ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22

OUR MISSION is to support and enhance the quality of life for persons with autism and other developmental disabilities, and their families.

ACN Autism Center of Nebraska

Our Locations and Services

- s — Shared Living
- g — Group Homes
- d — Day Service Centers
- r — Retail Outlets

ACN's Core Values

We embrace the worth of persons receiving services, their families, and the staff who support them with

Value | Respect | Choice | Growth

From the CEO

During fiscal year 2022, twenty-two individuals joined ACN. They chose us because of our mission and our focus on person-centered choices in daily life. They also chose ACN because of the people.

We work very hard to ensure that our core values are present in each of our services, at each of our locations, and in each of our interactions with the people we support. In all ways, we strive to demonstrate that we ***value*** the people who chose to receive services and support from ACN. We ***respect*** the individuality of each person and celebrate the unique character and personality of each person supported. We ensure that meaningful ***choice*** is evident in the lives of each individual supported; and we demonstrate our belief that each person is capable of ***growth*** in knowledge, in skills, in participation in our community.

As we emerge from the pandemic, ACN faces the same struggles and challenges as all businesses — to maintain a skilled and committed workforce is essential to providing quality services and support. We're committed to recruiting and retaining high quality employees who are dedicated to ACN's mission. That is evidenced by the large number of long-term employees. I've been with ACN for nearly 16 years; our CFO is planning on retiring after 16 years; our Residential Director and Day Services Director each have 16 years with us. We have Direct Support Professionals who have been with this agency for 17 years.

We have Direct Support Professionals who started with ACN while in college. After graduation, they began their professional career elsewhere but continue to work at ACN for one or two shifts per week. Why? Because of the relationships they've developed with the people we support. That's ***commitment.*** It's the people of ACN that give me hope for the future. Persons supported, direct support staff, parents, guardians, administration – we're all the ACN family. And we know the future is bright!

Sincerely,

Leslie Bishop Hartung
CEO & President

About us

Autism Center of Nebraska provides services and support for individuals of all ages who have autism or other developmental disabilities. The services we provide include: Residential Services, Vocational and Day Services, Community Inclusion, Transition Services, Employment Services, and Respite Services. We serve adults, children, adolescents, and toddlers while also working in support of parents and families.

Our Programs

Day / Vocational Services

Autism Center of Nebraska offers supported employment, community inclusion and habilitative day services to individuals with intellectual/ developmental disabilities (I/DD) and autism to individuals aged 21 and over. From working at The Art Garden locations to accessing community recreation opportunities, our goal with this program is to promote a sense of community inclusion and social belonging throughout eastern Nebraska.

In the 2021-22 fiscal year, the Day/Vocational Services at ACN, overseen by **Michael Blackstone**, was able to enjoy more community outings due to the lifting of early pandemic protocols and the return to normal business hours for many organizations.

"The agency saw an increase in enrollment," Michael reports.

ACN also expanded opportunities to explore artistic expression, thanks to the creative programming of **Melissa Paul,** who was hired to oversee The Art Garden programming.

Supported Employment

Realizing that true independence requires competitive employment and that there are many and varied barriers to competitive employment for persons with autism and I/DD, ACN developed the **ACN Connections** program in 2009. This program focuses on removing barriers by thoughtfully connecting clients with jobs in local organizations. Our employment specialists and job coaches provide job skills training to help coach adults until they are capable and ready to take on positions in their community. Staff members work with clients through phone, Zoom, and in-person meetings.

In the 2021-22 fiscal year, guided by longtime ACN staff member **Susanna Johnston**, ACN paired 76% of clients with employment opportunities at workplaces in Eastern Nebraska, including HyVee, Signature Performance Healthcare Administrative Services, Goodwill Industries of Greater Nebraska, Nebraska Humane Society, and many other local workplaces, including local sites of national organizations, such as TJ Maxx and Olive Garden.

"You see growth in the clients," says Susanna, "and that's what's so rewarding. **It keeps me coming back to work day after day, year after year."**

Residential Services

ACN provides group home options, shared living settings, supported family living, and supported independent living for individuals with disabilities in major population centers throughout Eastern Nebraska. Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) provide supports and services to clients in all of these residential settings.

In the 2021-22 fiscal year, led by **Diane Pacal**, ACN's Residential Services program faced the same challenges many agencies faced: high staff turnover and a competitive job market. However, true to our guiding principles of value, respect, choice, and growth, ACN maintained its mix of independent living, shared living, and group home clients.

