











Listening that Leads to Equity:

Transforming Organizations Through Relationships

Who We Are

District Health Department #10

HEALTH DEPARTMENT of Northwest Michigan

MUNSON HEALTHCARE

NORTHWEST COMMUNITY HEALTH INNOVATION REGION

Part of a team whose purpose was/is to work in the spaces of health equity, diversity and inclusion. We have brought some outcomes from innovative listening sessions to share.

"We realized that we would need to stop, step back, and re-learn what we knew as people and professionals of privilege." White Paper

Activities

01

Organizational Health Equity Assessments

Identify health equity practices and recommendations for change

02

Coaching Sessions

Study best practices related to equity and listening

03

Listening Sessions

Build trust, understand lived experiences, identify barriers, system strengths, and opportunities for partnership

Our Definition of Equity

- **Health equity is restoring balance in a living system** of relationships that support wellbeing. Health equity is a collective commitment to repair what has been unequal and strengthen what already nourishes health.

- **Health equity is the fair distribution of power and possibility** , ensuring people have real power to shape the conditions that influence their health. When power is shared, outcomes improve across the community, especially for those long pushed to the margins.

Our Role as Equity Partners

- Interpret community experiences with care.
- Make sure community voices are truly heard.
- Respect community members as experts in their own health.
- Use what they share to guide our advocacy.
- Be willing to change based on their perspectives.
- Acknowledge when the system fails people instead of defending it.
- Validate that friction comes from systems not built for their needs.

Purpose

- Connect with underserved target populations
- Develop/enhance trust and long-term relationships
- Ensure culturally relevant services and resources
- Enhance communication strategies
- Determine challenges to seeking and accessing care: transportation, insurance, language, stigma, etc.

4 Levels of Listening

Closed Mind

"I know the data & facts of this situation. I am only listening to confirm the story I already know."

Open Mind

"There are certain data & facts I do know, and those I do not. I'm interested to learn what others know."

Open Heart

I ask myself - "What do I think this person is feeling? What are they not saying that may be true?"

Open Will / Listening from a 'What If?' Mind

Letting go - "I can listen from a place that's larger than myself. I am willing to change and connect, I can step outside of my own reality to live in theirs."

One way to listen, is to listen for the material that’s being said.

Another way of listening is listening for the material of what is not being said.

