ANNUAL REPORT 2024-25

OMAHA

LINCOLN

FREMONT

YORK

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** — THE ART GARDEN

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

Dear Friends,

Michael Blackstone, Sr.

As I reflect on the 2024/25 year, I am deeply grateful to be part of the Autism Center of Nebraska community in a leadership role. Every day, I learn from our participants, families, staff, and partners, each of whom contributes to the strength and heart of this organization.

This year, we have continued to navigate a highly unpredictable federal funding landscape while ensuring that our services remain strong and responsive. At the same time, we've made significant progress in keeping pace with changes in our industry. This includes modernizing our operations and enhancing our digital recordkeeping, technological systems, hiring and employment practices. These investments allow us to deliver higher-quality care and support to those we serve.

We are proud to now have locations in four major cities across Nebraska, and we look forward to continuing to expand our footprint into Central Nebraska in the year ahead.

In this Annual Report, you'll find facts, figures, updates, photos, and stories that express the essence of this past year. In these pages, you'll see:

- *A participant profile featuring Megan, who receives services at our York location*
- *Introductions to our board members, Michelle Kelly and Nick Pacal, who joined the Board of Directors this past fiscal year*
- *Pictures and highlights from our annual community events*
- *A breakdown of the number of people served across each of our programs*

If you are reading this, it is likely because you are part of the ACN community, whether as a participant, family member, staff member, vendor, or friend. For your continued trust, support, and belief in our mission, we extend our heartfelt thanks.

With gratitude,

Michael P. Blackstone, Sr.
Executive Director

Autism Center of Nebraska is a proud member of these organizations

ACN 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

The ACN Connections program has grown significantly since it was first developed in 2009. This program was created to help individuals with autism and I/DD reach true independence through competitive employment. Our job coaches provide support to our clients and their employers through interventions and bidirectional education. Job coaches' consultations decrease as the individual attains independence, supporting a sustainable path to long-term 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.

Continuous Residential: DSPs are on site in the living quarters of the individuals 24 hours a day, assisting with all activities and daily living.

Intermittent Services: ACN DSPs do not live with clients but visit clients several times a week to ensure that they are meeting their personal goals.

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 is on hold, pending a yet-to-be-filled open position.

Above and Beyond

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

- First Responder Relations (Project Lifesaver)
- Workplace Interventions
- Emergency Services for People in Crisis
- Training for Caregivers
- Caregiver Coaching
- Referrals
- Free Community Events
- Legislative Advocacy

By the Numbers

1,300
Requests for Help Answered & Served (00 per week)

131,025
Vocational / Day Services Intervention Hours Provided

Persons Served
218
Day/Vocational Services
83
Residential Services

352,904
Residential Service Hours Provided

185
ACN Employees

Supported Employment
112 Participants
2,400 Hours Worked by Participants
50+ Participating Employers

Board of Directors

Cheri Albin, *Chair*
Seamus Kelly, J.D., *Vice Chair*
Joan K. Marcus, *Previous Chair*
Laurie Ackermann
Ann Bird
Travis Buck
Cynthia Ellis, M.D.
Michelle Kelly
Nick Pacal
Adama Sawadogo
Michael Blackstone, *Ex Officio*

Executive Staff

Michael Blackstone, Sr.
Executive Officer

Bryon Tenski
Director of Operations

Melissa Blakemore
Director of Programs

Annual Report Creation

Kevin Mahler
Contributed Line, LLC

Steve Raglin
Steve Raglin Graphic Design

Partnerships

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

GIVE NEBRASKA
Autism Society Nebraska
UNMC Munroe-Meyer Institute
The Arc of Lincoln
Healing Minds Therapy, PC
Williamsburg Behavioral Psychology™ Behavioral Health Solutions
Omaha Mounted Foundation
Autism Family Network
Special Olympics Nebraska
Autism Action Partnership
Kohll's Rx
A-I-F-S African Immigrant Family Services

Employee Milestones

The annual **ACN Employee Recognition Dinner** was held on November 14, 2024. Awards were presented to associates attaining various work milestones from 1-15 years of service.

