



Year in Review FY 2023

Elevating our commitment to provide premier quality services to the growing need of those challenged by developmental disabilities and autism

A Year of Impact

Reflecting on the past year, we recognize the exceptional work of our staff and the significant impact it has on the lives of those we serve. They have provided invaluable support to individuals and families we serve who are navigating intellectual and developmental disabilities, social and emotional challenges, and autism. Their compassion, care, and outstanding service are beyond words.

Our work spans a lifetime, starting with children as young as three and continuing through adulthood, helping to develop essential life skills that, over time, contribute to quality of life and increased independence. We remain committed to finding ways to grow and help more people as the need for our services continues to increase. Through sustained investment for the enhancement of our programming and facilities, we purchased and renovated an adjacent building to create a 14-acre campus encompassing 136,000 square feet to serve our communities for years to come.

While we acknowledge the positive impact we have on those we serve, we know there is more to do. This work is only possible with the support and generosity of many people. We are grateful for your continued support, empowering us to help others.



Mike Briggs, Little Friends President & CEO





History

Little Friends was established in 1965, when teachers, parents, and advocates began a school for children with special needs. Since then, Little Friends has grown to a multi-faceted human service agency providing educational and vocational training programs, community-based residential living, our Center for Autism, and family respite services.

Mission

Empowering people of all ages experiencing autism, intellectual and emotional disabilities and their families to live, learn, work and thrive in their communities.

Vision

To, as an organization, be recognized as one of the premier providers of services in the state of Illinois, addressing the needs of children, adults, and families challenged by autism, intellectual/developmental, and emotional disabilities. To provide whole person care through direct services and alliance partners the most robust offering of clinical and research support in the field of autism.



\$21MM

State = 40%
Districts = 34%
Private = 16%
Philanthropy = 10%



900

adults & children
served by
programs



350+ staff

Administration
Center for Autism
Adult Day Program
Educational Services
Residential Services
Respite Family Services



10
counties

53
school
districts



Coordination of Care

Alex, 14, attends Little Friends Krejci Academy, our therapeutic day school serving students aged 3 through 22. After the school day, Alex continues receiving services, including Applied Behavior Analysis/ABA, speech and occupational therapies at our Center for Autism. Alex's parents, Peter and Valerie, have seen tremendous growth in Alex's skills and are grateful for the support they receive from Little Friends.

This coordination of care from school to therapeutic setting has benefited Alex and can be seen in his increased use of language and a new sense of independence. "It's a holistic program. Everything from academics to independent living to socialization. Little Friends thought about that for all of our kids on the autism spectrum." Alex's mom, Valerie, agreed, "There are so many more opportunities for Alex later in life."

Peter also included that the family felt lucky that they were able to find Little Friends, stating, "They have been in the autism field for a very long time, and their reputation preceded them." Little Friends is proud of our 58-year legacy supporting people of all ages experiencing autism, intellectual and emotional disabilities, and their families.



"He's gone from a child who is non-verbal, isolated, and non-social to now becoming independent, becoming verbal, and wanting to do his own thing."

-Alex's Dad, Peter

Stories of
Impact



Extension of Services

Prior to leaving educational programming, Emily had many self-care-related goals, including being able to brush her hair with hand-over-hand assistance. Within a few short months of working with our occupational therapist at Little Friends Adult Day Services program, Emily began displaying skills she had never done before. Not only could she brush her hair without physical assistance, but she was actively seeking out her hairbrush and brushing her hair on her own! Emily has since acquired even more self-care skills like brushing her teeth, washing her hands, drinking from a straw, and so much more. This newly found independence would not have been possible without the addition of occupational therapy to our program.

In the year since we added occupational therapy to our adult program, we have seen tremendous growth in independent living skills, communication and social interaction, self-regulation, and vocational-related skills. Learning never ends, and skills developed through occupational therapy can lead to increased performance, participation, and independence in one's everyday life. If you see Emily today, she may even introduce herself using her communication device!



