



ANNUAL REPORT

THE AUTISM SOCIETY
OF SOUTHERN ARIZONA

2024



**Autism
Society**
Southern
Arizona

ANNUAL OVERVIEW
PROGRAMS & SUPPORT
FINANCIAL POSITION



OF BEING
ALL IN FOR AUTISM



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MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

To Our Amazing Supporters & Community!

As we conclude our first decade of officially being the Autism Society of Southern Arizona we want to extend our gratitude to all those who grew us into the resource and hub of support that we are today. Without the parents and community members that saw the need and took action to build something that has supported thousands of families across Southern Arizona we would not be where we are today. We are so grateful to all the hard work that has allowed us to take this next step of building a Community Center where our community can gather, connect, learn and thrive.

We strive to be a center of support for everyone in the Autism community and are proud that we offer programming for every circle across the Autism spectrum, from parents and caregivers to Autistic youth and adults. We offer opportunities for these circles to connect to support, community and resources for each person on the spectrum and their families.

This year we had the wonderful opportunity to expand our advocacy in the community. I was appointed to the Commission on Disability Issues for the City of Tucson, making sure that the needs of Autistic individuals are represented citywide. We worked with Banner University Health Plans to hold cafes where we listened to the adult Autistic population and gained helpful insights which will direct our work as we advocate and create programming.

We are committed to facing the challenges that plague our community head on. Autistic individuals are ten times more likely to attempt

suicide than their neurotypical peers, and this year we learned just how deeply this impacts those in our local community. This is why we were eager to engage when Arizona Complete Health gave us the opportunity to develop sensory bags for their crisis response teams. We traveled the state teaching the responders about utilizing sensory tools and nervous system regulation to help Autistic individuals in crisis. Crisis response teams that are neuro affirming are an important element in changing the statistics. We are dedicated to ending isolation by creating systems of support and education so that our community can live long wonderful lives. This year we had the honor of watching so many new relationships grow and blossom building community support and connection to one another.

We are so excited to start the next decade in our own Autism Community Center, where we can build a place for the community to grow, have access to education, support and resources and celebrate Autistic voices, Autistic art and Autistic lives. Together, we can make Southern Arizona the best place to be Autistic.

The Connection is YOU!



Kate Elliott, MSW

Executive Director

Autism Society of Southern Arizona



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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BCBA Consultant

Inspire Horizons

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Children's Clinics

Pete Schwarz

VP of Affiliate Relations

Autism Society of America

Lynda Weigel-Firor

Consultant/Grant Writer

OUR 2024 TEAM

Kate Elliott, MSW

Executive Director

Kate first came to the Autism Society of Southern Arizona in search of resources as a scared parent. Here she found the resources she needed and so much more. She joined the team in 2022 after being a group participant and volunteering with the agency for years. Kate earned her Master's in Social Work from the University of Chicago with a specialization in Family support and has spent her career supporting families facing life challenges. Kate is Autistic and she has two Autistic children. She loves being able to bring her experience and love for the Autistic community to support the families and individuals in our programs while strengthening the Autistic community, advocating and promoting allyship in southern Arizona.



Jade Munsey

Associate Director

Jade participated in ASSA's programs and joined the team in 2023. She worked as a registered behavior technician, received Bachelor's of Science in Psychology in Applied Behavior Analysis and is constantly challenging herself on what the behavior sciences truly represent. She has co-developed and trained Arizona's state-wide crisis intervention team on Autism sensory needs. Certified life coach. Certified in Mental Health First Aid. Organizes social groups for Adults with Autism.

Facilitated Peer-to-peer support groups and Parent Peer support groups. She has won grants for Autism Advisory Board funding and is very proud of her Advocacy work throughout the state of Arizona. Jade is a mom of three very smart, funny, and hardworking boys. She found her passion for Autism after her first son was diagnosed on the spectrum. Years later she was surprisingly (to her) diagnosed with being on the spectrum as well. Jade has been a committed learner to all things Autism for the last 8 years.



