

Autism Society San Diego
Annual Report 2019
Delivered by President Amy Munera, January 23, 2020

The mission of Autism Society San Diego is to improve the lives of all affected by autism. This mission includes public awareness, education, advocacy and research related to autism. Through our mission we strive to fully include autistic people as participating members of their community.

Each year the annual meeting affords us an opportunity to “look back” on the past year and reflect upon the accomplishments and achievements made by Autism Society San Diego. In 2019, we continued to provide support to the local autism community here in San Diego, as part of our mission as the oldest affiliate of the Autism Society of America, both by starting some great new programs and continuing many of our longest running programs. It has been a very productive and fulfilling year, in large part, due to the dedication and commitment of our board members and members of our community. The success of our organization lies within the grassroots efforts of our all-volunteer board and our community members working together. There is no price tag we can attach to the value of your impact on the autism community.

When the board convened last January, we set out a strategic plan for the year in an effort to maintain a close relationship with autistic people and their families as well as the needs of our greater community. We focused on several major areas and it is my pleasure to share with you tonight a summary of some of our accomplishments.

GOAL: To insure meaningful participation and self-determination for individuals and their families through programs and opportunities available in San Diego county.

We provided seven different monthly information and support meetings throughout the year for a total of 56 meetings. These groups include: Autism through the Lifespan in partnership with the San Diego Unified School District, North County San Diego, East County San Diego, Spanish Language, Autistic Adult Social Group, Adult Information and Support, and Coffee Talk. Collectively, these meetings provided both formal and informal opportunities and presentations of information by numerous professionals, self advocates, and parents. Each of these groups was chaired by members of the board and volunteers who worked tirelessly to provide meaningful speakers and topics, in addition to more informal support. Board members also provided their professional expertise to these groups as speakers.

We provided free, monthly family pool and gymnastics events at three locations: Aqua Pros Swim School in central San Diego and Magdalena Ecke YMCA Gymnastics Center in Carlsbad, and this summer we added seasonal North County Pool Parties at the Mottino YMCA in Oceanside. These popular programs were attended by an average of 250 adults and children every month for a total of 28 parties for the year. In addition, we held a holiday party at Aqua Pros in December. For many, this is their first opportunity to connect with the local autism community and successfully participate in a community activity.

We continued to support recreation programs benefiting our children and their families. This was the 18th year of our extremely popular Camp I CAN-Camp Including Children with Autism Now—summer day camp for children and teens. We offered this program in partnership with the Toby Wells YMCA and Ecke YMCA for 8 weeks in July and August. Total attendance in 2019 was 71 campers. Our organization provided 12 families with scholarships for this program.

AWARE, our adult social recreation program - Adults With Autism Recreation Experience, was held in August for our third year. This one week program for autistic adults 18 and over provides a social experience similar to Camp I CAN except tailored to adults, for our community members who still require support to access recreational activities. Total attendance in 2019 was 12 participants.

In 2019, we also held our 18th year of Surf Camp for Persons with Autism. This is another popular camp held at La Jolla Shores beach during July and August. Total attendance in 2019 was 85 children and adults. Our organization provided 15 scholarships to qualifying families.

In 2019, we held our third annual Lights Camera Autism! This event was a celebration of the talents of autistic adults in our local community in film, art and music. We featured 19 artists, as well as an autistic pianist, and featured films both about and made by adults with disabilities here in southern California.

In 2019, we continued to hold our Family Camp Weekends biannually in the spring and in the fall. This program is run in conjunction with the YMCA at Camp Marston in Julian. This program allows families to spend a weekend in the mountains and participate in a variety of fun activities for the entire family. Camp has grown to over 45 families, including some additional more rustic sites and YMCA Camp Raintree in order to accommodate all the interested families. Our next camp will take place in March of this year.

We provided 69 swim lesson scholarships to Autism Society San Diego members for the Pool PALS swim lesson program. This program was a collaborative program with Aqua Pros Swim School.

In 2019, we continued to partner with local libraries to bring sensory friendly family events to these locations. We partner with with Mission Valley Library to offer a quarterly program, and with La Mesa Library to offer a monthly program. We have continued consulting with other local libraries interested in starting similar programs, and Oceanside Library is the latest library to begin offering sensory friendly events to the community.

