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Community Newsletter



Partners in AUTISM

FAMILY OWNED • FAMILY FOCUSED



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Begin a new journey with our quality team



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Medicaid Cuts Impact Behavior Technicians

Hidden Cost of Medicaid Rate Cuts on ABA Behavior Technicians & Quality of Care



In the shadow of every policy decision is a child whose future will be shaped by it.

Medicaid's proposed reduction in reimbursement rates for Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) services isn't happening in isolation. It's part of a larger pattern of policies that are quietly dismantling access to care. These changes are being justified under the claim of "controlling costs," but in reality, they're doing the opposite: **driving up the cost of providing quality care while cutting the resources that make quality possible.**

Providers are already absorbing new administrative and compliance burdens that have nothing to do with direct care. Chief among them is the state's new credentialing requirement for Behavior Technicians, which now requires a **similar level of credentialing to that of physicians**. These are entry-level, frontline professionals who provide critical, hands-on support under the supervision of Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs). They are not independent medical doctors. Yet they are being held to **increasingly complex and time-consuming credentialing processes** that were never designed for their role.

This change adds **layers of bureaucracy, months of delay, and thousands of dollars in administrative costs** for providers - **costs that Medicaid does not reimburse**. Meanwhile, the very people expected to meet these new demands, the **Behavior Technicians, are being pushed toward lower wages as reimbursement rates fall**. It's an impossible equation: more requirements, less pay, and less time for the work that truly matters: helping children and families.

In my experience, **Behavior Technicians have one of the most demanding roles in healthcare**. Their job requires immense mental stamina, focus, and intelligence. They manage complex behaviors, follow detailed treatment plans, and maintain compassion through emotionally and physically draining situations every single day. The people pushing for Medicaid rate cuts will never sit with our children through their hardest moments. But Behavior Technicians do every single day. Their work is far more difficult and impactful than that of the agencies now deciding to cut their funding. In fact, I believe **they deserve to be invested in**. Today's Behavior Technicians may be tomorrow's Board Certified Behavior Analysts. These professionals deserve to be valued, not burdened.

The **quality of ABA services will inevitably decline**, not because the science has changed, but **because the system has made it unsustainable** to practice it. For us parents, that means the Behavior Technicians that work with our children will have less hands-on training and will find their positions less sustainable. One of the things autism parents know all too well is that consistency is crucial, and we are already straining due to societal cultural changes in this primarily young workforce.

If Medicaid truly wants to control costs and protect access, it should cut waste, not care. There are **clear opportunities** to do so:

- **End wasteful spending such as paying for Telehealth ABA**, where meaningful outcomes were never realistic. The idea of providing hands-on behavior intervention through an iPad defies common sense.
- **Stop funneling state dollars out of state** by limiting the expansion of national corporations that send profits back to their home offices rather than reinvesting locally.
- **Reduce red tape for Behavior Technicians** by simplifying credentialing and documentation so they can focus on clients, not paperwork.
- Streamline authorization and claims processes to **eliminate the excessive administrative time spent** appealing denials, chasing partial authorizations, and disputing unpaid claims week after week.
- If the amount of therapy must be reduced, it should be done **flexibly and thoughtfully without red tape and without cutting reimbursement rates**. Cutting rates doesn't just reduce access; it undermines the entire workforce that delivers care.

Smaller, family-owned, and locally grown organizations like Partners in Autism will be hit hardest. Unlike large, out-of-state corporations with deep pockets and administrative teams, **local providers operate on tight margins and community commitment**. We've already seen several local ABA providers close in recent years, while large national companies have flooded into Fort Wayne and surrounding areas, drawn by Medicaid's previous fee schedule, where not all providers were paid the same. That uneven structure gave many out-of-state corporations a financial advantage that local providers could not match. Now, those same corporations will weather the cuts more easily, while smaller providers who built trusted local relationships will struggle to survive.

Worse yet, **large, profit-driven corporations are typically more willing to sacrifice quality** to maintain their margins. Smaller, community-based providers often began their work because they themselves once needed these services—for their own children or family members. That personal connection drives higher quality, deeper relationships, and genuine investment in client outcomes. When the market shifts toward corporate ownership, the personal element disappears, and with it, the consistency and compassion that families depend on.