■ One-Year Awards

Kossi Atchou
Emma Boysen
Kyra Courville
Jamie Davis
Sydney Dose
Amanda Edgecomb
Mitchell Gehrig
Ammon Grady
Ellen Hixson
Kayi Kankoe
Nicole Legg
Christine McIntyre
Ashley Minnifield
Nohelia Slater-Ledesma
Bernardin Sossou
Bryon Tenski
Melissa Wagner
Timothy Wood
Palamanga Yonli
Stefani Lloyd
Melissa Mann
Rodney Moyer-Fuentes
Kelli Strunk
Natalie Swift
Amy Tonniges
Jill Ueckert

■ Five-Year Awards

Abdoul Compaore
David Dossa
Susanna Johnston
Linda Lannin

■ Retirees

Leslie Bishop Hartung

Participant Profile

YORK, NEBRASKA

Megan's Growth to Independence

Megan Z. became a participant with ACN with Supported Employment services in 2022. Then, a year later, she added Day supports and joined ACN's Art Garden in York.

"Megan works at Walmart," Jill Ueckert, ACN York Area Coordinator, shared. "When she first started, she didn't feel comfortable talking to customers or coworkers she didn't know. She started off with communication cards, one to let customers know she would get someone to help them, and another card to ask coworkers to assist with a customer." The cards gave Megan a structured way to participate.

With the assistance of a job coach and the communication cards, and Megan's own determination, those cards became temporary stepping-stones. "She only had to use them for a few months," Jill explained. "She started answering customers and coworkers back."

As confidence replaced hesitation, a new chapter emerged.

Today, Megan greets and helps customers verbally and engages more comfortably with her coworkers. She navigates busy workdays, showing a growing independence that reflects her hard work and the power of steady support. This year, Megan took another meaningful step forward when she transitioned into Residential Services with ACN, continuing her path toward independence.

Megan's journey represents what ACN strives for: meaningful growth and independence built step by step every day. Jill tells us, "Megan is a success story because of all the growth, confidence, and independence she has gained through her services with ACN."

Photo: York News-Times, 2024

Photo courtesy Jill Ueckert

Board Member Profiles

Michelle Kelly

Michelle Kelly has been a steadfast advocate in the Nebraska autism community since her daughter, Madeline, was diagnosed in 2008. "Although I knew quite a bit about autism," she shared, "when your own child is diagnosed, it is a totally different world."

Michelle has served the autism community of Nebraska for 15 years, including her current term as State Board Secretary of the Autism Society of Nebraska (ASN) and her job as a Parent Resource Coordinator at the Munroe-Meyer Institute, helping families navigate new diagnoses, therapies, and support systems. "It all comes together," she explained. "It wasn't something I chose. It chose me."

"One thing I would have loved when my daughter was first diagnosed was a mom who could walk me through the process. Now I can be that person for other families."

When she got the chance to be the ASN representative on the ACN board, Michelle was eager to say yes. "I love helping families see that there are options," she said. "I'd like to see even more options for those young adults and their families."

Michelle Kelly

ACN is grateful for Michelle's contributions, her experience, passion, and belief in a future where every person has meaningful choices.

Nick Pacal

Nick Pacal's connection to ACN began years ago through his mother, Diane Pacal, a former ACN director with 20+ years of experience in the industry.

"Any time I stopped in to see her at work, I'd meet the people ACN served," he recalled. "They have the best hearts in the world."

After Diane passed away in 2023, Nick reached out to ACN leadership to ask how he could help. That conversation opened the door to learning more about the challenges organizations face in navigating regulations, funding changes, and economic pressures. A later conversation with ACN's leadership team led to the invitation to join the board. "I know exactly why my mom got into this industry," he said. "When you enjoy the people you work with and the purpose behind it, it's a win-win."

Professionally, Nick brings substantial experience from his 20-year career in sales, banking, real estate, and corporate leadership.

Nick shares ACN's vision for building a stronger, more financially resilient future. "I want to see consistency in fundraising and long-term stability," he said. "ACN's future is bright. They're doing things that other organizations aren't doing, and they're building something sustainable." He sees tremendous potential in strengthening fundraising efforts, investing in growth, and continuing to innovate despite economic pressures felt across the sector.

