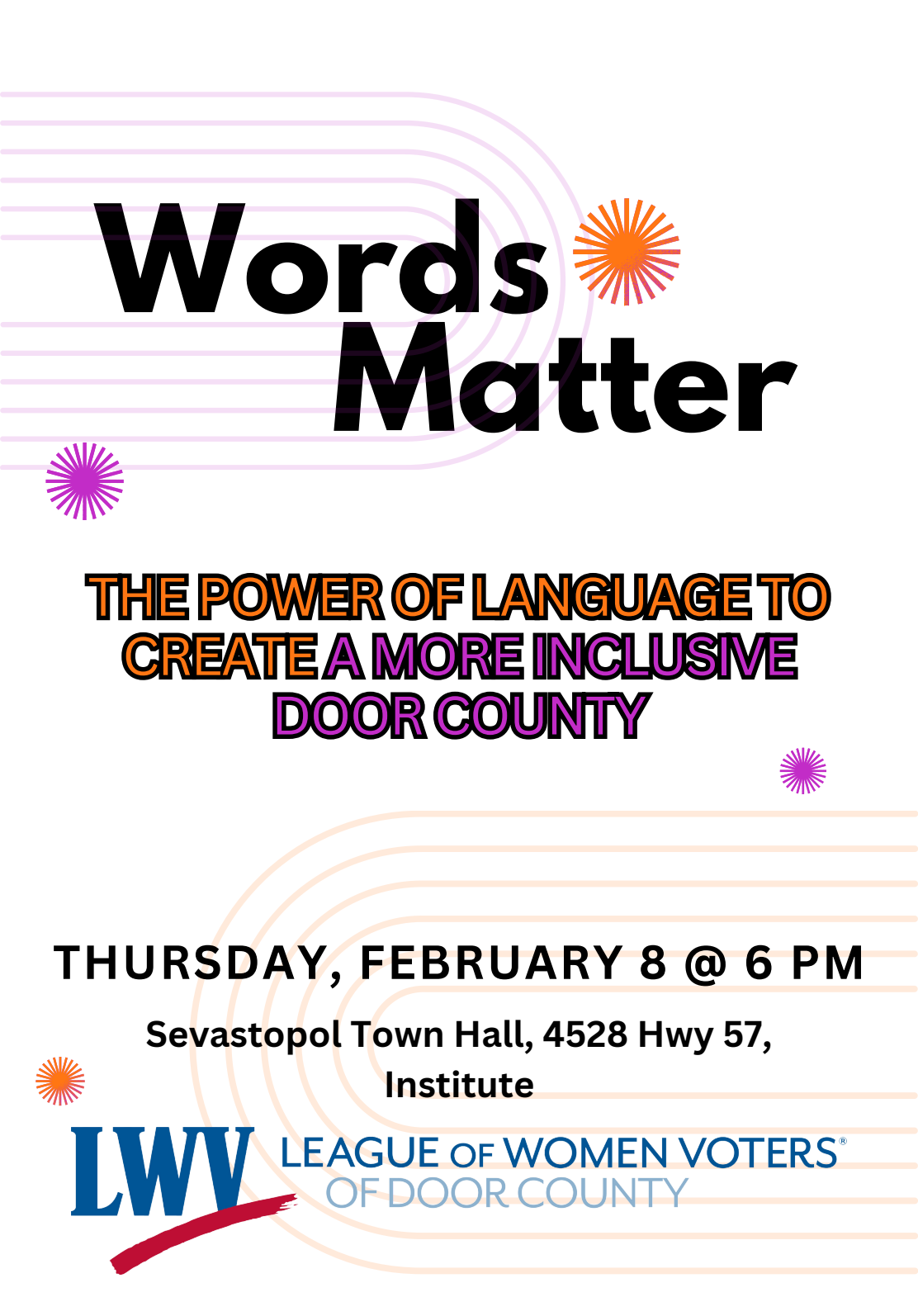# Words Matter

THE POWER OF LANGUAGE TO CREATE A MORE INCLUSIVE DOOR COUNTY

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 8 @ 6 PM

Sevastopol Town Hall, 4528 Hwy 57, Institute

LWV LEAGUE of WOMEN VOTERS® OF DOOR COUNTY

Featuring

Facilitating.......................................Natalie Morgan (she/they)
Chair of the DEI Committee,
League of Women Voters Door County

