ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23

June, 2023

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December, 2023

ACN AUTISM CENTER OF NEBRASKA

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

Our Locations and Services

- **cr** Continuous Residential — GROUP HOMES & SHARED LIVING
- **ir** Intermittent Residential — INDEPENDENT LIVING & FAMILY SUPPORT
- **d** Day Services — HABILITATION & COMMUNITY INCLUSION
- **se** Supported Employment
- **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

Value. Respect. Choice. Growth.

These are the short-hand versions of ACN's core values – values which apply to those we support, their families, and the employees of ACN. Nowhere is our commitment to these values more evident than in the work we do to create a corporate culture which shows, in multiple ways, that we value people, that we hold each person in the highest **respect**, that meaningful **choice** is evidence of that respect, and that whether you are a person supported, or a **valued** employee, **growth** is happening.

Members of the ACN family of employees represent **diversity** in gender, in faith tradition, and in ethnicity. But where we unite is in our shared commitment to be the source of best practices in service delivery for persons with autism and other developmental disabilities.

Fiscal year 2023 represented a time of change and a time of loss. Residential Director Diane Pacal passed away following 15 years with ACN. Her loss was devastating. Many of the persons supported by ACN chose not to attend the formal religious services, and, as an alternative, ACN provided an opportunity to share memories and comfort at the Omaha location. So often, the public perception of the autism community is of a community devoid of empathy, sympathy - deep feelings of any kind. But that is simply not what we experience at ACN. Nearly 35 persons supported plus several staff joined at our informal sharing. Memories were met with laughter and tears and I watched members of the ACN community of individuals served reach out to one another to support and offer comfort. I was reminded again that **quality of life is best** defined by **connections** and **relationships –** relationships that are not dependent upon someone being paid to be with us.

ACN has, for the entire 16+ years of my tenure, been a **hands-free agency**. We believe that using our physical strength to control the movement of those served is simply wrong, not to mention ineffective. In Developmental Disabilities services, the pendulum swings, yet, we continue to hold fast to our values and our ideals. We continue to teach our staff that all behavior is communication, and that, as we support people in developing communication skills, we will see a reduction in aggression.

And believe me, it's working. On just about any given day, a visit to our day services center in Omaha will provide the opportunity to observe peers supporting each other in developing self-management skills. This comes from relationship-building, from calm conversations, from taking a walk to process an upset mind. ACN's approach to providing support works. **We lift up the worth and dignity of each person supported** and teach self-management in a calm, quiet, and ultimately, extremely effective way.

FY 2023 was certainly not without challenges. Reimbursement rates simply do not keep up with the actual cost of doing business. Inflation, combined with the staffing shortage, resulted in expenses far exceeding budget. Throughout these challenges, ACN is committed to always **"do the next right thing,"** even when that "next right thing" may not be the best financial choice.

Fiscal years 2023 saw the retirement of longtime CFO Richard T. Lowery and Direct Support Professional Erlinda Mendoza Mora. As senior members hand the torch to younger employees, we are certain that the commitment to ACN values will continue long into the future.

We believe in what we do. We believe in the potential of those we support. And we believe that we will continue to be able to count on the members of the ACN family to provide financial support as they are able.

Sincerely,

Leslie Bishop Hartung
CEO & President

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 these programs is to promote a sense of community integration and social belonging throughout eastern Nebraska.

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. Our job coaches provide support to employers of ACN clients through interventions and bidirectional education with the individual (ACN client) and employer. Job coaches reduce the frequency of consultations as the individual attains independence.

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.

Transition Services

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

ACN's staff of paraprofessionals work to support individuals in learning to accomplish educational goals and self-manage behaviors in a variety of environments.

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**
- **Workplace Interventions**
- **Emergency Services for People in Crisis**
- **Training for Caregivers**
- **Caregiver Coaching**
- **Referrals**
- **Free Community Events**
- **Legislative Advocacy**

By the Numbers

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

169,032
Vocational / Day Services Intervention Hours Provided

Persons Served

210
Day/Vocational Services

83
Residential Services

96
Supported Employment (ACN Connections)

7
Transition Services

411,573
Residential Service Hours Provided

5,523
Transition Services Hours Provided

241
ACN Employees

2022-23 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.
Seamus Kelly, J.D.
Thomas Lee
Megan Misegadis
Nate Parks
Adam Sawadogo
Leslie Bishop Hartung, ex officio

2022-23 Staff

Leslie Bishop Hartung
President & Chief Executive Officer

Rick Lowery
Chief Financial Officer (through 03/23)

Bryon Tenski
Chief Financial Officer (beginning 03/23)

Diane Pacal
Director of Residential and Supported Services (through 05/23)

Michael Blackstone, Sr.
Director of Day Services

Melissa Blakemore
Director of Residential and Supported Services (beginning 05/23)

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.