This October, We held our second annual all ages autism friendly Halloween Dance Party at the Boys & Girls Club in Clairemont, for an opportunity for our families to be able to celebrate the season in a sensory friendly and supportive setting.

We partnered with Mainly Mozart for the second year with their Mozart & the Mind Genius Weekend in June of 2019, which focused on celebrating the many talents of individuals on the spectrum and featured a series of events including concerts, lectures, and a sensory friendly concert. We are pleased to continue this partnership in 2020 and look forward to an even more amazing weekend of celebrations.

GOAL: To be the primary source of current, accurate and relevant information to the San Diego community through professional and informal communication and contact. Provide increased awareness, advocacy and communication related to autism.

We provide a website with current information about our organization and related events and information. We produce a monthly e-newsletter with distribution of over 6000. We maintain an active social media presence, with a strong Facebook following, Twitter presence, and Instagram following. Through these outlets, as well as our meetup.com page, we provided information about autism and all of our events and supports to over 8500 people.

Our board members provided lectures, trainings and information presentations to many varied groups, including our own support group meetings, the Swimming with Autism Conference and various community organizations.

We have a dedicated office space with a paid office administrator who provides daily information and support to both our board and community at large. This enables us to provide regular, consistent assistance to the many inquiries received from throughout San Diego and beyond. We receive and respond to an average of 25 phone calls per week and 250 emails per week.

As an organization we wanted to increase public awareness and provide community outreach. To that end, we participated in the following community activities:

Conference: Evidenced Based Practices for Autism Spectrum Disorder, in partnership with CAPTAIN, the California Professional Training and Information Network

Resource/Information tables: NCCSE Summer Resource Fair, NFAR Race for Autism, IEP Day, Chula Vista Elementary School District Special Education Fair, Festiva Educativa, GEICO/United Way Outreach

Annual Resource Fair for Adults

Take Me Home Program: Collaborative Program with SD County Sheriff Department to provide rapid identification of persons with autism who are lost or injured.

We are members of the Autism Society of California and maintain active representation on their board.

We undergo an audit each year to remain a non-profit in good financial standing. Our accountants, Sonnenberg and Company, deemed the “financial position of the chapter, as of December 2019, in conformity with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America.”

We continued to actively pursue grants from a variety of sources, including: Toby Wells/Mission Valley YMCA and Ecke YMCA, the Foundation for Developmental Disabilities, the Stauffer Fund, and many others. Grants are an important part of how we fund our major programs such as our camp programs.

We had multiple successful fundraisers this year generating thousands of dollars for our organization. All of these events were the result of hard work on the part of our board members and numerous community volunteers. The funds generated by these events are used to support our numerous free and reduced cost programs throughout the year.

Our fundraisers and special events included:

6th Annual Beers and Cheers for Autism

Splash for Cash

Lights! Camera! Autism!

Holiday Cheers for Autism

We maintained our participation in the United Way and the Combined Federal Campaign, which are important funding sources for our organization. We are thankful for all who contribute to our organization through their payroll donations and to our board members for their donations.

We continued to participate in the Amazon Smile online fundraising platform, and have been the beneficiary of many online Facebook fundraisers in 2019. We accepted multiple donations of used cars. We also receive numerous donations of money and in-kind services throughout the year.

We participated in #GivingTuesday, the online day of giving held the Tuesday after Black Friday. This year, we more than doubled our total raised in 2018.

GOAL: To support continued research and education focused on improving quality of life for individuals across the autism spectrum and their families.

We provided scholarship funding for local graduate students studying the field of autism through our Bernard Rimland Memorial Research Grants.

The Stauffer Fund Grant is used to provide funding for persons working with and caring for individuals with autism to attend trainings and conferences to further their skills and knowledge. We provide \$250 scholarships for persons caring for and working with persons with autism to further their knowledge and training.

As we look forward to our 2020 Board Year, we have many exciting things planned. We will hold our fourth annual Lights Camera Autism! Film and Art Festival and our seventh annual Beers & Cheers for Autism. We look forward to developing these events as well as other new services to meet the needs of our constituents.

Thank you all so much for your continued support of Autism Society San Diego and the local autism community here in San Diego. It is thanks to our wonderful supportive community that we are able to accomplish so much in our effort to improve the lives of all affected by autism.

Amy Munera

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"Improving the Lives of All Affected by Autism"

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