



Autism
Society
San Diego



2024 Impact Report

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Message From the President & Executive Director

Celebrating 57 Years of Impact: The Autism Society San Diego

For over five decades, the Autism Society San Diego has been a steadfast pillar of support, advocacy, and empowerment for individuals and families navigating the autism journey. As the longest-standing affiliate within the Autism Society of America network, we take immense pride in our commitment to fostering a more inclusive and supportive community.

Expanding Services to Meet Rising Needs

Recent data underscores the increasing prevalence of autism, now affecting 1 in 22 individuals in San Diego. In response to the growing demand for resources and support, we have strategically expanded our programs to better serve the San Diego community.

Investing in Growth: Camps & Aquatic Programs

We have invested in expanding our beloved camp and swim programs, recognizing the profound impact these experiences have on skill development, confidence, and social connections for autistic individuals. With the support of over \$300,000 in grant funding, we are actively working to expand these programs and our other educational and support programs throughout the County geographically and into Spanish over the next one to two years, ensuring that more individuals have access to these transformative opportunities.

Recognizing a critical need for direct, personalized support, we also continue to expand and deepen the Autism Ask Line staffed by parents with lived experience who provide compassionate guidance to families seeking help. This initiative was made possible through strategic partnerships and grant funding, allowing us to respond to hundreds of inquiries to those navigating the complexities of autism, soon available on an App Store near you.

Looking Ahead: A Future of Growth and Collaboration

As we enter 2025, we are poised for unprecedented growth, driven by the dedication of our Board of Directors, staff, and valued community partners. We invite you to be part of this momentum—whether as a volunteer, Board member, sponsor, or program participant, your involvement helps us amplify our impact and strengthen our mission.

Together, we will continue to serve as San Diego's leading voice and resource for the autism community—championing inclusion, support, and opportunity for all.

Joe Ireland
President, Board of Directors

Shahriar Afshar
Executive Director

About Autism

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), hereafter referred to as Autism (which includes Asperger's Disorder and Pervasive Developmental Disorder – Not Otherwise Specified [PDD-NOS]), is a complex, lifelong developmental condition that typically appears during early childhood and can impact a person's social skills, communication, relationships, and self-regulation. The Autism experience is different for everyone. It is defined by a certain set of behaviors and is often referred to as a “spectrum condition” that affects people differently and to varying degrees.

While there is currently no known single cause of Autism, early diagnosis helps a person receive resources that can support the choices and opportunities needed to live fully.





We are the voice and resource for the Autism Community in San Diego

Our Mission

We create connections, empowering everyone in the Autism community with the resources needed to live fully.

Our Vision

Creating a world where everyone in the Autism community is connected to the support they need, when they need it.

We strive to improve the lives of people living with autism and their families in San Diego County.

About Us

Autism Society San Diego County originated in 1966 as the National Society of Autistic Children. Today, the Autism Society San Diego serves as the voice and resource of the San Diego autism community.

We promote meaningful participation and self-determination for autistic individuals and their families. We work diligently to ensure we support and amplify the voices of autistic individuals within our organization and throughout our community.



Autism Society San Diego hosted a panel at the 2024 Comic Con titled "Find Your Neurodiverse Tribe - Use Your Passion for Animation & Art to Make Friends, Join Groups and Create Community"



**Autism
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San Diego

2025 Board of Directors & Staff

2025 Executive Board:

**President - Joe Ireland
Vice President - Kasey Howell
Treasurer - Dustin Tracy
Secretary - Alyssa Label
Past President - Shirley Fett**

2025 Board Members:

**Chayo Chavez
Christopher Callahan
Jorie Ellazar
Derek Danziger
Amanda Marsh
Joel Anderson
Gilman Bishop
Tim Gobran
Allan Kaspar
Katie Phelps**

2025 Staff:

**Executive Director - Shahriar Afshar
Outreach Manager - Amy Munera
Program Manager - Gabriel Echaves
Administrative Assistant - Kay Freeman
Peer Resource Specialist - Virginia Rivera
Peer Resource Specialist - Michael Suckiel**

Our Work

We are the voice and resource for the Autism Community in San Diego

Autism Society San Diego is here to connect members of the Autism community to the support they need when they need it.

We do this by providing:

- Camp programs including Camp I CAN, Surf Camp, AWARE Camp, and Family Camp
- The Autism Ask Line, for all your autism related questions and referrals
- Educational programs and resources
- Support Groups for parents, caregivers, and autistic adults
- Aquatic programs including swim lessons and monthly Pool Parties
- Special events including Lights! Camera! Autism!, Autism Social & Mental Health Conference, Beers & Cheers for Autism, Splash for Cash and educational programs
- Monthly Newsletters and Emails
- Grants to ensure attendance for all
- Membership Benefits
- Social Media outreach through Facebook, Instagram, & Twitter



