



2021 AuSM ANNUAL REPORT

Keeping the Minnesota Autism Community Connected



ausm
autism society of minnesota

Minnesota's First Autism Resource®

AuSM had big plans for its 50th anniversary year, plans that had to be modified due to the unpredictable, frustrating pandemic that continues to disrupt our sense of normal.

While holding the safety of our community and staff as a priority, AuSM has moved forward with reimagined events, programs, and education, drawing from an ingenuity that has enabled us to continue our mission of service to the Minnesota autism community.



Our mission in motion has included:

- Changing the date and location of Steps for Autism in Minnesota, offering an outdoor venue at Como Pavilion that welcomed an eager community seeking resources and fellowship.
- Intense planning for and provision of five limited-capacity sessions of residential AuSM Camp for teens and adults this past summer.
- Offering a mix of in-person and virtual social skills classes, with increased focus on outdoor activities including summer recreation programming and hands-on experience collaborations with the Three Rivers Park District.
- Serving AuSM Counseling and Consulting Services clients through telehealth and in-person options. Continued offering of multiple monthly support groups through Zoom.
- A second year of partnership with the Autism Society of Greater Wisconsin in providing a collaborative autism conference that was virtually attended by more than 500.
- Organizing virtual education opportunities including Autism Direct Support Certification Program classes, the 2021 Educators Symposium, the 2021 Autistic Community Summit, AuSM Skillshops, and a hybrid workshop presented by Judy Endow in Austin, Minn. with in-person and virtual participation options.
- A November version of the 4th Annual AuSM Connections Jigsaw Puzzle Competition offered at Mall of America and on Zoom to teams across the country.
- Providing more than 350 vaccinations during sensory-friendly COVID-19 vaccination clinics held at AuSM's office and at Spero Academy, in partnership with the Multicultural Autism Action Network, Spero Academy, and Hennepin Healthcare.

Continued support from AuSM members, partners, donors, dedicated staff and board, and this amazing community is what keeps us moving forward. We eagerly anticipate what the future has in store for AuSM as we continue to listen, learn, and grow while providing services and programs that give people with autism opportunities to thrive.



A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As you may expect, you will find this annual report to be full of pivots, changes, and accommodations made in response to the pandemic in 2021. I hope that as you read these pages you feel a sense of the care that AuSM's team has for you, your families, and your treasured communities. Regardless of the challenges we face, everyone at AuSM wishes our community health, connection, and endurance through trying times, and I see my team work every day to make that wish a reality. With that said, I want to share my enormous gratitude for the AuSM staff, board of directors, donors, partners, and followers. Growth, flexibility, and strength are to be admired, even if they are born of necessity. To work together, to learn, and to serve a worthy community are privileges that we do not take for granted. The insight, connection, and inspiration that each of you provides is commendable, and as such, please accept my heartfelt thanks. May we be better, together, in 2022.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ellie Wilson'.

Ellie Wilson, AuSM Executive Director

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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.



YEAR-ROUND SOCIAL SKILLS CLASSES

AuSM's education team offered year-round social skills classes for youth and adults with autism that included CSz Improv, AuSM On the Town, AuSM on the Job, and classes with Toneworks and Three Rivers Park District. To support greater involvement through the summer months, while also following guidelines for COVID-19 safety, AuSM offered four sessions of morning and afternoon recreation programs that met in person at a variety of community venues where participants engaged in nature activities, museum and zoo visits, and other activities to foster learning, friendships, and fun.



AUSM CELEBRATES INTERDEPENDENCE



To further connect with the community and provide resources to meet needs, AuSM launched an informational initiative, “AuSM Celebrates Interdependence.” This initiative reflected on the ways that humans build relationships and communities, contributing in different ways and receiving in different ways. AuSM shared original resources about relationships, families, environment, and community. These resources viewed disability from a viewpoint that celebrates neurodiversity and highlights the amazing ways that our autistic community members participate in their communities, families, relationships, workplaces, and other spaces. These innovative resources were added to AuSM’s website and are available to all.