Staff Profile

ERLINDA MENDOZA MORA

Erlinda Mendoza

In this year, ACN saw the retirement of one of its longest-serving direct support professionals (DSPs), Erlinda Mendoza. Erlinda served ACN from 2016 to 2023 and worked with multiple clients in the capacities of transportation, daily outings, day services, residential services, and the Omaha Art Garden. What did Erlinda enjoy the most about working at ACN? **"I enjoyed the people, of course. I always say I enjoyed the people first,"** she replied.

Erlinda's tenure as a DSP shows how this work can be a meaningful, long-term position for people at any stage in their careers. What is Erlinda's advice to new DSPs? **"Learn client's names, learn their initial charting, and what is important to them. This is what I did and it served me well."**

IN MEMORIAM: DIANE PACAL

Diane Pacal

In May of 2023, ACN was saddened by the passing of longtime Director of Residential and Supported Services, Diane Pacal, who served the agency since 2008.

Not only did Diane dedicate her career to helping people with disabilities, she often spent her vacations and days off volunteering to help people with disabilities have special experiences, such as air travel and experiencing new places. Diane is remembered for her sense of humor and her lifelong devotion to the Nebraska disability community.

After her passing, Diane was remembered by family and friends at a memorial service at St. Stephen the Martyr Church in Omaha. Later that week, staff and clients gathered in the ACN great room to reminisce and celebrate her life.

"Diane was known and loved by all clients and respected for her steadfast commitment to people with disabilities," said President and CEO Leslie Bishop Hartung.

EMPLOYEE MILESTONES

One-Year Awards — 2023

Cable Mawuli Ahossou Boko
Gnandi D. Akpo
Kokou Agbeko Apedo
Zeinab Bikienga
Karin Blankenburg
Jennifer Bohn
Nathan Allan Cain
Ousmane Darankoum
Madison Marie Harken
Connie Jean Hartung
Deb Hernandez
Peggy J. Johnson
Norm Lahaug
Leon Adebo Nevis
Christophe Audrey Ouoba
Janice Saunders
Elizabeth Soderberg
McKenna Mae Wilson

Five-Year Awards — 2023

Sheriff Conteh
Rodney L. Moyer-Fuentes
Fiacre S. Tollo

Fifteen-Year Awards — 2023

Michael P. Blackstone
Leslie Bishop Hartung
Roberto Mata Mayorga

Retirees — 2023

Richard T. Lowery
Erlinda Mendoza Mora

THE END OF AN ERA: CFO Rick Lowery retires

Rick Lowery

Anyone who has spent any amount of time at the Autism Center of Nebraska in the last 16 years could not have left the building without hearing the booming voice and infectious laughter of the beloved and omnipresent Chief Financial Officer, Rick Lowery. In March of 2023, ACN said goodbye to Rick as he retired from the agency.

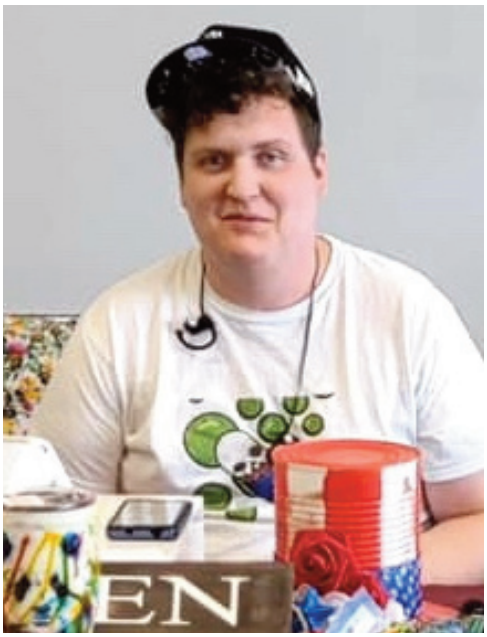
"Rick devoted 16 years of his life to helping take ACN from a small agency founded by two parents into a dynamic agency with a budget that routinely tops $9 million," says President and CEO Leslie Bishop Hartung. **"Rick had a background in nonprofit accounting and financial management and he helped this agency immeasurably."**

Rick grew up in Nebraska and Virginia, and studied accounting at University of Nebraska Lincoln. Rick worked for the State of Nebraska, and Quality Living, Inc. before joining ACN in November of 2007.

