



Grant Impact Report 2022/23 Cycle

Empowering programs that support autistic adults.

NEXT FOR **AUTISM**



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"The support that Shepherd's Way has received from NEXT for AUTISM has allowed us to take a concept and an idea and transform it into a highly structured and thriving organization."

Ben French, President and CEO, Shepherd's Way

NEXT
FOR **AUTISM**

OUR MISSION

At NEXT for AUTISM, we believe that everyone deserves to live a productive and fulfilling life. To achieve this vision, we strategically design, launch, and support innovative programs that transform the national landscape of services for autistic individuals.

Alongside signature initiatives —NEXT CONNECTS and NEXT for AUTISM FELLOWS—our grants program enables us to magnify our impact by investing in the talents of amazing people and organizations throughout the United States. We rely on a team of neurodivergent and neurotypical partners to ensure that our programs have the widest impact within the autism community. *Together, we are creating what's next for autism.*

FROM OUR CEO

As NEXT for AUTISM marks more than twenty years of investing in programs that enhance the lives of autistic individuals, I am excited to present this Grants Impact Report, an inside look at the organizations creating the future of what's next for autism.

What began as an idea by Robert and Michelle Smigel to raise funds for autism programs, using the support of their friends in the entertainment industry, has become one of the largest grants programs in the country supporting autism services. With more than \$30 million raised and more than 172 programs funded in 37 states and counting, the NEXT for AUTISM Grants Program, has put the immediate needs of autistic individuals front and center.

Autistic adults—no matter where they live—need more programs that provide support at home, at work, and in social interactions. There are many excellent organizations that are already having a positive impact on the lives of autistic adults, their families, and the community. Yet pockets of unmet needs remain.

Each year, NEXT sees significant growth in applications from new organizations that are seeking to fill service gaps in their communities. In fact, NEXT received a record number of applications for its 2023-24 cycle: 435 organizations from across the United States, including many autistic-led organizations.

In 2025, through a new initiative called NEXT COLLABORATES, NEXT will empower these organizations by fostering collaboration, idea generation, and the exchange of innovative solutions on a national scale. Alone, progress is swift, but true, widespread change comes when we COLLABORATE.

We are inspired every day by the outstanding people we have met at the organizations we have funded, the dedication and allyship that they have demonstrated, and the incredible autistic individuals that these programs serve.

We know you will be too.

Thank you,



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gillian Leek".

Gillian Leek
CEO, NEXT for AUTISM



“NEXT for AUTISM’s seed grant to Communication 4 ALL helped launch C4A Academy providing free, online video lessons for families and schools to teach non-speakers how to type with an approach that allows them to overcome their motor issues. It’s never too late to teach a non-speaker to type and we are grateful that NEXT for AUTISM sees this pathway for adult non-speakers.”

Elizabeth Bonker, Founder and Executive Director, Communication 4 ALL



The Arc of Westchester (Project SEARCH)

BUILDING AND FUNDING A GRANT PROGRAM

NEXT for AUTISM's grant program strategically identifies, supports, and grows initiatives that are connected to our mission. Our commitment to making an impact on the lives of those on the autism spectrum, combined with consistent and dedicated funding generated by our Night of Too Many Stars (NOTMS) live comedy event, is the foundation of our grant program's success. Donations raised through NOTMS have funded over 380 projects at 172 organizations in the areas of home, work, and social well-being since 2008.

NOTMS was created by longtime SNL and Conan O'Brien writer/producer Robert Smigel and his wife Michelle Smigel, a NEXT for AUTISM board co-chair, who struggled to find effective education for their autistic son, Daniel (pictured). Over the past 20 years, the Smigel's extended comedy family — including NEXT board member Jon Stewart, Jimmy Kimmel, and Adam Sandler, as well as a dedicated group of sponsors bring NOTMS to life and support this important work. The spirit of NOTMS embodies joy and hope, making it the perfect vehicle for funding organizations that have a positive impact on thousands of autistic adults nationwide. On behalf of the hundreds of programs across the country that have benefitted from these efforts, our deepest thanks to the Smigels for the laughter and joy they help bring to the stage.





