

Mission Statement

The Autism Society of Minnesota exists to enhance the lives of individuals with autism spectrum disorders. AuSM seeks to realize its mission through education, support, collaboration, and advocacy.

Young girl with autism marvels at trolley ride and meets Santa

Family thought they were unwelcome at public events, until YOU made sensory-friendly a community plan

The Giesen-Tyler family has been blessed with Finn, a remarkable, 7-year-old girl with blonde hair and big blue eyes. Finn loves blue and pink, maps, and knowing how many blocks the family is away from home when they are in the car. She won't wear anything denim, nor can she tolerate tags or sequins. She will not eat food that is too hot or too cold, nor too slimy or too crunchy.

Finn has intractable epilepsy, ehlers danlos syndrome, asthma, a feeding tube, and autism.

With these challenges in mind, the Giesen-Tyler family mindfully has to select the events in which they participate, taking into account the time of day and crowd potential. A simple visit to Target or a quick run to the grocery store does not exist for them; each trip has to be planned carefully.

Finn needs an environment that is small and fairly quiet; she needs to know what is expected of her and what to expect. She longs to have experiences like her friends, but it is impossible for her to be successful for any length of time in unpredictable environments.

The idea of visiting Santa during the holidays, strolling through a museum, or taking in a movie on a Sunday afternoon was never on the Giesen-Tyler family agenda.

Until YOU made sensory-friendly a necessary part of community events by supporting staff training and individuals with autism in Minnesota, including Finn.

Kristine, Finn's mom, said, "The guidance and training AuSM gives to businesses so they can offer sensory-friendly programming has allowed Finn to be 'normal.' Her self-stimming behaviors, like twirling and sniffing her hands, don't set her apart from her peers. At sensory-friendly events, Finn doesn't have to 'hold it together' in order to get along."



Kristine sees Finn relax at sensory-friendly events, and that allows Kristine, her husband, and Finn's brothers the chance to relax, too, while enjoying time as a family.

"Sensory-friendly events have helped us connect with other parents and share the joy of our unique child in environments that celebrate each child," Kristine said.

The Giesen-Tylers live three and a half hours from the Twin Cities, but they feel it is well worth the preparation it takes to attend an AuSM sensory-friendly event.

"The smile on Finn's face and her feeling of belonging and success is worth every second of that planning and then some," Kristine said.

"At events, our child isn't 'the autistic girl' – she's 'Finn.' Finn has been able to ride on a trolley, like *Daniel Tiger*, her favorite. When she met Santa during a sensory-friendly event, she didn't have to sit on Santa's lap or smile for a camera; she was able to experience Santa her way."

"We are grateful for all AuSM does for my daughter, for our family, and for all of the families that need a little bit extra to experience that joy."

And we at AuSM are grateful to YOU for supporting the growth of programs for the Minnesota autism community and making joy possible.

A Word from our Executive Director, Jonah Weinberg

The Minnesota autism community needs YOU.

When the Autism Society of Minnesota was founded 45 years ago, the prevalence rate of autism spectrum disorder was 1:10,000. Flash forward four decades, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that the prevalence rate for autism today is 1:68, or more than 1 percent of the U.S. population.

As the diagnosis rate increases, so, too, does the need for services and programs to help individuals with autism thrive.

AuSM has grown from its grass-roots origins to become one of the most active and robust Autism Society affiliates in the U.S., focused on the whole lifespan of individuals with autism, and recognized for its innovative, high quality services and programs.

AuSM supports its members and the broader autism community through Information and Resources services, advocacy efforts, counseling and consulting services, summer camp programs, social skills classes, the online AuSM Resource Directory, free support groups, an annual state autism conference, workshops, autism training, employment resources, emergency preparedness programs, and other events and activities that raise awareness of autism and benefit the Minnesota autism community.

YOU MAKE THIS POSSIBLE.

You are an exceptional community that supports AuSM's mission and donates time, talent, and treasure to ensure continued growth of innovative programs and services for those with autism in Minnesota.

Over the years, much has been achieved, but much also is left to accomplish, including seeking ways to serve communities in greater Minnesota. We need to reduce stigma around disability and ensure parents from all backgrounds know the early signs of autism so their children can be evaluated and have access to early interventions. As those with autism age from childhood to adulthood, we need to find ways to expand opportunities for adults with autism, from housing, to employment, to recreation.

Your support is integral to the fulfillment of AuSM's mission. We are grateful to have you by our side as we move into our 45th year and look forward to reaching our fifth decade of service to the Minnesota autism community.

Thank you.



2015 Highlights

Education, Support, Collaboration, and Advocacy

Membership: AuSM Members include nearly 1,000 families and individuals throughout Minnesota, Wisconsin, South Dakota, North Dakota, Michigan, Illinois, Montana, Virginia, Florida, Maryland, and beyond.

Information and Resources: A free service for our community, AuSM's Information and Resources team answered nearly 3,000 e-mails and calls in 2015.

Awareness: AuSM continues to develop sensory-friendly events with community partners including The Works Museum, the Minnesota Streetcar Museum, the Schubert Club, Children's Theatre Company, Northtown Mall, Southdale Center, Stages Theatre Company, and more. AuSM staff offer valuable resources at these events.

Summer Camps: In 1977, AuSM began one of the nation's first summer camp programs for youth with autism. Since then, AuSM Summer Camps have grown to serve those with autism ages 6+. In 2015, AuSM held eight weeks of camp for more than 300 youth and adult campers.

Advocacy: AuSM gave our community a voice on multiple committees and panels including: the University of Minnesota LEND Program; Autism Taskforce, Governor's Council; ADA 25th Anniversary/MSCOD; Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities; Coalition for Children; MNBLN; Twin Cities Diversity Roundtable.

