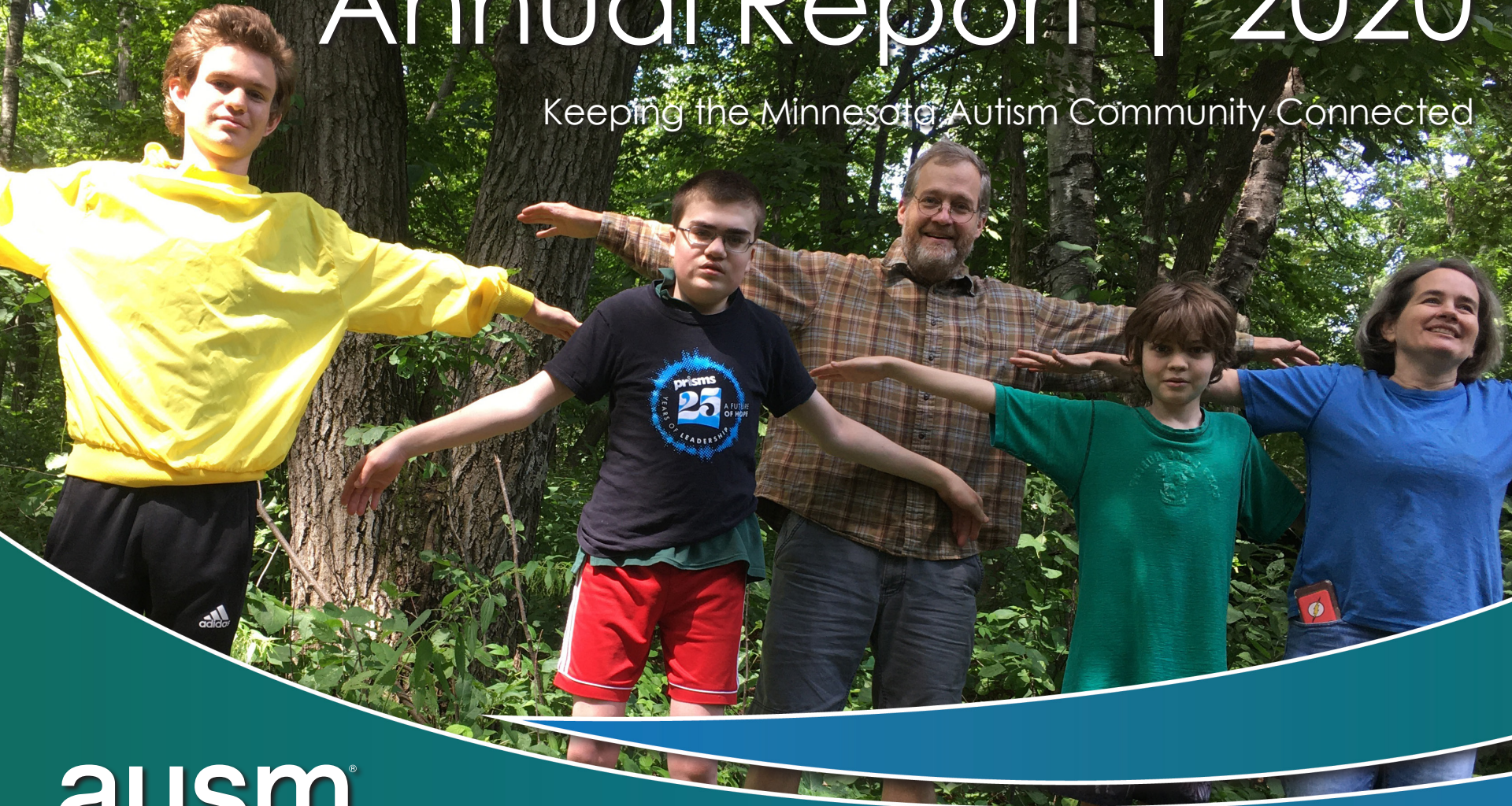


# Annual Report | 2020

Keeping the Minnesota Autism Community Connected



**ausm**<sup>®</sup>

autism society of minnesota

Minnesota's First Autism Resource<sup>®</sup>



# A Note from Ellie

## 2020 began with plans.

AuSM was heading into a year with a stellar annual conference line-up; social skills class programming was scheduled for youth and adults in multiple community settings; resource fairs and autism trainings throughout the state dotted our calendar; our therapists had full client schedules; and eight sessions of summer camp were eagerly anticipated.

