

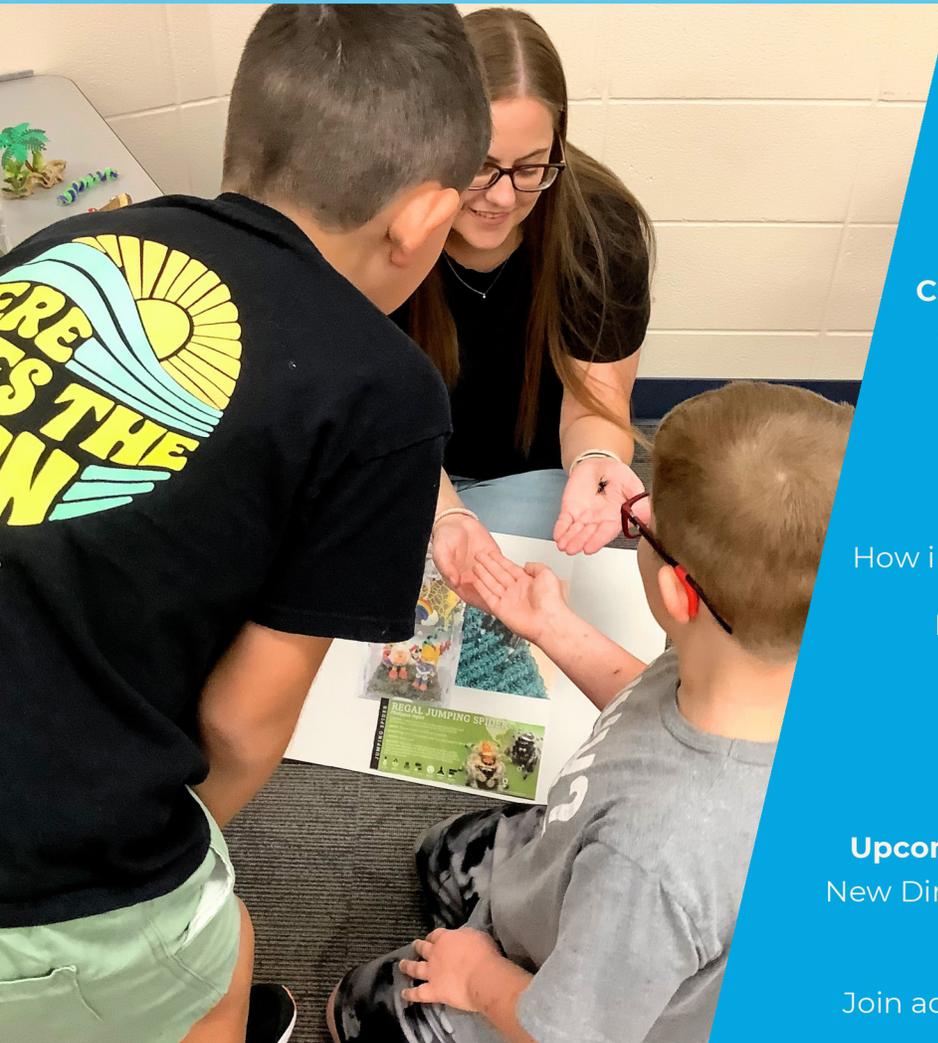
NOVEMBER 2025  
ISSUE 19

Community Newsletter



# Partners in AUTISM

FAMILY OWNED • FAMILY FOCUSED



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# Supporting Family Culture



As we enter the holiday season, many of us are reminded of the traditions, rituals, and connections that shape who we are.

Whether through family gatherings, acts of service, spiritual reflection, or meals passed down through generations, these traditions are more than celebrations. They are expressions of identity, belonging, and love.

I have frequently seen in my own life that support often comes from far beyond the traditional definition of “immediate family.” Grandparents, aunts, uncles, close friends, and chosen family all play essential roles in creating a network of love, guidance, and security.

In my own upbringing, my biological mother, my aunt by marriage, and my maternal grandmother were more than just caregivers to me; they were mothers. Familial connections become powerful sources of stability, especially for individuals with autism. Though I didn’t know it at the time, that stability was essential to my well-being.

Every individual’s care journey is unique, and so is their support system. In many homes, family is defined not just by blood, but by those who show up and contribute to daily life.

When we recognize and embrace these relationships, we honor the natural strengths of the people central to that supportive network.

The cultural norms and practices of each family are a vital part of the stability families provide. As a parent with non-mainstream cultural practices, I experienced firsthand how transformative it was to have a care team that values a family's culture. When my family was receiving ABA services, our cultural differences were respected and embraced. It brought us a sense of comfort, dignity, and safety. I truly believe that the positive outcomes we experienced were in part because our identity as a family was accepted, not treated as something to be worked around or corrected.