OUR PROGRAMS

NAVIGATING AUTISM PROGRAM

Our Navigating Autism Program is the first time we connect with many of our participants. This year 613 families reached out for support in finding the next step in their journey. Whether the person suspects their child or themselves are Autistic, we are often the first call they make in search of resources. People call when they are scared, confused and overwhelmed. They call when they don't know how to help their child, and when they are overwhelmed navigating the sea of services. We strive to meet each call with compassion and understanding. When a person is overwhelmed and lost and we are able to let them know they aren't alone, to let them know that they have support on this new journey; it is the greatest thing to hear the relief in their voice. Simply having someone on your side can make all the difference and the impact of that first stress relief is felt through the entire family. We continue to engage with new organizations to expand our comprehensive and unbiased list of referrals and recommendations to help guide everyone who calls or walks through our door.

"Thank you so much! Thank you for answering the phone and all this information."

"You're very nice and I love your operation and thank you for taking the time out, it really means a lot."

"I cannot express my gratitude for the info and your time. We will definitely support the organization."

LUNCH & LEARN SERIES

We hosted 13 Lunch & Learns to share valuable information with our community this year. Recording these has allowed everyone to continue to watch them on our website. We gathered professionals in different fields to speak on their useful knowledge in different ways to potentially help anyone on their Autism journey. We discussed Transition to Employment and Remote Work with Daivergent, Understanding Genetics in Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders, Letting Go of Anxiety with Tapping by Tyffany Howard, Navigating Special Education: Tips & Tools for Parents by MyschoolsTucson, and more! All of this valuable information is being recorded and shared on our website for anyone to be able to access it when they need it.

"Learning new concepts about specific niche areas - this information is hard to find independently so I appreciate being able to attend a webinar on it."

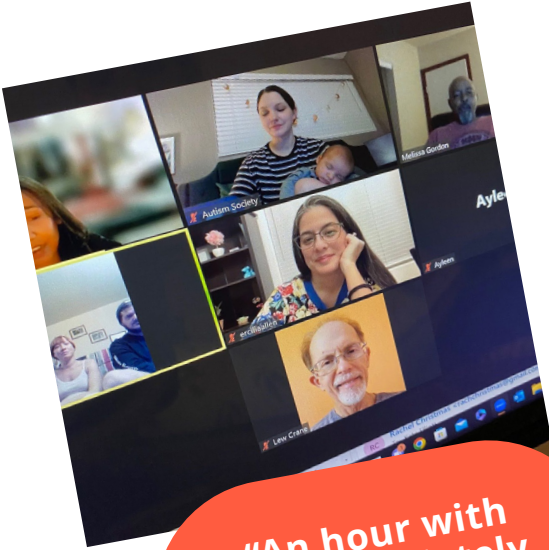


OUR PROGRAMS

PARENT PEER SUPPORT GROUP

The Parent Peer Support group has been an invaluable resource to our community, providing essential education and advocacy for parents and caregivers. By fostering a supportive environment where individuals can share experiences and knowledge, the group empowers families to navigate challenges with confidence. This year, 116 people participated in person, and 71 joined our virtual group, which allowed us to reach rural areas and connect with individuals who might not have been able to attend in person. Additionally, we introduced a virtual fathers' support group to address the unique needs of this specific group, further enhancing our efforts to support diverse families.


By helping parents and caregivers strengthen their skills and access crucial information, the group positively impacts the well-being of the entire family, ultimately creating a stronger, more resilient community.



"An hour with you completely changed my relationship with my kid!"

FATHER PEER SUPPORT GROUP

We started a father caregiver support group this year! We saw a trend in our groups being more female dominated and wanted to ensure that the father's could have a place to share, cry, and engage in their own way and at their own pace!



"Not feeling so alone which means the world. Connecting with other parents is the best!"



"Parent support group has been my favorite. It's awesome to relate and share stories with other parents who are on this journey only we understand. Sharing therapies and other services is super beneficial as well."

