set the timer for 40 minutes. It will tick quietly and let me know when it is time to transition back into the library.”
- **Items in the sensory room include:** Timers (can be beneficial for children who struggle with transitions), beanbags, vibrating balls, peanut ball, infinity mirror, projector with calming scene and music displayed, dimmable lights, fidgets, bubble/jellyfish towers, noise canceling headphones, tactile sensory pads, books, flyers for support groups and Bring On The Spectrum
- Families reserve space; adjusted capacity from 6 families → 4 families for smoother sessions
- **Total cost** for COLN: ~\$2,000, funded by local organizations
 - Contact Ann-Marie for more detailed information on funding and specific items they purchased

Scalable Space, Collections & Staff Training (Beth Rienti, MVLS)

- **Space Design:**
 - Aim for “living room” feel: natural light, plants, comfy seating, dimmable lights
 - Avoid harsh fluorescent lighting
 - Use calming posters (templates available on Canva)
 - Examples of these were passed around (“Things I can do when I need to calm down,” “Calming strategies,” “Strategies to help me with emotional regulation”)
- **Sensory Kits (Modeled from Clifton Park):**
 - Cost: \$43
 - Contact Beth for kit details/resources
 - Includes noise-cancelling headphones, sunglasses, fidgets
 - Kits may be for in-library use or checkout
- **Collection Recommendations:**
 - [Using Literature to Support Children’s Mental Health](#) - Chapters discuss anxiety, grief, neurodivergency - discusses how historically children with ASD were portrayed as a problem for families and classmates, book recommendations
 - [A Day With No Words](#) - discusses mom and child both on the Autism spectrum, child is nonverbal/low-verbal
 - [You Can Say Hi With Only A Smile](#) - reinforces that children who are nonverbal are still communicating with others, just in different ways
 - [Wiggles, Stomps, and Squeezes Calm My Jitters Down](#) - celebrates stimming
 - [My Brother Otto and the Birthday Party](#) - portrays an individual with disabilities as the same as everyone else, accepted by peers
 - [My Brain is Magic](#) - Discusses the need for sensory seeking. Describes a child seeking that environmental input and emphasizes that it’s normal to seek out sensory regulation

- **Staff Awareness & Inclusion:**
 - Ensure staff understand and consistently use sensory tools/language surrounding them appropriately
 - Normalize neurodiversity with signage and visible resources, increasing accessibility for patrons
 - Emphasize non-judgmental attitudes, appropriate de-escalation techniques for neurodivergent individuals
 - Consider staff development sessions on disability awareness and ways to best support individuals of varying abilities
 - **Programs & Resources:**
 - [Project ENABLE](#): 5 free self-paced modules for librarians (includes ASD module)
 - [Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Program](#): voluntary identifier for hidden disabilities, helps others to be more mindful and supportive when interacting with them
 - Inclusive volunteer opportunities: Consider BOCES, school-to-work, alternative education teens
 - Many neurodiverse individuals excel at detail-oriented tasks
 - **Teen volunteer program:**
 - Sign up forms with parent review and special needs disclosure option (“Does your child have any needs that we can help to accommodate/should be aware of while they’re in our library?”)
 - **Extending to Adults:**
 - Train staff to support neurodiverse adults with compassion
 - Recognize adults also need inclusive library experiences
 - **Suicide Risk:** higher for neurodiverse & LGBTQ populations → libraries should provide easily accessible resources and anonymous help options, as many neurodivergent individuals struggle with communicating and may struggle with reaching out for help and accessing resources
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Scalable Program Ideas

