

A group of four young adults are sitting together on a boat, all wearing life jackets. They are smiling and appear to be having fun. The background shows the dark blue water of a lake.

# ANNUAL REPORT 2018

*Inclusion, Appreciation, Celebration*

**ausm®**

autism society of minnesota

Minnesota's First Autism Resource®

## *A Note from Ellie*

2018 was an incredible year for the Autism Society of Minnesota. We were a force as the autism resource for our local media, helped organize Super Fest 2018, served hundreds through our summer camps and social skills classes, introduced the Self-Advocacy Summit, trained thousands of professionals, met and surpassed fundraising goals, engaged the community for our first ever AuSM Connections Jigsaw Puzzle Competition, and so much more.

These accomplishments are testament to the commitment and compassion of our staff, Board of Directors, members, partner agencies, financial supporters, volunteers, and advocates. Though it takes hard work, the results of our efforts together are undeniable. It is an exciting time to be AuSM.

We are devoted to advocating, educating, supporting, collaborating, and building community. All of these elements are essential to fulfill our mission; however, there is something else that makes AuSM stand out in a diverse and complex community. **We celebrate autism.**

We acknowledge that our community needs support, choices, and resources. We do not underestimate the work still to come.

Yet, acknowledging needs does not mean that we cannot also relish in the unique, fascinating, dynamic beauty of autism and the community it creates. We appreciate every inspiring story, valuable lesson, and challenging question. We desire to learn from autistic advocates, mentors, family members, and friends.

We believe in the fundamental acceptance, inclusion, and celebration of all autistic people of any age, any culture, any lifestyle. Our society is made better by the presence of those who think diversely and challenge our societal norms and expectations. Different is not less. Sometimes, it's better.

We believe that autism can be awesome. Thank you, Minnesota autism community, for giving us so much to celebrate.



*Ellie Wilson*

*Ellie Wilson, AuSM Executive Director*

# *Our Mission*

**The mission of the Autism Society of Minnesota (AuSM) is to enhance the lives of individuals and families affected by Autism Spectrum Disorder.**

AuSM serves Minnesotans, throughout their lives, with a fundamental commitment to advocacy, education, support, collaboration, and community building.



# *Advocate*

**ADVOCATE for legislation and policies that lead to improved services, increased opportunities, and greater self-determination for people with autism.**



**AuSM amplified our community's voice on multiple committees and panels including:** the University of Minnesota LEND program; Senate Autism Council; Governor's Council; Minnesota State Council on Disability; Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities; and the Coalition for Children.

**LOOKING FORWARD:** The AuSM Advocacy Committee (AAC) is ramping up to create a unified voice and to offer support and resources to advocates looking to effect positive change for the autism community. The role of the AAC is to examine legislative activity, make recommendations to the AuSM Board, and represent AuSM's official policy positions in public forums.





On Sept. 22, more than 100 autistic adults came together for an event unlike any other: the first annual AuSM Self-Advocacy Summit. Held at the University of St. Thomas, the event was **by autistic adults, for autistic adults**. The Summit included a keynote speaker, breakout sessions, exhibitors, and the AuSM Bookstore. More than 50 percent of the speakers were autistic and shared wisdom from personal experiences.

The Summit also featured accommodations specifically tailored to individuals on the spectrum including a quiet room, the opportunity to submit written questions, socializing opportunities, and a relaxed happy hour with limited sensory input.

*"It was incredible to look at the event program and see material meant for me rather than just those who might educate or support me. I can't begin to describe the feeling of sitting in a room and knowing that everyone else there was just like me. I had no idea how powerful that experience would be because I have never even considered the possibility. This event created a safe, judgment-free place to be ourselves and to ask questions on how to take that freedom elsewhere in our lives."*

Leslie, Self-Advocacy Summit Participant

**LOOKING FORWARD:** Building on feedback from 2018 Summit participants, AuSM is moving the 2019 Summit to a larger venue: Union Depot in St. Paul. The 2019 Summit also will include a Call for Papers, encouraging autistic adults to share their insight during this important community event.



