

MARCH 2026  
ISSUE 21

Community Newsletter



*Partners in*  
**AUTISM**

FAMILY OWNED • FAMILY FOCUSED

# Autism Acceptance: Make It Happen



**Healthcare  
Advocacy**

**Made Easy!**

**PartnersinAutism.com  
/advocacytools**

See page 8-9 to order  
advocacy yard signs and  
stickers!

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 @partnersinautism

# Autism Acceptance Month



## Advocating in April ... and Always

On April 1<sup>st</sup>, the start of Autism Acceptance Month, Medicaid will enact yet another limitation on ABA therapy making it even more difficult to provide services. This is a trend that will not end unless we demand change with every voice we have.

We ask you to do more than wear specific colors for the month. We ask you to make it clear that **autism acceptance** must go beyond social sentiment into the tangible reality of **healthcare access**.

This is where **acceptance demands advocacy**.

As an autistically-led, family-owned company, this is deeply personal. **We are not removed observers. Neither are you.** You understand how critical services like Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) are to our families. You also understand the real fear families face when these essential, evidence-based supports are threatened.

We have so much more to say about the importance of healthcare access, about its value to our whole community, and about the many better strategies Medicaid could use to invest taxpayer dollars well. And we will say it all ... over and over ... until we're heard by the powers that hold the purse strings and gatekeep our healthcare.

But we need you to say it, too. **Straight into the ears of legislators.** Without end.

Maybe you don't consider yourself political. That's okay. This isn't about politics. **It's about people.** It's about families who need access to medically necessary care today and children whose futures depend on it.

We know the task is tedious. But we want you to know that calling your legislators is the **single most impactful thing you can do** for this issue.

We're here to make the information you need for those phone calls easy to access. We're here to clearly lay out which legislators have voted for or against healthcare funding so you can hold them accountable.

We have and will continue to expand our [www.partnersinautism.com/advocacytools](http://www.partnersinautism.com/advocacytools) page to provide easy-to-use resources for you: phone numbers, talking points, background information, and a simple chart of legislators' voting records on autism healthcare bills.

Go to the webpage. **Trust that your voice matters.** Make the calls. Over and over. **Until every family's access is secure.**  
**Until autism is accepted.**

# SECURING FUNDING FOR SUPPORTIVE EDUCATION

We believe every child deserves access to an educational environment that **respects their identity, supports their strengths, and meets their individual needs.**

This goes beyond what most classrooms are equipped to provide and also beyond what typical funding sources cover. But just as we created an innovative learning environment, we are also always working to connect families with **innovative funding options** that make meaningful services like our Supported Pathways Learning Center accessible.

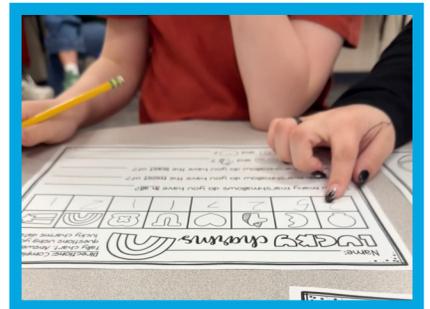
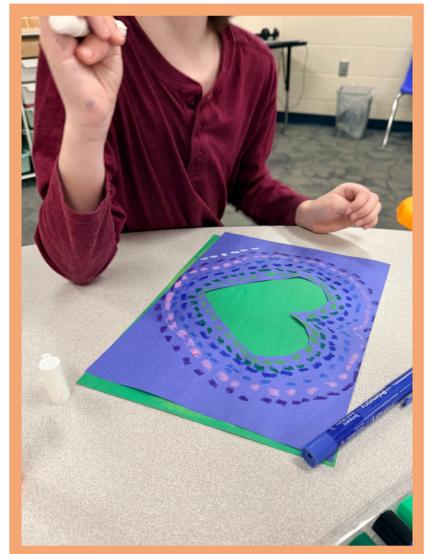
One such resource is Indiana’s Education Scholarship Account (ESA) program. This provides eligible families with tax-free funds that can be used for approved, flexible educational services. This allows families to customize their child’s education to fit them.