- **Sensory Storytimes** (see [YouthDesk](#) for resources)
 - Engage multiple senses, fidgets, room to move
 - Visual schedules/checklists for structure
 - Interactive books & rhymes
 - Use props
 - Double visual supports (book and flannel; book and puppet)
 - Movement activities - use sensory art projects or sensory toys/bins for playtime
- **Communication Supports**
 - Social narratives
 - Library [communication board](#) (symbols for common needs/actions) - similar to communication software
 - Symbols for “turn the page,” “help,” “funny,” letters and numbers, etc.
 - Ideal for anyone with a communication challenge: ELLs, individuals who had a stroke, nonverbal children/teens/adults
 - Can be enlarged into a poster, service desk may be an ideal location
 - Keeping a copy of one in a clipboard may be helpful for when you are on the move
- **Family Programs**
 - Sensory movie nights (low light/sound, flexible seating)
 - Quiet, sensory friendly browsing hours (weekly, around an hour, low-light environment)

- [Sensitive Santa](#) - Allows iconic experience of seeing Santa to be more accessible for neurodiverse children (without the commonly busy, loud, overstimulating mall experience. Develops a positive experience for the families with the library. Libraries have received sponsorships for this. Videos available on their website that show the positive impact of the program.
 - [Inclusible](#) games/events - Modifies games to adapt to neurodivergency.
 - COLN will be holding these events in the evenings to make it community-wide/for families. Teen volunteer groups will do BOTS training, then teens will volunteer in the sensory space and inclusive game night. Inclusible newsletter and website has many helpful resources
 - [Ausome Oops!](#) program (acceptance of mistakes, positive framing)
 - [Buddha Boards](#)
 - Invite seniors and group home residents to participate in inclusive events
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UHLS Updates

- OCFS & Parks and Recreation have developed what they call a Literacy Trail: 10 New York State parks have storywalks. Thacher is one of them. Mine Kill State Park has one, too.
 - Summer Reading statistics—please submit ASAP!
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Additional Resources/Recent Successes

- **ADHD Awareness Walk:** Oct 12, more [info](#)
 - **PBS Learning Media:** free accounts + [“Work it Out at Your Library”](#) modules
 - **Library Card Design Contest ([Castleton](#)):**
 - Winning design, made by a 6 year old, was passed around. The contest was open to all ages. The only requirement for the contest was that the design was library themed and said “Castleton Public Library” on the card. Mary was a judge on the selection panel. The panel chose two finalists to go to a public vote. The village of Castleton honored the designer publicly!
 - Vanguard (library card vendor) - highly recommended by CAST
 - Mary suggested that this could be an annual contest for libraries so that many different individuals have the opportunity to design a library card and highlight creativity in the community
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Book Recommendations

- **Mary’s Picks (Graphic Novels):**
 - [Class Pet Ghost Detective](#)
 - [The League of Littles](#)
 - [The Raven Boys](#)
- **Beth’s (MVLS) Picks:**
 - [Trans History from Ancient Times to the Present Day](#)
 - [Oh Dear, Look What I Got](#)
 - [Five Little Friends](#)
 - [The Gift of The Broken Teacup](#)
- **Other Recommendations:**
 - [The Trouble with Heroes](#)

- [You Can Sit With Me](#)
 - [Breathe In. Breathe Out](#)
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ARCs Available

- Request ARCs here: <http://reports.uhls.org/cgi-bin/staff/arc.pl>
 - These ARCs cannot be added to your collection in any way. By requesting ARCs, you are agreeing to give them to your kid, tween, or teen readers.
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Next Meetings

- [Science of Reading Workshop \(Sept 24, 11:30–5:00\)](#)
 - [Power of Play \(Oct 7, 2:00–3:00, virtual, Strong Museum educator\)](#)
 - [GOAT: Greatest of All Time Teen Services \(Oct 22, 10:00–3:30, in person at East Greenbush\)](#)
 - UHLS YSAC Meeting: Nov 14 (9:00–10:00 Book Review, 10:00–12:00 Meeting at UHLS) - Flyer coming soon!
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Resources & Contacts

More Events, Trainings, & Resources: <https://www.uhls.org/youth-and-family-services/>

- **Mary Fellows** – 437-9880 x228 | mary.fellows@uhls.org
- **Caroline Purdy** – 437-9880 x231 | ys.support@uhls.org