It's common sense that if behavioral strategies don't align with a family's culture, they will not be sustainable. When interventions reflect a family's traditions, routines, beliefs, and natural ways of living, they are not only easier to implement, but they also become meaningful and empowering.

This is especially true during the holidays, when cultural and religious values are often expressed more intentionally and more visibly in daily life. It is our duty as care providers to support each family's values, traditions, and rhythms so that each client can feel just as much stability in our care or with their staff as they do at home with their family.

We are committed to honoring the full circle of people who support each individual and the cultural traditions that shape how care is both given and received. Just as we don't expect clients to fit into molds, we don't ask families to adapt to a predetermined model. Instead, we design strategies that adapt to their lives.

By recognizing extended and chosen family as fully "family" and viewing culture as a source of strength, we deliver care that is not only effective but also deeply human. From our ABA team of Behavior Technicians and Behavior Analysts, to our Waiver team of DSPs and Behavior Consultants, our Employment Services team of Employment Specialists, our instructors in Supported Pathways Learning Center, and our administrative and management staff working tirelessly behind the scenes, every person at Partners in Autism is dedicated to providing care that reflects and respects who you are and who you define as a family.

When we honor who people are, their families, their communities, and their values, we don't just deliver services. We build trust. We foster belonging. And we create the conditions where individuals can truly thrive.

I hope we can all take some time this season to appreciate the diversity of our families and especially their unique contributions to our well-being as a whole. I especially hope that we are strengthened by family gatherings and cultural celebrations, large and small, this season and all year long. For those of you that have trusted Partners to be a small piece of that whole, we thank you for that privilege.

*Tommy Guest*, Owner

# SCHOOL YEAR TRADITIONS

From Photos to  
Gingerbread



In our Supported Pathways Learning Center, we believe that education is about more than academics. It's about belonging, celebrating, and engaging in the full range of school traditions that make learning joyful and meaningful. Each activity, whether it's a classroom project or a community event, helps our students experience the rhythm of the school year and connect with each other and the world around them.

This fall, our students participated in one of the most familiar milestones of any school year: Picture Day! Our Communications Coordinator brought her photography skills to the event, capturing each student's personality in a comfortable, supportive environment. Classroom staff played a key role in helping students feel confident and prepared, guiding them through how to pose and smile for the camera. The result was a set of beautiful portraits displaying pride and excitement.

We're also carrying that school spirit into the holiday season by joining a community tradition: the Fort Wayne History Center's Festival of Gingerbread! Our students will be working together to design and build a gingerbread house to enter in the all-ages contest, which will be on display from Nov 28 to Dec 21. This project brings creativity, teamwork, and fine motor skills together as students plan, decorate, and add their personal touches to a festive masterpiece. Come check it out!

By engaging in these traditions, our Supported Pathways students experience the joy, pride, and sense of belonging that come from being part of a school community that celebrates every milestone together.

## Different Routes for Exploration

There's no single best path to learning. In fact, taking multiple routes helps learners become more confident, flexible navigators of the wider world.

That's why Diamond's class in Supported Pathways has been exploring the skills of comparing and contrasting through multiple approaches that make learning real and relatable.

As students have been reading stories, they've been comparing and contrasting the characters' personalities, actions, and relationships. They also used those same thinking skills to examine pumpkins and gourds of all shapes and sizes. Together, they observed details like color, texture, and weight, describing what they noticed and talking about how those traits connect or contrast.

Through these parallel activities, students are learning to recognize patterns, think critically, and express themselves with descriptive language—all while having fun and engaging their senses. Using both literature and tangible materials reinforces the same cognitive skills across different contexts, helping students generalize their learning beyond the classroom!

# HOLIDAY GATHERINGS: CREATING TRADITIONS OF INCLUSION

Holidays can be joyous, but they can also easily become overwhelming and stressful. Here are some tips to make gatherings comfortable for all your guests in ways that show you value them for exactly who they are.

## Spaces

- Prepare a quiet place to recharge. It should be welcoming, free from clutter, and easy to access.
- Communicate where the room is ahead of time and on the day of the event. For large gatherings or unfamiliar settings, post a sign at the door. Use positive words to describe the room's purpose and make it clear that it is for everyone who needs a space to take a break or recharge for any reason.

## Foods

- Communicate the list of food items that will be available. If meals are potluck-style, let guests know about dietary restrictions of others, and ask guests to let you know what they're planning to bring.
- Let guests know that all individuals are welcome to bring their own safe foods for themselves.

## Sensory Considerations

- Avoid strong scents - what is comforting or fun for you might not be for others.
- Be attentive to noise levels. Make sure your guests can easily hear each other over festive music. If some of your guests want to socialize while watching TV, try to set aside a separate space for them.

