ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24

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

OMAHA

LINCOLN

FREMONT

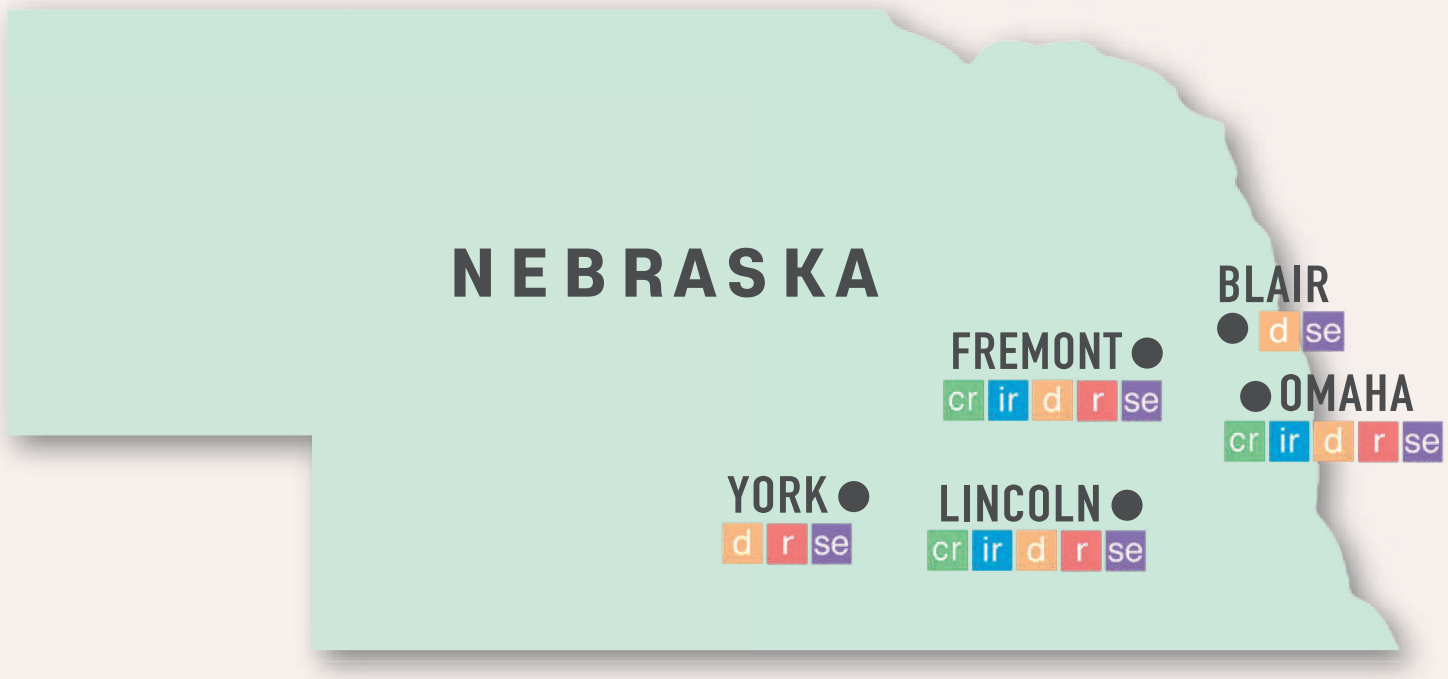
YORK

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 Executive Director

December 2024

Dear Team and Supporters,

Michael Blackstone, Sr.

I am both grateful and honored to step into the role of Executive Director of the Autism Center of Nebraska. While I was not the Executive Director in the 2023-2024 fiscal year, I have been employed with ACN since 2008 and became the Executive Director in August. In the pages that follow, you will read about the facts, figures, and human moments that tell the story of the last year.

One of the most memorable moments of last year was the retirement of our former President and CEO, Leslie Bishop Hartung. Leslie has been an incredible mentor to me, guiding me with her wisdom and passion for our mission. Her leadership has set a high standard that I aspire to uphold as we continue to advocate for individuals with disabilities and their families.