Nick Pacal

Thank You, ACN Donors

Individuals

Laurie Ackermann
Russell & Cheri Albin
Karen Amstuz
Emily Arkfeld
Rita Armendariz
Brenda Ash
Kim Bainbridge
Ken & Annie Bird
Leslie & Robin Bishop Hartung
Michael & Charlotte Blackstone
Micheala Blackstone
Melissa Blakemore
Sandra Boisseree
Ann & Thomas Brannen
Megan Bratetic
Laura Buechler
Thomas & Marianne Campbell
James Chol
Arnie & Jana Christensen
Julie & Doug Czepa
Harold & Mary Daub
Kathleen & Howard Dewhurst
Chris Dinslage
Diana Dye
Craig & Cindy Ellis
RyAnne Elsesser
Curtis Englund
Todd Erisman
Rene & Betty Ferndinand
Catherine Fiegenschuh
John Fratzke
Ron & Pam Garofolo
Michael & Cindy Gibney
Kathleen Grant
Moussa Guira
Jenni Haan
James Hagen
John & Jane Hallman
Carol & Howard Halperin
Madison Hanna
Jean Hansen
Sally Harrington
James Herd
Monica Hernandez
Trevor Howard
Carol Jensen
Kimberly Jensen
Thomas Jodlowski
CaSandra Johnson
Greg Johnson
John & Joyce Johnson
Lori Johnson
Susanna Johnston
Bruce Jones
H. Keith
Kenneth & Connie Keith
Michelle Kelly
Seamus Kelly
Patrick & Brenda Kostal
Shawn Kraus
Pamela & F.J. Kucirek
Jill & Christopher Kudron
Susan & Bill Laird
Patricia Langner
Thomas & Linda Lannin
Thomas Lee
Jesse Lipson
Richard Lowery
Michael & Michele Ludden
Patricia Lysaught
Paul Maginn
Kevin Mahler
Laura Manvitz
Monique McGee
Kathy McNeill
Lisa Meagher
Kellie Mihovk
Courtney Miller
Jeffrey & Kristy Milliken
Michelle Minor
Kay Monzingo
Mark & Jan Morris
Christine Nelson
Tom O'Hara
Brittney Ortman
Nick Osborn
Mary Pacal
Scott & Amy Pachman
Naomi & Kevin Painter
Jouis & Janet Pol
James Polack
Frances & Anthony Porter
Chad and Sarah Powell
Lynn Ramert
Ryan Richardson
Robin Ritter
Rosemary Roche
John & Angie Roderique
Allen & Rosaleen Roeder
Gary & Deborah Rosenberg
James Ryan
Steven Sangimino
Lucinda & Timothy Schmad
Joseph & Carol Schmitt
Darren Schrat
Sharon Schumacher
Nicholas Segura
Bruce Sharp
Janell Sime
Katherine Skidmore
Jarred Smith
Howard & Peggy Speck
Debra Spicka
Kelli Strunk
Lisa Strunk
Carolyn & Tom Sullivan
Lydia Swanson
Thomas Szalewski
Bryon & Martha Tenski
Don & Shirley Teply
Christine Thomas
Jim & Debra Timm
Robin & Amy Tollefson
Katherine Vanderveld
Frank & Barbara Velinsky
Staci Voss
Kimberly Waszgis-Vaca
Gene & Diane Whitener
Marty and Cathy Wiedenman
Katelyn Wilee
Dennis & Sherry Wolf-Drbal
Jack Young
Judith Zeman

Organizations & Foundations

24th Street Enterprises
Anant Hotels
Arthur J Gallagher & Co
Autism Family Network
Autism Society of Nebraska
Benevity Fund
Bonterra
DMK Investments LLC
The Enrichment Foundation
Everlake Corp.
First Interstate Bank
First National Bank of Omaha
Four Points FCU
Fremont Community Foundation
Fremont Therapy & Wellness
Galliant Care
Give Nebraska
Goodwill Industries
Kissel Kohout ES Associates LLC
Knights of Columbus, Council #6385
Knights of Columbus, Council #6429
Knights of Columbus, Council #10108
KohllsRx
Kroger
Landmark Performance Homes
Liberty Middle School
Lutz & Company, PC
Miracle Hill Golf Course
Pinnacle Bank
Pledgeling Foundation
Rookies Bar & Grill
Swift Behavioral Solutions LLC
The Auto Club Group
The Presbyterian Church
Union Bank & Trust
Village Pointe Lodging LLC
Zumiez at Gateway Mall

We apologize for any omissions or errors.