FOUNDED IN INNOVATION

From our inception, NEXT has been at the forefront of innovation, pinpointing areas of need, forging partnerships, and implementing impact-driven initiatives. In 2013, NEXT helped create the Center for Autism and the Developing Brain (CADB), a state-of-the-art clinical facility, in partnership with New York-Presbyterian Hospital and its affiliate medical schools at Columbia University and Weill Cornell. Today CADB is recognized as a leading resource for autistic individuals and their families seeking care, education, support, and community engagement.

As NEXT grew, so did our impact. NEXT provided initial funding and support to create NYC Autism Charter School—the first charter school in New York exclusively for children with autism, and the establishment of a professional training center with Hunter College.

NEXT is proud to continue its financial support of these groundbreaking programs.

Gillian Leek, CEO, NEXT for AUTISM stands with the 2024 Project Search Graduates; joined by teams from Project SEARCH, Center for Autism and the Developing Brain (CADB) and NewYork Presbyterian. NEXT was an initial funder of the successful work-based Project SEARCH program, preparing autistic adults for the workforce.

WHAT'S NEXT NATIONWIDE

NEXT Grant Funding and Support Across the U.S., 2008-2022



| | | | | | |
|---------------|----|------------------|----|------------------------|----|
| ALTOONA | IA | JANESVILLE | WI | PORT SAINT LUCIE | FL |
| ARLINGTON | VA | JENKINTOWN | PA | PORT WASHINGTON | NY |
| ATLANTA | GA | JUPITER | FL | PRESCOTT | AZ |
| AUSTIN | TX | LAKE WORTH | FL | PRINCETON | NJ |
| AUSTIN | TX | LAS VEGAS | NM | RANCHO MISSION VIEJO | CA |
| AUSTIN | TX | LENEXA | KS | RANDOLPH | MA |
| BAY CITY | MI | LEVITTOWN | NY | REDONDO BEACH | CA |
| BELLEVUE | WA | LILBURN | GA | RESEDA | CA |
| BETHESDA | MD | LINCOLN | NE | RICHMOND | VA |
| BINGHAMTON | NY | LONG ISLAND CITY | NY | SAN ANSELMO | CA |
| BOSTON | MA | LOWELL | AR | SAN ANTONIO | TX |
| BOYERTOWN | PA | MADISON | CT | SAN DIEGO | CA |
| BROOKLYNNY | NY | MAITLAND | FF | SAN RAFAEL | CA |
| CHAPEL HILL | NC | MILFORD | CT | SANTA ANA | CA |
| CHAPEL HILL | NC | MILILANI | HI | SANTA BARBARA | CA |
| CHERRY HILL | NJ | MINNEAPOLIS | MN | SEATTLE | WA |
| CHICAGO | IL | MOUNT KISCO | NY | SHERMAN OAKS | CA |
| CHICAGO | IL | NEPTUNE | NJ | SHERWOOD | OR |
| CINCINNATI | OH | NEW ALBANY | OH | SIOUX FALLS | SD |
| COLLEGE POINT | NY | NEW ALBANY | OH | SOUTHBOROUGH | MA |
| COLUMBUS | OH | NEW BRUNSWICK | NJ | SPRINGFIELD | IL |
| DALLAS | TX | NEW HAVEN | CT | TAFT | CA |
| DAVIE | FL | NEW MILFORD | NJ | TARRYTOWN | NY |
| DECATUR | GA | NEW YORK | NY | TOPEKA | KS |
| DEER PARK | NY | NORTH SEATTLE | WA | TOWNSHIP OF WASHINGTON | NJ |
| DENVILLE | NJ | OCEANSIDE | CA | TRENTON | NJ |
| DOWNINGTOWN | PA | OKLAHOMA CITY | OK | VANCOUVER | WA |
| EAST SANDWICH | MA | OLYMPIA | WA | VERON | NJ |
| EASTCHESTER | NY | ORLANDO | FL | WASHINGTON DC | |
| FALLS CHURCH | VA | PARAMUS | NJ | WATERTOWN | MA |
| GARFIELD | NJ | PARK RIDGE | IL | WEST ORANGE | NJ |
| GREENWICH | CT | PERALTA | NM | WESTERVILLE | OH |
| HAWTHORNE | NY | PHILADELPHIA | PA | WICHITA | KS |
| HIGHLAND PARK | IL | PHOENIX | AZ | WINNETKA | IL |
| HOUSTON | TX | PITTSBURGH | PA | WYCOFF | NJ |
| INDIANAPOLIS | IN | PLAINVIEW | NY | | |
| ITHACA | NY | PLANO | TX | | |
| JAMISON | PA | PORT ORCHARD | WA | | |

