SEE THE HOPE

NATIONAL AUTISM ASSOCIATION
Impact & Advances

2020
In the autism community, we know true strength. And we know that it comes from more than just muscle, money, or status. True strength comes from resilience and resourcefulness. Determination and perseverance. Tenacity and gratitude. More than anything, it comes from hope. In 2020, the world began to catch glimpses of our everyday strength, spirit, and hope. And even though many things have changed for us as humans, those three things will forever remain the same.
It was a year that changed everything, but we’re proud of how many organizations and advocates quickly came together to share knowledge, tips, and tools about COVID-19 for the 1 in 54 families affected by autism. In 2020, NAA served over 50,000 families across the U.S. with information related to COVID-19 and we will continue to provide assistance however, and whenever, it’s needed.
The National Autism Association is a nonprofit organization focused on addressing urgent issues that families and individuals in the autism community often face, including wandering/elopement, suicidality, bullying, restraint/seclusion, abuse, mistreatment, and discrimination. Our mission is to respond to the most urgent needs of the autism community, providing real help and hope so that all affected can reach their full potential.

We accomplish our mission by:

**Advocacy**

Advocating for federal policy and resources that address the most urgent needs of the autism community.

**Research**

Providing direct, tangible tools to families and schools in all 50 states.

**Education**

Providing education & training to families, first responders, and service professionals throughout the U.S.

**Direct Tools**

Creating awareness that promotes understanding, compassion and respect for individuals with autism.

**Hope**

Conducting and promoting research that uncovers and addresses the most critical challenges families and individuals face.

**Thoughtful Awareness**

Providing inspiration and empowerment through positive messaging, story-sharing and support.

Programs & Initiatives
At the National Autism Association, we provide critical tools and federal advocacy that positively impacts families and individuals in the autism community. Our mission continued in 2020 by providing meaningful awareness, education, help and support to individuals, families and professionals across the U.S.
The dangers of wandering/elopement behaviors remain a critical safety issue in the autism community. With nearly 50% of children at risk of leaving safe supervision, along with hundreds of fatalities over the last decade, NAA’s Big Red Safety Box Program was created in 2011 to provide lifesaving tools and education to families and schools throughout the country. Thanks to ongoing support, sponsorships, grants and private donations, we’ve been able to ship boxes to nearly 60,000 families and schools.

Each box includes a caregiver checklist, family wandering emergency plan, first-responder profile form, wandering quick tips, sample IEP letter, student profile form, emotion identification cards, two GE wireless door/window alarms with batteries, one RoadID bracelet or shoe tag, five stop sign visual prompts for doors and windows, two safety alert window clings for car or home windows, and a Child ID Kit from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

NAA’s Big Red Safety Box Program

In 2020, our Big Red Safety Box Program was made possible in 2020 by grant 2020-J1-BX-0009 provided by the Office of Justice Programs (OJP), U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) under the OJP funding opportunity entitled “Reducing Injury and Death of Missing Individuals with Dementia and Developmental Disabilities – ProactivePrograms.” Special additional thanks to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children.
Far too often, individuals with autism who are nonverbal or minimally verbal are left without a way to communicate basic wants or needs. This can lead to certain safety risks for those who may leave a safe place to seek out special topics or places without their caregiver, or if they're experiencing medical issues or mistreatment. Many families across the country are unable to attain a device for use in the home, which is why NAA’s Give A Voice Program is essential for many in our community.

Our program provides a comprehensive communication package to nonverbal and minimally verbal children. In 2020, NAA continued this important program, as well as educating families across the U.S. on how to obtain communication technology through their child’s school. This program was made possible in 2020 through the generosity of GreaterGood.org and Avatalker AAC.

“We just received Amira’s iPad and I wanted to say thank you! I was really struggling to put presents under the tree, but now because of this, she will have the ability to communicate as her Christmas present! We are so grateful and so thankful!”

Bridgette M.
2020 Give A Voice Recipient
SEE THE COMPASSION

Our Autism Atrium Program allows us to deliver critical messaging and education to families and service professionals throughout the country, along with ongoing reminders, positivity, and inspiration. In 2020, our educational materials continued to reach over 2M people through NAA’s website and social media channels.
Providing Simple Tools 24/7
To promote safety and well being in our community, NAA works to provide free tools that families can easily download and use that same day. These tools range from free emergency forms and tips to DIY cutouts. Although simple, these ready-made resources are impactful for families facing everyday challenges and often long waiting lists in their local communities.

Promoting Understanding & Hope
At NAA, it is our ongoing goal to educate every person about autism through thoughtful messaging and awareness building. In doing this, we believe we can shift mindsets from negative assumptions to loving compassion, respect and acceptance. Our team also believes in continuing to encourage families and caregivers to stay educated, motivated and hopeful. To help with this, we continued our Milestone Monday initiative, a day of sharing positive stories and celebrating victories, large and small.