Local and smaller providers **see the faces of the children and families** affected by these decisions every single day. They know their names, their stories, their progress, and their struggles. They see the impact in real time. For the large, out-of-state corporations and the politicians that support these cuts, those same children and Behavior Technicians become little more than numbers in a spreadsheet—faceless and nameless, just as they are to Medicaid and other insurance companies. Every child deserves care from someone who sees them, not someone who just bills for them. **Our children deserve better than the cheapest version of care.**

Medicaid says it wants to cut costs. If that's truly the goal, it should start by addressing the waste within its own system—streamlining inefficiency and bureaucracy—rather than reducing reimbursement for those who deliver the direct care: the Behavior Technicians.

As these decisions unfold, we all have a responsibility to pay close attention.

- **Remember which politicians supported these cuts** and the layers of administrative burden placed on our Behavior Technicians and providers.
- **Remember who is steering us back toward institutional care**, the very system we worked for decades to move beyond—and away from the community-based future our children were promised.
- Remember which advocacy organizations are now celebrating these changes or declaring any level of victory when you're asked to donate or attend their fundraisers. **Real advocacy stands with families and the people doing the work**, not with policies that strip away care under the guise of cost savings.

Every child deserves care from someone who knows their name - and those people deserve to be supported in return.

Tommy Guest

FULL “STEAM” AHEAD

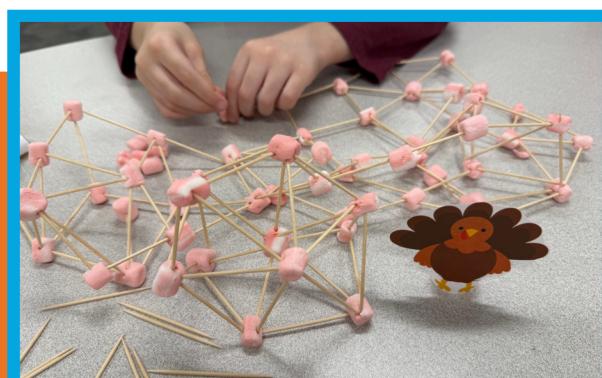
This past semester, the Supported Pathways Learning Center embraced STEAM learning (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math) through hands-on, activities that support academic growth and social connection.

With our new instructors, Ashley and Diamond, leading the way, students began by building classroom community through name art projects, then explored science in memorable ways—like creating microorganism art as they learned how germs spread and why proper handwashing matters. These activities made abstract concepts tangible and meaningful.

Students studied a famous glass artist and created their own inspired designs, measured with Legos, used real hand tools, designed parade balloons, and participated in sensory-rich activities like apple taste and smell tests. Fall fruits provided even more learning opportunities as students dissected pumpkins and gourds.

Students compared characters in stories and contrasted real objects like pumpkins and gourds, strengthening observation and descriptive language skills. After reading How to Catch a Turkey, students engineered creative turkey traps and later collaborated to design and build a gingerbread house, which they entered in the History Center’s Festival of Gingerbread.

After all that learning, students got to kick back with a Polar Express party before break. Now they’re back and ready to keep rolling... full STEAM ahead!



ABA CULTURE CHAMPIONS

Living Our Values Every Day



Strong culture doesn't happen by accident. It's built daily through small, consistent choices: fully engaging with clients, supporting teammates, staying open to change, and bringing steady optimism into challenging moments. Our ABA Culture Champions recognitions exist to shine a light on the staff who quietly and consistently do exactly that.

Each month, four team members are recognized for embodying the core culture traits that guide our clinic: **Giving of Self, Adaptability, Growth, and Positivity.** Our Culture Champions make these ideals concrete, living them out in therapy rooms, hallways, team meetings, and moments where flexibility, patience, and compassion matter most.

What makes this recognition especially meaningful is how it's passed on. Each month of Culture Champions selects the next recipients, creating a chain of peer recognition grounded in firsthand experience. This ensures that the people being celebrated are those whose impact is truly felt by the teams and clients around them.

