



20

YEARS OF

| listening,
innovating,
empowering,
& sharing.



YEAR IN REVIEW 2023

A MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO

20 years ago, NEXT for AUTISM was founded on the vision that everyone deserves to lead a productive and fulfilling life. We hold steadfast to this goal and work to build programs that enhance the lives of autistic adults and support the community.

From founding the first charter school in New York to exclusively serve children with autism, and the establishment of a professional training center with Hunter College to the creation of the renowned Center for Autism and the Developing Brain with NewYork-Presbyterian, Columbia and Cornell, NEXT for AUTISM has always been at the forefront of building programs that enhance the lives of people with autism and their families.

Throughout 2023, NEXT's 20th anniversary year, our team of neurodiverse and neurotypical stakeholders identified and built new initiatives, as well as expanded existing programs, to help us best achieve our objectives.

2023 was one of our most impactful years to date with the launch of two new programs; NEXT for AUTISM FELLOWS and NEXT CONNECTS. These new initiatives will continue to focus on the areas of home, work, social, health & well-being for autistic individuals and the overall community. This year also saw the return of our successful Night of Too Many Stars live comedy event, which is instrumental in funding the NEXT grants program.

I invite you to read more about the launch of **NEXT for AUTISM FELLOWS**, and **NEXT CONNECTS**, as well as our **NEXT for AUTISM grants programs** and **NEXT for DSP**.

We are proud of what we accomplished in 2023, and even more excited about what the future holds. *The **future** is what's **next** for autism.*



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

Gillian Leek
CEO, NEXT for AUTISM

WELCOME THREE NEW BOARD MEMBERS

NEXT for AUTISM is fortunate to have welcomed three new members to its Board of Directors, all bringing unique backgrounds and talents. Jen Clark, Ph.D., Christopher “CJ” Wallace, and David Schwartzbaum joined the NEXT for AUTISM board in 2023.

“Creating an equitable and fulfilling world for autistic adults is a mission close to my heart, and I’m excited to get to work with NEXT for AUTISM,” shared Christopher “CJ” Wallace regarding his new board appointment. “NEXT is doing what no other organization is, focusing on enhancing the lives of autistic adults through innovative programs that address the whole person.”



Jen Clark, Ph.D.



Christopher “CJ” Wallace



David Schwartzbaum

Dr. Jen Clark is a clinical psychologist, working with children, young adults, and families for over 25 years.

Christopher “CJ” Wallace is a social entrepreneur, actor, photographer, and producer. He is the co-founder of Frank White, a purpose-driven lifestyle brand that celebrates Black culture and creativity. Its mission is ownership and the creation of generational wealth within the Black community in the cannabis, entertainment, and fashion industries.

David Schwartzbaum is senior counsel with Covington & Burling, LLP, with over thirty years of experience representing clients in mergers and acquisitions and other transactions, including corporate governance matters.

OUR WORK & IMPACT



“I’m so inspired by NEXT for AUTISM’s impact on neuroinclusion and their support of initiatives that allow individuals to live their best lives.”

Jim Hogan, *Principal Innovation Strategist, Google VP, Accessibility in Technology, Google’s Disability Alliance Employee Resource Group Board Member, NEXT for AUTISM*



NEXT for AUTISM FELLOWS is a national employment-based scholarship program for students and professionals interested in working with neurodivergent adults launched in Summer 2023 . The fellowship program is a new way to encourage the next generation of Direct Support Professionals (DSP) while simultaneously closing the hiring gap for many service providers. Each student works 800 hours annually as a DSP and receives regular training with our NEXT for DSP curriculum.

*“I am thankful not just for the scholarship but also for the chance to learn and get real-life experience working with adults on the autism spectrum. **It’s something that I love to do.**”*

Laura Esly C., 2023 NEXT for AUTISM FELLOWS Recipient





For many autistic adults, the opportunity to work is a vital part of living a fulfilling and productive life. To help support autistic adults, NEXT launched NEXT CONNECTS, a bi-directional mentorship initiative.

The goal is to support young autistic adults entering the workforce while fostering improved acceptance and inclusion within businesses. NEXT CONNECTS launched a pilot program in Fall 2023; established professionals from across the country came together to mentor college students on the spectrum. Participating schools include Bryn Athyn College, CSU East Bay, Drexel University, Gonzaga University, La Salle University, Saint Joseph's University, SUNY- Cobleskill, Towson University, University of British Columbia, University of Delaware, and West Chester University of Pennsylvania.



“Teaching future generations what to prepare for when they dive into the animation industry themselves... I found it rewarding to participate and would love to do it again.”

Max E, Owner and Founder, Wondermation Productions

Sign up to become a mentor: NEXTforAUTISM.org/NEXTConnects

NEXT FOR DSP

NEXT for DSP is a professional development curriculum that transforms mandatory compliance into skill-based training that empowers DSPs to prioritize the health and safety of those under their care while fostering lifelong growth. NEXT for DSP provides organizations with cutting-edge competency- and performance-based training grounded in best practices as well as ongoing mentoring from a team of professionals. The program provides professional support for DSPs while simultaneously creating improved outcomes for the people they support.