Financial Report

For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025

REVENUE

Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation

VR Services	$ 422,696

Nebraska Health & Human Services / DD

Group Homes	2,748,733
Shared Family Living	1,484,374
Supported Services	435,556
Day Services	1,884,325
Community Inclusion	924,419
Consultative Assessment	12,026

Philanthropy

Charitable Donations & Grants	333,672

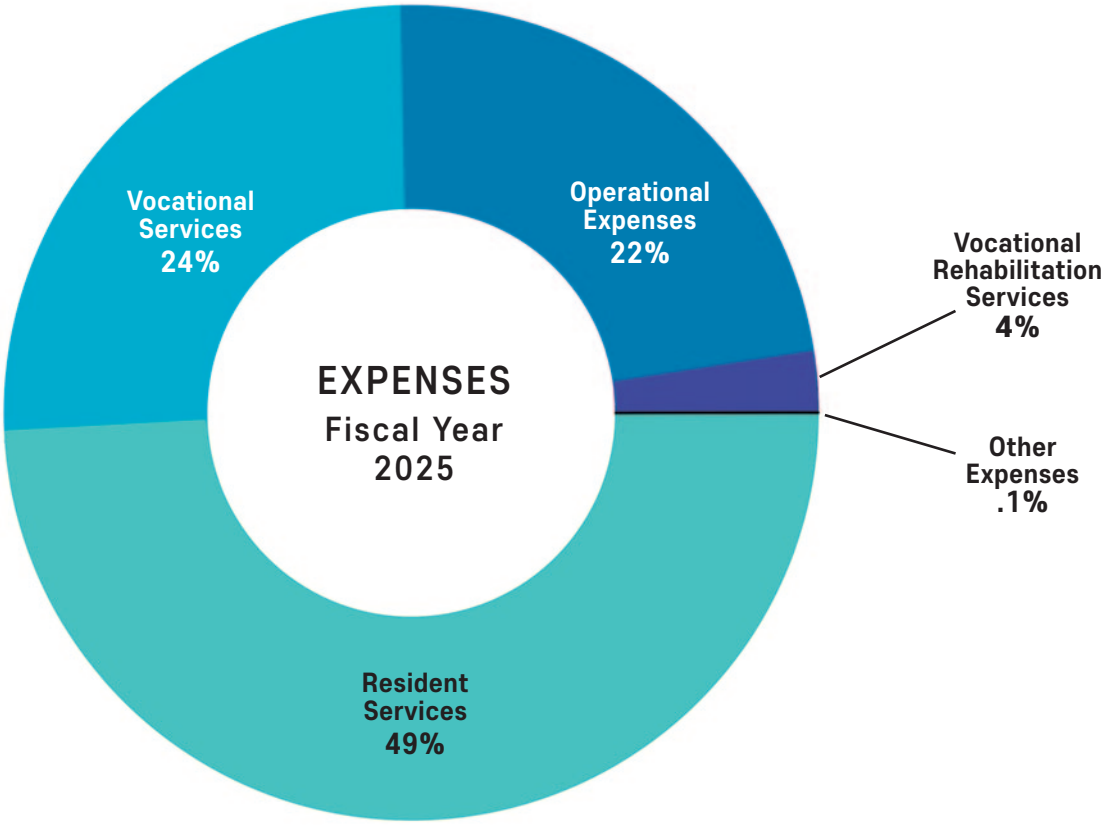
Other Income

Building Rental, etc.	163,728
Total Revenue	**$ 8,409,569**

EXPENSES

Residential Services	$ 4,166,313
Vocational Services	2,035,575
Vocational Rehab Services	309,718
Operational Expenses	1,849,213
Other Expenses	56,159
Total Expenses	**$ 8,416,978**

Autism Center of Nebraska engaged the services of Lutz to provide an independent audit of finances for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025. Copies of the audit are available upon request.



Hats Off to ACN

On April 26, 2025, the annual **Hats Off Gala** took place at ACN headquarters. The John T. Clark Award was presented to Rene Ferdinand, the former President and CEO of ACN (2007 – 2018). He is known statewide as an expert in the field of developmental disabilities and service delivery. Hats Off guests enjoyed food from A Catered Affair and the time to mingle with loyal ACN supporters.

More event details at this link.

A **Golf Tournament** benefitting ACN was held on June 8, 2025 at Miracle Hill Golf Course. The event was hosted by Rookie's Bar & Grill whom we thank in particular for their good will and continued support.

ACN's Food Truck Festival 2024

Our annual **Food Truck Festival** took place on Saturday, Oct. 12, 2024 at ACN headquarters. Staff members, friends, participants, and participant family members enjoyed tasty selections from food trucks while they played games and relaxed on a beautiful October night. We thank everyone who contributed to make this event a success.

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 $250
can provide 4-5 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 $3,000
covers the utility bill in ACN's main headquarters for one month of operations.

Your one-time gift of $3,300
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.

Scan to donate on the ACN website

ACN AUTISM CENTER OF NEBRASKA

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