Hearing from Our Community

Father of 12 -year -old girl living with Autism

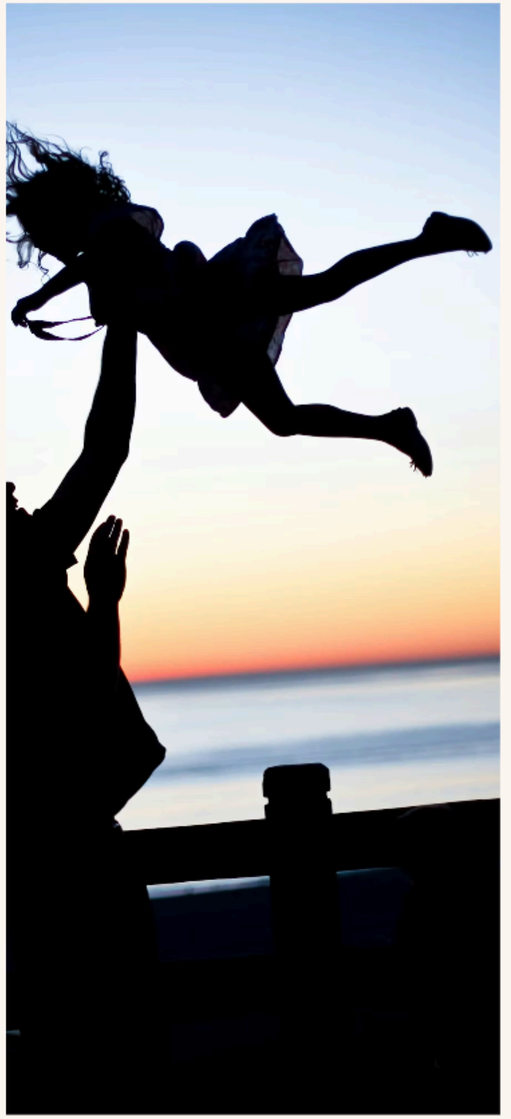
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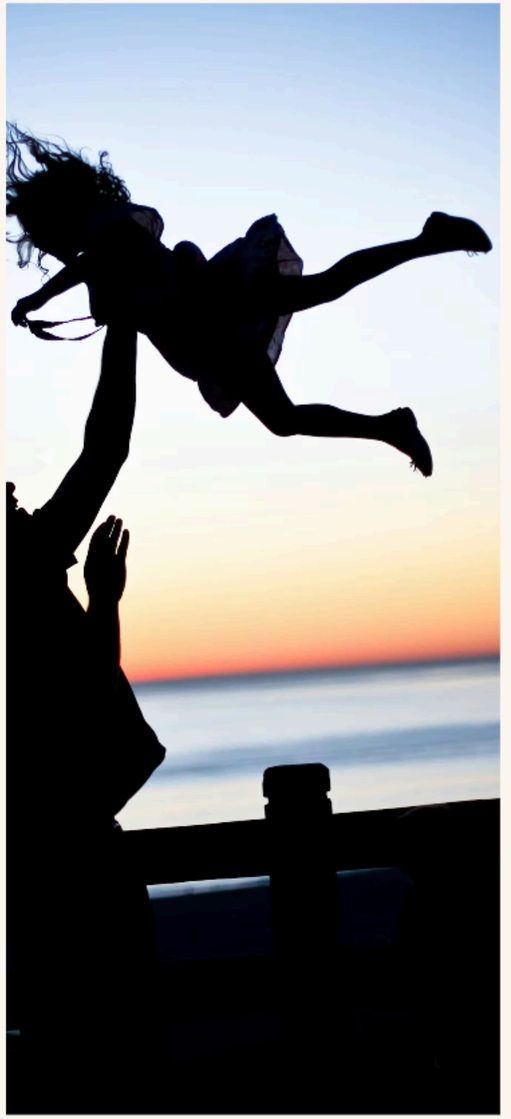
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Self-Listening: Your Internal Audience



Notice

What shifted in me as I heard his story?



Name It

What am I feeling or assuming?



Ask

What is shaping my reaction?



Choose

How can I return my attention to his experience?

Indigenous Woman

When your community is at its best, what is true?

Listen Inward:
What Did You Notice?

With an open mind and open heart...

What was happening within your
internal audience as you listened?

What We Learn When We Truly Listen



Communities have wisdom.



Listening builds trust.



It leads to better solutions.



Before we decide what a community needs, we must understand what they already know, value, and see as possible.

What We Found

Systems can take on a life of their own.

They don’t always do what we **want** them to.

If we want to change a system, one tool we have is to **understand the patterns** of systems behavior.

A Framework to Explore Power

The Alley



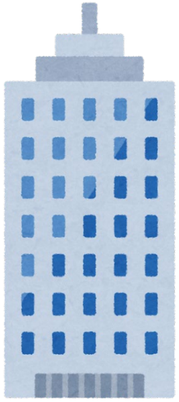
Where inequity is experienced-lived experience, frontline realities, community truth; where people are healthy or not healthy; the long story stands; tower people are or are not guests

The Market



Sites of exchange, clearly defined roles, power moves in many directions; where the community organically gathers; tower people have to adapt; how healthcare used to work

The Tower



Places of privilege, easier access to resources, Authority, systems, policies, and enforcement to hold equity as enforceable or optional; sets the terms

Power

more distributed ⟷ more concentrated

Where do you feel you operate from?

0	Alley	0	Market Place	0	Tower



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Barriers to Healthy Equity Change

- **Fixation on Finding a Cure/ Reaching Panacea**
  - Centering as Heroes Over Communities
- **Overgeneralization in Scaling the Solution**: “It worked there, so let’s try it in 10 more places."
- **Forgetting that Communities Work for Improvement Internally**
- **Using ‘Wins’ to Build Status**
- **Believing that community engagement should always result in integration**
- **Building Trust While Making Change Takes Time**

Listening Session Outcomes

How Far Will You Go to Listen?

