

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.

AuSM's Mission in Action

Peer mentor program enhances the lives of youth and adults with autism

Emily Goldberg, AuSM member from Minneapolis and mom of 7-year-old twin boys on the autism spectrum, wants her boys to have positive support from people who “get” them as they navigate a world that doesn’t always make sense.

“It occurred to me that they don’t have people in their lives who think like they do, who understand what they’re going through in a way that the wonderful and well-meaning neurotypical people who provide support in their lives can’t,” Goldberg said.

Because of AuSM’s 46-year history of supporting people affected by autism, Goldberg approached AuSM with an idea for adults with autism to support youth with autism – an autism peer mentor program.

AuSM quickly became Goldberg’s program partner.

Jonah Weinberg, AuSM’s executive director said, “Mentors serve a valuable purpose in society, offering a relationship where like minds can relate and grow together through common understanding and a comforting sense of belonging.”

Goldberg noted that one of her 7-year-old sons already says “no one understands me.”

The autism peer mentorship program is a solution, allowing young people with autism to learn first-hand about others who have faced and overcome similar life struggles, teaching youth that a successful future is in their grasp, too.

The program also will benefit the adult mentors with autism who will be viewed as insightful leaders making a positive contribution to the lives of the next generation of youth with autism.

Goldberg realized the program must be designed and implemented by a team that includes those who understand the needs of those with autism best – people with autism.



Goldberg's sons, Zachary and Benjamin, enjoy a treat.

“The members of the steering committee who have autism are critical because they have lived it and are dedicated to helping those following in their footsteps,” Goldberg said.

In addition to the steering committee, Goldberg and AuSM have enlisted help from several organizations including Minnesota Life College, The Mentoring Partnership of Minnesota, the University of Minnesota’s Family Social Science and Clinical Behavioral Neuroscience Departments, and the Autistic Self Advocacy Network.

Goldberg and AuSM wrote and secured a “Community Innovation Grant” from the Headwaters Foundation for Justice. The grant is supporting the initial phase of the peer mentor program design, a phase that will continue through summer 2017.

The next step will be seeking funding for a pilot test of the program. The goal is for program implementation in Minnesota, with creation of a blueprint for other communities to build similar autism peer mentor programs.

The autism peer mentor program is AuSM’s mission in action.

“Engagement in this project puts AuSM at the forefront of developing new ways to help people with autism thrive,” Goldberg said.

A word from AuSM Executive Director, Jonah Weinberg

Minnesota autism community, you keep AuSM's mission in action.

The Autism Society of Minnesota exists to enhance the lives of individuals with autism spectrum disorders with education, support, collaboration, and advocacy.

This mission is realized through our members, volunteers, community partners, dedicated staff, educators, program participants, event participants, and others who support people with autism.

In other words, we need you to put our mission into action, to help individuals with autism thrive.

AuSM, with your support, serves 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, autism certification, and other events and activities that raise awareness of autism and benefit the Minnesota autism community.

These programs are AuSM's mission in action, and you make them 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.

Together throughout the years, we have made great strides helping people with autism, but our work is not done, and the need for programs and services continues to grow. Growth means bringing information to greater Minnesota, reducing stigma around disability, ensuring parents from all backgrounds know the early signs of autism and have access to early interventions, and finding ways to expand opportunities for adults with autism, from housing, to employment, to recreation.

Thank you for your continued support in putting AuSM's mission into action. We are grateful to have you by our side as we enter our 46th year of service to the Minnesota autism community.



2016 Highlights

Education, Support, Collaboration, and Advocacy

Membership: AuSM's membership is comprised of nearly 900 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 more than 2,600 e-mails and calls in 2016.

Awareness: AuSM continues to develop sensory-friendly events with community partners including the Minnesota History Center, the Science Museum of Minnesota, the Schubert Club, Children's Theatre Company, local malls, Stages Theatre Company, and more.

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 2016, AuSM held eight weeks of camp for 289 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; Minnesota State Council on Disability; Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities; Coalition for Children; and MNBLN.

Counseling and Consulting Services: AuSM's Mental Health Services increased by two therapists and the team handled more than 3,000 appointments in 2016. Staff also facilitated free support groups to meet the needs of more than 60 monthly parents, children, family members, and individuals.

"I have four children with ASD, one with DD, and my husband and I are on the spectrum. My son went to camp Hand in Hand this summer and really had a fantastic experience. The support given to my family has been just amazing. I feel AuSM has gone above and beyond."

- AuSM Member, Apple Valley, 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 2016, AuSM continued to expand the reach and accessibility of the AuSM Skillshops by holding them at partner locations including Fraser, St. David's Center, Lionsgate Academy, Minnesota Life College, 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, Mia, 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. Nearly 300 youth and young adults participated in AuSM's Social Skills classes in 2016.

Autism Direct Support Certification and Training: AuSM provided nearly 100 state-wide trainings on autism and related topics in 2016, including training for educators, multiple first responder and law enforcement groups, and professionals at Children's Hospitals of Minnesota. 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 2,220 people learned through AuSM's trainings in 2016.