"There are endless things I can say about Emily. I am so proud of all she has accomplished,"

-Dr. Lauren Hintzman, OTD, OTR/L
Little Friends Occupational Therapist

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Impact



Proven Partnership

Early in 2023, Little Friends began a partnership with Grow Wellness Group in Naperville to provide diagnostic evaluations for those we serve. Soon after, a parent reached out, eager to have two of her young sons evaluated. Our staff helped schedule evaluations at Grow Wellness within weeks, and upon completion, recommendations were made for ABA, speech and occupational therapies. The Center for Autism was able to support the family.

After working with our therapists for only a few months, Owen's mom, Crystal, noticed a significant change in her 4-year-old son's behavior due to his increased confidence and speech. Six-year-old Ian also receives therapies at our Center, working on functional communication, social, play, and academic skills. Ian has been able to apply these skills at home, now putting on shoes and sitting for haircuts.

The experienced clinicians at Grow Wellness Group and therapists at our Center continue to fully support families from diagnosis to therapies, benefiting those we serve through this successful partnership.



“He became more confident and talked a lot more on the days he visited the Center, having mini-conversations instead of using just one or two words,” Crystal said. “I’ve waited four years to hear him speak, and it was absolutely worth the wait. I couldn’t be more grateful.”

- Owen & Ian’s Mom, Crystal

Stories of
Impact



Gained Independence

It's exciting to see the growth and improved quality of life the services Little Friends provide to those we serve. Tom joined our Residential Services program in 2018, living in one of our group homes. Tom got to know his new surroundings by riding his bike everywhere, and as he settled in, he began to share his cooking skills too! In the years since, Tom's independence has grown, as has his interest in seeking employment in the community. This is where the next chapter of Tom's story begins.

With his emerging life skills and interest beyond the group home, Tom moved this year from a home receiving 24-hour care to being on his own. At his new home, shared with roommate and coworker Jamal, Tom receives intermittent services from our staff, continuing his love for cooking but now expanding his life skills to menu planning, budgeting, and sharing chores.

Tom and Jamal work at a nearby Jewel and are proud of the paychecks they earn budgeting for rent, bills, and groceries, while still having enough to spend a little on themselves. They continue to develop their skills and are enjoying this transition to greater independence.



*"It's very exciting to see the changes they have made
and goals they set for themselves."*

- Megan, Little Friends Case Manager

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Finding Community

With the reintroduction of our Family Support Network this past year, we have connected hundreds of caregivers throughout our area with resources, services, and a sense of community. Through quarterly events on topics relevant to families of those with special needs, such as behavior strategies and guardianship, to discussions about shared experiences in caring for loved ones, this group has not only provided information but also comfort to those who are often isolated through caregiving.

Connecting the common bond between our families and friends of children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities at the different stages of life's journey is the goal of our family support services. Offering socialization opportunities for families along with the information, resources, and support they need to make informed choices for loved ones is our continued mission, not just for those served by Little Friends but for our larger community.



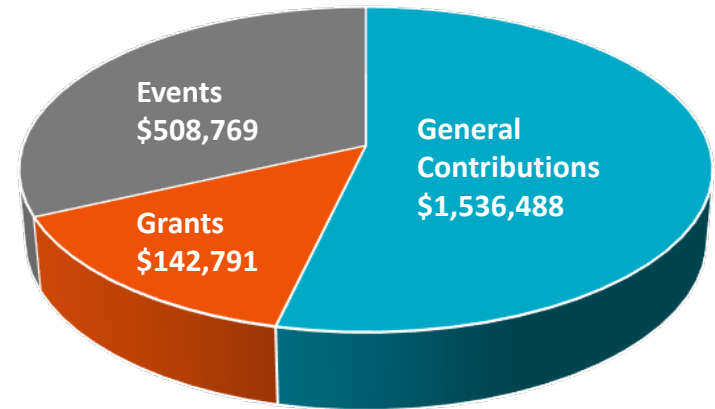
"We are so grateful for this group and its introduction to topics and services. As parents, we have learned so much and met other families facing challenges similar to ours."

- Parent, Little Friends Family Support Network

Stories of
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Philanthropic Support

While the agency maintains a diverse funding portfolio totaling more than \$21 million, we must raise funds each year to help us cover all our expenses. We rely on your support to help us meet all our mission-related funding objectives, to which we are truly grateful. For every \$1 raised, we dedicate 92 cents toward our five different programs.