Research-Informed Identification of Communities

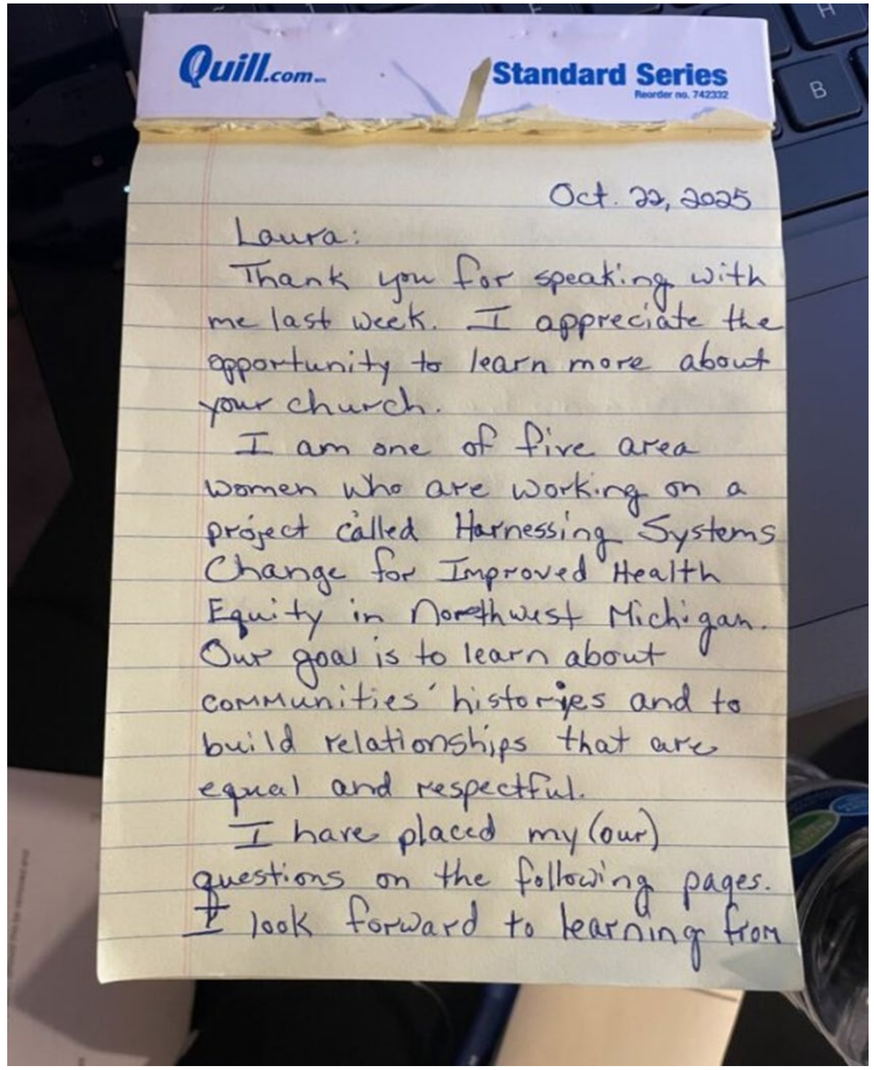
Trusted Leaders/ Messengers

Flexible Formats

Regroup to synthesize: seeing underlying patterns of behavior in ourselves

6
Listening Sessions

42
Community Members Attended



Our Findings

An Innate Sense of Selflessness / Desire to Help One Another

Spanish-Speaking Community

“[You have to control to stay healthy] when you feel physically and mentally fit to help others.”

Amish

“There are many things we women can do in the church…helping others in need sending our daughters as maids, babysitting, hosting, meals, the list is endless… even a cup of cold water in a disciple’s name.”



VETERANS

"We're all here for you, brother.”

Our Findings

The Effect of External Narrative

<u>Parents of Children with Complex Needs</u>

“You are considered a difficult parent, all for advocating for your kid.”

<u>Spanish-Speaking Community</u>

“Many people don’t want to help because of the color of your skin”

Feeling unseen and undervalued by society.