And then the COVID-19 pandemic happened.

Like the realization of most in our community, AuSM was knocked off course and the plans as we envisioned them were canceled.

However, we quickly reacted because our essential services for the local autism community could not stop. We called on our creativity, learned about online tech tools, and discovered safe ways to keep connected to you, the community we love. Our pandemic pivot included:

- Offering virtual summer camps, allowing participants to interact with favorite counselors and participate in camp activities from the safety of their homes.



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

- Providing five support groups using Zoom and increasing the frequency to encourage community interaction and support.
- Moving AuSM Counseling and Consulting Services appointments to an accessible telehealth option, keeping both clients and therapists safe and connected.
- Partnering with the Autism Society of Greater Wisconsin to offer a collaborative autism conference that was virtually attended by more than 700.
- Organizing workshops, including the 2020 Educators Symposium; the 2020 Autistic Community Summit; and the Autism & Trauma: Exploring Effects and Strategies Workshop in a virtual platform that provided education and resources.
- Conducting the new AuSM Community Unity Challenge scavenger hunt in the summer and the 3rd Annual AuSM Connections Jigsaw Puzzle Competition virtually in the fall.

We couldn't have done this without your trust and dedication to this organization. You leaped with us into the virtual world, and together we continued to learn, share resources, and grow.

Together we are making it to the other side of this pandemic; keeping connected is keeping us strong.

As we head into 2021, our 50th anniversary year, I'm confident in AuSM's mission as our guide and know that together we will continue to ensure that people with autism have opportunities to thrive.

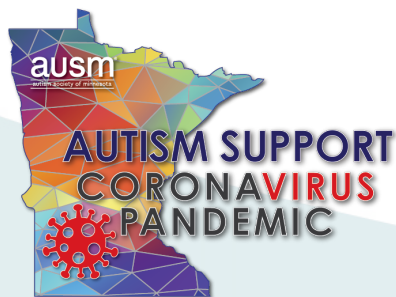


*Ellie Wilson*

**Ellie Wilson, AuSM Executive Director**

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

# Serving Our Community During the Pandemic



## Providing Resources, Offering Support

When the COVID-19 pandemic started altering our lives, community members felt anxious over changes in routines, unsure about how to handle social isolation and distancing, and nervous about copious and often conflicting information available through the news and social media. They were not alone.

The AuSM team jumped into action, developing and collecting support resources to help guide our community through information and requirements, including offering strategies for supporting physical and mental health as well as connection to others. We developed social narratives for mask wearing, created a Guide to Managing Self-Quarantine and Social Distancing for Autistic Adults, and provided links to additional resources connected to mental health, food support, and coronavirus updates.

## Multicultural Grant Project Supports Inclusivity and Access

2020 marked AuSM's second year of partnership with the Somali American Parent Association (SAPA), the Multicultural Autism Action Network (MAAN), and the Minnesota Department of Human Services Innovations Program. The goal of this partnership is to advance community capacity for culturally responsive disability services and networks for local Somali and Oromo families. The project served more than 100 families seeking training and peer networking for multiple challenges in disability diagnosis, special education, medical care, waived service navigation, and necessary disability supports. Project partners and parent-peer leaders offered updated and relevant information to families in an environment fostered to be stigma-free, inclusive, and linguistically and culturally appropriate.

Dedication to participating families helped the project be flexible during the pandemic, and supports shifted to include helpful virtual options and tools for families to use at home. AuSM is proud to support a growing diversity of Minnesota families and is truly fortunate to share this opportunity with SAPA and MAAN, who inspire AuSM's commitment and passion for equitable and inclusive services that are driven by diverse community advocacy and need.