OUR PROGRAMS



TEEN AND TWEEN GAMING GROUP

This year we started the Teens & Tweens Gaming Group to provide a much needed space for Autistic teens and tweens to come together, play games, and build connections. This group is designed to be a fun, relaxed environment where participants can enjoy each other's company, foster friendships, and combat the loneliness that often accompanies Autism. This group is lead by Autistic adults allowing the teens to have mentorship opportunities while having fun. In 2024, we had 69 individuals participate, and with the addition of a dedicated community center for activities, we are expecting even more participants in 2025. The new space will offer a consistent, welcoming location for these teens and tweens to feel a sense of belonging, build meaningful relationships, and enjoy an environment where they can be themselves without judgment. It's not just about gaming—it's about creating lasting social connections and helping individuals feel connected to others.

In 2024, our Playformance program saw a 20% growth, continuing to provide high-quality play experiences for children. Located in a local gym, Playformance features trained coaches who lead games and social activities designed to enhance cognitive, physical, emotional, and social development.

"We get to participate in family exercises together, and our Autistic child gets to make friends."

WATCH THIS VIDEO!



OUR PROGRAMS



LITTLES' MEET UP

Engaging with younger children is essential for community growth, as it helps ensure that the entire family feels welcomed and included in the community. The Littles' Meet Up helps us achieve this goal. This group offers an accepting and inclusive space for autistic children 9 years old and under, along with their siblings and caregivers, to come together and connect. We provide space, activities, and opportunities for everyone to make new friends, have fun, engage in parallel play, stim, or simply be themselves in an environment where they are embraced with open arms. In 2024, 104 people joined us, and while the group has had a slow start due to losing our first space and adjusting to a time that works best for everyone, we are committed to continually adapting to the community's needs to ensure the group remains accessible to as many families as possible.



U OF A PARTNERS FOR TWO STEAM CAMPS

Each year Dr Jennifer Casteix and Dr Terry Matsunaga work with student organizations to put on STEAM Camp for kids 11 and up to engage hands-on with science activities alongside students to explore the world in a whole new way and make careers in science and higher education seem more accessible. This year we had 23 kids join the students from the Chemistry Department to explore cool science and start to dream about what their future careers may be.



The Autism Society of Southern Arizona is truly leading the way and it's always an honor to share your resources and information with our families and community. Even in my own personal experience with my autistic children, your programs like the Lunch & Learn have given me so much insight and ideas.

OUR PROGRAMS



ADULT SOCIAL CLUBS

This year, our Adult Social group has continued to flourish, becoming our strongest and fastest-growing program. We have truly outgrown our space, and while we are incredibly grateful for the space we've had, we know it has limited our ability to fully accommodate our population. One of the biggest challenges was that we couldn't make the space as accessible as needed, but we're excited to create a new environment that is not only emotionally welcoming but also physically accommodating. In our new space, we will be able to adjust lighting, manage noise levels, and provide more comfortable seating for our participants.

Our Virtual Group, held on the first Friday of every month, saw 180 people join this year, including participants from three different states outside of Arizona. Meanwhile, our In-Person group, which meets on the third Friday of every month, welcomed 399 Autistic adults, ranging in age from 18 to 70, and representing the full spectrum of Autism. This year, the group has been particularly special, as Associate Director Jade Munsey, an Autistic adult herself, won a grant to create an Autism Advisory Board. Jade, once a participant in the social club, has worked to involve more Autistic voices in shaping the club's direction, making it a community-led space. Each month, participants gather to share ideas on how to make the Social Club even better.

"Thank you ASSA for making the adult social club. It has helped me grow as a person and has made me make a few friends along the years. Thank you so much!"



"Adult Social Club is amazing. I get to play games and be socialized. It gives me an opportunity to be able to be me. Also, learn new things. I wish there were more places that adults with Autism could go and do stuff."



"Google after a few search attempts. Only kept finding everything for kids. Finally found this and other resources and I almost cried."