Mental Health Services: AuSM's Mental Health Services team handled more than 2,500 appointments in 2015. Staff also facilitated free support groups to meet the needs of more than 175 regularly attending parents, children, family members, and individuals.

"Participating in AuSM's programs has changed my life for the better. Finding help as an adult diagnosed late in life was difficult until I found AuSM. AuSM support groups have been particularly helpful. Before I attended, I didn't know any other adults, especially other women, on the spectrum. Walking in I felt I had finally found my tribe."

- AuSM Member, Winona, Minn.

Life with Autism Series: AuSM's *Life with Autism Series* includes hope-filled, engaging classes designed for parents, family members, relatives, and caregivers of individuals with autism, as well as classes for those who want to obtain a basic understanding of autism.

AuSM Skillshops: These monthly mini-workshops explore specific subject areas related to autism. In 2015, AuSM expanded the reach and accessibility of the AuSM Skillshops by holding them at partner locations including Fraser, St. David's Center, Lionsgate Academy, and Merrick, Inc.

Social Skills Classes: AuSM's interest-based social skills classes involve partnerships with community organizations including Como Park Zoo & Conservatory, Eastman Nature Center, the Minneapolis Institute of Art, Children's Theatre Company, the Minnesota Zoo, the Science Museum of Minnesota, Stages Theatre Company, ComedySportz, the Great Lakes Aquarium, and the Lake Superior Zoo. More than 230 youth and young adults participated in AuSM's Social Skills classes in 2015.

Autism Direct Support Certification and Training: AuSM provided nearly 100 state-wide trainings on autism and related topics in 2015, including training for educators during the MEA conference, multiple first responder and law enforcement groups, and professionals at the Mayo Clinic. Several disability service providers had full departments participate in AuSM's Autism Direct Support Certification Program, an in-depth course that provides practical solutions for working with people on the spectrum. More than 2,500 people learned through AuSM's trainings in 2015.

Emergency Preparedness: Developed in 2012, AuSM's Emergency Preparedness program provides training and education to families and emergency responders. AuSM's curriculum is endorsed by the Minnesota Board of Peace Officer Standards & Training, which has expanded demand for the program by police and law enforcement departments across the state. AuSM has become recognized as a leader in this area. In June, AuSM led a workshop for a group of emergency response professionals in California.

Community Building: Fundraisers organized by and for AuSM help raise awareness and increase resource sharing. Steps of Hope, the AuSM Golf Classic, Ride for Hope, Joey's Ride, Cam's Ride, What's On Tap for Autism, CommVault, and others raised funds in 2015 to support AuSM programs and services for our local community.

Annual State Conference and Gala: AuSM's state conference includes multiple tracks for parents and caregivers, educators, mental health and therapy providers, and individuals on the spectrum. The conference attracts nearly 1,000 participants each year, and features nationally recognized experts. In 2015, AuSM held its inaugural gala, *Celebrate AuSM Inspirations*, an event that brought the community together for fantastic food, games, and a celebration of those serving as true inspirations to individuals affected by autism.

Autism and Employment: In addition to providing autism training for employers, AuSM organized *Autism in Business*, held on Oct. 24, 2015. The event focused on reducing stigma around disability and educating employers on increasing access for qualified workers with autism at all levels of employment.

AuSM summer camps serve youth and adults in 2015

Adults with autism have valuable summer experiences at Hand in Hand



AuSM's popular summer residential and day camps were the first in Minnesota to serve local youth with autism. Many campers eagerly attend each year, and campers have been disappointed when they "age out".

Aware of the need to serve people with autism as they grow, and through the generosity of supporters like YOU, AuSM offered two Camp Hand in Hand sessions for adults in 2015.

Alexandra Neis, an adult with autism, attended AuSM camp in her youth. She loved horseback riding, playing with puppies, swimming, fishing, and pontoon rides.

Karen Neis, Alexandra's mom, said her daughter didn't understand what it meant to age out of camp, but Alexandra was thrilled when she learned she could return to Hand in Hand in 2015.

"Alexandra loved being back at camp and was so relaxed; she even comforted her bunk mate," Neis said. "To see her happy and enjoy camp is so comforting and rewarding."

Neis added, "I'm grateful to AuSM for extending the camper age. Alexandra can't wait to participate in Hand in Hand in 2016."



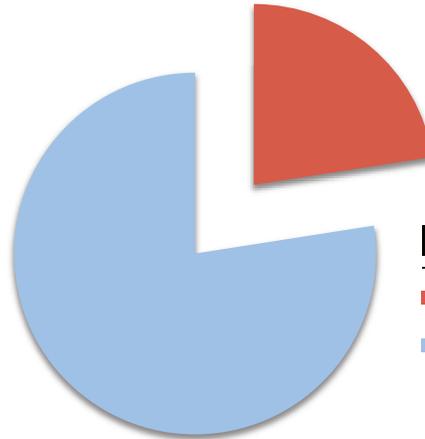
AUSM 2015 FINANCIAL REPORT

AuSM is dedicated to transparency, accountability, and financial health. 100% of donations made to AuSM support programs and services for those affected by autism in Minnesota. AuSM's 2015 budget was 1.479 M.



Expense

Programs and Services	75%
Fundraising	6%
Property Related Expense	5%
Administrative	14%



Income

Fundraising	23%
Programs and Services	77%

2015 AuSM Board of Directors

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We look forward to sharing AuSM's 45th Anniversary year with you in 2016!

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 autism society of minnesota

www.ausm.org