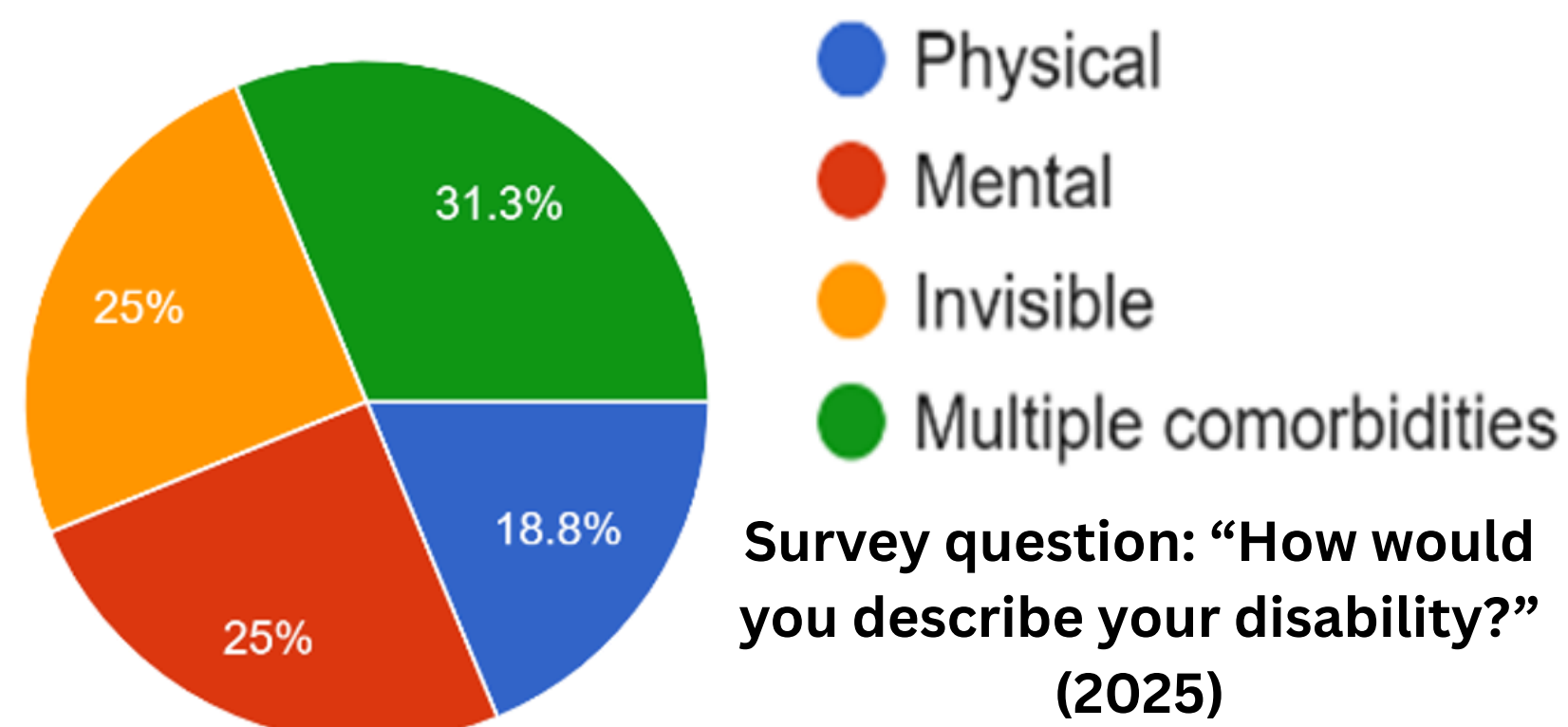


# School Alliance for Mental Health Project: Making Mental Health & Wellness Inclusive for All

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This is an example of a resource that could be available in The SAM Project App, if people wanted to learn about making an accessible school wellness room for staff & students. The Madison Wellness Room (Sam's Center) was a project I did during my Generalist Practicum in the Olympia School District.



