

Karis Disability Services works closely with Credence & Co. to equip our leaders and employees in conflict transformation and organizational health. **Cayla Charles**, Senior Consultant (Credence & Co) presented on “EDI is Belonging” at our Karis Connected conferences. She joins **Dwayne Milley**, Vice President of Operations in September’s reflection to expand upon this theme.

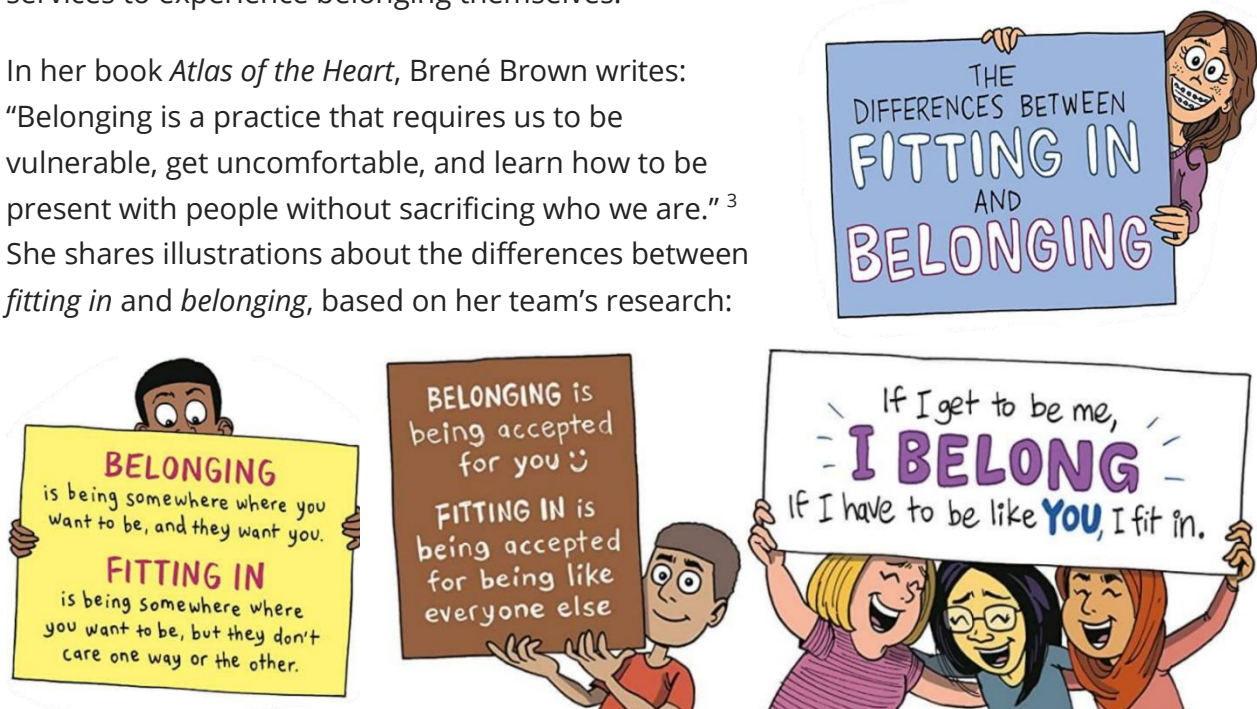
At our spring Karis Connected conferences, we connected the work of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) to people’s ability to feel like they belong in a workplace. We learned that EDI is belonging.

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) represents society’s desire to remove systemic barriers to help every person have equitable opportunities, appreciate everyone’s uniqueness, and ensure all people are valued and respected.¹

We know that people with disabilities often do not experience belonging and that broader society is set up to favour people without disabilities. We also know that people with disabilities are created in God’s image, that everybody has gifts and talents to celebrate, and that communities are better when everyone belongs.

What does this mean for us, as employees? How might we foster belonging with one another? To start, let’s not be afraid to embrace matters of equity, diversity, and inclusion. This will involve all aspects of our identities – those that are common or unique, visible or invisible.² When we know we’ll receive equitable opportunities within Karis; when our differences are celebrated; when we make space for everyone’s gifts to be shared – then we experience belonging together. In turn, we will be better able to help people who use our services to experience belonging themselves.

In her book *Atlas of the Heart*, Brené Brown writes: “Belonging is a practice that requires us to be vulnerable, get uncomfortable, and learn how to be present with people without sacrificing who we are.”³ She shares illustrations about the differences between *fitting in* and *belonging*, based on her team’s research:



If we are all worthy of belonging, why is it so hard to make it happen – especially in a work setting? Could it be the uncertainty of what might happen if we bring our whole, authentic selves into our interactions with others? Could it be that we’re worried about what others might bring?

Brown talks about how we question our own experience of belonging with “belonging uncertainty.”⁴ Uncertainty is often the barrier that prevents us from moving from *where we are* to *where we want to be*.⁵ If belonging means knowing who we are and inviting other people to be who they are, valuing and respecting each other in our diversity, and celebrating everyone’s gifts, then it is belonging that will help bring us to *where we want to be*.

Something else that will help us can be found in the letter that Paul the Apostle wrote to the people of the church in Philippi:

“Don’t be selfish; don’t try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.”⁶

At Karis, we know that this posture of humility helps to receive the gifts and talents that everybody has to share. And we don’t just receive these gifts – we celebrate them! As we practice belonging with each other, we will, in turn, be better equipped to help the people who use our services to experience belonging, and better able to help our communities to receive and celebrate everyone’s gifts. And when we practice equity, diversity, and inclusion with each other – when we embrace it for ourselves – we experience belonging. In turn, we are better able to help others experience belonging.

EDI is belonging. Communities are better when everybody belongs. And it starts with us.

Making the Connection

1. Understanding that belonging is both an organizational commitment and involves interpersonal actions, what does belonging look like for your team?
2. Share experiences of belonging and actions you’ve taken to help others experience belonging. What are the similarities? What are the differences?

¹ Government of Canada, “Best practices in equity, diversity and inclusion in research practice and design.” April 9, 2024. <https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/nfrf-fnfr/edi-eng.aspx#3>

² Aspects of our identities include age, ancestry, colour, racialization, ethnicity, place of origin, creed, citizenship, ability, family status, marital status, gender identity and/or expression, sex, sexual orientation. See [our values](#) to learn more about what this means at Karis Disability Services!

³ Brené Brown, *Atlas of the Heart*. Random House Publishing Group, 2021. p. 159.

⁴ Ibid., p. 165.

⁵ Julia DiGangi, *Energy Rising: The Neuroscience of Leading with Emotional Power*. Harvard Business Review Press, 2023. pp. 83-92.

⁶ Philippians 2:3-4, New Living Translation