At Autism Center of Nebraska, we believe in the core values of respect, choice, value, and growth. These principles guide our efforts as we strive to create a better future for people with disabilities in our community. I am proud of the programs we provide every day to enhance the lives of those we serve and foster an inclusive environment where everyone can thrive.

Thank you for your ongoing support and dedication to our mission. Together, I am confident we can continue to make a positive impact in the communities we serve and beyond. I look forward to hearing from and speaking with anyone reading this report.

Warm regards,

Michael Blackstone, Sr.
Executive Director

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

Andrew is an ACN participant with pieces available at the Art Garden

By the Numbers

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

140,838
Vocational / Day Services Intervention Hours Provided

Persons Served

243
Day/Vocational Services

84
Residential Services

68
Supported Employment (ACN Connections)

4
Transition Services

274,567
Residential Service Hours Provided

2,401
Transition Services Hours Provided

221
ACN Employees

Board of Directors

Laurie Ackermann
Cheri Albin
Ann Bird
Bill Bishop
Leah Boldt
Travis Buck
Cynthia Ellis, M.D.
Ken Keith, Ph.D.
Seamus Kelly, J.D.
Thomas Lee
Joan K. Marcus
Megan Misegadis
Nate Parks
Adama Sawadogo
Leslie Bishop Hartung, *ex Officio*

Staff

Leslie Bishop Hartung
President & Chief Executive Officer (through 5/2024)

Bryon Tenski
Chief Financial Officer

Michael Blackstone, Sr.
Director of Day Services

Melissa Blakemore
Director of Residential and Supported Services

Jim Ryan
Human Resources Administrator (through 11/23)

Emily Worthington
Human Resources Administrator (beginning 11/23)

Partnerships

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

Celebrating a Legacy of Excellence: LBH Retires After 17 Years with ACN

Leslie Bishop Hartung

After 17 remarkable years with ACN, including four as President and CEO, Leslie Bishop Hartung retired in May 2024, leaving behind an extraordinary legacy of leadership, dedication, and advocacy. She helped build ACN into one of the most respected providers in the industry, setting a standard of excellence that will guide the organization for years to come.

Leadership through the Years

Leslie's journey with ACN began as Director of Quality Assurance under former CEO and President Rene Ferdinand. She brought to this role a focus on ensuring high-quality care, a value that became a cornerstone of the organization under her leadership. Over time, her role expanded as she embraced greater responsibilities, culminating in her appointment as President and CEO & President in 2020. Her unwavering commitment to operational integrity strengthened relationships across all facets of ACN, including employees, contractors, government partners, and—most importantly—the individuals and families we serve.

Colleagues universally praise Leslie for her dedication, hard work, and the profound impact she had on them personally, on the local community, and beyond. They describe her congeniality, sense of humor, and genuine caring. People simply enjoy working with "LBH," as she is affectionately called.

Serving in Many Capacities

Leslie oversaw programs, managed leaders, and upheld relationships with government, media, and other organizational partners. Most of all, she always stayed in touch with clients, got to know them personally, and worked with their families to ensure they were receiving the best possible experience. She is widely regarded as a tireless advocate for people with autism and developmental disabilities. With her uniquely inspired vision for ACN and her remarkable ability to get things done, she delivered meaningful change for countless individuals.

Though her presence will be deeply missed, Leslie's legacy will continue to inspire ACN's current leaders, including Michael P. Blackstone, Sr., Melissa Blakemore, Bryon Tenski, and others. Her transformative work and enduring passion for service will remain a guiding light as ACN builds on the strong foundation she established.

Thank you, LBH, for your leadership and impact!

Jim Ryan retires

After 14 years as ACN's Human Resources Manager, Jim Ryan retired, leaving behind a legacy of putting people first in dedication to ACN's mission.

"The most rewarding part was working with the people we support," Jim shared. "Every day, I got to interact with them, hear about their lives, and see their growth." Although Jim is enjoying retirement, especially spending time outside and a part-time job at a golf course, it's the people that he misses most: "The people we serve and the team I worked with, and the reward of working with these individuals every day."