4TH ANNUAL AUTISTIC COMMUNITY SUMMIT



The Autistic Community Summit, an event organized by autistics for autistics to build a strong community through education, shared stories, and advocacy, was held virtually on Sept. 18, supporting the safety of participants during the COVID-19 pandemic and allowing greater accessibility to those who may not have been able to travel to a specific physical location. Keynote speaker Wendell Britt, Jr., an autistic man, spoke about overcoming structural barriers for marginalized groups. Britt’s keynote was followed by breakout sessions led by autistic speakers that focused on topics ranging from autistic identity to communicating with health care professionals.



AUSM PROVIDES OFFICER TRAININGS

According to a bill passed by the Minnesota legislature in 2020, law enforcement agencies are required to provide autism training to every peace officer. With input from autistic adults, family members, autism experts, and officers, AuSM developed a four-hour training that was delivered to nearly 1400 officers in 2021. The training includes: 1. Autism overview and recognition across diverse populations; 2. Best practices for interventions and de-escalation strategies; 3. Crisis prevention and reduction models; and 4. Objective review of tools and technology available. AuSM will continue to deliver these autism trainings to officers in 2022.



A NOTE FROM A ST. PAUL POLICE DEPARTMENT OFFICER AFTER TRAINING

"I just wanted to pass along a note of sincere gratitude and encouragement. I've been attending these department in-services for 25 years, covering a multitude of topics, and I have to say your presentation ranks among the best we have ever had.

I was profoundly impressed with your expert and intimate knowledge, the depth of your passion, and your commitment to the mission. You are an excellent presenter and unquestionably the right [partner] for the role.

As a parent of a child with autism, I was touched by so many aspects of your presentation. It was exemplary on many levels. Especially the accuracy.

Thank you for being a soldier for those who live with autism and thank you for being a warrior for their quality of life."



26TH ANNUAL MINNESOTA AUTISM CONFERENCE

Inform, Influence, Innovate Together 2021

During our second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Autism Societies of Minnesota and Greater Wisconsin combined our state autism conferences again into one amazing virtual event, “Inform, Influence, Innovate Together,” which was held online April 21-24, 2021. This important conference featured dozens of livestream breakout sessions, virtual exhibit booths, an autism resources bookstore, and keynote speakers covering topics including disability and social justice, autism and happiness, the power of accessibility, and helping different kinds of minds be successful.



STEPS FOR AUTISM IN MINNESOTA 2021 – HYBRID EDITION



For the first time in AuSM’s history, we were thrilled to host Steps for Autism in Minnesota as a hybrid event. On a new date and at a new venue, community members were excited to connect in person again, while many community members chose to fundraise and walk in their own space at their own time. On May 23, the clouds rolled in, but the rain held off, and participants, sponsors, partners, volunteers, staff,

and AuSM Board members eagerly gathered at Como Lakeside Pavilion to see each other, collect resources, and have fun. With safety in mind and social distancing in place, AuSM offered participants a walk route, fun activities, an autism resource fair, and opportunities for community connections.



4TH ANNUAL AUSM CONNECTIONS JIGSAW PUZZLE COMPETITION



AuSM CONNECTION
Jigsaw Puzzle Competition 2021

Held in-person at Mall of America and virtually through the Zoom platform on Nov. 6, AuSM’s puzzle competition featured more than 125 teams competing in the 500-Piece and 1,000-Piece divisions. While teams worked hard in-person at the Mall of America, AuSM also had several Zoom rooms where the competition was intense for teams throughout Minnesota,

Indiana, Illinois, Utah, Massachusetts, Iowa, Michigan, Kansas, Washington, Georgia, North Carolina, Kentucky, Oregon, California, and Pennsylvania. An in-person event highlight, AuSM’s information-packed autism resources fair featured event sponsors and the products and services they provide to the local autism community.



