

OASIS · AT A GLANCE

Organizing locally (support groups, coalitions, mutual aid)

When the formal system lags, four or five families who trust each other can build something the state hasn't. A shared ride, a respite trade, a provider tip, a testimony written together. It starts smaller than people expect.

BY JIM PALASTY · 9 MIN READ · WHAT FOUR FAMILIES CAN DO THAT THE STATE HASN'T

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PRACTICAL MUTUAL AID TASKS LOCAL GROUPS TAKE ON

Sharing respite through traded caregiving shifts, coordinating transportation, pooling provider information, and sharing advocacy templates. Small, concrete, and genuinely useful.

How it works

THREE STEPS

STEP 1

Formal systems lag, sometimes badly

Waitlists, service gaps, and slow bureaucracy leave real needs unmet in the meantime.



STEP 2

Informal networks fill real gaps

A handful of connected families can trade respite, share provider leads, and coordinate rides in ways no agency does.



STEP 3

Small groups build real advocacy power

Local organizing that starts with mutual aid often becomes the coalition that shows up to testify together later.

What a local group can actually do

Traded respite	Families cover each other's caregiving in shifts
Coordinated transportation	Shared rides for appointments and activities
Pooled provider knowledge	A shared list of responsive, competent providers
Shared advocacy templates	Letters, testimony scripts, and documentation formats
Collective testimony	Showing up together at CMH board or legislative hearings

THE GROUP TEXT THAT BECAME A COALITION

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Marisol started a group text with three other mothers she'd met in a CMH waiting room, originally just to trade tips about which respite providers actually called back. Eighteen months later, that same group of four had grown to fifteen families, traded hundreds of hours of informal respite, and showed up together at a CMH board meeting to testify collectively about a proposed service cut. The board postponed the vote. The group text was still the thing holding it all together.

FOUR WOMEN TRADING RESPITE TIPS BECAME FIFTEEN FAMILIES WITH ENOUGH COORDINATED VOICE TO POSTPONE A BUDGET VOTE.

What matters, at a glance

MICHIGAN SPECIFIC

Start small, start informal

Identifying other families through CMH, schools, providers, or community connections is often the entire first step.

Facebook does real organizing work

A private Facebook group, even a small one, becomes the practical hub for scheduling, sharing, and coordinating.

Isolation is the default without effort

Nobody organizes these connections for you. Families who wait for a formal program to introduce them to peers often wait indefinitely.

Traded respite shifts

Families covering each other's caregiving for a few hours creates real, no-cost respite that no waiver has to fund.

Pooled provider information

A shared list of which providers actually answer calls, actually show up, and actually understand autism saves everyone months of trial and error.

Coordinated advocacy

A group that already trusts each other can show up together at a CMH board meeting or coordinate testimony far more effectively than individuals acting alone.

BRING THESE · CHECK AS YOU GO

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| ☐ Contact information for three or four families to start with | ☐ A meeting space option (library, faith community, or virtual) |
| ☐ A shared document or group chat for provider tips and scheduling | ☐ A plan for trading respite shifts fairly |
| ☐ Awareness of your CMH board's meeting schedule for coordinated advocacy | |

YOUR MOVE

When you want to start organizing locally, here is how

- 1 Identify three or four families through CMH, school, or a provider's waiting room.
- 2 Start a group text or small private Facebook group.
- 3 Begin with something concrete: trading respite or sharing provider tips.
- 4 Grow the group gradually through word of mouth and shared trust.
- 5 Coordinate collective action when a shared issue arises (like a CMH board vote).
- 6 Share advocacy templates and testimony scripts across the group.

The state didn't build the network that actually gets families through the week. Families building it for each other is not a consolation prize. It's the thing that works.

RESOURCES NAMED IN THIS POST

michiganallianceforfamilies.org · <https://www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org>
 arcmi.org · <https://arcmi.org>

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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