"ACN remained person-centered in its approach to matching clients with available residential settings," says CEO/President **Leslie Bishop Hartung.**

Transition Services

ACN's Transition Services, overseen by **Narelle Burns**, provides education for individuals aged 17-21 who are identified by local school districts as needing services outside what the district can provide. This program provides education in accordance with the client's Individual Education Plan (IEP).

In the 2021-22 fiscal year, ACN provided education for these individuals in a calming environment, with predictable routines, and 1:1 staff-student ratios. ACN's staff of paraprofessionals work to support individuals in learning to accomplish educational goals and self-manage behaviors in a variety of environments.

During this time, individuals enrolled in this program experienced marked increases in quality of life and drastic reductions in the frequency of aggression.

"My mother is a nurse, and she spent her career serving people with disabilities," says Narelle, **"so it is important to me to work with people with disabilities and serve them in this way, and try to find ways to make the world work for them."**

By the Numbers

1,200
Requests for Help Answered & Served (23 per week)

121,193
Vocational / Day Services Intervention Hours Provided

Persons Served

199
Day/Vocational Services

75
Residential Services

99
Supported Employment (ACN Connections)

5
Transition Services

250,167
Residential Service Hours Provided

4,749
Transition Services Hours Provided

214
ACN Employees

2021-22 Board of Directors

Joan K. Marcus, chair
Ken Keith, Ph.D., vice chair
Laurie Ackermann
Cheri Albin
Ann Bird
Bill Bishop
Leah Boldt
Travis Buck
Cynthia Ellis, M.D.
Ken Keith, Ph.D.
Thomas Lee
Megan Misegadis
Nate Parks
Chuck Sederstrom, J.D.
Leslie Bishop Hartung

2021-22 Staff

Leslie Bishop Hartung
President & Chief Executive Officer

Rick Lowery
Chief Financial Officer

Diane Pacal
Director of Residential and Supported Services

Michael Blackstone, Sr.
Director of Day Services

Jim Ryan
Human Resources Administrator

Partnerships

This year, Autism Center of Nebraska collaborated with these agencies and companies to deliver high-quality services to our clients.

Above and Beyond

Additional work performed by ACN staff outside of the core program offerings provided at our expense out of unrestricted general operating funds

- **First Responder Relations**
  ACN is the agency to call in Eastern Nebraska when people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are in crisis and have no immediate family available to provide care.

- **Workplace Interventions**
  Employers of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities know to reach out to ACN to help both employers and employees navigate workplace changes.

- **People in Financial Crisis**
  ACN works with families and caregivers to ensure continuity of services are provided even as gaps in payment occur. This continuity is profoundly important to individuals who seek stability and predictability in their daily lives.

- **Training for Caregivers**
  Caregivers of ACN clients are invited to attend the same training sessions provided for ACN employees. This level of transparency builds trust in our community and endows family members with new skills and tools in caring for their loved ones.

- **Caregiver Coaching**
  ACN staff takes time to orient and guide caregivers through complex governmental and insurance-related processes to ensure the most efficient path to qualification for services needed and related funding streams.

- **Referrals**
  Given our profile in the community, ACN is often called by people in crisis, people in need of answers, caregivers of newly diagnosed individuals, and people who have recently moved to our state. ACN's resourceful and well-connected staff provide "warm handoffs" to professionals and agencies that can help people get the services and solutions they need.

ACN staff at Breakfast with Santa event

- **Free Community Events**
  Events such as Breakfast with Santa and the annual Art Garden Holiday Boutiques are FREE to attend and help build community.

- **Legislative Advocacy**
  ACN works with professional advocates to help ensure that no bill affecting the disability community passes the Nebraska Legislature without being thoroughly examined and understood by all constituents. We understand we can only provide the best services to our clients if our laws respect the dignity, value, and autonomy of all people.

Board Member Spotlights

We salute two valued members of ACN's Board of Directors

JOAN K. MARCUS

Joan K. Marcus

Joan K. Marcus is the Chair of the Board of Directors of Autism Center of Nebraska. Her service in this role is inspired by a deeply personal investment in the quality of life for people with disabilities in our state.

Mrs. Marcus shares, "When my daughter, Elaine was, in about 1965, diagnosed with 'Mental Retardation,' my late husband, Milton, and I vowed that she would never live in an institution. This became a vow that was very hard to keep. So, it became obvious to me that it would take work in order to keep Elaine and other people with disabilities in our community."

"I was joined by other parents and we became a 'grass roots' group. This is how I've spent the last 58 years of my life."