Jim Ryan with former ACN CFO Rick Lowery at 2023 Employee Recognition Dinner

Jim's HR work made an impact on hundreds of ACN employees during his tenure. From guiding new hires through applications and onboarding to helping staff with benefits and payroll, Jim ensured ACN's employees felt valued and supported. He led innovations like the shift to self-service payroll system, which reduced errors and made life easier for employees.

But for Jim, the real reward was the shared sense of purpose. "The culture at ACN was always about the individuals we serve. Every decision was made with their best interests in mind. We have many staff members who have worked here for years because they believe in the work and its importance," he said.

Participant Profile: Jarred S. (Lincoln)

Jarred Smith has accomplished a lot over the past year as an ACN client, participating in day services and the Art Garden.

In day services, he has built lasting friendships, learned practical skills like using a debit card, and volunteered in community programs like Meals on Wheels.

At the Art Garden, he loves working on art projects and furniture restoration. On weekends, he works at Art Garden, which gives him the opportunity to learn how to work the cash register and interact with customers. He has been excited to sell some of his own work.

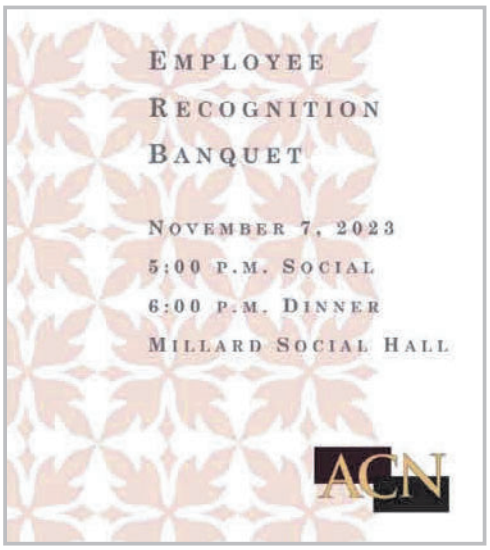
Jarred proved to be a quick learner in vocational rehabilitation, graduating from job coaching in a mere six months. He now works in the cafeteria and kitchen, cleaning, serving, and delivering food.

"To see him so independent is fantastic," his mother, Janelle, shares. "He loves his job and has built relationships with his co-workers, who appreciate his positivity."

Outside of work, Jarred is a competitive Special Olympics athlete, playing basketball, soccer, flag football and swimming. He competes at the national level and will be traveling to Florida to compete in a tournament with his flag football team.

"He is becoming an independent, confident adult," Janelle says. "I attribute that to all the success he's had over the years with ACN."

Employee Recognition



The annual Employee Recognition Dinner was held November 7, 2023. Awards were presented to ACN associates attaining various work milestones from 1-15 years of service.

■ One-Year Awards

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

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

■ Fifteen-Year Awards

Michael P. Blackstone, Sr.
Leslie Bishop Hartung
Roberto Mata Mayorga

Seamus Kelly: A Life of Advocacy

Over the past 15 years, Seamus Kelly has been a steadfast advocate in the developmental disabilities community, both as a professional and a parent. When Leslie, the recently-retired Executive Director, invited him to join the board, Seamus was already well-acquainted with the organization's work.

"My entire legal practice is about helping people with developmental disabilities, their families, and caregivers, and getting them the support services they need," he explains.

This father of five began his journey with his oldest daughter, who is now 20. "Over her lifetime, I've learned how to advocate for her, for other people, and for systemic change."

He brings his expertise to his work on the board, setting goals, providing oversight, and most recently, contributing to the search for the organization's new Executive Director. Seamus is optimistic about ACN''s future. "We may see changes with a fresh perspective on leadership, but the mission stays the same." Seamus notes that ACN's strength lies in providing services in a way that respects the rights, personalities, and wishes of their clients.

"I'm excited to see how both awareness and the services we offer can expand," Seamus continues, "while we continue to offer quality services."