# Imperative Advocacy Efforts



## 2020 Advocacy Initiatives

Despite the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 global pandemic in 2020, AuSM Advocacy Committee (AAC) Co-Chairs, Jean Bender and Jillian Nelson, along with the support of committee members and collaborative organizations, had a year of triumphs with the Minnesota legislature. As the AAC looks forward to 2021, they are preparing an ambitious package of bills to increase ADA requirements for those with invisible disabilities. 2020 highlights included:

- Passing the law enforcement training bill during special session in partnership with the People of Color and Indigenous (POCI) Caucus.
- Partnering with ARC, Upstream Arts, MN Brain Injury Alliance, and other groups to pass a bill requiring training on sexual assault prevention for direct support providers.
- Advocating for additional legislation including: Personal Care Attendant (PCA) wage increases, increased customized employment access, equitable COVID-19 vaccine distribution, organ transplant regulations, and sensory friendly grants.
- Joining COVID-19 workgroups with the Department of Human Services, Minnesota Department of Health, Minnesota Department of Education, Minnesota Disability Council, and national groups as well as groups in EIDBI, Employment First, TEFRA reform, waiver reform, and adult protective services reform.
- Collaborating with the Minnesota Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities to host Virtual Tuesdays at the Capital. Co-hosting the Disability Day at the Capital and partnering with Rev Up to increase voter engagement.
- Committee co-chairs serving on the Minnesota Autism Council, Governors Council on Developmental Disabilities, and the Minnesota State Rehabilitation Council. Chairing the MNCCD Anti-Discrimination and Intersectionality Committee.



# Partnerships Support Resource Access

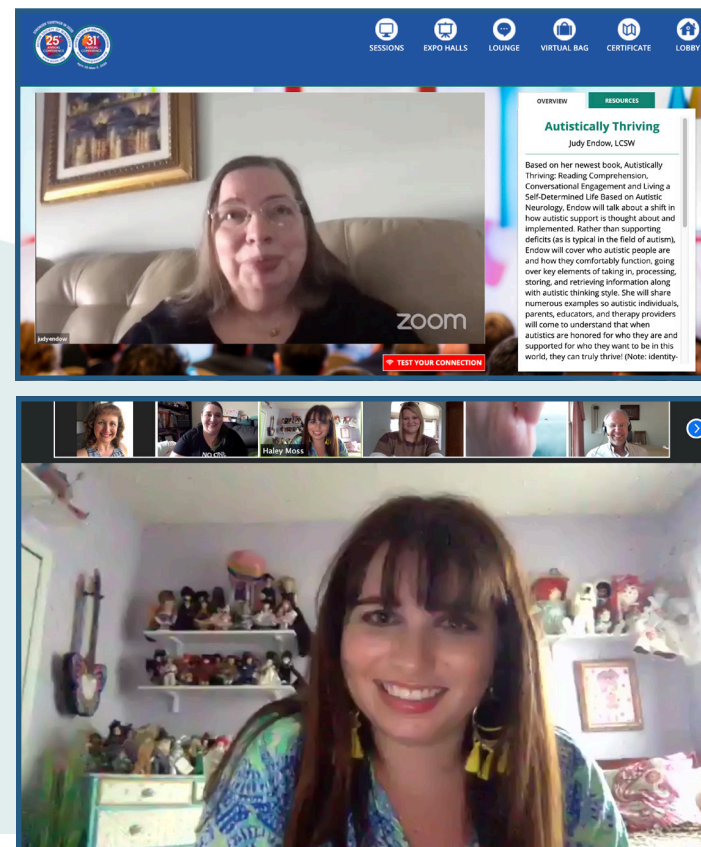
## 25th Annual State Autism Conference Goes Virtual

Just as the COVID-19 pandemic was becoming the topic of conversation throughout the state and nation, AuSM was deep into planning for the 25th Annual Minnesota Autism Conference. Scheduled to take place at the Minneapolis Marriott Southwest, new shelter-in-place decrees from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Minnesota Department of Health required the cancelation of all in-person events. While we were deeply saddened not to be able to bring our community together, the safety of our participants, speakers, exhibitors, and staff was paramount.

AuSM quickly learned that our neighboring affiliate, the Autism Society of Greater Wisconsin shifted plans for their state autism conference to a virtual format. After connecting with them to learn more, we realized that it was most logical for us to partner, using their selected WorkCast platform to deliver the important educational content to our communities virtually.

On April 30-May 2, 2020, the Autism Societies of Minnesota and Greater Wisconsin together provided access to a pre-conference interoception-focused workshop presented by Kelly Mahler, MS, OTR/L; four keynote speakers including Judy Endow, LCSW; Loui Lord Nelson, PhD; Kari Dunn Buron; and Haley Moss; 17 livestream breakout sessions; 30 on-demand breakout sessions; Minnesota and Wisconsin exhibit halls; and connection through virtual chat sessions. Not only did participants have access to this amazing content during the conference days, but they also had access to recordings for six months following the event.