Arc of Palm Beach DSP Liz B. with residents

NEXT for DSP has been piloted at the Arc Westchester and the Arc Palm Beach. Through these pilots, we have trained upwards of 150 DSPs, 30 Frontline Supervisors, 20 Clinicians, and 10 Directors.

NEXT for AUTISM GRANTS PROGRAM

Since its inception, the NEXT for AUTISM grants program, thanks to Night of Too Many Stars has funded more than 350 projects at 145 organizations across the country, directly impacting more than 100,000 autistic individuals. We are particularly inspired by the increase in the number of autistic-led and centered organizations NEXT supports.

NEXT follows a rigorous review process to identify and award grants, thanks in part to a review committee comprised of neurodivergent and neurotypical professionals.



Urban Autism Solutions, a Chicago-based NEXT for AUTISM grantee

GRANTS FUNDED

2023 Grants Cycle



ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORTED

15

AUTISTIC-LED ORGANIZATIONS

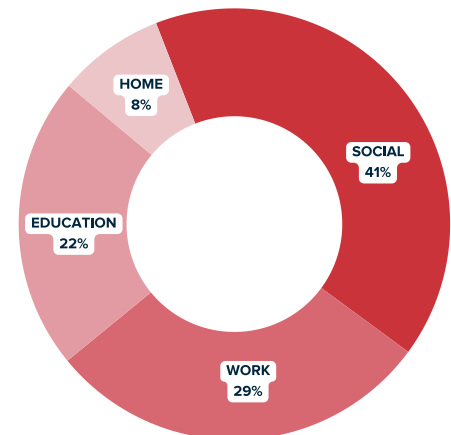
8

AMOUNT FUNDED

\$527,120

FUNDING BY CATEGORY

2023 Grants Cycle



“Communication 4 ALL is thrilled to partner with NEXT for AUTISM to help non-speakers with autism gain access to communication. An estimated 40% of individuals with autism cannot reliably use speech for communication. This seed grant will launch C4A Academy providing free, online video lessons for families and schools to teach nonspeakers 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





COMMUNITY & EVENTS



Night of Too Many Stars

NEXT for AUTISM's signature comedy fundraising event, Night of Too Many Stars, returned in December 2023 to a sold-out crowd of nearly 3,000 at the Beacon Theatre in New York City.

Guests were entertained by host Jon Stewart who opened the show following a performance from Darlene Love and the Max Weinberg house band. The evening featured stand-up from Jim Gaffigan, Sam Morril, Sarah Sherman and John Oliver as well as musical performances by Jewels Harrison and Rachel Bloom. Throughout the show Jon Stewart and auctioneer Guy Bennett introduced auction items that you can only get at Night of Too Many Stars including, Chris Rock recording a personalized message for an audience member, a once-in-a-lifetime holiday card photo with Harvey Keitel, Steve Buscemi and Paul Rudd that was such a hit it was sold to two lucky winners and a live speed dating round with Paul Rudd, Chris Rock and John Oliver. The night ended with Adam Sandler taking the stage and entertaining the crowd before being joined by his longtime friend Rob Schneider to close the night with a song.



Night of Too Many Stars was created by longtime SNL and Conan O'Brien writer/producer Robert Smigel and his wife Michelle Smigel, who struggled to find effective education for their own autistic son, Daniel.

[See highlights of the event here.](#)



Removing Barriers to Empower a Neurodiverse Workforce: A Panel Discussion

NEXT for AUTISM and The Ramesh and Kalpana Bhatia Family Foundation hosted a panel event in Los Angeles on Thursday, September 14, 2023, to raise awareness about the importance of businesses offering clear and actionable hiring opportunities for neurodivergent adults.

There is a myth that it's cost-prohibitive for businesses to provide accommodations for people with disabilities. In fact, 58% of accommodations cost absolutely nothing, while the rest typically cost only \$500. If it's not cost, what is it? Why don't more businesses remove the current barriers to employment for neurodivergent individuals?

The benefits to removing barriers to empower a neurodiverse workforce are many, benefitting both businesses and job seekers. The downside to not addressing this critical, and time-sensitive issue, is the high unemployment rate among neurodivergent adults.

The panel was moderated by NEXT for AUTISM CEO Gillian Leek. The panelists were Patrick Bardsley, Co-founder/CEO, Spectrum Designs, Diane Delaney, Global Diversity & Inclusion Leader, People with Diverse Abilities (PwDA) Community, IBM, Ferose V.R., SVP/Head of SAP Academy for Engineering, SAP, and Jhillika Kumar, CEO/Co-founder, Mentra.

[See event details here.](#)



Act Locally, Impact Nationally

Local awareness and fundraising campaigns are proof that all support is meaningful. Special thanks to two special fundraisers this year, Lindsay Valenti and David Van Buskirk and our friends with Simon Property Group.