Along with Supported Pathways Learning Center tuition, several of our other services qualify for this educational funding as well, including ABA therapy and our ABA Transitional Classroom, our Life and Career Skills Courses, Pre-Employment Services, Tutoring, Paraprofessionals / Educational Aides, and more.

**The ESA application window runs from March 1 to Sept 1. It is important to apply as early as possible, as funds are limited.** [www.in.gov/doe/eoq/esa/](http://www.in.gov/doe/eoq/esa/)

If you have questions about service eligibility, coverage, or navigating the ESA application process, our team is here to help. Please reach out. We are committed to helping families find the resources that make the right educational path possible. [www.PartnersinAutism.com/contactus](http://www.PartnersinAutism.com/contactus)

**Watch our webinar to see what makes our Learning Center different:** <https://youtu.be/Fo3018tRRQ8>



# SELF-ADVOCACY: SMALL TO BIG

ABA: Building Skills for Life



The word **"advocacy"** can often mean speeches, protests, or big public moments. But some of the most important advocacy is **far quieter**: asking for help, saying "I need a break," choosing a preferred activity, or telling someone when something feels uncomfortable.

We all need this subtle but powerful self-advocacy to navigate the world successfully and independently. That makes it a **central focus of our ABA therapy**.

In ABA, we help our clients identify their own needs and master ways to communicate them clearly. For some children, this might mean **practicing simple phrases** like "help please" or "all done." For others, it could involve using **visual supports, communication devices, or gestures** to express what they need. Over time, these skills grow into more complex forms of self-advocacy, such as requesting changes to an activity, explaining a preference, or asking for more time to complete a task.

Our team works intentionally to create **natural opportunities** to practice self-advocacy skills. During play, learning activities, and daily routines, clients' behavior technicians encourage them to make choices, request support, and express their feelings in ways that are comfortable and productive. **Staff model clear, respectful communication, respond consistently to requests, and celebrate** when a client successfully communicates their needs.

**These skills matter just as much for children as they do for adults.** In the broader world, our clients will use the same skills to enjoy social activities, pursue personal and career goals, and build strong, safe relationships.

Our staff create a **safe, supportive space to practice** the small moments of advocacy that make a big difference throughout life.

## Tips For You: Self-Advocacy at Home, School, and Beyond

Self-advocacy grows through supported practice. As families, caregivers, and teachers, you build self-advocacy daily. By helping children learn to recognize and express their needs, you will help them build the confidence and independence they will rely on throughout their lives.

- Offer choices ("Do you want the blue cup or the green cup?").
- Encourage children to request help before stepping in - it's ok to watch and wait; let them know you're available if they want help.
- Acknowledge when a child communicates a need ("Thanks for asking..." "I'm glad you told me...").
- Help them clarify mixed emotions - sometimes only one thing needs to change to make an activity appealing.
- Give children time to respond and show respect if they change their mind.

# CLEAR SPACE, CLEAR SUCCESS: INTENTIONAL SPACES FOR SKILL BUILDING



The room is quiet.

Soft light from a lamp fills the space. A coffee table sits neatly in front of the couch. The bed fills another corner, ready to be made. The wardrobe doors are closed, and the TV is off. **Nothing is competing for attention.** Nothing is rushing the moment.

Our client checks the to-do list in his hand before working step by step to tidy the mock apartment. Each step is clear. Each task moves in order around the room.

He starts with the couch. There's satisfaction in the straight edges and even spacing. The room stays quiet while he works, though he could listen to music if he wanted. But no distracting sounds, no unexpected interruptions. Just the task in front of him. In a space like this, it's easier to focus. And learn. **And succeed.**

**Building new skills and routines is far more difficult in busy environments.** This is true for everyone, but especially for our clients. That's why our training spaces exist. At home there may be clutter, noise, or other responsibilities pulling attention in different directions. In our structured spaces - apartment, office, grocery, and more - the **environment is simpler, and so is the goal: one task at a time.**

His Life Skills Technician is nearby, but not hovering. Support comes when it's needed in the form of a quick question, a reminder of the next step, a bit of encouragement. **With each visit, our client moves through the checklist more independently,** perfecting details: the smoothness of the blanket spread across the bed, the clean shine of the coffee table, the quiet order of the room when everything is finished.