Our Findings

Knowledge of Bodily Autonomy or Self-Advocacy in Patient-Provider Relationships

Indigenous

"Many of our women still don't know they can ask their OB questions or say 'no.' *We* have to teach them that it's okay."

Amish

"I can only make my own choice [related to health]... each person still has to make their own choices."



Our Findings

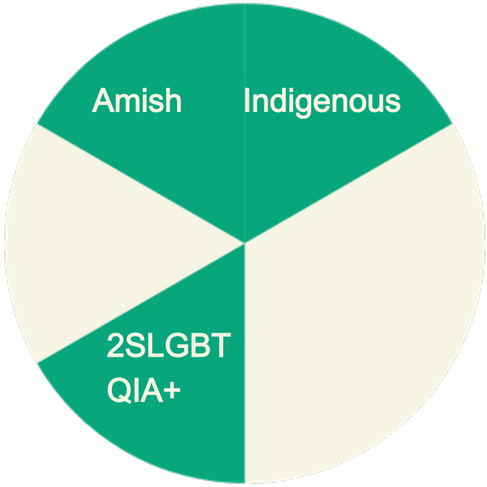
Understanding by Health Organizations Does Impact Patient Experience Positively

Spanish - Speaking Community

Amish

“We try to stick with people we know are trustworthy and places run or supported by our own people.”

“The healthcare professional with the deepest relationship is a local nurse midwife who often helps through pregnancy and birth.”



Our Findings

Sense of Control

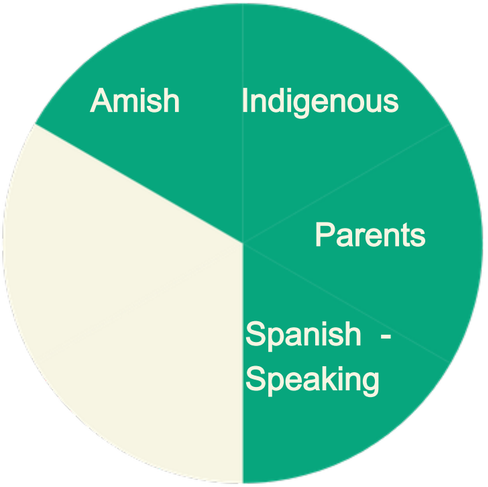
Spanish-Speaking Community

“[I can help my family stay healthy] when we are informed about what can keep us healthy, like knowing about climate change, food care, cleanliness, vaccines, viruses and how to battle them.”

“[We can] prepare well the food we eat.”

Indigenous

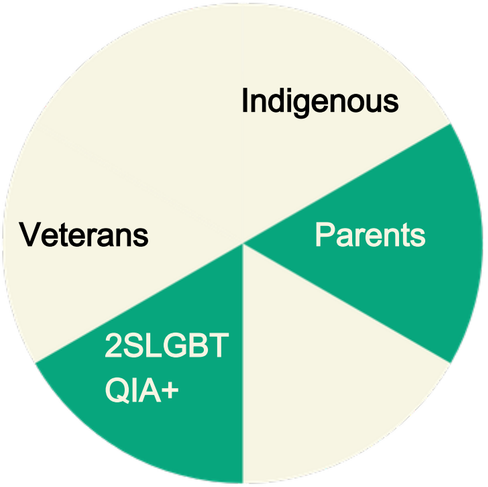
“So much of my health is out of my control [perceived as ‘in the control’ of resourced healthcare systems.] I’ve had to sit with that.”



Our Findings

False-Promise Messaging

Identifying / advertising organization to have master of understanding without backing.



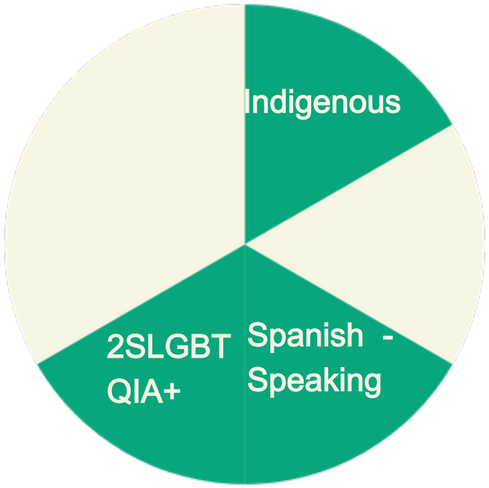
Our Findings

Dreams of a Sense of “Safety”

Indigenous
“We need a feeling of safety.”