Participant.......................................Corey Batson (she/they)
with Lived Experience on LGBTQ+ Inclusion

Participant...........................Stephanie Birmingham (she/her)
Mental Health Therapist and Disability Advocate

Participant.....................................Seth Wiederanders (he/him)
Wisconsin Certified Peer Specialist

Participant......Damion (he/him) & Nikkie Howard (she/her)
with Lived Experience on Racial Inclusion

Order of Events

Introduction...................................Natalie Morgan (she/they)

LGBTQ+ Inclusion............................Corey Batson (she/they)

Disability Inclusion............Stephanie Birmingham (she/her)

Mental Health Inclusion...........Seth Wiederanders (he/him)

Racial Inclusion...............Damion (he/him) & Nikkie Howard
(she/her)

Q&A..Audience Participation

Conclusion...................................Natalie Morgan (she/they)

What is Inclusive Language?

According to the Linguistic Society Of America, Inclusive Language: "acknowledges diversity, conveys respect to all people, is sensitive to differences, and promotes equal opportunities. These guidelines highlight ways in which linguists can both lead the way in proactively writing inclusively and avoid past pitfalls or habits that may unintentionally lead to marginalization, offense, misrepresentation, or perpetuation of stereotypes. Stereotyping language is often not a matter of intention but effect.

STRONGER TOGETHER

"In order to empathize with someone's experience, you must be willing to believe them as they see it, and not how you imagine their experience to be."
-Brene Brown

Ten Tips on Inclusion

1 - Person-First Language

Start with using person-first language until you have confirmed another preference.

Person-first language emphasizes the humanity of an individual or specific group.

The alternative is identity-first language. Be aware that there are individuals and some specific groups that prefer identity first language. Identity-first language places the name of a condition a person lives with or other adjective describing them before the noun. There can be many reasons for different language preferences, but some people describe their preference for identity-first language to be based on feeling that their identity is inseparable from themselves as a whole. Specifically the Deaf community is known for generally preferring identity-first language. Currently there are many people with Autism expressing the same preference, however; it's important to keep in mind that not every person with Autism is able to share their opinion on the matter.

It's your responsibility to ask those you interact with what they prefer.

Examples

Person-first	Identity-first
Person of Color	Deaf Person
People with Disabilities	LGBTQ+ People
Person with mental health concerns	Autistic Person

A place to begin with awareness around race is that race is a cultural concept that has been harmfully promoted and falsely perpetuated as genetic inferiority. The perception of a person as belonging to a certain race is based on phenotypical traits, or physical characteristics, which are an expression of genes, but which are in themselves neutral. Historically race is based on a false narrative and myths created to justify enslavement and other atrocities done to Black people, Indigenous peoples, and other People of Color, for the economic and social advancement of others, particularly white people. Due to this false narrative dominating Western, white culture, it is particularly important to learn to center experiences of people from these communities.

Examples

Instead of: Try this:

BIPOC…………List each specific identity you're referencing

Non-white,racial minorities…………………Racialized People, or Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

Blacks, Asians, Latinos, Natives, Arabs…………Black, Asian, Latine, Indigenous, and Arab communities

slave owner, slaves…………………………enslavers, people who were enslaved

master……………………………………………Primary/Main/Original Ex: Primary bedroom, Main copy, Original version

Mixed race/ethnicity, mulatto…..Multi-racial, multi-ethnic

Non-BIPOC…………………………………………………white people

Minority…People/Person from a marginalized background

Urban, Inner City, Exotic, Ethnic (as euphemism)…directly name the group of people you're referring to

I don't see color………………Acknowledge each person's full identity and its context

3 - Language & Disability

When talking about people with disabilities it's important to recognize that they are whole human beings living with a condition/set of conditions. For some individuals, this means using assistive devices. It can also mean the individual needs certain accommodations, adaptations, or accessible spaces. Be sure not to define the individual by their devices or support needs. Keep in mind that accessibility needs and assistive devices aren't optional. Remember that accommodations aren't special favors, but rather creating equity. Accessibility benefits everyone using the space. Making accommodations universal allows everyone to benefit from having a variety of needs met without having to ask or be singled out.