Seamus emphasizes keeping the daily work in perspective with the mission."It can be easy to get busy and lose sight of why we do what we do. It is important to focus on why we are here and why we do this -- for our families and our community."

Seamus Kelly

Thank You, ACN Donors

Individuals

Laurie Ackermann
Cheri Albin
Charlotte & Michael P. Blackstone, Sr.
Leah Boldt
Judy Bruce
Narelle Burns
Cindy Burns
Michael Coyle
Bill & Jeanne Curfman
Harold (Hal) & Mary Daub
Kelly Dieter
Collin Elgert
Dr. Cindy Ellis
Beth Friedman
Chad & Barb Geiger
Jack Geist
Daniel Gleason
Moussa Guira
Kate Harris
Rob Hartung & Leslie Bishop Hartung
Guy Heidemann
Monica Herd
Lori Huffman
Thomas Jodlowski
Jean & Lee Johnson
Susanna Johnston
David Kadavy
Marty & Mona Kanne
Jeffrey Kanne
Brian Kanne
David Keith
Robert Kucirek
Marie Larchick
Thomas Lee
Richard Lowery
Kevin Mahler
Bonnie Mathiasen
Judy Matuszewski
Kathy McNeill
Elizabeth McNeill-Case
Michele Phillips
James Polack
Kevin & Theresa Rihanek
Lori Rinehart
Kristin Sampugnaro
Ed Schaaf
Caryn Scheer
Todd & Lisa Skokan
Vicki Smith
Michele Stagemeyer
Kelli Strunk
Bryon Tenski

Organizations & Foundations

Bridge to Independence
Enrichment Foundation
First Citizens Bank
First Interstate Bank
Growl & Grace, LLC
Kohll's Rx
Liebe's Home of Hope
Nebraska Transition College
ReRUNS R Fun Inc
Rookie's Bar & Grill
Security National Bank
Turner Technology
Zumiez @ Gateway Mall

We apologize for any omissions or errors.

Participant Profile: Ryan M.'s world of music

Ryan M. (Omaha) has a passion for music. Melissa, who works closely with him, says, "Ryan is a happy guy who enjoys life. As long as he has music, he's down for almost anything."

You can always find him with his headphones on, listening to music. He can listen to a song and play it on the piano or keyboard at the ACN center. "It's amazing how quickly he picks up on things," Melissa says.

At the center, Ryan is building independent skills, helping clean up after meals, washing his hands and face, and charging his phone. He learns best when people put instructions in the form of a song. "If he speaks to you, it's in the form of a song," Melissa says. "He'll stop me and say, 'Hey Melissa,' and then sing what he has to say."

Ryan's journey with ACN highlights the importance of accessible services. When he began receiving day services in early 2022, ACN did not have a transportation route near his home. When we expanded transportation routes, that enabled him to attend regularly, and he now attends every day.

Ryan lives at home with his parents and three brothers. He enjoys camping, watching YouTube videos, and caring for the family's foster cats. His family always makes sure he is connected to the music he loves.

Financial Report

For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024

REVENUE

Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation
- VR Services . . . . . $ 344,120

Nebraska Health & Human Services / DD
- Group Homes 2,850,328
- Shared Family Living 1,683,574
- Supported Services 652,149
- Day Services 1,825,714
- Community Inclusion 1,072,976
- Consultative Assessment 14,821