OUR PROGRAMS

AUTISM ADVISORY BOARD

This year we received a grant from the Hussman Foundation to start an Autism Advisory Board. This board meets monthly to discuss any issues or goals that our adult population may have. It is filled with Adult's on the spectrum who can share their opinion and experiences to help aid the growth and stability of our growing Adult population.



ADULT DIAGNOSED GROUP

In 2024, our Adult Diagnosed group welcomed 143 participants, continuing to grow as a space centered on acceptance and emotional processing. This peer-led group creates an environment where individuals are free to explore and express their feelings in a supportive, non-judgmental space. Participants are encouraged to process their emotions at their own pace, with the understanding that everyone's journey is unique. The peer-led nature of the group is key, as it ensures that the community's voices and needs shape the experience, fostering a sense of empowerment and shared understanding. All forms of communication, including stimming, are not only accepted but celebrated, ensuring that every participant feels seen, heard, and embraced for who they are. The group continues to be a powerful reminder that when Autistic adults come together to support one another, healing and connection can thrive.



"My favorite program is the late diagnosed adult group because it's such a relief to communicate with others who have experienced many of the same trials having not been diagnosed or realized they were Autistic."

"It's really nice to have a community space where I can relax and feel comfortable being myself with other people! The adult social club has been fun and I also think it is one of the things that has helped me feel less lonely than I used to. I also appreciate having the adult diagnosed group to talk about some of my experiences and feelings with others who have some similar experiences, since it can help me process things and sometimes get ideas about things I'm concerned about better than just on my own. Anyway I'm glad these groups exist and that I started coming to them, I've started to look forward to them every month."

OUR PROGRAMS

AUTISM FRIENDLY

COMMUNITY TRAINING



AUTISM FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

With Autism Friendly Communities, our mission is to ensure Southern Arizona is the best place for Autistic individuals to thrive, free from the challenges that too often lead to isolation and harm. We are committed to addressing these challenges proactively, helping to prevent our community from being left behind. With Autistic individuals being ten times more likely to attempt suicide than their neurotypical peers, we've seen firsthand how critical it is to provide support and understanding within our local community.

This year, we were honored to partner with Arizona Complete Health to develop sensory bags for crisis responders. These bags are equipped with tools to help Autistic individuals self-regulate during moments of distress. We traveled across the state, training crisis responders on how to use these sensory tools and implement neuro-affirming crisis responses. This initiative is a vital part of our commitment to ensuring that Autistic individuals in crisis are met with compassion, understanding, and appropriate care. Neuro-affirming crisis response is key to shifting the statistics and helping prevent tragic outcomes for those in our community.

In addition to our crisis training, we also continue to provide educational workshops for employers, teachers, emergency responders, and community organizations, helping them build a more inclusive environment for Autistic individuals. This year, we provided hands-on training for 567 people, equipping them with the tools to create a more supportive and understanding community. By addressing these systemic issues and offering solutions, we are dedicated to ending isolation and ensuring that every Autistic individual has the opportunity to live a long, fulfilling life.

"Clear information that I can use now in my classroom. Thank you!"



"It gave a very clear visual on how children with autism see and experience the world members with Autism, and it just makes me understand them a lot more by putting myself in their shoes."



"I liked the perspectives the presenters gave in what it's like having Autism"

"The speakers really went in depth with each slide and really knew the information being presented. They did not stand there and just read off slides, they spoke from knowledge and heart."

"Knowledgeable, sincere presenters who shared personal experiences. That helped their audience understand and relate."

"The instructors were incredibly engaging and answered our questions in very kind ways!"

"WOW! So much Great information, examples and suggestions!!! presented in varied formats. Extremely useful presentation. THANK YOU!"

"This was an excellent class for defining an introduction to Autism Spectrum. There were examples of sensory system overloads and different accommodations for helping."



"Thank you so much for that in depth email! My wife has looked into most of this on her own with her ex-wife. I'm new to the equation so while she knew most of this already, it was very informative for me. I truly appreciate the time you took to get it to me."