Examples

<u>Instead of:</u>   <u>Try this:</u>

Handicapped...Disabled

Special needs..................Developmentally Disabled, Name the specific condition, type or group of conditions

Normal...Typical/Common

High/Low Functioning...............Requires more/less support

Wheelchair-bound.....................................Uses a wheelchair

They're a spaz...They're energetic

Mentally handicapped, idiot, imbecile, moron..........Person with (name condition/category of condition), person with intellectual disabilities, person with cognitive impairment, person with a brain injury

4 - Language & Mental Health

Mental Health diagnosis can also be considered disabilities. People living with mental health concerns share much of the same history as those with other disabilities.

Historically people with disabilities have been marginalized due to misunderstanding of their needs. Their behaviors and appearances often broke social norms which continues to be perceived negatively. There is a long record of people with disabilities being institutionalized, infantilized, and outcast.
One lens used to rationalize these choices is the idea that a persons value is tied to their productivity. Honoring the intrinsic value of each person regardless of their ability to be productive is one way to encourage equity for people with disabilities.

When using language about people with mental health concerns and diagnosis focus on reducing stigma and recognizing the individual beyond the condition they are living with.

Examples

<u>Instead of:</u>   <u>Try this:</u>

Addict, alcoholic.......person living with substance use concerns

Comitted Suicide...Died by suicide

Mentally Ill, insane, mad, mental patient.................Person living with a mental health concern

Anorexic, bulimic.......Person living with an eating disorder

Starving...Hungry

Non-verbal...Non-speaking

I'm so OCD......................................I like to be tidy/organized

Everyone's a little Autistic.................We all have our quirks

That's psychotic/delusional...................That's unbelievable

That's crazy...That's outrageous

5 - Language & LGBTQ+ Community

First steps to using inclusive language with the LGBTQ+ community are thinking beyond heteronormative, cisnormative, and binary assumptive terms. Heteronormativity is the tendency to assume all people are attracted to a person of an opposite gender and all the choices based on that assumption. Cisnormativity is the tendency to assume that everyone is cisgender (that their gender aligns with the one they were assigned at birth), and all the choices based on that assumption. Binary assumption states that there are only two opposite, binary genders and makes choices based on that assumption. Using gender neutral language begins to break cis/het/binary normative assumptions.

Sharing pronouns as standard practice is another crucial way to include people from the LGBTQ+ community. Pronouns should be part of verbal introductions as well as appear under or next to anyplace names are listed.

Examples

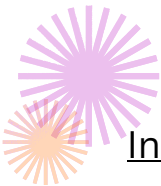| Instead of:	Try this:
Do you have a boy/girlfriend?	Are you dating anyone?
Husband/Wife	Partner/Spouse
Mom/Dad	Guardian/Adult/Grown-up/Parent
Brothers, Sisters	Siblings
Guys/Gals	Y'all/Friends/Folks
Ladies & Gentlemen	Everyone/Folks/All/Guests
Boys/Girls	Children/Kids/Young People/Youth
Feminine Hygiene Products	Menstrual/Period Products
Pregnant Women	Pregnant/Birthing People
Menstruating Women	People who menstruate
Women's health	Reproductive health

6 - Do's & Don'ts of Diagnostic Terms

Casual use of diagnostic terms is generally inappropriate. At the same time the use of euphemisms when talking about diagnosed conditions is generally considered just as inappropriate. Among individuals with lived experience of a condition there can be great variation in word preference. Keep in mind that there can be a significant difference in inclusive language and language used by the medical profession, legal terms, and government use of language. Consider the setting and who is in the conversation when choosing your words.

Examples

Instead of: Try this:

I'm so OCD...................I'm uncomfortable when things are disorganized

Everyone's a little Autistic.................We all have our quirks

That's psychotic/delusional..................That's unbelievable

That's retarded..That's uncool

They're a spaz/hyper................................They're energetic

It's a little ADHD...It's disorganized

7 - Another Person's Identity is Not Yours to Use for Creditability

My cousin is...
I have xyz friends...
My daughter is...
I have an uncle who is...
My coworker is...