The 2020 conference was a huge success, and the Autism Societies of Minnesota and Greater Wisconsin will partner again for a second year virtual conference in 2021.





# AuSM Classes and Camps Find a Way

## Social Skills Classes go Virtual and In-Person

The AuSM Education team worked diligently to find ways for our community to continue to learn and connect. This included working with the Three Rivers Park District to organize socially-distanced opportunities in outdoor environments, organizing AuSM On the Town destinations and activities with safety in mind, and holding ComedySportz Improv Skills via Zoom.

In the fall, AuSM also held its first AuSM On the Job class, an eight-session offering designed to provide workplace readiness training for young adults with autism that included small-group instruction and employment-focused experiential learning opportunities for building skills that translate into real-life, meaningful future employment. This program was offered free of charge thanks to a grant awarded by Minnesota State–Career and Technical Education.



## AuSM Summer Camps

AuSM's Camp Discovery, Camp Wahode, and Camp Hand in Hand went mostly virtual in the summer months. Virtual Camp Discovery included an offering of morning and afternoon interest-focused groups and evening activity sessions. The 40 participants selected the sessions that best fit their schedules and then participated with Camp Discovery staff through Zoom July 19-24.

As with Camp Discovery, staff and directors for AuSM's Camp Wahode and Hand in Hand were disappointed not to be able to meet in-person; however, they quickly came up with a plan for alternative programming Aug. 3-7. Each day, the 45 registered campers had access to one real-time virtual event and had unlimited access to pre-recorded activities presented through YouTube.

To wrap up this camp experience, AuSM planned a short in-person camp get together at Camp Eden Wood where each participant had access to in-person camp activities facilitated by familiar counselors from past summers of AuSM camp programming. Though it wasn't ideal, AuSM was grateful to be able to connect with campers in 2020 and looks forward to in-person experiences in 2021.



# Gathering for Learning and Fun

## Need for Knowledge Brings Community Online

The virtual world was a place for audiences to gather for learning from the safety of their own spaces. AuSM's education team provided Understanding Autism and Best Support Strategies, certification, and AuSM Skillshops through Zoom. AuSM also presented the 2020 Educators Symposium and the 2020 Autistic Community Summit online.

## Events Provide Resources, Support Fun

The 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Steps for Autism in Minnesota was held on March 1 at Southdale Center. The hundreds attending the pre-pandemic event gathered information from resource tables; won medals for participating in the AuSM Flash Dash; and viewed a special "Steps of Possibilities" poster showcase that highlighted success stories from adults with autism.

AuSM also organized the first ever AuSM Community Unity Challenge scavenger hunt, an online contest where participating teams had a weekend to complete mini challenges ranging from random acts of kindness to the absolutely bizarre. Teams took photos of the challenges and submitted them to win prizes.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual AuSM Connections Jigsaw Puzzle Competition took place virtually on Oct. 24, 2020, making it possible for 117 teams to compete from more than 18 states. Teams gathered in kitchens, family rooms, and even outdoors, creatively working together to solve their 500-piece and 1,000-piece PuzzleTwist® puzzles.





# Heeding the Call for Change

## Workshop Acknowledges Intersection of ASD and Trauma



On Dec. 3 AuSM partnered with the Autism Society of Greater Wisconsin to offer the *Autism & Trauma: Exploring Effects and Strategies* virtual workshop tailored to acknowledge and support the experiences of our autistic community. Keynote speaker, Phyllis Solon, PsyD, LP presented *A Neurodivergent Brain in a Neurotypical World: Neurology and Trauma in the Autistic Experience*. Jen Blusky, OTR, discussed the *Interplay Between Sensory, Trauma, and Autism*; Sara Lahti, MA, CCTP, spoke about identifying and treating trauma with autistic clients; *EMDR and ASD* was covered by Beth Pitchford, MA, LPCC; and Barb Luskin, PhD, LP, wrapped up the workshop with *Supporting Autistic Individuals in Non-Autistic Environments*.

## Thank You, 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

Accra since 2018

Best Care since 2020

GT Independence since 2020

Lions United Fitness Center since 2020

## Death of George Floyd Ignites Cry for Racism's End

On May 25, 2020, George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, was arrested outside a Minneapolis convenience store. While three officers stood by, one of the arresting officers knelt on Floyd's neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds, stealing the breath from his lungs, and ending his life.

