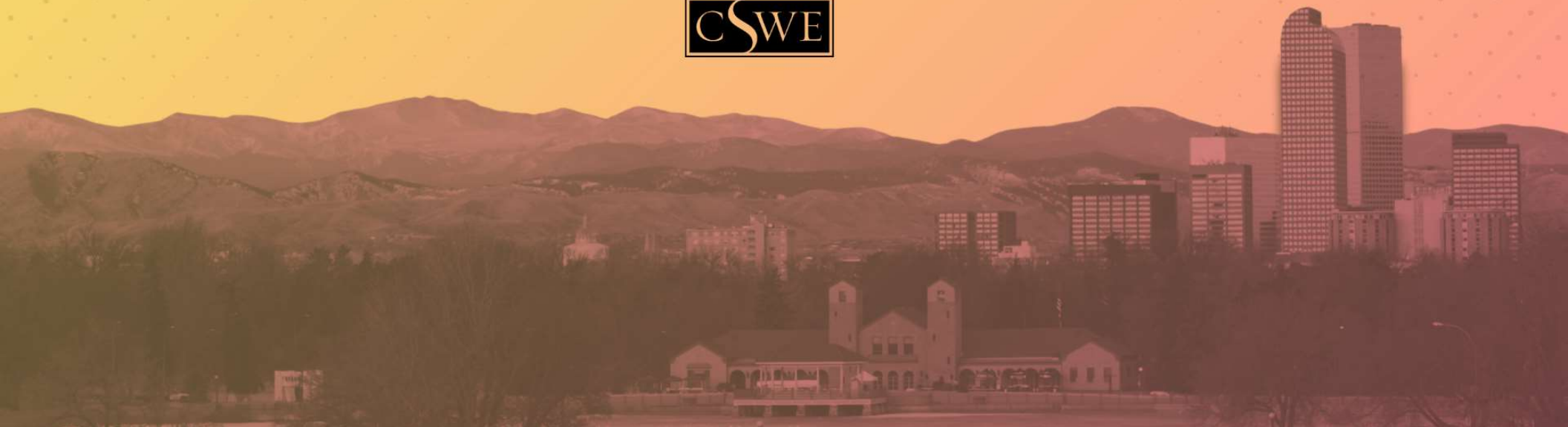




# It's time to act.

*Championing Disability Justice  
and Disability Joy in Social Work*

**CSWE 71<sup>ST</sup> ANNUAL CONFERENCE | DENVER, CO**





***Empowering Direct  
Support Professionals:  
Bringing Joy to Adults  
with Intellectual and  
Developmental  
Disabilities***

Donna Marie D'Angelo-Simon, LBA, BCBA, LCSW, MSW

Audrey N. Allicock, MSW, LSW, MPAP

# What is joy?

- Feelings of Joy
- Greater risk of inaccessible joy
  - pathology
  - institutionalization,
  - lack of connectedness,
  - maladaptive treatment models
  - lack of choices/freedom
  - Infantilization/othering
  - dependence on others
  - time based interactions



# Direct Support Professional (DSP)

National estimates for home health and personal care aides

Employment	Employment Relative Standard Error	Mean Hourly Wage	Mean Annual Wage	Wage Relative Standard Error
3,988,140	0.3 %	\$16.82	\$34,990	0.3 %