THE GRANTING PROCESS: *Identifying Areas of Need*

The bulk of autism-related funding targets children and research; yet programs that focus on supporting autistic adults remain woefully underfunded. With more than 5.4 million autistic adults in the U.S., this leaves far too many people under-supported with the tools and resources to thrive. NEXT is working to bridge that gap.

NEXT grants uniquely prioritize services, directly tackling the pressing needs of autistic adults in three key areas: **home**, **work**, and **social well-being**. In 2022, NEXT dedicated a funding stream to autistic-led initiatives, ensuring that autistic adults are at the forefront of solution-making.

Following the rhythm of NOTMS, NEXT has historically invited organizations to apply for funding during alternate years. In 2025, NEXT is transitioning to an annual cycle to help expedite grant funding to these innovative organizations.



Southwest Autism Research & Resource Center (SARRC), a NEXT for AUTISM grant recipient in 2023. SARRC builds inclusive communities for individuals with autism and their families.

THE GRANTING PROCESS:

Guidelines and Accountability

To ensure that every dollar invested translates into tangible and meaningful outcomes, NEXT for AUTISM employs a rigorous and inclusive decision-making process. We engage two review committees comprised of internal and external reviewers with a range of neurodiverse perspectives. Each reviewer uses a rubric to evaluate applications; the committee then convenes to discuss the highest-scoring submissions.

Each application undergoes scrutiny based on standardized criteria, including innovation, impact, support for underserved populations (e.g., poverty, POC, rural, nonspeaking), and the articulation of measurable and achievable outcomes.

All grantees agree to comply with robust accountability measures via year-end reporting.



University of Central Florida Foundation received a grant from NEXT in 2023 to support housing for autistic adults.



THE GRANTING PROCESS: *Grantee Support*



ActionPlay provides autistic, neurodivergent, and disabled teens and adults with equal access to the theatre-making process.

When the programs that NEXT funds are successful, we are all successful. Part of their success includes the NEXT team performing regular check-ins with the organizations, to ensure they are on track to meet the goals of their grant. And if they're not, how can we help?

Grantee support is a vital component to ensuring that NEXT is a trusted steward of donor resources.

THE GRANTING PROCESS: *Kick-starting Change*



NEXT for AUTISM was a founding funder to Elizabeth Bonker's Communication 4 ALL, empowering nonspeakers with the means to communicate through typing. NEXT's seed grant to Communication 4 ALL helped launch C4A Academy providing free, online video lessons for families and schools to teach non-speakers how to type.

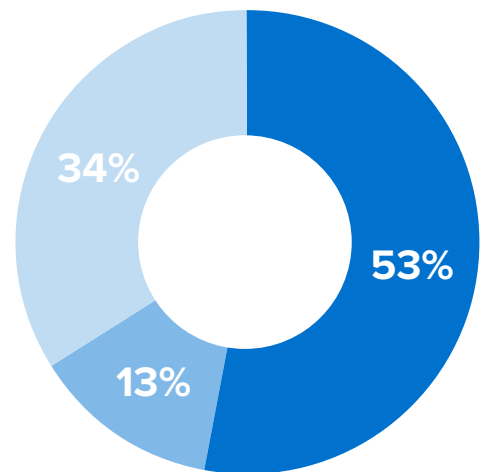
NEXT has provided seed funding for many visionary organizations. Projects like Elizabeth Bonker's Communication 4 ALL, Urban Autism Solutions, Exceptional Minds, Banding Together, and Shepherd's Way are just a few that embody our commitment to fund innovation that fulfills community needs. Together, we're nurturing movements that redefine possibilities.