Our ABA Culture Champions have stood out in powerful, practical ways:

- Giving freely of their time, energy, and emotional presence.
- Stepping into new roles or teams with enthusiasm, adjusting quickly and supporting continuity of care.
- Taking on new responsibilities, embracing challenges, and expanding their skills while maintaining high-quality support.
- Anchoring the rest of the team through consistent positivity in fast-paced, high-demand environments, making the workplace feel supportive and motivating even on difficult days.

These team members receive a locker trophy representing their trait, a week of reserved parking, and, most importantly, the appreciation of their peers. These gestures are simple, but the message is clear: the way you show up matters, and it's noticed.

To every ABA Culture Champion past, present, and future: thank you! You truly make a difference, and our culture is stronger because of you.

¿Hablas Español?

El lenguaje es **identidad**.

Language is **identity**.

Cuando escuchamos palabras dichas de la misma manera en que las dice **nuestra familia**, nos sentimos en casa.

When we hear words spoken the same way **our family** speaks them, we feel at home.

Nos sentimos...

Comprendidos - Understood.

Valorados - Valued.

Seguros - Confident.

Sabemos que las personas a nuestro alrededor nos van a **apoyar**.

We know that the people around us will **support** us.

For children from Spanish-speaking homes, receiving support in Spanish helps them feel safe, understood, and ready to learn. For families, it opens the door to clearer communication, stronger collaboration, and true partnership in their child's care.

We are always seeking bilingual Behavior Technicians who want to make a meaningful difference by supporting children and families in the language that feels like home.

Apply at PartnersinAutism.com/joinourteam

MORE THAN RESOLUTIONS: SELF-DIRECTED, STRENGTH-BASED GOALS

The best goals, like the best resolutions, build on the strengths a person already has. These goals are shaped by understanding the whole person. These are the types of resolutions that stick, and these are the types of goals we insist on for our clients.

Our clients select their own goals. This matters. When goals are self-directed, they carry personal meaning. They reflect what someone values, what excites them, and what feels worth working toward right now. Self-selected goals affirm and protect the traits, preferences, and identities that make each person who they are.

Our role is to provide skill-building expertise. We are here to break goals into manageable steps, to structure those to build on existing strengths, and to create environments where learning can happen naturally.

Sometimes these environments are literal physical spaces: our training spaces. This January, like every January, many people select a resolution to be more fit. Gym memberships increase. But why not just work out at home? Because the environment promotes success.

Think of how much easier it is to complete a workout in a fully equipped area free from distractions. Our training spaces are a gym for life skills. They allow our clients to focus without distractions or barriers.

Sometimes the environment isn't space alone, it's people. Each person's support network is one of their strengths. Families, friends, Life Skills Technicians, and other trusted supports all play a role in creating environments of consistency, encouragement, and opportunity. They also add their own insights as peers and guides into what is helpful for a client as they work to overcome barriers.

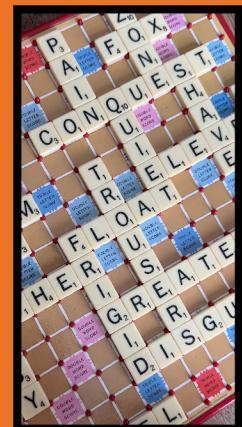
Every person deserves the opportunity to pursue what matters to them with the right support beside them. Our resolution is, as always, to make that happen!



Playing for Joy: Homebrewing the Rules

Games are a powerful way to practice multiple skills in a way that is fun, low-pressure, and authentic. "Homebrew" rules, personalized adjustments, can help games better match someone's skills and preferences, making the game an even more engaging experience.

Recently, one of our clients and their behavior consultant played Scrabble and made huge strides forward. In their version, all the tiles are exposed and available to everyone. That session was the first time our client had played with all real words, left other player's words undisturbed, and connected new words to pre-played words. The flexibility of open letter selection created a sense of ease and comfort that propelled our client forward. When they played again even more recently, their first word was NOVICE - they're certainly not one! When games are adapted with intention and support, they become more than just play; they become moments of meaningful acceptance and growth.