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.

Community Building: Fundraisers organized by AuSM and other organizations that support our mission help raise awareness and increase resource sharing. Steps of Hope, the AuSM Golf Classic, Ride for Hope, Joey's Ride, Cam's Ride, Mud Rhythm Race Series, Hip Hop 4 Autism, and others raised funds in 2016 to support AuSM programs and services for our local community.

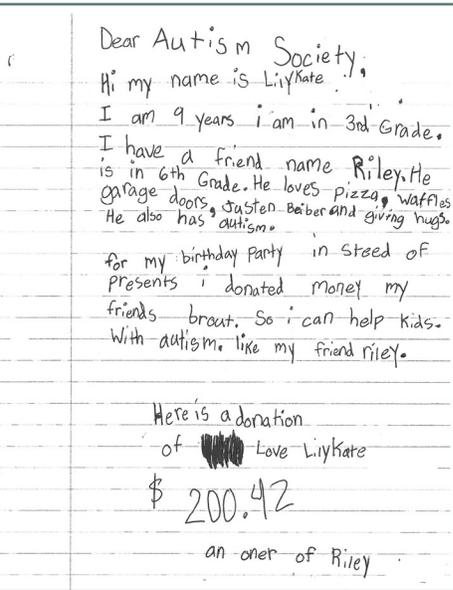
Annual State Conference and Gala: AuSM's state conference includes multiple tracks for parents and caregivers, educators, mental health and therapy providers, and individuals on the spectrum. The conference attracts nearly 1,000 participants each year, and features nationally recognized experts. In 2016, AuSM held its second 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.

Volunteers: Many who are a part of or support our awesome community volunteer to help during classes, events, camps, fundraisers, and more. Volunteers are essential in helping AuSM meet community and individual needs. We are grateful for all who support AuSM through sharing of time, talent, and treasure.

Donations large and small support AuSM's services

AUSM 2016 FINANCIAL REPORT

Girl's birthday wish supports her friend with autism



In November 2016, AuSM received this thoughtful letter from a young lady named Lily Kate who chose to donate her birthday dollars in support of the Minnesota autism community, a community that includes her friend, Riley. Lily Kate's generosity touched the hearts of many, and her friendship with Riley remains strong.

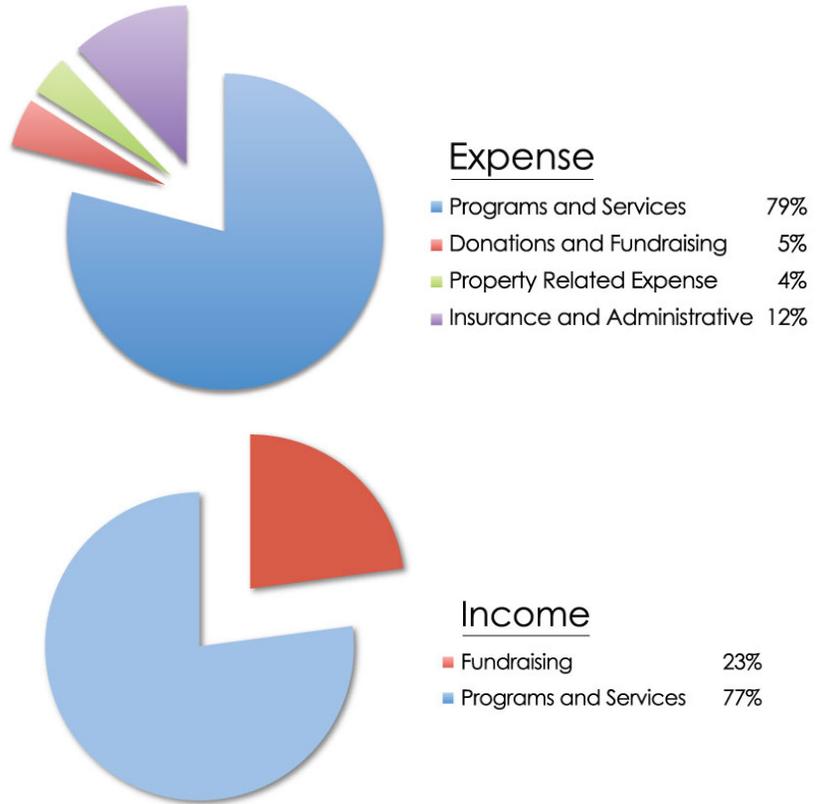
Lily Kate's letter reads:

Dear Autism Society,

Hi, my name is Lily Kate. I am 9 years. I am in 3rd Grade. I have a friend name Riley. He is in 6th Grade. He loves pizza, waffles, garage doors, Justin Bieber, and giving hugs. He also has autism. For my birthday party, instead of presents, I donated money my friends brought. So I can help kids with autism. Like my friend Riley.



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 2016 budget was 1.56 M.



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Thank you for continuing to support AuSM's mission in action as we move into 2017!



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