ALL IN FOR AUTISM DAY

This year we held our biggest event of the year, All In For Autism Day, at the Tucson Convention Center celebrating Autism Acceptance Month. This year was our 10th anniversary and we filled their Grand Ballroom with resources, entertainment, and a dance-A-thon for those on the spectrum, their families, and the community.

The whole community came to celebrate with us including: Mr. Nature, UofA Science group, Disney princesses, 501st Legion characters, Southern Arizona Reptile Rescue & Education, Civic Orchestra of Tucson with their instrument petting zoo, Saguaro City Music Theatre, Arizona Avengers, 360 Photo Booth, face painting, a sensory zone for calming down or getting those wiggles out in a safe place, and lots of local resources!

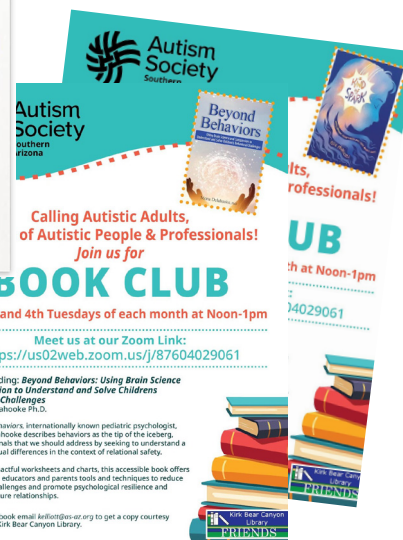
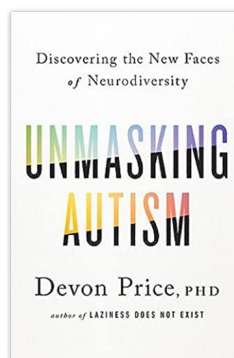


"My daughter had a blast and made friends and I found great resources for her!"



BOOK CLUB

This year we were able to host a virtual book club twice a month due to the generous donation from the Friends of Kirk Bear Canyon Library. We were able to give books away to 46 and had 72 participants throughout the year. Reading and connections with the community for bi-monthly meetings has been great and has sparked new interest in hosting more groups to host "Autism Talks." As a community, having a place to learn and ask questions freely is vital for the growth of the community.



NIGHT AT THE CHILDRENS' MUSEUM

Thanks to the generous sponsorship of Arion Care, we were able to host a Night at the Children's Museum for all our community to come take over Tucson's Children's Museum for a night of sensory-friendly fun. We had 110 people come out to join us in taking over the museum, connecting with the community in a way where their needs could be met to join the night fully! These Community Connection events offer wonderful opportunities to engage new families while engaging the rest of our community in different, fun ways. This event allowed participants from different Spectrum Circles to meet and interact in a new way, which facilitated the intersectionality of communities.



GET AIR JUMP NIGHT

The Doug Flutie Foundation and Get Air Trampoline Park have been extremely generous to us again! Our families got to enjoy a sensory-friendly night at the trampoline park. We had 43 participants and Get Air generously donated the space and socks for all of them. Connections were made while jumping and playing games. We excitedly finished the night by being given a giant check for \$500 from the Doug Flutie Foundation to support our programming.



**Doug Flutie Jr.
Foundation for Autism**

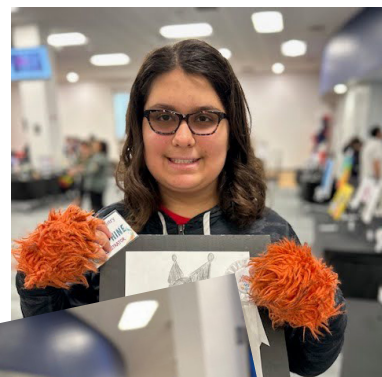


THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
BookStores



AUTISTIC ARTISTRY

Art is a powerful means of expressing memories, emotions, ideas, and information, and the Autistic community knows this very well! With this in mind, we aimed to create a space where the talented artists in our community could showcase their work. We were excited to have a diverse range of creative expressions shared, from pencil sketches and handcrafted jewelry to poetry and interpretive dance. The event also featured food, drinks, art activities, and an inclusive atmosphere that allowed everyone to appreciate the artwork and connect with one another. We are deeply grateful to the UofA Bookstore for generously providing the venue and to TEVA for their support in funding the food. The event was a great success, with 150 attendees joining us to celebrate the art of 70 Autistic Artists.