## The Moments of Gift Giving

- Opening gifts in front of others can bring a lot of social pressure:
  - They might feel pressured to show excitement in a way that's not natural for them.
  - They might be worried about being able to unwrap their package fluidly.
- Options:
  - Provide a private space for individuals to open gifts either alone or in the company of only the gift giver.
  - Let the individual choose whether to open it when they receive it or later.

## Inclusion and Respect

- If a guest communicates nonverbally, learn about their method and actively include them in conversation.
- Be receptive and not dismissive of others' feedback. Trust that they are the expert of their own experience.
- Clarify misunderstandings without giving instructions on what someone should have done.

## Sweet Treat of Natural Environment Teaching

Every moment is an opportunity for learning in ABA - even office trick-or-treating! Integrating skill practice into a fun, natural activity accomplishes a lot of meaningful growth.

Our kiddos got a map of the trick-or-treating spots throughout the clinic and practiced these skills with their behavior techs: map/number reading, knocking and waiting, saying "trick or treat," safely staying outside of doors, reading directions on signs and following spoken directions from trusted people, tolerating costumes, taking turns, selecting treats, posing for photos...all while still having the agency to decide if they wanted to participate (also a very valuable skill)!



# SEASONAL DISCOVERY

A Gateway to Attracting Lasting Talent



Seasonal employment is often viewed as a short-term fix for a busy season, but it has the potential to be so much more. For employers, these temporary roles offer a chance to see employees in action, recognize their strengths, and discover how they might contribute long-term to a team's success.

A number of our clients begin with seasonal or part-time positions that let them demonstrate reliability, creativity, and problem-solving in real-world settings. For employers, this trial period is a powerful opportunity to experience the dedication and perspective that neurodivergent and other diverse employees can bring.

For employers, capitalizing on that opportunity requires creating an inclusive and affirming environment by doing the following:

- Communicate with clarity, using written and visual aids often.
- Provide predictable routines and transparent expectations.
- Offer flexible pathways through accommodations.
- Adjust your communication style to be the best fit for the recipient, such as structured check-ins with time to process feedback instead of spontaneous conversations.
- Pair new employees with a supportive peer who can provide guidance in real time.
- Focus on strengths by taking note of what tasks make each employee feel most engaged and then shifting responsibilities toward those strengths to boost productivity and morale.
- Celebrate problem-solving diversity. Neurodivergent minds often bring unconventional but highly effective approaches, so be sure to recognize and reward that creativity.

When employees feel understood, supported, and valued for who they are, they invest more deeply in their work and their workplace. Employers who use seasonal roles to discover talent and who build inclusive environments for those talents to thrive gain not only loyal team members but also shape a stronger, more innovative company.

## Sharing Warmth: Coat Drive

We're excited to announce that we are once again hosting a Coat and Winter Clothing Drive for Martha's Closet/Career Closet, a local referral-based program that provides clothing to individuals in need.

From now through December 15, we're collecting new or gently used coats and other winter clothing items of all sizes. Donations can be brought to: 601 Noble Dr, Fort Wayne, IN 46825 from 8-5, M-F.

Martha's Closet not only provides clothing to our community but has also partnered with our Employment Services as a volunteer location where our clients can practice skills. Our clients who are interested in retail jobs or service industry jobs are able to practice washing, drying, folding, sorting, and packing donated items.

Beyond working on their employable skills, this connection also allows our clients' hard work to have a true impact on the rest of our community. Kindness really does have a wide and warm reach!

# PREFERRED CAREGIVERS: CARE BUILT ON LOVE

- She creates a safe, structured environment where her grandchild can thrive.
- He demonstrates unwavering love and professionalism as he plans activities that celebrate his nephew's interests and accelerate growth.
- She always treats her sister with dignity, respect, and kindness.
- The deep, genuine love he shows in caring for his sibling demonstrates the power of family.

Preferred Caregivers lead with heart and purpose as they serve as DSPs (Direct Support Professionals) for loved ones. They define what it means to be family through their lifelong commitment to care and their powerful insight into their clients' lives. They embrace interests, foster growth, and celebrate their loved ones as unique, valuable individuals.

Because preferred caregivers are part of their clients' families, they are also able to engage fully and fluidly with the many cultural aspects of life - both daily and during holidays. They are able to combine skill practice with traditions. This helps the practice feel more meaningful and builds an affirming sense of identity and connection that will last a lifetime.

It is truly an honor to support these caregivers with training and resources to amplify the profoundly positive effect they have on their loved ones' lives.



## Life Skills - Special Session: Baking Basics

Amanda Herald, our Director of Operations and our Life Skills instructor, is excited to launch our first spin-off session to our Food and Nutrition course: Baking Basics!



Participants will build practical baking and kitchen skills, practice teamwork, and gain confidence and independence in baking ... all while making No-Bake Energy Bites, Sugar/Chocolate Chip Cookies, Quick Bread Biscuits, and getting an intro to decorating with a guest teacher.