Floyd's death sparked a reckoning to change the deeply integrated and deadly prejudice that plagues too many public and civic institutions and practices. Racism and oppression are real and present in Minnesota and across our nation. It is our responsibility to acknowledge this reality and take action.

AuSM believes that Black Lives Matter. Despite our articulation of this belief and our dedication to serve, we explicitly recognize our need to learn, collaborate, innovate, and change our practices to meet needs long overdue. In response, AuSM is strengthening its goals and strategies to contribute to the transformation of social service, mental health, and community building at the intersection of race and autism. By doing so, we will help create a stronger, better society.



# Keeping Appointments, Connecting Online

## AuSM Counseling and Consulting Services Transitions Quickly

The AuSM Counseling and Consulting Services team in the Twin Cities and Rochester reacted quickly to continue services for clients remotely, transitioning all appointments to telehealth one week prior to the start of the statewide shelter-in-place mandate. All clients had the option for appointments via computer or telephone regardless of coverage, resulting in little to no interruption of services.

## Therapists' Continued Growth

**Dr. Amy Carrison, PsyD, LP**, completed her post-doctoral supervision, passed the national Examination for the Professional Practice in Psychology, and obtained her Minnesota Board of Psychology license.

**Bjorn Walter, MA, LAMFT**, passed the Association of Marriage and Family Therapy Regulatory Boards national exam and obtained licensure as an Associate Marriage and Family Therapist from the Board of Marriage and Family Therapy.

**Sara Lahti, MA**, completed 4,000 hours of supervised practice, passed the National Clinical Mental Health Counseling Exam, and is patiently awaiting approval of her Professional Clinical Counseling license from the Board of Behavioral Health.

## Support Groups Needed More Than Ever

AuSM Support Groups also moved online to the Zoom platform in 2020. In response to increased community anxiety, support groups were increased from once per month to once per week. The online format served to increase access by those who wouldn't otherwise have participated in-person, alleviating transportation barriers and allowing participants to join the group from the comfort and safety of their own spaces.

## Virtual Supports Access

"I have been able to participate in AuSM support groups and other offerings safely from home, making it easier to participate more than I ever did before the pandemic started. Having things virtual gives more people the ability to participate. I'm very happy to be able to participate and meet friends this way."

– Katarina, AuSM Member



# 2020 Financials

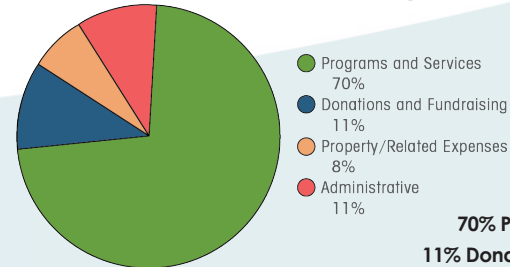
## 2020 AuSM Board of Directors

Paul D'Arco, President	Brooks Donald
Keith Guggenberger, Vice President	Noah Gerding
John Skillings, Treasurer	Anne Harrington
Jenna Matteson Laabs, Secretary	Deeqa Hussein
Jean Bender	Katie Knutson
Tom Cox	Michelle LaMar
Laura Dettloff	Paul May-Kramer
	Laura Nisi
	Shannan Paul



AuSM is dedicated to transparency, accountability, and financial health. All donations given to AuSM support our local autism community. AuSM expenses breakdown: 70% programs and services; 11% donations and fundraising; 8% property/related expense; and 11% administrative.

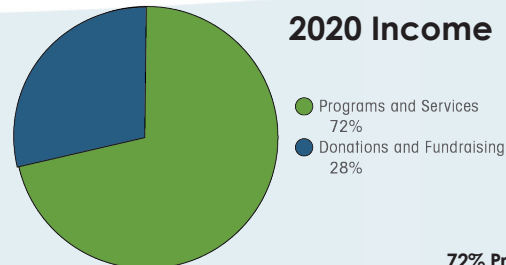
### 2020 Expenses



70% Programs and Services	\$1,128,464.37
11% Donations and Fundraising	\$ 178,993.75
8% Property/Related Expense	\$ 125,826.74
11% Administrative	\$ 176,606.14

Total \$1,609,891.00

### 2020 Income



72% Programs and Services	\$ 1,155,018.87
28% Donations and Fundraising	\$ 456,644.78

Total \$1,611,663.65

# Connecting the Minnesota Autism Community