SENSORY FRIENDLY SANTA

The holidays can be a sensory-overloaded and overwhelming time of year, especially for those with Autism. For many families, enjoying the season's simple pleasures can be a challenge. Meeting Santa is exciting, but special accommodations can make the experience even more enjoyable for individuals with Autism and their families. That's why we host a Sensory Friendly Santa meet and greet, offering families the chance to reserve a private time with Santa. During this relaxed event, families can engage in holiday activities, take photos, receive a gift, and feel at ease knowing the event is designed with them in mind. We were delighted to have 73 participants join us for this memorable and magical occasion.



*"The Autistic mixer.
I could dance or run
& listen to music.
It's so meaningful
to be social with
someone."*



AUTISTIC PRIDE MIXER

June 18th marks Autistic PRIDE Day, a special occasion created to celebrate the diverse identities of individuals who are part of both the Autism and LGBTQIA+ spectrums. With a significant overlap between the Autistic and LGBTQIA+ communities, the event provides a space for people to connect, celebrate, and embrace their unique selves. The event was a great success, drawing in new participants and offering a welcoming environment where everyone felt accepted for who they truly are. 34 attendees enjoyed games, dancing, food, and the joy of meeting new people.





Liz Gallagher



Vanessa Zuber



STARFISH AWARD

This years Award Receivers:

The Starfish Award was started to recognize those who are working to support the Autism community of Southern Arizona. There is a story often told of a young man walking down the beach throwing starfish stranded on the sand back into the ocean as he walks. Another man approaches him and says "Why are you bothering? You will never save them all!" The young man throws another starfish back into the sea and responds, "But it matters to that one." Every day we have the opportunity to improve the lives of those around us. We at the Autism Society of Southern Arizona strive to make Southern Arizona an amazing place to be Autistic through community building, advocacy, and training throughout the community. We want to honor those who are working towards this mission with us in big and small ways. When we work together to make a difference our actions build on each other and create stronger communities. We will be awarding Starfish Award throughout the year and once a year a Superstar Award to someone making an extra impact.



Ricki Williams

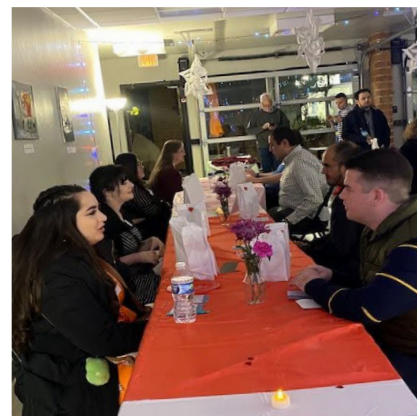


Maria Aguayo Telles, Ph.D
& Jennifer Fischahs, MAT



SPEED DATING

Our Speed Dating event provided the Autistic community with a fun and safe space to practice social skills and explore dating in an inclusive environment. We created a comfortable setting with a cozy dating room, conversation topic suggestions, and fidgets to help guide each participant through their six 15-minute dates. The event was a great success, and a few private dates were even arranged afterward. With 30 participants in total, the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with many in the community asking when the next event will be. Due to its success, we plan to make this a yearly event around Valentine's Day, offering a chance for Autistic individuals to connect and build meaningful relationships.



LOOK WHO WAS ALL IN FOR AUTISM IN 2024!