Survey question: "How would you describe your disability?"  
(2025)

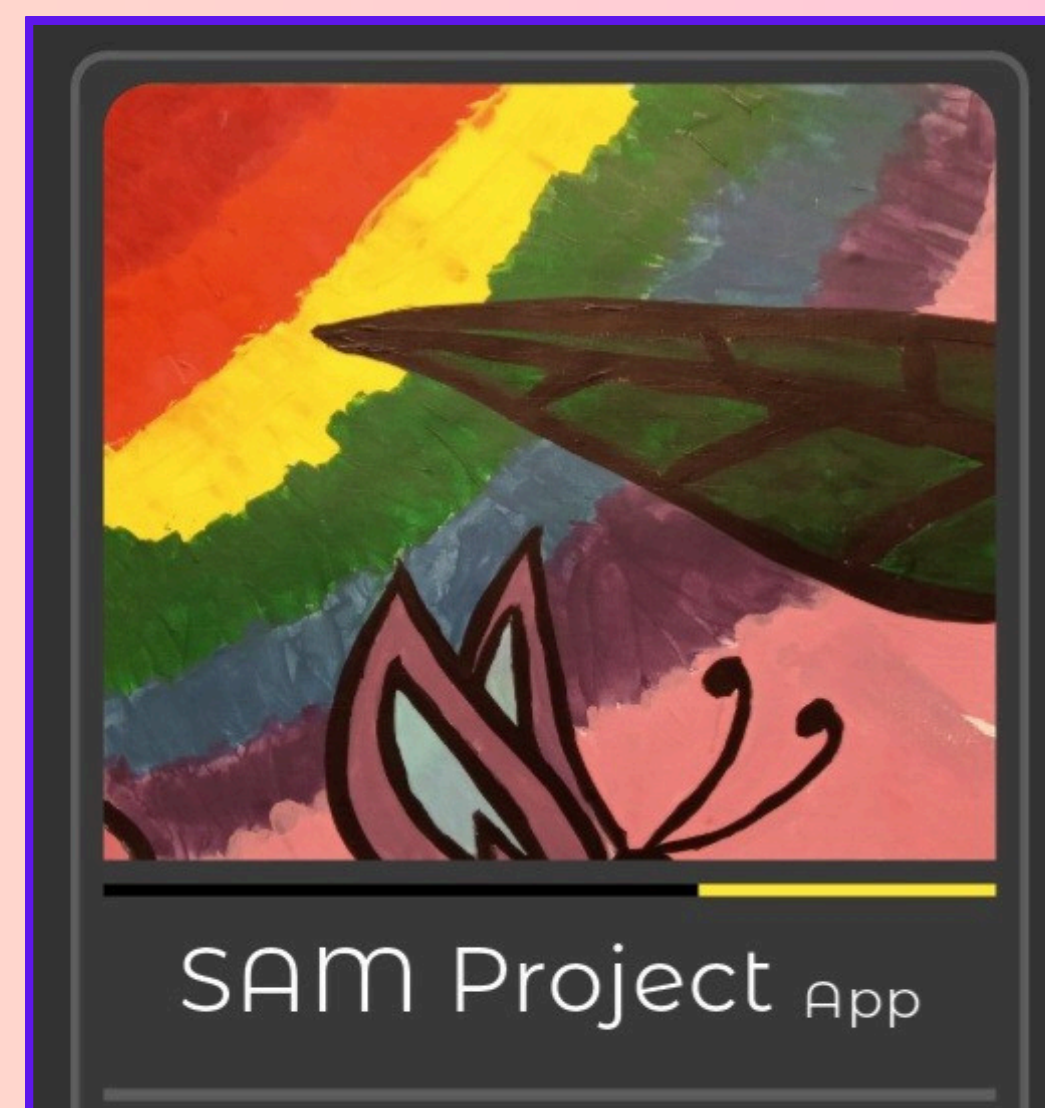
## Needs statement:

School staff with disabilities need more centralized, accessible, inclusive mental health support that increases awareness, visibility, and proactively reduces stigma, to promote a more welcoming school culture and wider range of role models for students.