GRANT IMPACT: Celebrating Success in 2022-23

The impact of our 2022 grantees is evident in the outcomes of projects executed in 2023 in the key areas of **Work**, **Home**, and **Social**.

In 2022 NEXT provided
\$1,286,671 to
40 organizations,
across
19 states.

GRANTS BY CATEGORY



SOCIAL WORK HOME

From education to healthcare,
housing to social integration, our
investments are driving positive
change in every facet of life.

27% of 2022 grant funding
supported autistic-led
initiatives

2,882 adults with
autism
impacted

61% BIPOC
76% living in
poverty

1/2 of 2022 funding supported grants that
focus on employment.

GRANT IMPACT: *Grantees*

Autistic-Led Grantees:

| ORGANIZATION | GRANT TYPE | CITY, STATE |
|---|------------|-------------------|
| Advocacy Without Borders | Work | Houston, TX |
| Arc of King County | Home | Seattle, WA |
| Autastic.com | Work | Santa Barbara, CA |
| Autism Empowerment | Work | Vancouver, VA |
| B3 Coffee | Work | Chapel Hill, NC |
| Blue Legacy | Work | Port Orchard, WA |
| Communication 4 ALL | Social | Maitland, FL |
| Asexual Outreach | Social | Boston, MA |
| Divergent Labs Inc. | Work | Las Vegas, NV |
| Foundations for Divergent Minds | Home | Plano, TX |
| Infinite Reach | Work | Mililani, HI |
| Ourtism | Work | Redondo Beach, CA |
| Pittsburgh Center for Autistic Advocacy | Work | Pittsburgh, PA |
| Rutgers Center for Adult Autism Services/Rutgers Foundation | Social | New Brunswick, NJ |
| Wilderwood Equine | Social | Peralta, NM |

Community-Based Grantees:

| ORGANIZATION | GRANT TYPE | CITY, STATE |
|---|------------|-------------------|
| Actionplay | Work | Brooklyn, NY |
| Exceptional Minds | Work | Sherman Oaks, CA |
| Have Dreams | Work | Park Ridge, IL |
| Mental Health Partnerships | Work | Philadelphia, PA |
| New England Center for Children | Work | Southborough, MA |
| New York Presbyterian Hospital: Center for Autism and the Developing Brain (CADB) | Home | White Plains, NY |
| The Arc of Westchester (Project SEARCH) | Work | Hawthorne, NY |
| Oklahoma Family Center for Autism Inc. | Work | Oklahoma City, OK |
| Our Place | Social | Winnetka, IL |
| Pillsbury United Communities (Autism Mentorship Program) | Social | Minneapolis, MN |
| Prevail | Home | New Milford, NJ |
| South Dakota Parent Connection | Social | Sioux Falls, SD |
| Secret Valley Explorers | Work | Boyertown, PA |
| Services for the Underserved | Social | New York, NY |
| Shepherd's Way | Work | Wichita, KS |
| Sibling Leadership Network | Social | Chicago, IL |
| Southwest Research and Resources | Social | Phoenix, AZ |
| Texas Rowing Foundation | Social | Austin, TX |
| The Autism Program of Virginia | Work | Richmond, VA |
| The Ed Asner Family Center | Social | Reseda, CA |
| The Jewish Community Center of Manhattan | Work | New York, NY |
| University of Central Florida Foundation | Home | Orlando, FL |
| University of Nebraska Foundation | Home | Lincoln, NE |
| Unscripted Learning | Social | San Diego, CA |
| Urban Autism Solutions | Work | Chicago, IL |

GRANT HIGHLIGHTS: *Home – Work - Social*



A good housing experience can make a world of difference in a person's well-being. For many adults on the autism spectrum, finding and securing a good living environment, and learning life skills, can be challenging. NEXT grants enable innovative organizations that design and/or develop and maintain high-quality living environments for autistic adults.

We invite you to get to know 2022 NEXT Grantee, *Shepherd's Way*.

Shepherd's Way was formed to help an 18-year-old with autism living in a homeless shelter. Now, they operate three homes, empowering eight individuals and families, with three live-in mentors.