Whatever your proximity to someone with an identity other than your own, that relationship neither gives you creditability as an ally, nor is it appropriate to claim that it does. Keep in mind the relationship you are referring to may look very different from the other side. Mentioning that someone in your life has a particular identity as a bridge to show you care about people with that identidty doesn;t necessarily have the intended impact. The relationship you have with the person you mentioned is not hthe same as the relationship with the person in front of you. It's important to put in the time and effort to build trust in that new relationship. Only actions show ally ship.

Community care requires us to show up for those who are most vulnerable to systems of oppression and have a greater likelihood of dealing with social inequities.

-Minaa B., LMSW

from Owning Our Struggles: A Path to Healing in a Broken World

8 - Work Over Claims

Making claims of being an ally or providing a safe space can do more harm than good if the practices aren't in place and the actions aren't consistently taken to be those things.

Consider the importance of a taking a whole organization approach to integrating inclusive practices. Does the maintenance crew and the desk clerk have the same training as senior staff? Anyone who might interact with clients or contribute to their experience should be able to provide a consistent experience. What specific policy is in place to protect marginalized people within or interacting with your organization? Consider if your facility sends a consistent message. How accessible is the space throughout? Have you chosen inclusive signage? Take a look at your materials and systems. If you are using imagery of people, have you depicted a variety of skin colors, body types, genders, family structures, and abilities? Do use software or forms that limit the options which can be chosen to the exclusion of some identities? Is the information required to interact with an individual respectfully easily accessed and viewed by those directly interacting with an individual?

When false claims of ally ship and safe spaces are made it dilutes the meaning, which can make it feel just as risky to engage with these self-labeled people and places as any other place. Focus on doing the work that shows you are an ally and it is a safe space, rather than making claims or slapping a sticker on the door.

Let the people you interact with decide if they think you are an ally or the space is safe.

9-Regularly Integrate
A Wide Range of Views

It's up to each of us, to the best of our ability, to activity seek the voices of those with experiences and identities other than our own in order to gain perspective on the importance of inclusion and what that means to different individuals and communities.

Consider practicing some of the many ways to do this by seeking voices from a variety of individuals in these ways:

Quick Bites-15 minutes or less
TikTok's
Facebook Posts/Reels
Memes (any platform)
Short YouTube videos
Short articles
Pamphlets
Reddit
Instagram Posts/Stories
Read infographics
X

Deep Dives-an hour+
YouTube Videos
Streaming series
Podcast series
Books
Scholarly research/essays
Movies
Web series

Mid-size Meals-up to an hour
Long form articles
YouTube Videos
Streaming Shows
Podcasts
Websites
Children's Books

IRL
Attend a Play
View an Art Exhibit/Showing
Go to a Concert
Check out a cultural event
Attend a lecture
Take a course

10-Ask Each Individual

Take what you know about different identities as a starting point, then be sure to check in with each individual. No community is singular in thought, so it's important to find an appropriate time to ask individuals you interact with what language they like to use in reference to themselves and the practices that make them feel included.

Keep in mind some language that belongs to an individual or community is not appropriate for use by someone outside the community. Use discretion in repeating in-group language. You may need to qualify the language by saying something like, "They describe themselves as…" In other cases you may need to choose different language. Context is important to consider in these cases.

Take responsibility for learning inclusive language. Don't put the burden of educating or correcting you on individuals from marginalized communities.

If you make a mistake, briefly apologize, correct yourself and move on. Extensive apologies shift the focus to your feelings. Failure to correct yourself undermines any apology.

Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.

-James Baldwin

Jules Gardner is a Door County resident and Wisconsin Certified Peer Specialist. Jules has lived experience with mental health, disability, and is a member of the LGBTQ+ community. J has extensive training in cultural awareness. Jules is a life-long auto-didact with focus on: United States history - particularly as it relates to marginalized communities, mental health, DEI, and communications. J is also a maker with interest in mixed media and pottery. J's passions are to promote equity and inclusion, provide healing and recovery experiences, and educate through art. J likes to spend time in nature and garden as a restorative practice.

<u>Words Matter Notes</u>
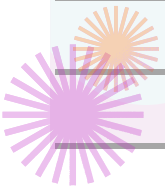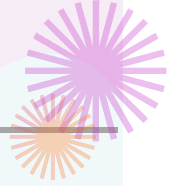
Thank You for Attending

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We invite you to engage with more information at lwvdoorcounty.org

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