These skills matter for **personal life:** keeping a living space comfortable, organized, and manageable. But they also **connect to careers** in hospitality, housekeeping, property management, and many other industries where attention to detail and consistent routines are valued.

He finishes the final task and looks around the room, **satisfied, confident, proud.**

## The Apartment Training Space - one of several for our Employment and Waiver Services clients



# EMPLOYMENT ADVOCATES

Staff  
Combine  
Experience  
for Client  
Empowerment

- Personal experience navigating autism services with her family.
- More than 5 years experience in community engagement with local non-profit organizations.
- Connects people and community groups to maximize support and enrich lives.
- Takes pride in helping clients break barriers and grow in their skills and confidence.
- Creative and innovative advocate.
- Skilled communicator.
- Experience: ABA Services and Camp Red Cedar.
- Strategic thinker and problem solver.
- Her deep understanding of diverse needs across many settings allows her to tailor support to each individual's unique strengths and needs.
- Active listener with a background in hospitality.
- Experienced in our ABA Services.
- Excels in behavioral interventions.
- Thinks outside the box to match client passions and interests with job prospects.
- Builds relationships with community partners: Parks & Rec, Red Cross, Camp Red Cedar, FWACC.
- Plans and leads our Life and Career Skills Courses.
- 15+ yrs of client-centered service in ABA Services, Employment Services, and administration.
- Ensures that clients and families fully understand their options for funding and services.
- Equips clients for meaningful independence.
- Has a heart for service to the whole community.
- Great attention to detail that keeps behind-the-scenes tasks running smoothly
- Stays up to date on local programs and resources
- 5 years in early childhood education and over 1 year in municipal administration
- Makes sure clients feel welcome and staff feel supported



**HAYLEY BARNFIELD**

Director of Life Skills and Career Development



**SAIGE GOTTWALD**

Employment Specialist



**BRITTANEY FARRELL**

Employment Specialist



**AMANDA HERALD**

Director of Operations



**KAITLYN BESTUL**

Assist. Dir. of Life Skills and Career Devel.

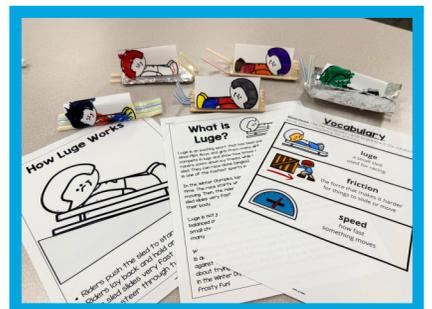
# TEAM SPIRIT: OLYMPICS IN ABA AND NAVIGATORS SCOUTING

Our ABA Services and Navigators Scouting Troop brought the excitement of the Olympics right into our halls with our own creative version of the Winter Games!

Our ABA crew grouped into teams and took on daily challenges designed to incorporate their individual ABA goals. Each activity gave teammates the chance to practice skills, encourage one another, and contribute points to their team. The friendly competition made it even more exciting as the point totals grew on the hallway chart each day. Spirit Day added even more fun, with everyone proudly sporting their team colors and cheering each other on.

Meanwhile, our Navigators Scouting Troop joined in the Olympic spirit with a creative twist on curling. Using plastic bowls and masking tape, scouts slid their “stones” across the floor toward targets, laughing and learning along the way. It was such a hit that we highly recommend this activity for groups of any age!

Our Navigators meet every 1st and 3rd Thursday. Interested? Email [Linzie@PartnersinAutism.com](mailto:Linzie@PartnersinAutism.com) Know a family who might enjoy a truly inclusive scouting experience? Share this with them!



## Lasagna Love: Layers of Service

Our Director of Operations, Amanda Herald, knows how to combine ingredients into a good recipe - whether those ingredients are food or people. With a generous heart for both our clients and those in need in our community, she found a connection that could serve both groups: Lasagna Love, a community-based initiative spreading kindness and care through shared meals.

Clients who want to practice their kitchen and meal prep skills are able to join together with other volunteers, socialize, and work together to make pans of lasagna that will be sent out to families who are experiencing grief or financial strain. We've supported 6 families so far, and we're just getting started!