Offering Free Toolkits to Families
NAA continued to provide free downloadable toolkits in 2020, along with our safety series brochure suite. In addition, families were given access to NAA’s webinar archives featuring guest presenters and experts on a range of topics.
Providing National Criminal Justice Training

In 2020, NAA provided training to over 1600 criminal justice professionals, which covered the signs of autism, missing-person response, prevention, and tips for interaction. In addition, our team continued to provide agencies with our extensive library of resources, toolkits, and educational handouts for caregivers.

“In addition to having amazing information, this was also one of the most professional webinars that I have attended since the start of COVID-19. I really appreciate how well this was structured, led and coordinated! The presenter was also amazingly engaging for it to be online. This was definitely the best webinar that I’ve attended so far in the last 6 weeks!” - 2020 NCJT Training Attendee

Our Latest Timeline on Wandering Prevention

- 2010 NAA sounded the alarm on autism-related wandering deaths before a federal committee; requested data, a diagnostic code and federal funding
- 2011 Preliminary data released; wandering diagnostic code went into effect; NAA launched national safety initiatives
- 2012 Trained staff at National Center for Missing & Exploited Children; assisted in creation of federal search & rescue guidelines; released first research paper on lethal outcomes related to wandering
- 2013 NAA New York Times OpEd called for federal legislation to help prevent wandering-related deaths
- 2014 Worked with Senator Chuck Schumer on creation of legislation; worked the next four years to get the bill passed
- 2018 Kevin & Avonte's Law is enacted
- 2019 Kevin & Avonte's Law funds are appropriated, grants announced
- 2020 Kevin & Avonte's Law funds are distributed to agencies and organizations, including NAA's Big Red Safety Box Program
NAA Live Chat: Connected Conversations

In 2020, NAA hosted its first Connected Conversations Live Chat covering the critical topic of Autism & Bullying during Bullying Prevention Month. The chat featured self-advocate and NAA Board Member Dr. Kerry Magro, who answered tough questions from a personal point of view. More topics are to come in 2021 with NAA president and host Wendy Fournier.

NAA’s Newest Initiative: Spot ASD By 3

In response to average-age disparities in low-income, minority & female populations, NAA worked in 2020 to create its new initiative, Spot ASD By 3. This early-signs education campaign will work to help reduce average-age disparities in diagnosis, as well as provide early safety awareness. Launching in 2021, NAA’s hope is to promote this brandable message that is approachable, recall-friendly, time-centered and visually relatable to underserved populations.
As a parent-run organization, hope is at the center of everything we do for the 1 in 54 families affected by autism. It drives us to initiate important national conversations, to push for better solutions, to strengthen our families and community, and to provide real tools and assistance that can be immediately felt on the ground.
Board of Directors

Wendy Fournier, President
Claire Bothwell, Chairperson
Rosemarie Dubrowsky, Treasurer
Krystal Higgins, Executive Director
Kerry Magro
Lori McIlwain
James A. Moody
Leslie Phillips
Joseph Ranseth

We would like to thank all of our sponsors, hosts, supporters and community members who donated to our programs in 2020, including the Department of Justice as well as the Warwick Police Department with their wonderful patch program! Our programs are only possible because of you.
2019 Income

Retail Partners/Sponsors  $ 238,162
Major Gifts, Grants, Other  $ 252,271
Donated Goods  $ 6,000
Total  $ 496,433

2019 Expenses

Programs  $ 433,305
Management & General  $ 84,379
Fundraising  $ 26,265
Total  $ 543,949

Net Assets for 2019: $328,021
In 2020, our community’s impenetrable resilience and strength shined brighter than ever before. Parents became teachers while continuing to work their own jobs from home. Teachers scrambled to connect with their students in entirely new ways. And while many folks stayed busy devouring Netflix or learning new TikTok dances, we saw incredible people stepping up in the autism community to help one another cope. For example, the wonderful music therapist from New Jersey who created free live sessions via Instagram, and the autistic individuals and caregivers who shared activities and strategies. Not to mention the many kind words of encouragement to each other on our social media platforms. So many wonderful moments of strength.

While we’ve said goodbye to 2020, we will carry the strength, resilience, and lessons into 2021 as NAA launches its new Spot ASD by 3 initiative to address the issue of disparities in the average age of diagnosis, especially in children of color and females. We will be calling on all of you to help with this mission on a local level to reach those most in need of this information as we try to help every child get access to early intervention services and support.

We are also celebrating the 10th anniversary of NAA’s Big Red Safety Box program as we quickly approach the milestone of 60,000 boxes distributed to families across the country. We sincerely thank all of our sponsors and supporters for embracing this program over the last decade.

Many of the challenges of 2020 remain and it will take time to recover, but we will all move forward together. Let’s continue to see the hope, see the strength, see the support, see the compassion and see the love that fills this community every day!

With hope,

Wendy Fournier