Appreciated for his professional skills as much as his jovial personality, Lowery served alongside Renee Ferdinand (2007-18), Brett Samson (2018-20), and Leslie Bishop Hartung (2020-present).

In his retirement, Rick is enjoying his many pastimes and hobbies including spin class, bowling, travel, and taking care of his grandkids.

Client Profile



Ammon

AMMON G. is an ACN client that has been receiving day services since 2020. His bright smile and ever-present concern for other people has made him a friend to nearly all staff members and fellow clients. Ammon also receives residential services from ACN, recently moving from a Shared Living Provider to a Group Home setting in preparation for more independent living.

When asked why he likes being at ACN, Ammon says, **"I like it here because there are a lot of friendly people here. And the people here understand me."**

Ammon has many friends among clients including Ricky, Christian, Shawn, Andrew, Jack, and others.

In addition to his rapport with people at ACN from all walks of life, Ammon also thrives because of his profound enjoyment for learning how to express himself through art. **"At ACN, I have been taught how to do art and it's become a big thing in my life."**

Director of Day Services Michael Blackstone works directly with Ammon and says, **"Ammon is really a unique individual. He's not like anyone else I have ever worked with. As much as staff helps him and asks him how he is doing, he is equally interested in the staff and their lives. He asks them how they are doing, how their weekend was, and how their families are doing."**

Board Member Spotlight

We salute a valued member of ACN's Board of Directors

Cheri Albin

CHERI ALBIN is a dedicated member of the Autism Center of Nebraska (ACN) board, bringing a wealth of experience and a personal connection to the organization's mission. Serving on the board as Vice Chair, Cheri has been part of the ACN community for the past six years.

Her journey with ACN began through the recommendation of a friend and former ACN board member, the former Douglas County Commissioner, Marc Kraft. Through service with ACN, Cheri has found a community that resonates with her own experiences as a parent navigating Down Syndrome and autism. She acknowledges the transformative impact ACN has had on her family, providing support through diverse needs and challenges.

What resonates most with Cheri about her involvement with ACN is the organization's commitment to personalized care and empowerment. She admires the dedication of ACN employees, noting, **"Everyone I've encountered at ACN is personally invested and enjoys their work. It shows they care."**

Cheri's service to ACN is a testament to the power of compassion, dedication, and community-driven support in building a community that feels like home.

ACN Donor Salute

Betsy Wallace & Brandon Gilbert

For the last four years, Omaha Firefighter Betsy Wallace and Omaha Police Officer Brandon Gilbert kindly delivered many gifts to ACN clients in late December. As first responders, Brandon and Betsy have encountered a number of individuals with disabilities in their work.

They both have developed a passion for doing their part to ensure a joyful holiday season. They collect these gifts through their personal networks of family and friends and they deliver them to ACN, where gifts are wrapped and distributed to clients based upon their personal interests. ACN sincerely thanks Brandon and Betsy for their inspiring generosity!

"The catalyst for our journey with ACN donations began by responding to 911 calls for the City of Omaha," they shared. **"Through these calls for service, we quickly learned that we understood little about autism and other developmental disabilities."**

"Each year we are met with smiles and warm welcomes," they say, **"which is reflective of all in the ACN community."**

See more at this link.