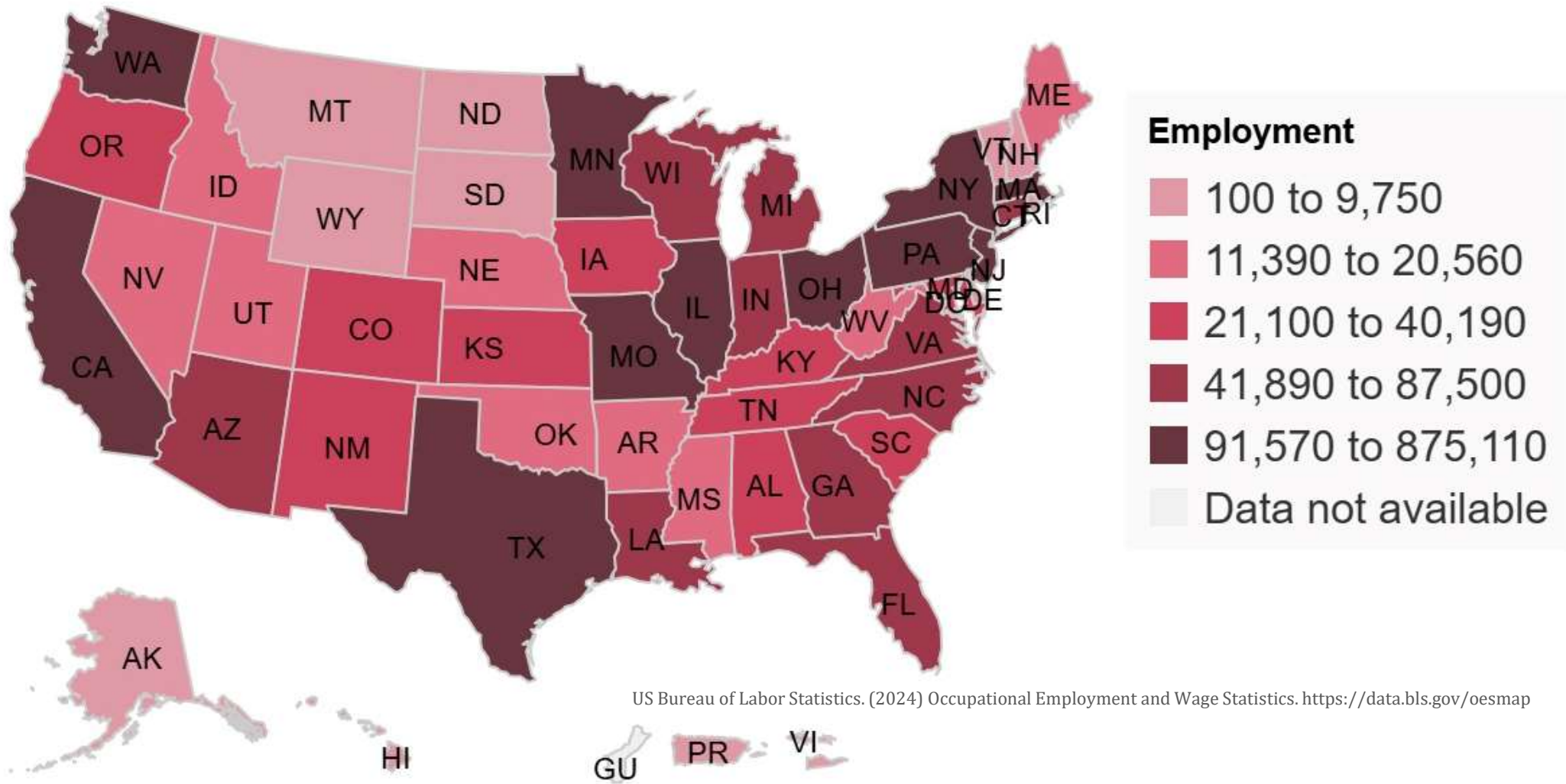
Percentile	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%
Hourly Wage	\$12.31	\$14.60	\$16.78	\$18.26	\$21.25
Annual Wage	\$25,600	\$30,370	\$34,900	\$37,980	\$44,190

- What is a DSP?
- Some stats
  - About 306,260 DSP's are employed in Residential Facilities\*
- Barriers