A NOTE FROM A SENSORY-FRIENDLY VACCINE CLINIC PARTICIPANT

Lauren, mom of 8-year-old Alex, brought Alex to the sensory-friendly clinic after a traumatizing experience receiving the first of the two-vaccine series at Mall of America. Alex, whose diagnoses include sensory processing and anxiety disorder, as well as PTSD from medical trauma, found unparalleled support at the clinic.

“Everybody has some level of fear or doesn’t want shots,” Lauren said. “Most people can handle a clinic at Walgreens or Mall of America, but there are people who have more complex needs. When you have an opportunity to remove some of the struggles and make something easier, it’s an impeccable opportunity to get more people successfully vaccinated.”

Lauren notes that Ellie Wilson, AuSM’s Executive Director, and Hennepin Healthcare nurse Bridget, assigned to be Alex’s special helpers, created a safe comfort zone and patiently answered all of Alex’s questions and worked with her for nearly four hours. Above all they made sure that Alex knew her consent was respected. Ellie and Bridget never expressed frustration, pressure, or urgency. They said that there were so many other nurses helping other kids – they were there to help Alex.

“I went into your clinic with a sense of optimism, inclusiveness, understanding, community, and comfort. I was overwhelmed by it in a positive way,” Lauren said. “The clinic empowered individual choice and autonomy in a situation where it’s difficult to understand consent. Even if you’re a child, you have rights. This clinic afforded the opportunity for consent – something Alex will take with her for her whole life. Getting Alex fully vaccinated would not have been possible without this clinic. Each piece supported a successful outcome. My level of gratitude for your team is endless.”

AuSM Partners Offer Accessible Vaccine Clinics

In partnership with the Multicultural Autism Action Network (MAAN) and Hennepin Healthcare, AuSM hosted two sensory-friendly COVID-19 vaccine clinics for adults on July 15 and Aug. 5. Held at AuSM’s office in St. Paul, these clinics offered private vaccine areas, additional time, fidgets, and other accommodations to make the vaccine experience go as smoothly as possible.

Once the Centers for Disease Control approved the vaccine for youth, AuSM again partnered with MAAN, Hennepin Healthcare, and additional partner, Spero Academy, to offer two sensory-friendly vaccine clinics at Spero Academy for ages 5+ on Dec. 18 and Jan. 8. More than 350 vaccines were administered during these four events, providing inclusive access and making our communities safer during this pandemic.



The AuSM Counseling and Consulting Services team in the Twin Cities and Rochester continued to serve clients remotely in 2021; however, some in-person appointments were added back into schedules, depending on safety and comfort level. AuSM served more than 400 clients in Minnesota in 2021.



AuSM Support Groups

AuSM Support Groups continue to meet through the Zoom platform, making meetings accessible to all throughout Minnesota and providing a safe way for the community to interact with each other from the comfort of their own spaces. AuSM Support Groups include: Women's, LGBTQIA, Independent Adults, and Family Members of Adults.

“The Independent Adults with ASD Social Support Group has helped me to understand what ASD really is, because when I go there I see so many people with ASD. I find it sensational just to be there among all those people who are weird like me. It really helps me understand myself.”

-Support Group Client

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



AUSM SUMMER CAMPS COME BACK

After a year of having to move camp offerings to a virtual platform due to the pandemic, AuSM was able to offer five in-person residential camps for campers ages 14+, including 2 sessions of Camp Discovery and 3 sessions of Camp Hand in Hand. Due to pandemic-related programming restrictions at Camp Butwin, AuSM's day camp, Camp Wahode, was not held. To promote access and inclusion to AuSM's popular summer camps, 2021 placements were assigned via a lottery process. 127 campers were served through Discovery and Hand in Hand, and campers and staff alike were thrilled to be back together again, enjoying the amenities afforded by each amazing camp location.