Mrs. Marcus has served in numerous community leadership positions. Mrs. Marcus is also the recipient of the Woman of Wisdom Award from University of Nebraska at Omaha (2007); the Caring Hands Award from Chabad Synagogue (2017); and the Social Justice Award from The Congregation of Temple Israel (2004).

"My most important job was as wife and mother to Elaine Susan Marcus and Howard K. Marcus," Mrs. Marcus shares.

DR. KEN KEITH

Dr. Ken Keith

Ken Keith, Ph.D, has served as Vice Chair of the Board of Directors of Autism Center of Nebraska, and has been a member of the ACN Governance and Finance Committees. Through his roles at ACN, Dr. Keith contributes to policy and ideas that foster integration of people with intellectual disabilities into their communities.

Growing up, Dr.Keith had friendships with individuals with developmental disabilities, an experience that helped to shape his interest in their lives. As an undergraduate, Dr. Keith studied psychology and worked summers at an institution serving individuals with developmental disabilities. His research over the years has focused on human learning, quality of life, and cultural psychology, and he is an advocate for communities that foster the inclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities.

"Rather than understanding and seeking to change traits of individuals with disabilities," he says, **"understand what a community should do to support all individuals, including those living with disabilities."**

Staff Profiles

JAMES CHOL

James Chol

A Lead Staff member in Residential Services, James Chol has been with ACN for 8 years. Before joining ACN, James (originally from South Sudan) worked as an interpreter for 6 years in Nairobi, Kenya with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. He was among thousands of lost boys/girls of Sudan, who grew up in refugee camps in Africa.

After relocating to Nebraska with his family, a friend introduced James to ACN's work. He joined the staff to make a difference in the lives of those with intellectual disabilities, "I aim to help in many areas and contribute to my community. I like working with people and this program helps people improve their lives."

James has held multiple roles at ACN but now works solely in residential care. He works one on one with individuals and performs supervising duties such as ensuring medicines are distributed, bookkeeping, appointments, and assessing residential housing needs. **"It touches my heart that I am making someone smile in their daily life."**

HEATH SMITH

Heath Smith

Heath Smith is a long-term staff member at ACN. He took a chance and applied for work as a caregiver 17 years ago because of a lack of success in landscaping. "It was truly a blessing to have turned in that application," he says. **"This job helped make me a better, more caring adult."**

Heath assumed the position of a Direct Support Professional, a role that assists ACN residents with daily life tasks. For 14 years, he has been assigned to the same two residents at ACN, six days a week. This means Heath's position is more than a job — he's created lasting friendships with the individuals he assists daily, other ACN residents, and his colleagues.

Over his long and lasting time at ACN, Heath has seen first-hand the positive impact ACN makes for his community — for residents, their families, and ACN staffers. He hopes ACN continues to grow and flourish. "I want us to keep progressing and serving people. I want to keep giving people the opportunity to be the people they want to be."

*In recent years, both James and Heath received The Association of Community Professionals' award of **Direct Support Professionals of The Year** for our region.*

Client Profile

JANIS S.

Janis S. is a 59-year-old client living in Fremont. ACN's Fremont Coordinator Kelli Strunk had known Janis in the community for several years before she enrolled in services at the Fremont Art Garden.

Before enrolling in The Art Garden program at the Fremont branch of Autism Center of Nebraska, Janis routinely resisted going to day services. She strongly disliked the elementary school-style worksheets and activities that were offered by her previous agency, often saying that she was not in kindergarten (!).

After repeated visits, Janis made the choice to participate in The Art Garden programming, where she could slowly begin to exercise her ability to express her thoughts and feelings, likes and dislikes.

Janis S.

"Now she is smiling so much more," Kelli says. "When Janis shares her art journal, I see a different outlook on her face."

Janis's state services coordinator, who has known her before her time at The Art Garden, said, "I cannot believe this is the same person."

ACN Donors *We sincerely thank all of our donors for 2021-2022*

INDIVIDUALS

Virginia & Rev. Dwain Acker
Laurie Ackermann
Russell & Cheri Albin
Elaine & Chris Allen
Sandy Bendow
Ann & Dr. Ken Bird
Bill Bishop
Leslie Bishop Hartung & Rob Hartung
David Boocker
Judy Bruce
Travis Buck
Michael Burns
Jean & Robert Burns
Andrew Cano
Jana & Arnie Christensen
Brenda Clark
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Joyce Crockett
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Firespring Foundation
Fremont Area Community Foundation
Fremont Area Big Give
Peter Kiewit Foundation
Knights of Columbus
Milliken Family Charitable Trust
Adah & Leon Millard Foundation
Network For Good
Omaha Community Foundation
Pledgeling Foundation
TAGG
UK Online Giving Foundation
Weitz Family Foundation

We apologize for any omissions or errors.