**EDUCATE and inform individuals, families, professionals, and the broader community about autism and effective strategies for support and inclusion.**

AuSM educated more than 4,400 in our community through social skills classes, the state autism conference, workshops, the Life with Autism series, trainings, and Autism Direct Support Certification classes.

**AuSM's education team conducted specially tailored autism trainings throughout Minnesota** at places including the Guthrie Theatre, Dakota County Libraries, Three Rivers Parks District, the Science Museum of Minnesota, the YMCA, emergency response and law enforcement agencies, schools, and more.

**LOOKING FORWARD:** AuSM continues to be a first call for autism information and education. In addition to serving the community through increased trainings, AuSM will continue to consult on public accommodations and better service for people on the autism spectrum.

**150+**



State-wide trainings for businesses and organizations throughout Minnesota.

**224**



AuSM Skillshop participants at six community partner locations in the Twin Cities.

*"Receiving autism training from the experts at the Autism Society of Minnesota is a complete game changer. In order to provide high quality customer service, we need to be equipped with concrete tools and effective strategies to be welcoming and inclusive to all members of our community, including those with autism. Not only does AuSM provide that information, their training helps build understanding and acceptance of the autism community. That's why this training is significant—it breaks down barriers between people with and without autism with the goal of creating stronger communities."*

Renee Grassi, Youth Services Manager  
at Dakota County Library

## *Support*

**SUPPORT** individuals and families through quality programs, counseling services, and resource information.

AuSM's team of eight therapists handled more than 3,000 appointments in 2018. Staff also facilitated free support groups to meet the needs of more than 1,800 participants throughout the year.

A free service for our community, AuSM's Information and Resources team answered thousands of e-mails, calls, and in-person questions. Also also tabled at dozens of resource fairs throughout Minnesota.

**LOOKING FORWARD:** AuSM will continue to serve clients and community members through AuSM Counseling and Consulting Services, support groups, and its Information and Resources hotline. Upgrades in technology, including use of an online client portal, will support improved communication and service.

AuSM Summer Camps accommodate the needs of individuals with ASD, ages 6+ and served more than 300 participants in 2018. Camps are an integral summer experience for participants, bringing many back for repeat experiences. Hand in Hand, Discovery, and Wahode sell out quickly once registration opens in January.

**3,000 +**

AuSM Counseling and Consulting Services appointments.

**4,500 +**

I&R and resource fair responses to inquiries.

**465**

AuSM Summer Camp participants and staff.



**LOOKING FORWARD:** AuSM continues to look for ways to expand camp offerings to fulfill needs, with the directive to continue our commitment to superior quality camp programming.

## *Collaborate*

**COLLABORATE** with organizations and individuals who share our commitment to enhancing the lives of those affected by autism.

AuSM proactively reaches out to businesses and organizations to educate, seek financial support, and partner on better serving those with autism. AuSM Premier Partners are select businesses and organizations that align with AuSM's mission in support of the Minnesota autism community.

**Autism Awareness Month offers a special opportunity for all community members to learn more about autism.** Businesses and organizations who partnered with AuSM during April received a poster to help spread public awareness and appreciation, and **some also chose to hold fundraisers to support AuSM's programs and services.**

AuSM also partners with organizations that make possible dozens of community-based social skills classes, including Como Park Zoo & Conservatory, the Minneapolis Institute of Art, the Minnesota Zoo, CSz Twin Cities, the Three Rivers Parks District, the Great Lakes Aquarium, and the Lake Superior Zoo.

## *AuSM Premier Partners:*

- Allegra Downtown St. Paul since 2013
- Minnesota Independence College & Community since 2013
- Autism Advocacy & Law Center, LLC since 2014
- St. David's Center for Child & Family Development since 2014
- Anime Twin Cities since 2016
- Lindamood-Bell Learning Processes since 2017
- Accra since 2018
- Vitals Aware Services since 2018



**LOOKING FORWARD:** AuSM will continue education and collaboration outreach initiatives in communities of diversity and communities with limited access to resources. AuSM also will partner with MN LEND for the 2019 state autism conference.