BENEFIT ANALYSIS

A Clear Map for New Adventures



Many people use the start of the year to set new goals, revisit long-term plans, or take a fresh look at what's possible. For individuals considering new employment or changes in their current work, this is also a prime time to review how those goals interact with state and federal benefits.

That's where our Benefit Analysis service comes in.

New or changing employment can impact benefits in ways that are unexpected or difficult to navigate alone. Our Benefit Analysis service empowers clients and their support networks to make informed decisions with confidence.

Our on-site Benefit Specialist works directly with each client to analyze their current benefits and develop a Benefit Information Network (BIN) plan tailored to their unique situation. This plan outlines:

- What benefits are currently in place
- How changes in income or employment may affect those benefits
- Available work incentives and protections

Rather than relying on general information or guesswork, clients receive guidance that reflects **their specific goals, needs, and circumstances.** Our Benefit Specialist meets with clients in person, ensuring that both the client and their chosen support network fully understand the information being shared. Questions are encouraged, details are explained clearly, and next steps are discussed. The BIN is shared with the client's Employment Specialist to ensure that employment planning and benefits planning move forward together smoothly.

At the helm of these financial calculations is someone with a true heart for people: Amanda Herald, our Director of Operations. Amanda brings over 15 years of client-centered experience across ABA services, Employment Services, and administration. Her approach is grounded in clarity, respect, and the belief that people deserve accessible information to make empowered choices. **Reach out to Amanda@PartnersinAutism.com to learn more about this service.**

Goals for Our Community

One of our Employment Services goals this year is to spend more time **connecting with employers** and working together to expand what **inclusive hiring and job carving** can look like in our community. Inclusive hiring brings in candidates whose skills and unique strengths are often overlooked. Job carving shapes roles to better align with both business needs and individual strengths.

To support this effort, we are preparing **practical, employer-friendly resources** designed to make inclusive hiring appealing, approachable, and sustainable. These tools will help businesses feel confident opening their hiring practices to a more diverse workforce while also highlighting the practical benefits that inclusive hiring brings.

Together, we aim to create pathways where individuals can thrive in meaningful work and businesses can grow stronger through the unique strengths that diverse talent provides. That's good for everyone!

Want to access these resources? Start here: PartnersinAutism.com/inclusive-employer-resources

LIFE SKILLS: COOKING WITH CONFIDENCE

Our Life Skills participants completed another 5-week course in our “Cooking with Confidence” series. In “Introduction to Baking” they spent time developing practical baking and kitchen skills, engaging in teamwork, social interactions, and communication, and gaining confidence and independence in baking.

We rose from no-bake energy bites, to cookies, to quick breads, to biscuits, and then learned how to use different decorating tools to frost cookies and cupcakes.

They shared their creations around the office before taking the rest home to share with their families, but even more so, **they shared time connecting and enjoying each other's company while making something meaningful and beneficial.**

It was so exciting to see their growth and know that their new skills will far outlast the food!



Our next session of **Cooking with Confidence** will run each Thursday from February 5th to March 5th, 11:45am-2:15pm. This next session will focus on one-pot/pan meals.

Email Amanda@PartnersinAutism.com to register - space limited!

As always, we welcome **sponsorships of our cooking supplies** to help support our courses. If you're interested, reach out to Amanda to learn how you can get involved.

COMMUNITY



SENSORY SUCCESS

Understanding Yourself Opens New Paths

If you've ever struggled to stick with a goal, it's easy to assume the problem is motivation or discipline. But often, especially for autistic adults, the issue isn't effort. It's that **the path itself doesn't fit who you are** - possibly because of the sensory elements along that path.

Consider the goal of "get more exercise." Starting a gym routine might be the traditional route, but going to a place that's loud, bright, and full of social pressure may not be sustainable if you have heightened sensitivities. That doesn't mean movement isn't for you; it means that format isn't. Movement might look like:

- Jogging outdoors or mall-walking before stores open
- Hiking, gardening, or exploring new places
- Stretching at home with quiet or familiar sounds

The goal stays the same, but the different path works with your nervous system instead of against it.