LPH employees at 2022 Garden Spruce-Up Event

ACN thanks **Landmark Performance Homes (LPH)** for providing 10 volunteers for our "VolunThursday" Garden Spruce Up event on May 19, 2022. They helped revitalize our raised gardens for the summer growing season, helping pull weeds and tidying up the surrounding landscape. The garden offers our clients a hands-on learning experience with gardening, ecology, and nutrition.

LPH is one of many businesses that provides volunteers and donated/ discounted services to support ACN's mission. If your company is interested in such opportunities, please contact: info@acnomaha.org

Financial Report

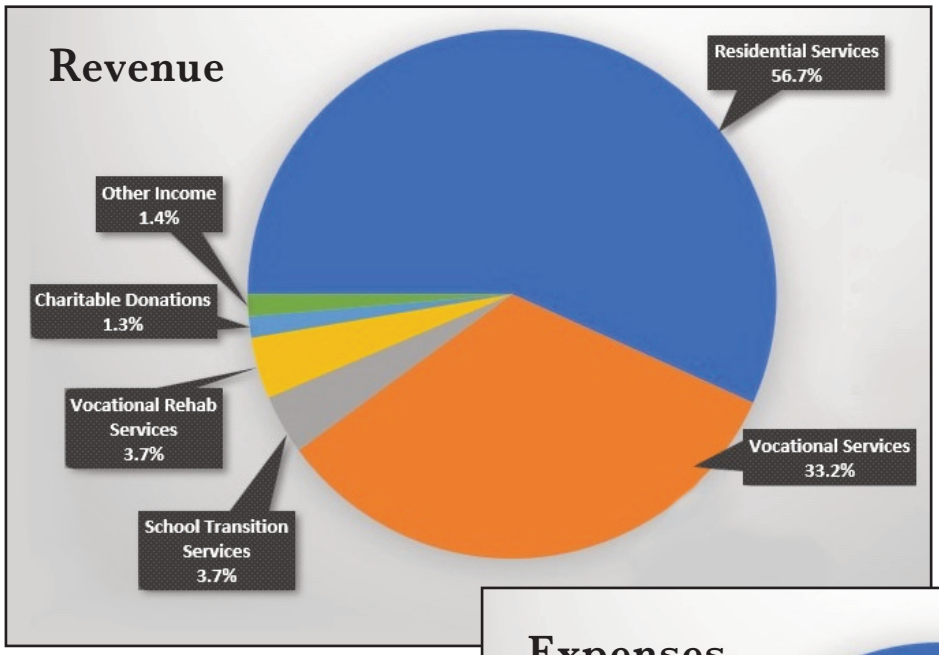
For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2022

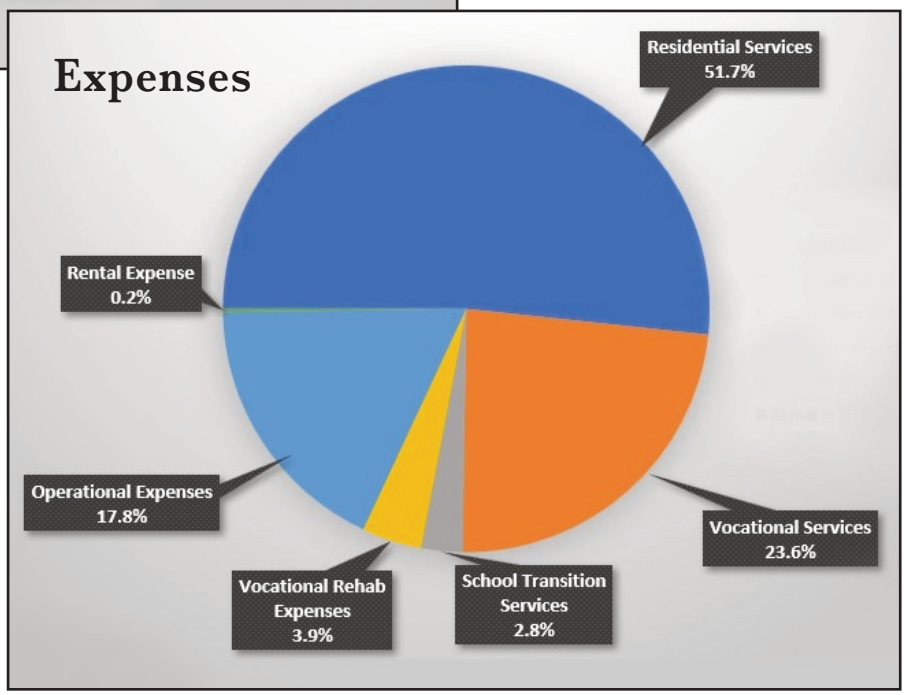
REVENUE

Residential Services	$ 4,343,800
Vocational Services	2,542,692
School Transition Services	280,662
Vocational Rehab Services	285,460
Charitable Donations	98,726
Other Income	104,083
Total Revenue	**$ 7,655,423**