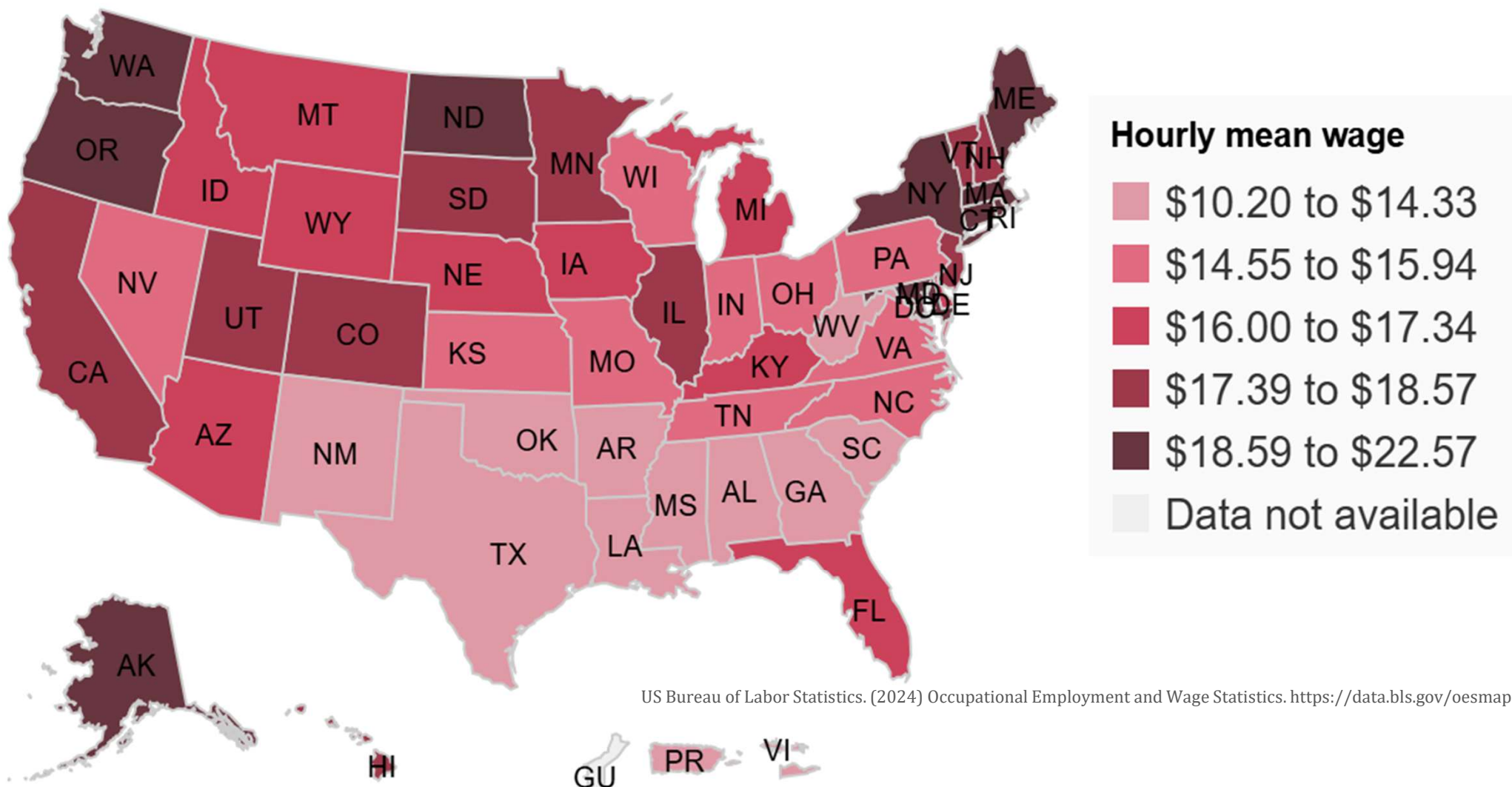
US Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2024) Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics. <https://data.bls.gov/oesprofile>