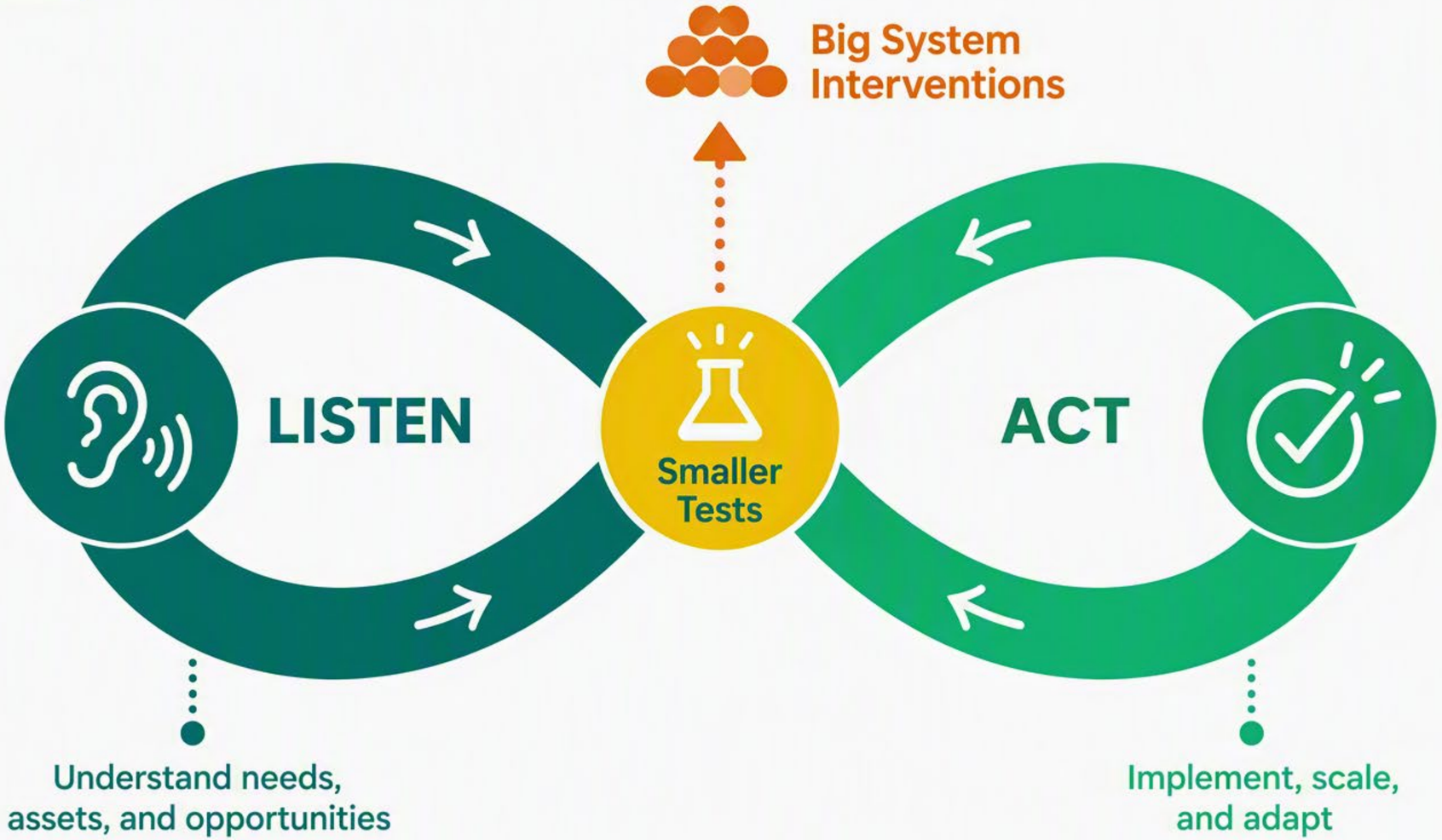
2SLGBTQIA+
“Our desire is not hope, it’s survival.”