EXPENSES

Residential Services	$ 4,109,713
Vocational Services	1,872,449
School Transition Services	219,908
Vocational Rehab Services	313,453
Operational Expenses	1,417,414
Rental Expense	17,213
Total Expenses	**$ 7,950,150**





Autism Center of Nebraska engaged the services of BerganKDV to provide an independent audit of finances for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2022. Copies of the audit are available upon request.

ACN "Merch" is now available

Whether you're an ACN client, employee or friend, you can show your ACN pride by purchasing one of our custom products from our merchandise retailer, Redbubble.

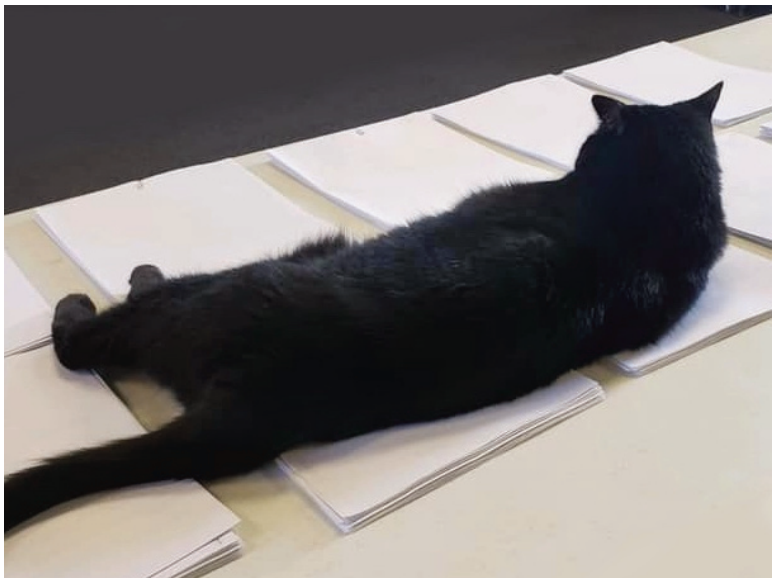
You might like a coffee mug, a sticker or perhaps a shirt — then select sizes (youth or adult), fabrics, colors, short- or long-sleeve, etc.

You can choose to sign up and create a Redbubble account which will earn you a discount on your first order. ACN receives a portion of each sale and thanks you for your interest!

Scan this code to see items available

Our Cat Ambassador

Leighla is a cat who lives at ACN's headquarters. She has access to most of the main floor and greets visitors with loud "meows." She's beloved by many clients and staff and sometimes she will even let you pick her up and pet her... but not for long!



Your gift to ACN at any level helps us change lives and impact the community! We encourage monthly giving as it's most helpful in the delivery of mission through our 365-day, 24/7 operations but we appreciate and acknowledge all gifts at every level.

Thank you for considering a monthly or one-time gift to ACN!

Your monthly gift of $25 can help us buy seeds and bedding for the Vegetable Garden throughout the growing season.

Your monthly gift of $50 can help us purchase personal hygiene products for a group home of three individuals for each month.

Your monthly gift of $100 can buy sheets and towels for a person in a group home without the ability to pay for their own materials, an ongoing month-to-month need.

Your monthly gift of $250 can provide six new mattresses per year for ACN group homes.

Your one-time gift of $600 provides two months of art supplies for onsite creation of sellable goods by ACN's clients in The Art Garden.

Your one-time gift of $1,000 provides patio furniture and a grill for group home residents to enjoy the outdoors.

Your one-time gift of $2,500 covers the utility bill in ACN's main headquarters for one month of operations.

Your one-time gift of $2,750 can help purchase a washer and drier for two group homes.

Your one-time gift of $5,000 allows one month of rent and utilities for the service hubs in Blair & Fremont.

ACN AUTISM CENTER OF NEBRASKA

9012 Q Street | Omaha, NE 68127 | ACNomaha.org