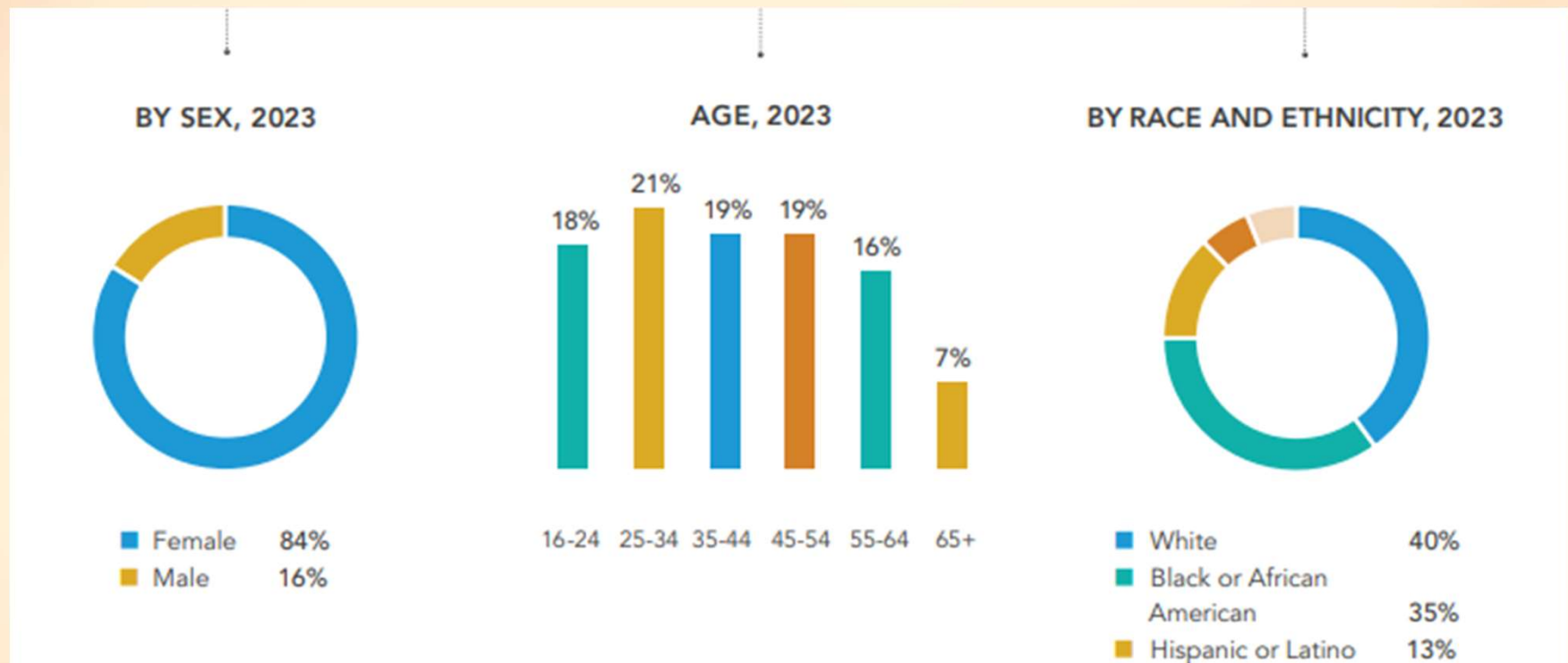
## All Home Health and Personal Care Aides, May 2024



## Hourly mean wage of home health and personal care aides, by state, May 2024



# PHI National, 2025, p. 13



PHI National. (2025). Direct Care Workers in the United States: Key Facts. <https://www.phinational.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/PHI-DCW-Key-Facts-Report-2025.pdf>

# Racism

- *a belief that race is a basic factor that determines human traits and abilities and that differences between races result in a natural superiority of a particular race”.*



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# Intersectionality

*Intersectionality highlights the interconnectedness of two or more attributes.*



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# Let's talk about Neoliberalism



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# Empowering joy in DSPs: the impact

- John M Kessler (2018)
  - ACEs and DSPs
- Dennis Reid (2016)
  - Familiarity is important to those with IDD
- John Guercio (2011, 2021, & 2025)
  - Staff training, self care, and mindfulness
- Keesler & Troxel (2020)
  - Self care and professional quality of life
- Chauncey, et al (2019)
  - ACT mindfulness staff training