Spanish - Speaking Community
“We need to feel secure, not persecuted.”

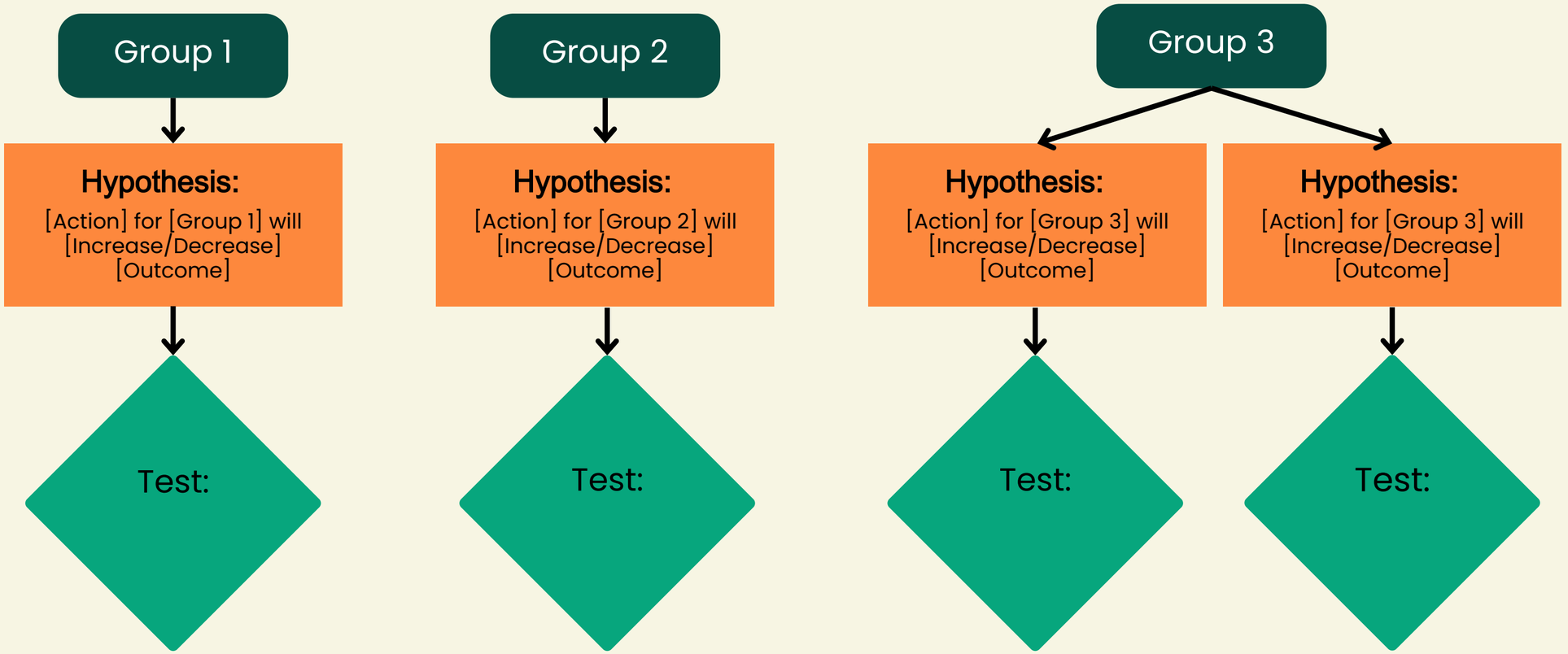


So How Else Can We Move Forward?

Non-Linear Adaptive Responsiveness



Test and Teach



Actions emerge from scalable tests informed by listening sessions.

Our Partners

Thank you to the following communities who made this work possible:

All Kids Thrive
American Legion Post #219 Fife Lake Michigan
Amish Church
Kapwa Leadership
Rotary Charities
Sacred Waters
Strangers No Longer
Up North Pride

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We’d love to keep the conversation going. To receive resources, follow-up information, or future updates related to today’s information, scan the QR code and share your name and email address.

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