ACN Donors

We sincerely thank all of our donors for 2023

Individuals

Laurie Ackermann
Gildas Agbassou
Cheri & Russell Albin
Aelea Armendariz
Sheir & Pat Berney
Annie & Dr. Ken Bird
Leslie Bishop Hartung
Charlotte & Michael Blackstone
Corey Blakemore
Leah Boldt
Bobbie Brooks
Judy Bruce
Laura Buechler
Cindy Burns
James Chol
Mary Ann Christensen
Samantha Citro
Kody Clark
Harold Daub Jr.
Lee & Jay Durmaskin
Cindy Ellis
Alisha Epp
Helen & Tuffy Epstein
Patricia Fennelly
John Fratzke
Nancy & Ed Frey
Kathryn Friedli
Beth Friedman
Erin Fulton
Denise Gehringer
Barb & Chad Geiger
Jacqueline & Jack Geist
Linda Janssen Gjere
Saul Gonzalez
Randi Gordman
Shyrlene & Tom Graf
Mary Sue Grossman
Leslie Bishop Hartung & Robin Hartung
Julia & Adrian Hernandez
Terence Houinsou
Sandra Houser
Mary Kay Hrupek
Lori & Ted Japp
Janice Johnson
Greg Johnson
Susanna Johnston
Mary Ann & Steve Jordan
Jill Kassmeyer
Constance & Ken Keith
Michelle Kelly
Shaistha Kiran
Michael Krausman
Norm Lahaug
Lori Lanouette
Veronica LeClair
Thomas Lee
Helen Lohman
Marilyn & Richard Lowery
Judith & Richard Lundquist
Shawn Macken
Kevin Mahler
Becky Maltby
Melissa Mann
Lisa & Howard Marcus
Randell Martin
Kathy McNeill
Lois Milder
Megan Misegadis
Melissa Morillo
Ken Munzesheimer
Laura Needelman
Howard Needeu
Shawn Neff
Jennifer Neilan
Amy Nelson
Debbie Newkirk
Eden Ostravish
Sandra & Jeffrey Passer
Christy Payne
Jonathan Ramsey
Miles Remer
Norma Reynolds
Theresa Rihanek
Mary Ripps
Angie Roderique
James Ryan
Linda Saltzman
Erin Sample
Kristin Sampugnara
Caryn Scheer
Kim & Andrew Schnatz
Edward Schneider
McKenzie Schneider
Danielle Sherman
Julie Sherman
Brandon Stennis
Janet & Joe Taylor
Martha & Bryon Tenski
Debra & Jim Timm
Dian Turnwall
Patti Vincent
Amber Wicherski
Cathy & Marty Wiedenman

Organizations & Foundations

Autism Family Network
Autism Society of Nebraska
BerganKDV
CenTime
Enrichment Foundation
First Citizens Bank
First Interstate Bank
First National Bank
Ground Builders
Kissel, Kohout, ES Associates LLC
Knights of Columbus
Kohll's Pharmacy
Mindset
Roots To Wings
Security National Bank
Turner Technology
Walmart

We apologize for any omissions or errors.

Financial Report For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2023

REVENUE

Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation	
VR Services	$ 215,874
Nebraska Health & Human Services / DD	
Group Homes	3,006,029
Shared Family Living	1,775,809
Supported Services	637,186
Day Services	1,691,157
Community Inclusion	910,907
Consultative Assessment	21,246
Nebraska School Districts	
Transition Services	336,888
Philanthropy	
Charitable Donations & Grants	58,041
Other Income	
Building Rental, etc.	20,999
Total Revenue	**$ 8,774,136**

EXPENSES

Residential Services	$ 4,804,721
Vocational Services	2,069,414
School Transition Services	254,179
Vocational Rehab Services	284,071
Operational Expenses	1,578,568
Other Expenses	25,642
Total Expenses	**$ 9,016,595**

An additional $405,661 was received from the State of Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services / DDD Stabilization Grant in June, 2023.

Autism Center of Nebraska engaged the services of BerganKDV to provide an independent audit of finances for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2023. Copies of the audit are available upon request.

Guest captures selfie to commemorate her evening at Hats Off Gala *(more at right)*

Hats Off to ACN

2023 ACN Event Recap

Hats Off Gala

Our 2023 Hats Off Gala was held on April 28th which returned for the first time since 2019! ACN bestowed the John T. Clark Award to longtime President of the Board of Directors, Joan K. Marcus, a tireless advocate for disability rights in Nebraska.

Our Keynote speaker was Wendy Hamilton who spoke about living with a parent who is on the autism spectrum and diagnosing the condition in adults.

We appreciate our Hats Off event sponsors and guests who helped make this fundraising event a memorable success.

See more at this link.

Joan K. Marcus received the John T. Clark Award

Food Truck Festival

On September 8th, Autism Center of Nebraska celebrated the second annual Food Truck Festival at our headquarters in Omaha.

It was an enjoyable evening of relaxation and community! Our clients, staff, friends, and client family members enjoyed food and drinks from several food trucks while listening to the musical stylings of Anne & Kevin from One2Go.

Valued sponsors for this event included First Citizens Bank, First Interstate Bank, Jack's Liquor, Kohll's, Lucky Bucket Brewing Company, Security National Bank, and Turner Technology.

We give thanks to everyone for their participation and support!

See more at this link.

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