Our Program Impact

| | |
|--|------|
| Swim Lesson Scholarships Provided | 26 |
| Surf Camp Participants: | 153 |
| Camp I CAN Participants: | 79 |
| Family Camp Attendees: | 434 |
| Support Group Attendees: | 900 |
| Pool & Dance Party Attendees: | 1200 |
| Lights! Camera! Autism! Attendees: | 300 |
| Autistic Artists at Lights! Camera! Autism!: | 29 |
| Community Autism Trainings Provided: | 15 |
| Community Members Trained: | 1150 |



Our Program Impact (Continued)

| | |
|---|-------------|
| SD Padres Behind the Scenes Attendees: | 150 |
| SD Padres Autism Acceptance Night Attendees: | 220 |
| Children's Discovery Museum Sensory Friendly Event: | 116 |
| Autism Social & Mental Health Conference: | 325 |
| Captain Educational Conference: | 89 |
| People Who Received Support by Phone/Email: | 1500 |
| Resource Fairs Attended: | 14 |
| Community Members Reached at Resource Fairs: | 2000 |
| Splash for Cash Pool Party Attendees: | 250 |
| Beers & Cheers for Autism Attendees: | 120 |
| Total Program Impact: | 9070 |

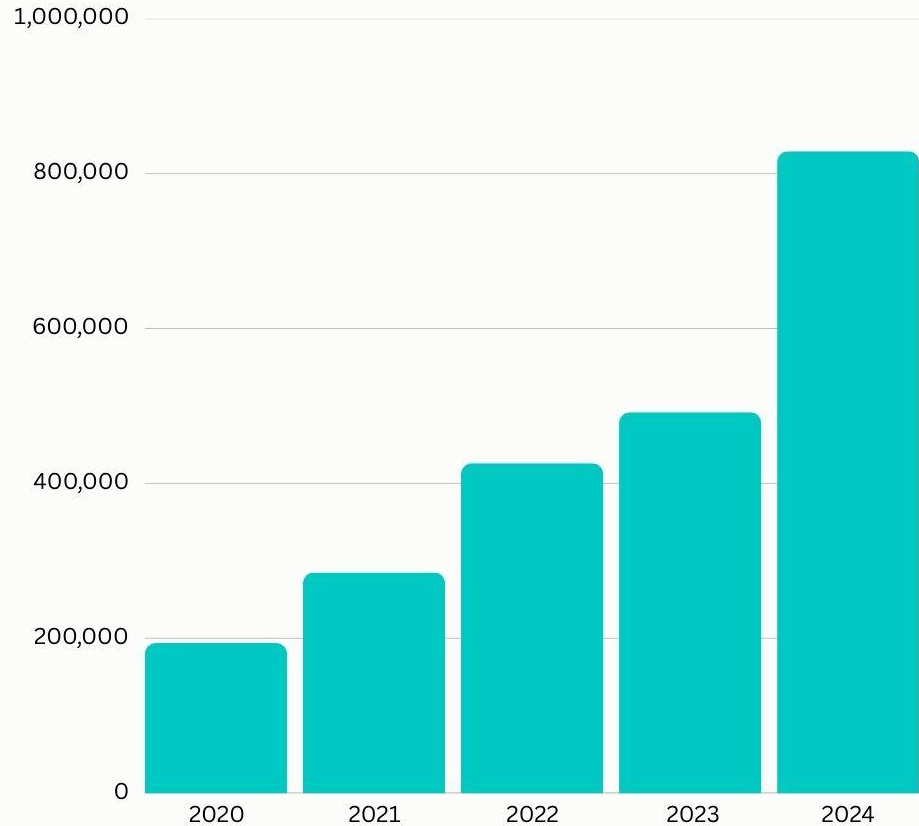


Our Reach

Autism Society San Diego's Online Community



Our Revenue Growth



\$948k in Reserves

Projected Grant Funding Goals:

| | |
|--------------------------|-----------|
| Camp Programs | \$135,000 |
| Lights! Camera! Autism! | \$120,500 |
| Autism Education Academy | \$135,000 |
| Autism Spa Podcast | \$13,600 |



**Pending & Targeted Grant
Applications:**

\$1,078,100



Impact Stories

"We have seen our child's overall confidence, not just in surfing and beach-related activities, skyrocket through his second year of Surf Camp. We literally cannot wait to see what gifts it will bring to him next summer. Thank you for making this possible for our son and for our family."

Surf Camp Parent



"The ability for my children to be themselves without judgement amongst their peers means that Family Camp is a magical utopia of a place for us."

Family Camp Parent



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Impact Stories

"The autistic joy, celebratory cheer & unyielding support shown to our entire family, is this spectacularly illuminating, enveloping and soul charging experience. Thank you for the genuine, heartfelt, unreserved acceptance of our son's entire self."

Camp I CAN Parent



"The best part of the AWARE Summer Camp was getting to be part of a program tailored to my son, making new friends, having new experiences, and having fun."

AWARE Camp Parent



2024 Event Highlight:

Autism Social & Mental Health Conference

Friday, March 1st

- Developed and produced a one day conference focused on the social and mental health needs of people with autism
- Vendored conference with the San Diego Regional Center to allow greater access to community members
- Featured a variety of topics ranging from crisis management to developing and nurturing neurodiverse relationships



2024 Event Highlight:

Lights! Camera! Autism!