A NOTE FROM A COUNSELOR WHO EXPERIENCED MAGIC OF CAMP AND COMMUNITY

Abby Price, a graduate student at Edgewood College in Madison, Wis., signed up to be a Camp Hand in Hand counselor to put herself out of her comfort zone, broaden skills, and experience something new.

Becoming a Camp Hand in Hand counselor changed Price's perspective in a big way. "Having a diagnosis can set limitations on life, but when campers are at camp, they are reminded that they are capable of anything that they set their minds to," she said. "There are no limitations to their abilities at camp. They can be their true selves, have confidence in themselves, and be surrounded by others who support them and want them to feel the best version of themselves."

Price added, "Once you experience camp, especially Camp Hand in Hand, it becomes infectious. You want to come back, you want to be a part of these campers' favorite week of the year, and you want to be a part of why their week at camp was a special one."





INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

AuSM's Information and Resources team answered nearly a thousand e-mails, calls, and questions throughout the year. Information and Resources is one of AuSM's cornerstone services, allowing anyone the ability to reach out with a concern or question and receive free recommendations and guidance.



ADVOCACY

In 2021, the AuSM Advocacy Committee (AAC) Co-Chairs, Jean Bender and Jillian Nelson, along with the support of committee members and collaborative organizations, prepared an ambitious package of bills to increase ADA requirements for those with invisible disabilities. 2021 highlights included:

- Advocated for rights, testing, and vaccine access related to the COVID-19 pandemic for individuals with disabilities.
- Helped pass Recovery Education legislation to support individuals with education losses during the pandemic.
- Supported the creation of a subminimum wage task force to create a plan in Minnesota in the event that subminimum wage is removed.
- Helped to increase wages for direct service professionals.
- Created self-advocacy grants.

2021 AuSM Board of Directors

Paul D'Arco,
President

Keith Guggenberger,
Vice President

John Skillings,
Treasurer

Jenna Matteson
Laabs,
Secretary

Jean Bender

Tom Cox

Laura Dettloff

Brooks Donald

Sonya Emerick

Noah Gerding

Anne Harrington

Deeqa Hussein

Katie Knutson

Michelle LaMar

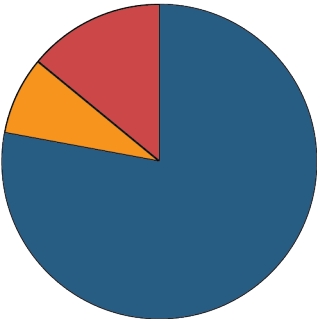
Paul May-Kramer

Laura Nisi

Shannan Paul

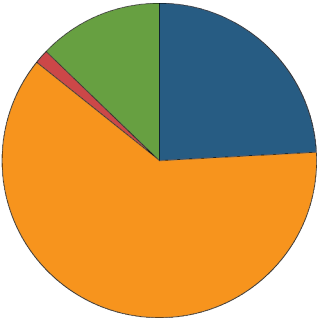


AuSM is dedicated to transparency, accountability, and financial health. All donations given to AuSM support programs and services for our local autism community. In 2021, AuSM received Paycheck Protection Program loan assistance as part of the government’s efforts to help businesses keep their workforce employed during the COVID-19 pandemic. This assistance is noted in the below chart along with AuSM’s income and expenses.



2021 Expenses

● Programs and Services	78%
● Donations and Fundraising	8%
● Management & Administrative	14%
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78% Programs and Services	\$1,245,327.97
8% Donations and Fundraising	\$ 120,795.91
14% Management & Administrative	\$ 228,088.00
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Total	\$1,609,891.00



2021 Income

● Programs and Services	24%
● Donations and Fundraising	62%
● Management & Administrative	1%
● PPP Loan Assistance	13%
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24% Programs and Services	\$ 418,963.08
62% Donations and Fundraising	\$1,089,247.24
1% Management & Administrative	\$ 17,021.42
13% PPP Loan Assistance	\$ 226,997.60
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Total	\$1,752,229.344



Connecting the Minnesota Autism Community