## Community

**BUILD COMMUNITY** and provide a welcoming and accessible environment for autistic people to connect and form their own social bonds.

A new fundraiser in 2018, the AuSM Connections Jigsaw Puzzle Competition brought together individuals, families, and the general community for a friendly competition for fastest puzzle completion time. More than 60 individual and family teams met at Mall of America to have fun and create puzzles in support of AuSM programs and services.



**AuSM CONNECTIONS**  
Jigsaw Puzzle Competition

As community awareness of autism has grown, so, too, has the willingness of the community to make businesses and activities sensory-friendly. This newly realized access has helped those affected by autism get out into the community and connect with each other.

**LOOKING FORWARD:** AuSM developed the first ever *AuSM's Guide to Sensory-Friendly Minnesota*, a helpful resource that explains why it's important to make public spaces accommodating. The guide also includes a calendar listing of sensory-friendly offerings throughout Minnesota.



Nearly **900** AuSM members include individuals with autism, families, professionals, and organizations.

**1,000+**

Participated in the Steps of Hope 2018 fundraiser at Southdale Center.

**150+**

Participated in AuSM's monthly support groups for adults, caregivers, and more.

**200+**

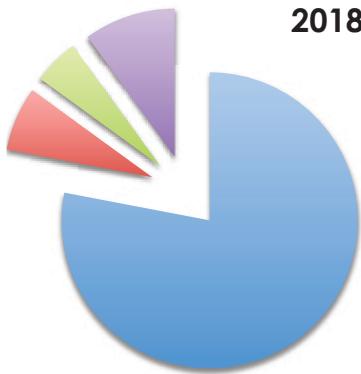
Volunteers put AuSM's mission into action in 2018.

**40**

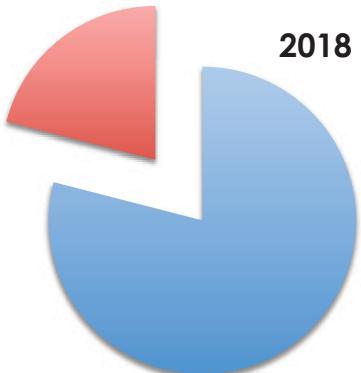
In 2018, nearly **40** fundraisers were organized by businesses and individuals supporting AuSM.

# 2018 Financials

AuSM is dedicated to transparency, accountability, and financial health. 100% of donations to AuSM support our local autism community. AuSM expenses breakdown: 77% programs and services; 7% donations and fundraising; 6% property/related expense; and 10% administrative.



- Programs and Services
- Donations and Fundraising
- Property Related Expense
- Administrative



- Programs and Services
- Donations and Fundraising



## 2018 AuSM Board of Directors

- Jean Bender, President
- Paul D'Arco, Vice President
- Katie Knutson, Secretary
- Kyle Bloch, Treasurer
- Robin Boeke
- Tom Cox
- Laura Dettloff
- Brooks Donald
- Noah Gerdling
- Jenna Matteson-Laabs
- Lois Josefson
- Shannan Paul
- Catherine Pulkinen
- Anantha V R Santhanam
- Maci Spica
- Tracy Templeton
- Joe Timmons
- Mike Walsh

## *AuSM achieves BBB accreditation*



By meeting key standards of board oversight, finances, results reporting, and fundraising appeals, the Autism Society of Minnesota achieved accreditation by the BBB Wise Giving Alliance in 2018. The BBB Wise Giving Alliance (BBB WGA) is the nation's only comprehensive charity evaluator, assisting donors in making sound giving decisions. Their broad standards go beyond what the law requires of charity monitoring organizations. Each BBB WGA charity report process involves a rigorous review using 20 holistic BBB Charity Standards, interaction with charity officials about corrective actions needed to address deficiencies, and quality control measures to assure report accuracy.





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