Nebraska School Districts
- Transition Services 144,446

Philanthropy
- Charitable Donations & Grants 147,602

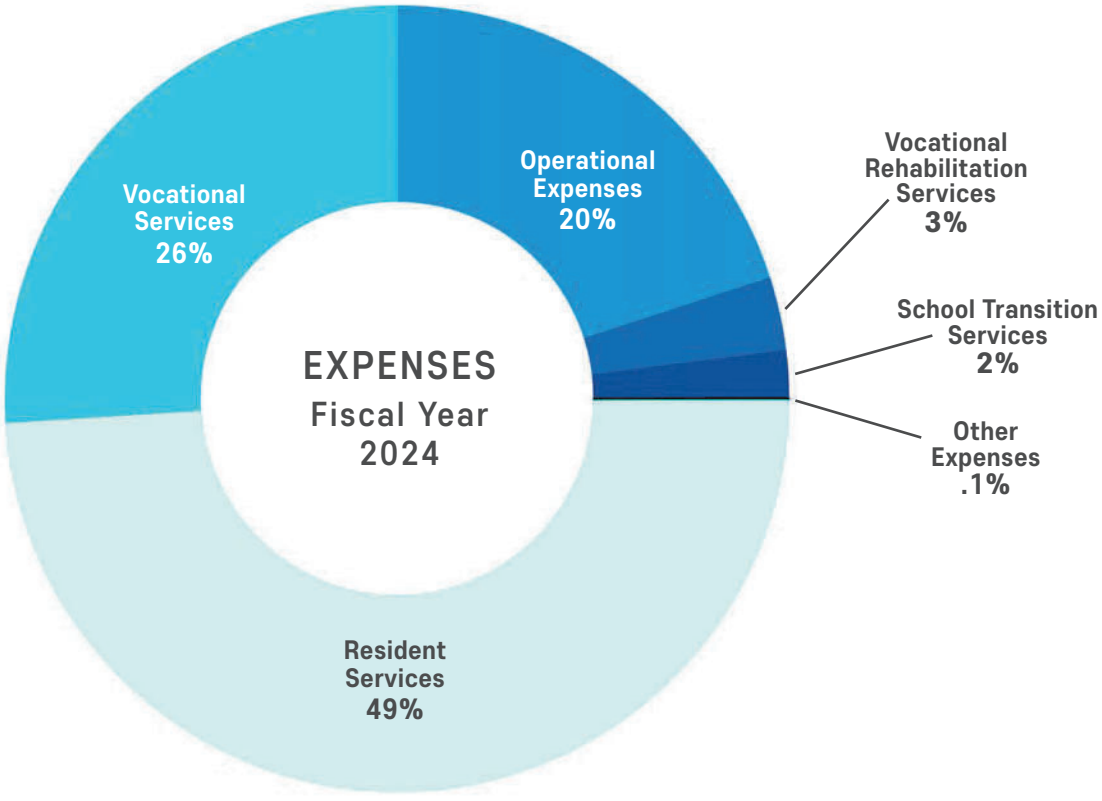
Other Income
- Building Rental, etc. 107,432

Total Revenue . . . . . $ 8,845,162

EXPENSES

Residential Services . . . . . $ 4,608,531
Vocational Services 2,421,524
School Transition Services 165,409
Vocational Rehab Services 307,622
Operational Expenses 1,852,895
Other Expenses 21,335
Total Expenses . . . . . $ 9,377,316

Autism Center of Nebraska engaged the services of BerganKDV to provide an independent audit of finances for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024. Copies of the audit are available upon request.



2023-24 Events

Hats Off Gala

Despite historic weather events in Omaha that day (including an F5 tornado!), ACN's Hats Off Gala for 2024 was held April 26th at ACN Headquarters in Omaha. Guests enjoyed presentations, a silent auction, plus food and drinks from Chef Hattam and Brickway Brewery/Cut Spike Distillery. Dr. Kenneth Keith was presented with the 2024 John T. Clark Award.

See details at this link.

Cheri Albin & Dr. Ken Keith pose with the John T. Clark Award at the Hats Off Gala

Holiday of Horses, December 2023

Leslie Bishop Hartung with "Santa" at Breakfast with Santa, December 2023

Other Events

- Food Truck Festival / 10-12-2023
- Halloween Party / 10-31-2023
- Thanksgiving Lunch / 11-25-2023
- Holiday Of Horses / 12-10-2023
- Breakfast With Santa / 12-16-2023
- Art Garden Boutique / 12-18-2023
- Valentine's Day Dance / 2-14-2024

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 one-time gift of $25
can help us buy seeds and bedding for the Vegetable Garden throughout the growing season.

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

Your one-time 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 one-time gift of $2500
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