## Background:

- The vast majority of people with disabilities don't have access to appropriate, adaptive mental health or wellness resources in schools today, despite comprising 29% (about 1 in 4) of the population.
- 32.9% of adults with disabilities experienced 14 or more mentally unhealthy days within a 30-day period in 2018.
- Only 56% of US schools claim to be able to effectively serve all students in need of mental health services; lack of access to adaptive mental health treatment to disabled learners—especially those with additional intersectionalities—experience higher rates of expulsion in schools.
- There is limited research on challenges that educators with disabilities face, which decreases visibility of role models for students, limiting exposure to employment possibilities post-graduation.
- People with disabilities (ages of 16-64) average around 37.4% of the employment population ratio compared to 74.9% of non-disabled people. Of 16-19-year-olds with disabilities, the unemployment rate is 23.9% compared to 12.3% of non-disabled peers, and of 20-24-year-olds with disabilities 13.3% compared to 7.1% of non-disabled.
- People with disabilities make significantly less money, are more likely to live in poverty, have reduced quality of life in comparison to non-disabled adults; in 2022 people with disabilities were estimated to make an average of \$46k per year with 25.9% living in poverty compared to \$55K per year of non-disabled people with 11.5% living in poverty.

References: (Tan & SSWAA, 2024); (CDC, 2024); (Alderson, 2024); (NAMI, 2023; US Department of Education, 2022). (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 2024); (Annual Report on People with Disabilities, n.d.)



## Proposed intervention:

The SAM (School Alliance for Mental Health) Project is a one-stop-shop platform for inclusive mental health and wellness resources in WA State schools, created for people with disabilities. Through the use of the accessibly designed App, staff will be able to use the custom search tool that incorporates an intersectional lens, and customizes mental health/wellness resources that address the unique needs of each person holistically. It will also include a section that will feature evidence-based training programs, literature, inclusive lesson plans, and tips for making school wellness rooms or "calm corners" for a more accessible classroom.

- Validates how intersectionality and comorbidities impact one's experience of access to mental health resources.
- Provides needed services to adults with disabilities in a demanding field; optimizing job performance, maintaining employment, financial stability, sense of pride, and connection to society.
- Uses trauma-informed, person first language that is user-friendly and accessible in a variety of languages and formats.
- Reduce the amount of time trying to locate appropriate resources.
- Reduces stigma by creating more visibility and voice for people with disabilities, normalizing mental health treatment for all.
- Aligns with the Framework for the 21st Century School Social Work Practice to make schools healthier for staff, students, families and communities.

**Outcome 1: Schools will have increased accessibility of inclusive mental health supports and resources.** Indicator A: Staff will self-report in monthly surveys about their mental health status, if they have appropriate accommodations and resources via the SAM Project, and overall job satisfaction. Indicator B: Schools will monitor and report monthly on staff engagement in resources, job performance, attendance rates, and employment rates. If a staff member decides to resign, they will be offered an exit interview.

**Outcome 2: Schools will be more proactive about addressing stigma surrounding mental health and disabilities.** Indicator A: Schools will provide ongoing monthly anti-stigma training and literacy to address topics such as the social model of disability, highlighting intersectionality, and integrated mental health education. Indicator B: Schools will promote more inclusive visibility, ensuring 1-3 images of people with disabilities are featured in all school-based images and promotional materials. Indicator C: Schools will do bi-annual evaluation, reporting, and modifying of physical/digital accessibility.

## Dedication...

The acronym "SAM" represents the name of a former beloved student who I cared deeply for, who sadly didn't survive her mental health condition, passing away in November 2023. She was a great kid, who frequently spent time helping students with disabilities in our classroom. She also participated in our collaborative mural project, and painted the square that represents the logo for The SAM Project. I dedicate my capstone project to her memory and what she stood for; how essential it is to care for our mental health, and what the world could be if we were a little kinder and more accepting of each other. She has inspired my entire journey during my MSW.