



special needs network

TOGETHER

Inclusive LA: A Civic Imperative



Neurodivergent Talent to Power the Future of Los Angeles

Briefing for Elected Officials & Public Sector Leaders

Los Angeles is at an inflection point. The city is receiving unprecedented global investment, to prepare for the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games, and positioning itself as a world-class hub for innovation, commerce, and culture. The question before civic leadership is simple: who gets to participate in that prosperity?

1 in 36 children in the United States is diagnosed with autism.

In Los Angeles, neurodivergent individuals and their families represent one of the city's largest and most underserved constituencies. They navigate underfunded services, fragmented systems, and a workforce infrastructure that was not designed with them in mind.

Special Needs Network (SNN) is convening today's leaders to advance a single proposition: inclusion must be structural, not symbolic.

What We Are Asking of Public Sector Partners

The policy levers that drive real change sit with elected officials.

Special Needs Network is seeking alignment on three fronts:

Workforce policy. Support for legislation, procurement standards, and agency partnerships that open pathways for neurodivergent workers across city and county departments and among companies that receive public contracts.

School-to-employment pipelines. Investment in transition-to-work and workforce training programs for neurodivergent young adults, delivered through partnerships between community-based organizations, workforce providers, community colleges, and universities, with a focus on workforce readiness, internships, apprenticeships, and public sector career pathways.

Resource equity. Advocacy for equitable distribution of state and federal disability services and workforce funding to communities with the highest unmet needs, including South Los Angeles and other historically underserved areas.

About Special Needs Network (SNN)

Founded by award-winning civil rights attorney and advocate Areva Martin, Special Needs Network is one of Los Angeles' leading autism advocacy and services organizations. SNN delivers clinical therapy, behavioral health services, workforce development, and family support to thousands of individuals annually, with deep roots in underserved communities.

SNN has a demonstrated track record of designing, launching, and operating large-scale workforce and social enterprise programs that address both sides of the workforce equation — training the workforce that supports individuals with autism and developmental disabilities, and creating employment and job training opportunities for neurodivergent individuals.

This includes SNN's CORE Workforce Development Program, a multi-year, multi-million-dollar workforce initiative that has trained more than 700 individuals for careers in the behavioral health and developmental disability workforce — one of the fastest-growing and most critically understaffed sectors in California.

SNN also operates social enterprise programs in hospitality, food service, and related industries, which provide job training, workforce experience, and employment pathways for neurodivergent individuals, while also creating training and employment opportunities for the workforce that supports them. These social enterprises serve as revenue-generating, scalable models that combine workforce development, small business development, and disability employment.

Special Needs Network is already operating multi-million-dollar workforce programs and social enterprises in Los Angeles. With public sector partnership, these models can be scaled to help meet the region's workforce shortages while expanding employment opportunities for neurodivergent Angelenos.

SNN is not proposing theory. We are building and operating workforce and employment solutions now, at scale, in Los Angeles.

The Moment – A Call to Action

Los Angeles is investing billions to prepare for global events and economic expansion. The question is whether our public systems will intentionally prepare neurodivergent young adults to participate in that economy – or whether thousands will remain locked out of the workforce and dependent on public benefits, not because they cannot work, but because the system never prepared them to.

At the same time, California is facing a severe shortage of workers in the very sectors that support individuals with disabilities – behavioral health, developmental services, and direct support professionals.

These two challenges are connected. And they require a coordinated public sector response.

We are asking public sector leaders to commit to the following:

- Adopt neurodiversity hiring and procurement goals across city and county agencies and among companies that receive public contracts.
- Fund and scale transition-to-work and workforce training programs for neurodivergent young adults through partnerships with community-based organizations and workforce providers.
- Invest in and expand the behavioral health and developmental disability workforce pipeline to address critical regional workforce shortages.
- Partner with Special Needs Network and other community-based organizations to pilot and scale workforce and social enterprise models in Los Angeles ahead of the 2028 Olympics and other global events.

Inclusion is not a charitable act. It is an economic strategy, a workforce strategy, and a civil rights issue.

The decisions made by civic leaders over the next three years will determine whether Los Angeles becomes a model for inclusive economic growth – or a city where thousands of capable young people are left out of its prosperity.

The time to act is now.

Partner With Us

Special Needs Network welcomes the opportunity to partner with public sector leaders to develop and implement inclusive workforce, training, and employment initiatives in Los Angeles.

We are available to:

- Provide policy and program consultation
- Share workforce development and social enterprise models
- Assist with program design and implementation
- Serve as a community partner on workforce and disability initiatives
- Provide technical assistance on neurodiversity inclusion and workforce development strategies

To stay informed, access resources,
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OR



Leading Change For Neurodiverse Communities!

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