Running for the Future

Lindsay raised money for NEXT by running the Publix Florida Marathon in honor of her son with autism. She also shared, *“I’m supporting NEXT for AUTISM because it’s a wonderful organization impacting the lives of those on the spectrum to live their lives to the fullest—with a focus on innovative investments for a more inclusive future.”*

[Read more about Lindsay’s story.](#)

Small Business, Big Impact

David, owner of D&L Nursery in Florida, dedicated his business’ “Customer Appreciation Day” to support NEXT for AUTISM, to honor his grandson, Joe, and great-grandson, Caleb, who are both autistic. *“I like that NEXT for AUTISM is focused on programs and services for autistic adults,”* shared David. *“It’s important to build for Joe and Caleb’s future now, so they have all the opportunities to live fulfilling and productive lives.”*

[Read more about David’s story.](#)



Connect with NEXT to get involved: **NEXTforAUTISM.org/GetInvolved**

Community Awareness

In April, Simon Property Group hosted NEXT for AUTISM at Roosevelt Field, Smith Haven Mall, and Walt Whitman Shops to promote inclusion and awareness during Autism Acceptance Month. Thanks also to NEST New York and NEXT founder Laura Slatkin, NEXT Gen co-chair Jenna Grippo, NEST New York, Neiman Marcus, Kendra Scott, NYDJ, Fragrance.com, and Lush for their generous support.



NEXT Gen Board

In 2023, the NEXT Gen Board welcomed two new members, Jacquelyn Jablonski (pictured at *Night of Too Many Stars*) and Emily Schenck (pictured, far right). Our NEXT Gen members are young professionals with a personal connection and commitment to support NEXT for AUTISM's mission. They played an integral fundraising role in this year's Night of Too Many Stars event by securing attendees, fundraising, and forming a dedicated committee to support their efforts.

In addition, NEXT Gen members participated in events to raise awareness, peer-to-peer fundraisers, and support the NEXT CONNECTS mentoring program. Accomplishments also include securing a grant and providing support across the organization. Their many successes highlight their dedication and impact in advancing our mission.

*NEXT Gen Board co-chairs
Jenna Grippo (left) and Jen Hilibrand (right)*



Learn more about being a member of the NEXT Gen board:

NEXTforAUTISM.org/NEXTGen

PARTNERS

We are thankful for generous partnerships to help support our mission. NEXT would like to give special recognition to these 2023 partners who went above and beyond providing awareness and funds.

NEST
NEW YORK



Bearaby

TOMMY  HILFIGER

supersmile[®]


SIMON[®]
MALLS



Foot Locker[®]

NGBA
NATIONAL GOLF
BUYERS ASSOCIATION

Callaway[®]




HOMEWORX
by Slatkin & Co.



FINANCIALS

To view NEXT for AUTISM financial statements, go to: NEXTforAUTISM.org/Financials



Platinum
Transparency
2024

Candid.

OUR TEAM

Executive Leadership

Gillian Leek, *Chief Executive Officer*

Pamela Cohen, *Chief Development Officer*

Michelle O'Connor-Teklinks, *LMSW, Chief
Program Officer*

Amy Wallace, *Chief Financial Officer*

NEXT Team

Abigayle Jayroe, *MBA, Senior Vice President of
Strategic Operations*

Holly Wainwright, *Vice President, Marketing and
Communications*

Kelly Fleming, *Senior Director, Development and Events*

Leah Spindell, *Development Operations Manager*

Candace Weaver-Dowds, *LMSW, Manager,
Strategic Initiatives*

Coleif Holte, *Senior Associate, Finance and Administration*

Patty Newby, *Senior Associate, Office Administration*

Board of Directors

Laura Slatkin, *Co-Founder and Board Chair*

Harry Slatkin, *Co-Founder*

Michelle Smigel, *Board Chair*

Michael Auerbach

Jen Clark, *Ph.D.*

Sharon Cunningham

Doug Herzog

Tommy Hilfiger

Jim Hogan

Steven Kantor

Arlene Maidman

Bellanca Smigel Rutter

David Schwartzbaum

Karen Siff-Exkorn

Robert Smigel

Jon Stewart

Tracey Stewart

Christopher "CJ" Wallace

NEXT Gen Board

Jenna Grippo, *Board Co-Chair*

Jennifer Hilibrand, *Board Co-Chair*

Ali Goldsmith

Jacquelyn Jablonski

Andrew Klestadt

Kim Koentjoro

Kayla Lebovits

Erik Rutter

Tania Ryalls

Emily Schenck

Advisory Board

John Barrowman

Dawn Buffington Townsend, *Ph.D., BCBA-D*

Mari Cerda

Nasiah Cirincione-Ulezi, *Ed.D., BCBA*

Dr. Peter Gerhardt

Casey Grothus

Russell Lehmann

Johanna Murphy

Maria Davis-Pierre, *LMHC*

Anne Roux, *MPH, MA*

Denise Rozell, *JD*

Maurice Snell