- Reading more might mean audiobooks, short pieces, graphic novels, or scripts.
- Increasing focus might involve natural light, fidget tools, or movement breaks, as well as finding the best time of day
- Building routines might mean flexible timing with a bingo-sheet instead of rigid schedules

There is no single best path to a goal. Progress doesn't have to look a certain way to be real. Every person has a different sensory profile. That's not a flaw; **it's information you can use to pave a sustainable path to success ... so use it!**

When you understand your sensory needs and support them, you can focus your energy on tackling the goal you've set for yourself. Stress lowers. Strengths like attention to detail, pattern recognition, and creativity have more room to show up. **Success grows along paths that are built on understanding and accepting what makes you, you.**

Want helpful insight into understanding the roots of your sensory needs? Take advantage of our pre-screening assessment: partnersinautism.com/autism-pre-screening-assessment

IT TAKES A TEAM

Director Spotlight



Goals aren't achieved alone. They're reached by supporting motivation with resources. Personal goals require using tools others have created. Community goals require the combined strengths of a diversely skilled team.

Our ABA Directors work as a tightly aligned team, each bringing distinct strengths and drawing on personal experiences to ensure our kids receive thoughtfully individualized services, our staff receive boots-on-the-ground support, and our families feel empowered by resources.

Director of ABA Services, **Olivia Dunten**, sets the tone for how we show up for one another: confident, committed, and consistent. ABA Clinical Director, **Delaney Oetting**, brings insightful attention to detail that strengthens every system and scenario she touches. Her ability to balance precision with flexibility plays a critical role in further improving strong, effective services. Assistant Clinical Director, **Kaydn Ullom**, upholds a commitment to increasing treatment fidelity that is evident in the thoughtful feedback and hands-on support she provides to our technicians, encouraging growth and dedication.

Together, these leaders are extending their impact beyond our clinic. They are actively working towards the goal of expanding community understanding of autism and the value of ABA services. By participating in community family events (see "Upcoming Events") they help a wide range of families better understand how autism can appear on the outside, what it may feel like on the inside, and how ABA equips children to navigate daily life with greater confidence and agency.

Their collaborative leadership is constantly pushing towards strengthening **care and support within our clinic** and increasing **understanding throughout our broader community**. Go team!

Upcoming Events

Life Skills - Cooking with Confidence: One-Pot Meals, Thursdays Feb 5 - Mar 5, 11:45-2:15pm
 Register with Amanda@PartnersinAutism.com

Iris Family Resource Center's Frost Fest, 1-4pm, 5100 Gaywood Dr. Ft Wayne, IN 46806

PAC Family Bowling - Last Tuesday monthly
 Registration required in advance to Hayley@PartnersinAutism.com

Navigators Scouting Troop 1st and 3rd Thursday with monthly outings!
 Contact 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

Sensory Friendly Spring Into Reading - Dr. Seuss Party at Purdue Fort Wayne - March 1st, Noon-3pm, FREE!
 Hosted by My Autism Ally

You Deserve to Know Yourself More Deeply

Autism, Giftedness, and ADHD Pre-Screening Assessments

Find out if Autism, Giftedness, or Adult ADHD are part of your story ... with less waiting and cost than a diagnosis.

You deserve clarity. You deserve understanding.
You deserve to know yourself fully.

We offer neurodivergent-affirming pre-screening assessments for anyone wondering if autism is part of their identity. Our assessments are matched to your age and communication method. We also offer assessments for giftedness in adults and children age 4 and up and assessments for adult ADHD.

Ask about our family and bundle discounts! Learn more here:
PartnersinAutism.com/pre-screening-assessments



Hiring: Behavior Consultants

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.

Experience the Difference of Family Owned - Family Focused

Ask about our employee and contractor positions to find what best suits you.

Contact Hayley@PartnersinAutism.com



Collaborative Support for You

Our Director of Behavior Quality Assurance is your on-site professional resource!

Training Spaces for Your Clients

Our facilities include a wide range of controlled spaces for skills practice. Come build skills in a quiet, customizable space filled with resources!