Want to help us spread the love even further? Donate a grocery gift card. Contact [Amanda@PartnersinAutism.com](mailto:Amanda@PartnersinAutism.com) for an ingredients list.





# COMMUNITY

# ADVOCACY MADE EASY

**For Everyone You Meet:**  
[www.PartnersinAutism.com/advocacytools](http://www.PartnersinAutism.com/advocacytools)

**Advocacy** starts with community. **Understanding** each other. **Supporting** each other. The power of a voice grows - exponentially - when that voice is echoed by its neighbors.

**Understand:** Our community is facing real and immediate challenges. Cuts to Medicaid funding and barriers to providing ABA therapy don't just affect autistic children and their families. This will affect our entire community, our entire state, in far-reaching ways.

On the surface, these cuts are explained as cost-saving measures. But they're not. These cuts move the cost down the road, punishing innocent families and ethical service providers.

Were cost-saving measures needed? Absolutely. They were needed in the form of fair oversight and standardized rates - rates, mind you, that should still be high enough to provide living wages for behavior technicians and oversight that wouldn't interfere with quality therapy. Such changes would have protected our community's economic well-being. Instead, "economic well-being" is being used as an excuse for actions that stray far from that result.

**Support** will not come from political decision-makers unless we demand it at a level they can't ignore. We know how to support each other. We need to raise our support to a new level. A level beyond our old comfort zones. More persistent. More informed. More unified, regardless of how directly we feel we are affected...because this funding crisis will cascade out to affect everyone. We need everyone on board. Your neighbors. Your friends. **Everyone.**

This year, our Autism Acceptance Month yard signs link to our updated **advocacy tools, designed for you.** Never called a politician? That's fine. We provide their phone numbers and online portals. We highlight the **most influential** politicians and tell you which ones have been supportive. We give you talking points to **support** what you say with **understanding.**

We also made sticker designs for advocacy on-the-go. Order them for **FREE** (see next page)! **Use them. Start conversations with them. Make your own calls because of them.**

We all have a responsibility to **advocate: halt harmful Medicaid cuts, remove unnecessary barriers, and reverse legislation that has denied access to essential healthcare services.** Legislators pay attention when the whole community speaks up, when they hear from many voices at once. Each phone call, email, yard sign - these add up. They send a message that our community is informed, engaged, and not willing to accept policies that put children at risk.

# YARD SIGN & STICKERS

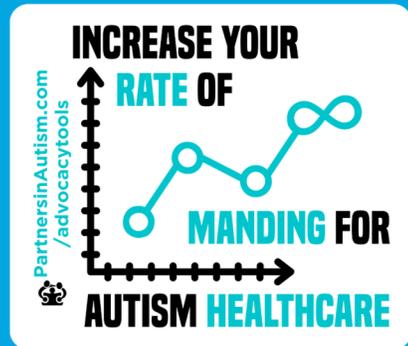
## Engage Others Everywhere!

### Autism Acceptance: Make It Happen



Healthcare Advocacy  
Made Easy!

PartnersinAutism.com/advocacytools



Hold on darling...



I'm explaining the social and economic importance of funding medically necessary therapy to our legislators.

PartnersinAutism.com/advocacytools



"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world..."



... it's the only thing that ever has."

PartnersinAutism.com/advocacytools

Ah yes, the evidence-based approach of ... less funding for services.



De"Mand" Autism Healthcare

PartnersinAutism.com/advocacytools

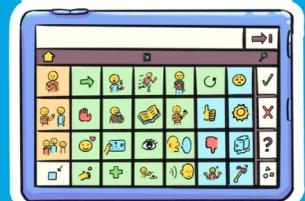
It's a great day...



...to protect ABA.

PartnersinAutism.com/advocacytools

### Words Matter



### USE THEM: ADVOCATE

PartnersinAutism.com/advocacytools

Order here: <https://forms.gle/2qBX5UCsoEYqgWWa6>

# DIRECT CONNECTION

## Team Spotlight: Behavior Analysts

Ensuring quality care with **dignity and compassion**?  
That requires direct connection **at every level**.