Banner Health Plans	\$15,000
Premiere Wealth Advisors	\$10,000
Helping Hands Behavior Therapy	\$7,000
Intermountain	\$5,000
Arion	\$5,000
SARRC	\$3,000
Brainwave	\$3,000
Roman Empire	\$3,000
Absolute HCBS	\$3,000
Zona Behavioral Consulting	\$3,000
Mercy Care	\$3,000
TEP	\$3,000
O'Rielly Chevrolet	\$2,000
RISE	\$1,000
Pioneer Title	\$1,000
AZ Autism Charter	\$1,000
Hopebridge	\$1,000
Karanas Law	\$1,000
Long Realty Cares	\$1,000
Truly Nolen	\$1,000
Blue Sprig	\$1,000
Centria	\$1,000
AST	\$1,000
Snell & Wilmer	\$1,000
AXIS	\$1,000
Blake Easter Seals	\$500
Arizona Lotus Corp	Media
Total	\$77,500

COMMUNITY FUNDRAISING PARTNERSHIPS

Bashas - April Charity of the Month Campaign

Raised \$12,473

Trulieve - April Roll Up
Program Recipient

Raised \$11,457

GRANT FUNDERS

Arizona Complete Health
for Autism Friendly Communities
& Sensory Bag First Responder Training

\$55,709

Banner Community Reinvestment Grant
Navigating Autism Program

\$12,145

Cox Communications
Teen Groups

\$6,100

Hussman Foundation
Adult Social Club & Advisory Board

\$2,000

Parker

\$5,500

The Hellene Henrikson Fund
of the Lutheran Church of the Foothills
Spectrum Circles

\$15,000

Total Grants: \$98,455

The connection is you.™

Thank you to all of our supporters who believe in our mission to create connections, empowering everyone in the autism community with the resources needed to live fully.

OUR FINANCIAL POSITION

FOR THE YEAR ENDING DECEMBER 31, 2024

OPERATING REVENUE

Contributions <i>Annual Giving</i>	\$23,321	(10%)
Grants <i>Grants awarded in 2024</i>	\$98,454	(44%)
Fundraising Partnerships <i>Funds raised by community campaigns</i>	\$23,930	(11%)
Special Events <i>All In For Autism Day</i>	\$80,811	(35%)
Total	\$227,719	100%

OPERATING EXPENSES

Program Expenses	\$52,811	(24%)
Administration Expenses <i>Salaries & Wages (includes running of programs)</i>	\$114,988	(52%)
Fundraising Expenses	\$30,110	(14%)
Operational Expenses <i>Rent, tech, insurance, etc.</i>	\$23,031	(10%)
Total	\$220,940	100%

NET INCOME **\$6,779**



Thank YOU for being **ALL IN FOR AUTISM**

Your support was the foundation for our 2024 achievements in...

ADVOCACY

Co-hosted in Autism Cafes
with Banner University



Health Plans
listening to
the needs of
the Autistic
Community

Participated in
advisory panels for U
of A Counseling Dept
and Sonoran Center
for Excellence in
Disabilities.

Our Executive Director
appointed as representative
on Commission of Disability
Issues for



EDUCATION



12
organizations
completed
Autism Friendly
Community
Trainings

Developed sensory bags and
educated Crisis Intervention
teams across Arizona with
Arizona Complete Health



90 people learned
with us at
Lunch & Learns

CONNECTION

700
families connected
to resources through
Navigating Autism

1477 people
celebrated with
us at
All In for Autism
Day



We had fun and made
friends at **12**
Community Connection
Events

Autistic Artistry featured
art, poetry and dance from
over **70** local Autistic artists



and is essential to building our future in...

our new Autism Community Center!

The Connection is You!

ADULT DIAGNOSED
GROUP



ADULT
SOCIAL CLUB



PARENT PEER
SUPPORT GROUPS



LITTLES' MEETUP



COFFEE &
AUTISM CHATS



FATHERS' PEER
SUPPORT GROUP



THANK YOU!

FOR BEING ALL IN FOR AUTISM 2024



Banner
University Health Plans



Southwest
Autism
Research &
Resource
Center



Pioneer Title Agency



Snell & Wilmer



The connection is you.