Saturday, April 27th

This event showcases autistic adults in every aspect of the evening including:

- Music performance by Jake Woodruff, autistic guitarist
- Art show with 30 artists in attendance
- Special guests Dani Bowman, Adan Correa, and Matt Dunford from Netflix's "Love on the Spectrum US" Season 2
- Decor & Swag Bag Items from Non Profits Employing and Training Disabled Adults as well as from Autistic run microbusinesses
- Over 300 attendees



2024 New Support Programs:

Expansion of Support Groups to Meet Diverse Community Needs

- Two New Support Groups Established in 2024 due to increased needs for specialized support
- Dadvocate Happy Hour offers a group specifically for fathers to have a place to gather for support, information, and community
- Girl Power Support Group offers female specific support for autistic women 18 and over, offering a safe space to address their specific questions and needs



2024 ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Camp Program Expansion

- Expanded our Surf Camp from 6 weeks to 10 weeks thanks to generous funding by the County of San Diego, allowing us to serve more participants
- Added weekly field trips to Camp I CAN to expand access to community experiences for participants



2024 ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Autism Ask Line

A call -in helpline for parents, caregivers, autistic self-advocates, and autism service professionals

- Received and provided in depth support to over 500 callers
- Callers ranged from parents to professionals to autistic adults, with a wide variety of questions and needs
- Currently staffed by two Peer Resource Specialists, including support offered in Spanish



SHORT TERM GOALS 2025:

- Expand our **Community Programs** to better serve our four major healthcare districts, major school districts & diverse geographic corners of San Diego
- Work with public & private stakeholders to establish a **Housing Program** that not only advocates for more high support needs housing for our community but also leverages our Ask Line to help families connect with all the housing options available in San Diego County
- Establish an **Autism Education Academy** to leverage over two decades of outreach to law enforcement, school districts & healthcare districts to create a well rounded curriculum



LONG TERM GOALS:

- Secure funds to support the continued growth of programs and staff to meet the needs of the autism community in San Diego County
- Expand donor development, philanthropy, and fundraising efforts for the long-term stability of the organization
- Modernize our technology capabilities and offerings to allow us to better serve our community's needs
- Implement our new strategic initiatives including public policy, innovation, business partnerships, employment, and justice





**Autism
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2025 EVENTS

Autism Social & Mental Health Conference - February 7th, 2025

Spring Family Camp – March 28-30, 2025

SD Padres Behind the Scenes - March 2025

SD Padres Autism Acceptance Night – April 1, 2025

Lights! Camera! Autism! – April 26, 2025

Splash for Cash – May 4, 2025

Camp I CAN – June - August 2025

AWARE Summer Program – July 2025

Surf Camp – July - August 2025

Fall Family Camp – September 2025

Beers & Cheers for Autism – October 2025

Monthly Events:

Family Pool Parties – 2nd Saturday of the Month

AWARE Dance Parties (18 & Over) – 4th Sunday of the Month

Monthly Support Groups – 6 Groups a Month, including Spanish Language and Autistic Adult Support

*** Red = Vendedored by SDRC**

Thank you

To Our Major Donors in 2024!
Your Contributions Make a
Difference in People's Lives!

ABS Kids
Amber Penrod
Amy Lastuka
Amy Munera
Anel Califano
ARCC Center Foundation
Banc of CA Charitable Foundation
Barona Band of Mission Indians
Berg Electric Charitable
Foundation
Brian Wasserman
Bright Funds
Carly Kennedy
Carol Brzezinski
Caroline Wickman
Charitable Adult Rides
County of San Diego
Dave Branfman
Diane Russell
Dianna Gonzalez

Douglas Franks
Edelmira Diaz-Weaver
Erik Lyesiuk
Erin & Allan Kaspar
Foundation for Developmental Disabilities
Fran Daniels Marchesini
Friends of Vista Hill
Gail and John Finkenberg
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Gary Hayslip
Gerry Ranglas
Grossmont Healthcare
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PhRMA
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Rustin Parsi
Samuel & John Henry Fox Foundation
Sanford Autism Advocacy Group, LLC
Sarah Ansari
Sarah Burgin
SD Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

SDICDS
Shahriar Afshar
Smart Care Behavior Health
Spencer, Alison & Jude Higgins
Stephanie Rosen
Stephanie Seeno-Miles
Stephen Fishwick
SuperStar Consulting
Tammy Anderson
The Arc of San Diego
The Thursday Club
The VanBrabants
Tom & Barbara Lincoln
Travis Stirling
Tyler Bohm
Valerie Garza
Veronica Peterman
Woman's Club of Vista
Zable Foundation

Thank you

*To Our 2024 Sponsors! Your
Contributions Are Vital to
Our Success!*

**KLEIN-HUNTER
FAMILY**

KAREN FRENCH PHOTOGRAPHY





Autism Society San Diego is so thankful for the support of our community as we strive to provide life-changing services to the San Diego Autism community.



Autism Society
San Diego

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The connection is you.