In many clinics, Behavior Analysts (BAs) write plans and analyze results from back offices, supervising via iPads, removed from direct, hands-on interactions.

Ours don't.

They have no back offices.

**Our BAs are active on the floor:** observing, giving feedback, and modifying programs in real time.

Using the most **current and ethical** best practices in Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), our Behavior Analysts ensure that each strategy used throughout a therapy session **respects** the unique strengths, preferences, and dignity of their clients.

Through regular **coaching, modeling, and feedback**, our Behavior Analysts help our Behavior Technicians who deliver therapy refine their skills and build confidence so that every interaction with a client is fluidly thoughtful and supportive. This **coordinated approach** ensures that services maintain treatment fidelity and procedural integrity while being delivered with compassionate care.

To bring the entire **support network** together, our Behavior Analysts remain closely connected to the families we support. They **meet regularly with caregivers** to provide training, listen to celebrations and concerns, share progress, and develop new goals.

Direct connection **makes a difference**. It communicates respect, conveys care, ensures quality, and creates environments where children **grow and thrive**.



## Upcoming Events

Lasagna Love cooking session Apr 20, 4:35pm  
Register with [Amanda@PartnersinAutism.com](mailto:Amanda@PartnersinAutism.com)

Mamas Guerreras 3<sup>rd</sup> annual Autism Walk and Celebration  
April 26<sup>th</sup> 3pm at Foster Park by the baseball field entrance

PAC Family Bowling - Last Tuesday monthly  
Registration required in advance to [Hayley@PartnersinAutism.com](mailto:Hayley@PartnersinAutism.com)

Navigators Scouting Troop 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>  
Thursday with monthly outings!  
Contact [Linzie@PartnersinAutism.com](mailto:Linzie@PartnersinAutism.com)

See our Social Groups page for dates and times of our other current social and support groups as well as external groups we host.  
[PartnersinAutism.com/social-groups](https://PartnersinAutism.com/social-groups)

Disabilities Expo, Allen County Memorial Coliseum  
May 9th, 10am-3pm  
FREE admission and parking. Register for our services on-site!

Opportunities:

Community Resources and Job Posting

Get Started at the Disabilities Expo!

Come chat with us and enjoy fun activities at the Disabilities Expo: May 10th, 10am-3pm at the Memorial Coliseum. All of our service directors will be on-site to answer your questions about services and funding. You can even take a seat with us to begin your registration while you're there. Admission and parking are FREE.

My Autism Ally: Part-Time Positions

Our community partner, My Autism Ally, is launching their Sensory Calming Spaces program and are hiring Calming Allies to work within larger community events throughout NE Indiana. Details can be found on their website at [www.myautismally.org/join-our-team](http://www.myautismally.org/join-our-team)

Experience the Difference of Family Owned - Family Focused

Partners in Autism.com /values

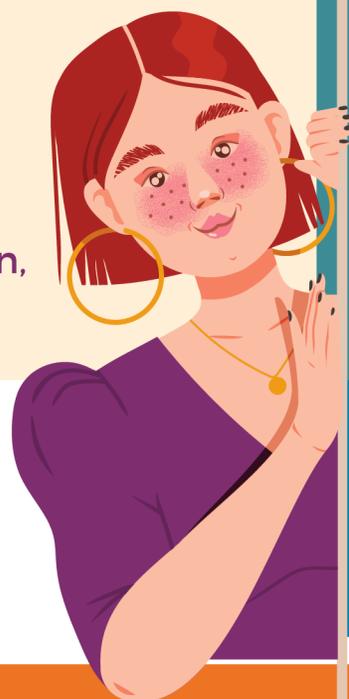
Hiring: Behavior Analysts

Make a difference in a place that's different.

We support you with professional collaboration and resources so you can support clients with compassion, dignity, and respect.

We offer after-hour tours for BCBA's. Come get to know us on your schedule.

Contact [Olivia@PartnersinAutism.com](mailto:Olivia@PartnersinAutism.com)



Collaborative Support for You from our Director of Behavior Quality Assurance. Diverse Natural Learning Environments and direct connection to services for all stages of the autism journey.