# Systems theory framework

## Closed systems:

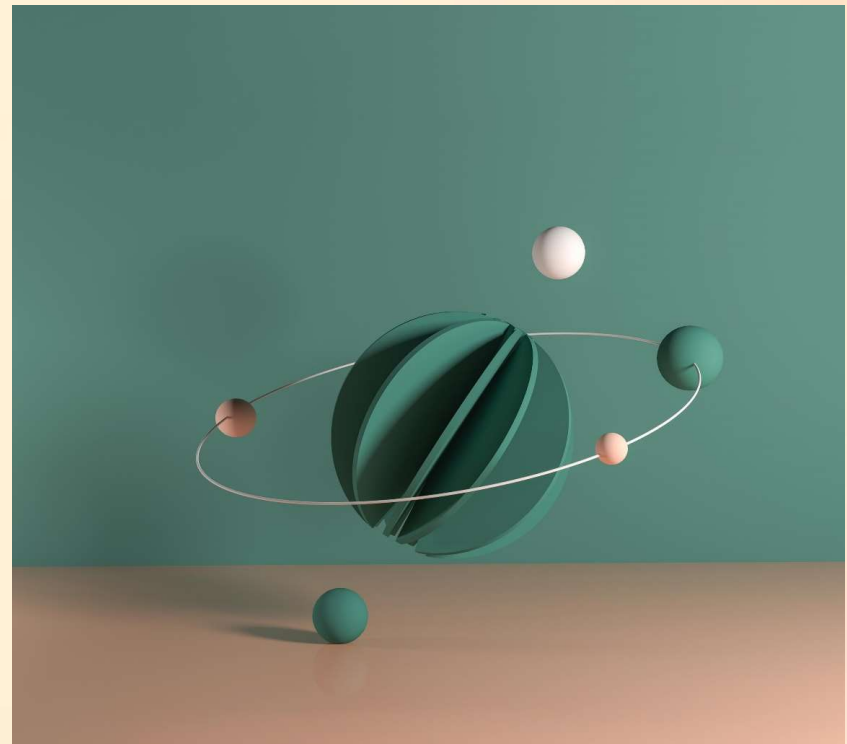
- Minimal contact with “others” outside the system
- Rigidity
- Stress
- Confusion
- Limited sustainability
- Stagnation

## Open systems:

- Communication
- Growth
- Problem solving
- Coordination
- Decision making
- Goal making
- Independence/Autonomy

# Implications for social work education, social justice and human rights

- Basic 'client' rights
  - a therapeutic environment
  - services whose overriding goal is personal welfare
  - functional skills
  - the most effective treatment procedures available
- Basic human right
  - The pursuit of happiness
  - Increases quality of life
  - Co-creates the system and rebalances power
- Social Work as advocates for programmatic change, staff support, and policy reform





# Call to Action



- What we are doing to support DSPs:
  - EAP programs/Training Opportunities/Career Ladders
- Replication of ACE/ACT study
- Comparative analysis of agencies
- Satisfaction surveys without fear
- Policy reform
- Humanness back to human services

## Questions/Discussion



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# Questions or Comments post-conference?

Let's connect!

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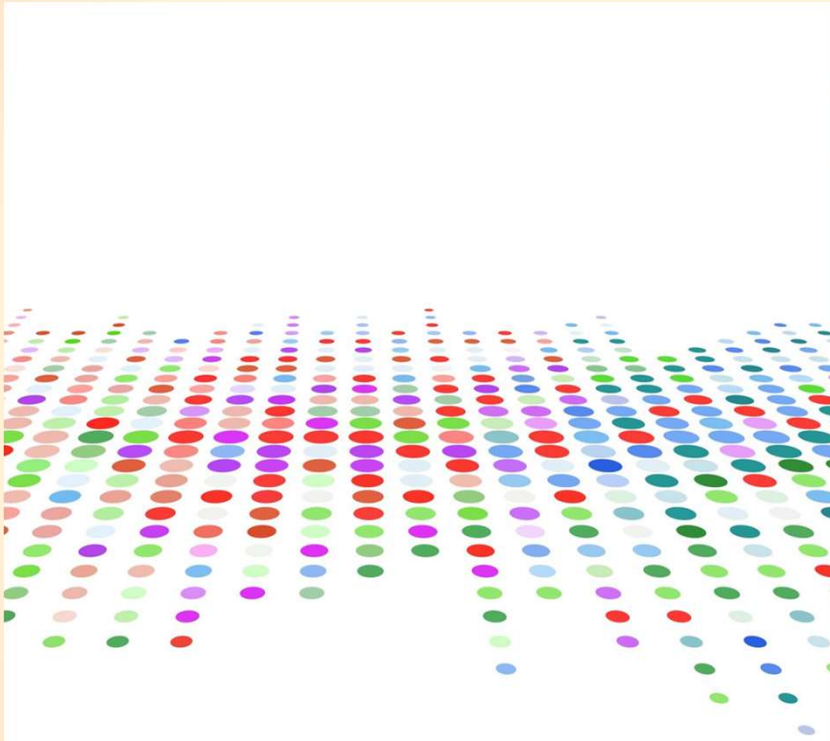


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# Empowering





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