This session is for those who have completed the Food and Nutrition course or already have basic kitchen/cooking knowledge and want to expand and learn about baking. Participants must be able to engage in an activity that is 2 hours long. The course will start on Thursday, Nov 13th, from 12-2PM, and it will run every Thursday for six weeks, except the week of Thanksgiving.

There's still time to register - reach out to [Amanda@PartnersinAutism.com](mailto:Amanda@PartnersinAutism.com).

**COMMUNITY****The Council of Autism  
Service Providers****MEMBER****ALLIED FOR ADVOCACY**

## Channeling Support to Enhance Lives

Partners in Autism is now a proud member of CASP, the Council of Autism Service Providers. This membership affirms our continuing commitment to delivering high-quality, evidence-based services and extending thoughtful support for our clients, families, staff, and community.

### For Our Clients and Community

By joining CASP, we are strengthening our advocacy on behalf of our clients and our community. CASP is a national association that brings together autism service providers dedicated to shared standards of care and continuous quality improvement. CASP supports its members through advocacy directed to legislators, committees, and the general public. This support empowers members like us to be a collaborative force for change.

Through this membership we gain access to CASP's resources and network, helping us stay current with regulatory and legislative developments, as well as best practices, all of which strengthen our ability to serve clients and support meaningful outcomes.

### For Our Staff

We believe in supporting our staff's growth and development because this enriches their sense of purpose and means even stronger support for our clients. Our staff now have free access to CASP's online Continuing Education (CEU) Center: recorded webinars, resources, and courses offered by CASP as a BACB-Authorized Continuing Education (ACE) provider. Staff also have access to practical resources for daily use.

### For All

Becoming a CASP member aligns with our commitment to continuously uphold high standards of service, to support both staff and clients, and to strengthen our advocacy for our community. We are excited about this partnership and look forward to leveraging our CASP membership to benefit everyone we serve.

# BRIDGING WORK AND LIFE FOR CLIENTS

Director  
Spotlight

Director of Life  
Skills and  
Career  
Development:  
**Hayley  
Barnfield**



We're thrilled to welcome **Hayley Barnfield** as our new **Director of Life Skills and Career Development!** In this role, Hayley will be overseeing both our Employment Services and Waiver Services (PAC and Behavior Consultation) to ensure a more connected, consistent, and collaborative approach to client growth and success.

These services already complement each other naturally. Our Behavior Consultants and Employment Specialists collaborate on shared clients so that goals and strategies are aligned. Hayley will further streamline communication between services and with families to ensure consistency for clients. Her focus will be on ensuring that all services work in tandem to support each client's unique path toward their own goals.

Hayley brings a dynamic background in program management, event coordination, and community engagement, with experience spanning healthcare, law enforcement, and the arts. She organized large-scale fundraisers and educational events, managed budgets, led cross-team collaborations, strengthened community partnerships, developed inclusive programs, and supported professional development.

Hayley has strong strategic thinking and relationship-building skills as well as a focus on creating programs that balance compassion with impact. We're excited to see how her experience and enthusiasm will continue to strengthen and unify our services.

## Upcoming Events

Launch of Life Skills  
Baking Session

Nov 13th

Register with [Amanda@PartnersinAutism.com](mailto:Amanda@PartnersinAutism.com)

Waiver Reset

Collaborative

Conversation - your  
chance to provide

feedback to BDDS

Nov 17<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup>

(see page 10)

PAC Family Bowling - Final

Tuesday monthly

Registration required in

advance to [Hayley](mailto:Hayley@PartnersinAutism.com)

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

Navigators Scouting Troop

1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday with

monthly outings!

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

[PartnersinAutism.com](mailto: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/](https://partnersinautism.com/social-groups)

[social-groups](https://partnersinautism.com/social-groups)

# The Future of Waiver Services in Indiana!

You Can Shape ...

This is your chance to improve disability services so people can live more independently in their homes and engage more fully in their communities.

BDDS needs to hear from YOU!

Give feedback on:

- What's working well with covered services
- What needs to change
- What you want future services to look like

Join a Virtual Waiver Reset Collaborative Conversation from 6-7:30PM on...

- Mon, Nov 17: <https://shorturl.at/Goiey>
- Wed, Nov 19: <https://shorturl.at/o1yKv>

Learn more at: <https://www.in.gov/fssa/ddars/bds-waiver-redesign/>



## Families: Did You Know?

Do you help a loved one with daily living and socialization?

Let Us Support You!

Ask us about becoming a Preferred Caregiver to receive compensation and resources for care you provide.

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



### Who?

Parents can be preferred caregivers for children over 18. Adult relatives or family friends can be preferred caregivers for any age!

### How?

Preferred Caregivers are Direct Support Professionals through our Waiver Services. They receive special training, resources, and continual support.