Using a 1:1 peer live-in mentor model, Shepherd's Way teaches independent living skills and prevents future homelessness. The program emphasizes skill development in communication, community integration, self-care, and health, guiding participants toward independence and community involvement. With graduates transitioning to independent living, Shepherd's Way now operates in Wichita, KS, Waco, Texas, and a newly launched community, offering career development and evidence-based practices to enhance participants' lives.

Thanks to their 2022 grant funding from NEXT, Shepherd's Way successfully supported 11 autistic men, while able to engage 20 more through additional funding.



WORK

Autistic individuals experience extremely high rates of under- and unemployment. The need for improved resources, training, and inclusion is paramount. To help improve neurodiverse hiring and employment, NEXT grants support innovative organizations that are finding solutions to address the need—and the desire—of autistic adults to gain and retain paid employment.

We invite you to get to know 2022 NEXT Grantee, ***Autism Empowerment***.

Autism Empowerment was founded in 2001 as a grassroots autistic-led organization, offering support groups, social clubs, service activities, and events promoting education, employment, and social connection. Autism Empowerment hires, showcases, and connects with autistic adults in Washington and Oregon. Their multimedia programs--created by and highlighting the lived experiences of autistics--set the standard for inclusivity and accessibility.

Thanks to their 2022 grant funding from NEXT, Autism Empowerment was able to hire 42 individuals as freelancers, four of whom are nonspeaking. During the funding period, Autism Empowerment published three complete issues of Spectrum Life Magazine, focused on entrepreneurship and employment, pictured (Spring 2022, Summer 2022 and Fall 2022). In total, the initiative reached at least 25,000 readers in the Northwest and countless online viewers.





Making connections with each other is vital for all of us. Unfortunately, disconnection and isolation are not uncommon for autistic adults. Grants in this area must support autistic adults in making connections, building relationships, and establishing friendships.

We invite you to get to know 2022 NEXT Grantee, **Actionplay**.

Actionplay provides autistic, neurodivergent, and disabled teens and adults with equal access to the theatre-making process. Actionplay's creative and compassionate learning environments, professional development, and training modules teach respectful ways of inviting neurodivergent and disabled people to experience education, arts, and culture.

Thanks to their 2022 grant funding from NEXT, Actionplay hosted a series of Audition Workshops for disabled and neurodivergent actors, with a showcase of casting directors. The workshops were held virtually, led by disabled actors Kiah Amara and Allie B. Gorie. Each of the 30 participants gained confidence and learned audition techniques, and 10% secured roles through larger casting calls. The grant also ensured that the workshop was free of charge to participants, increasing enrollment, and attracting top-tier instructors.



WHAT'S NEXT

NATIONAL NETWORK OF AUTISM CHANGEMAKERS NEXT COLLABORATES

In partnership with the Ramesh and Kalpana Bhatia Family Foundation

NEXT COLLABORATES is a pioneering initiative aimed at fostering collaboration and addressing critical needs within the autism community.

Through NEXT's unique vantage point, reviewing hundreds of grant applications and engaging deeply with service providers nationwide, we have consistently observed a shared set of challenges: disconnection, resource scarcity, and a growing need for professional development. Our broad perspective enables us to identify complementary services that, when combined, hold the potential for transformative impact.

In 2025, NEXT will empower these organizations by fostering collaboration, idea generation, and the exchange of innovative solutions on a national scale. Together with our ever-expanding and diverse network of grantees, we will build the tools and partnerships needed to address these challenges head-on, transforming the service delivery landscape.

Alone, progress is swift, but true, widespread change comes when we COLLABORATE.

To learn more about NEXT grants or any of our programs, reach out to a member of the NEXT for AUTISM development team at development@NEXTforAUTISM.org or call (212) 759-3775.

What's next is a future full of promise. Join us.



(Left) SARRC residents.

(Right) University of Central Florida Foundation (HOME)

THANK YOU

Special thanks to our top long-term funders of Night of Too Many Stars and the grants program:

T O M M Y  H I L F I G E R

NEST
NEW YORK

SLATKIN + CO.

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