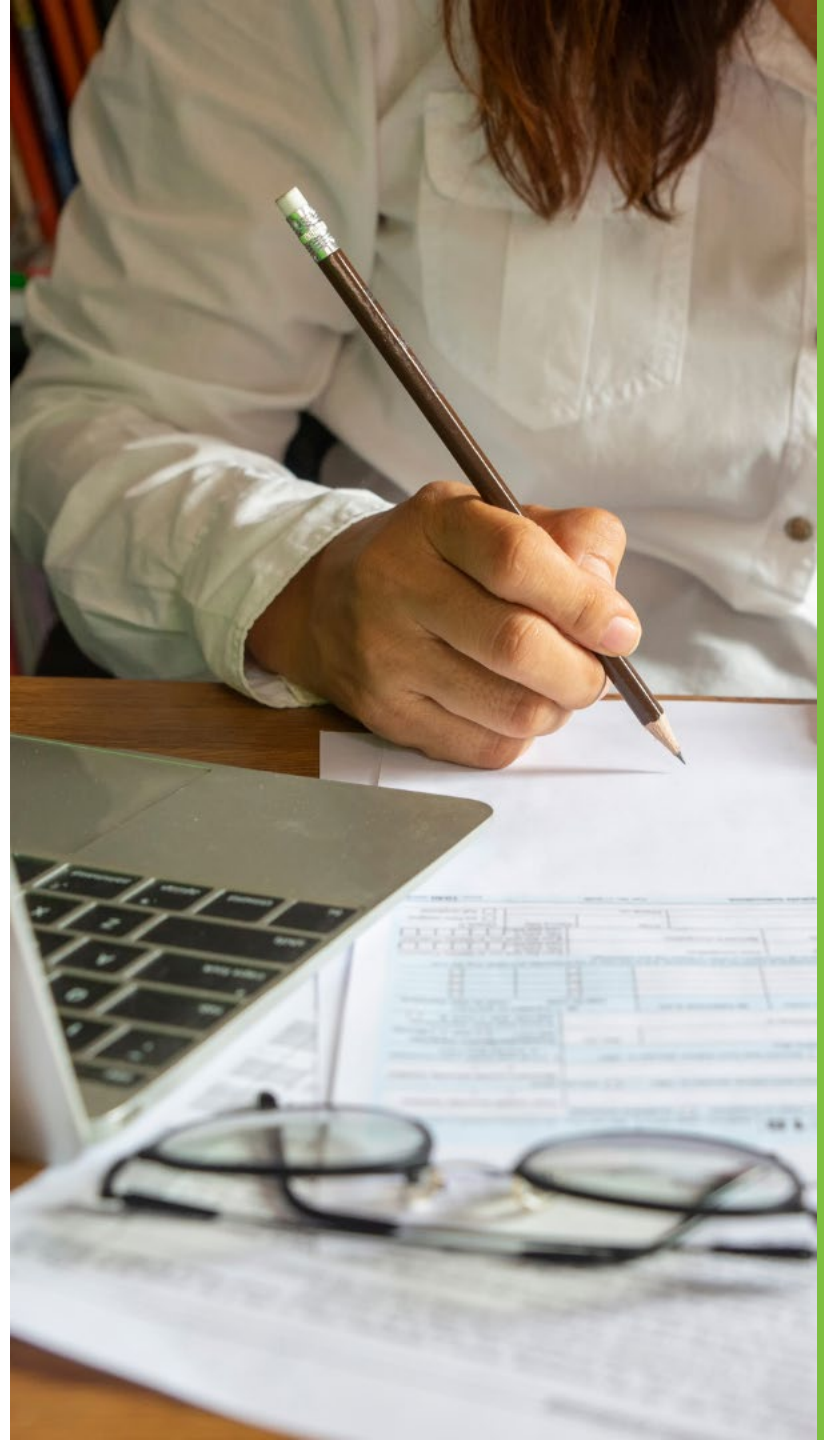
Planned Giving

Planned Giving enables you to make larger gifts to Little Friends than you could make from ordinary income. Some planned gifts can provide life-long income to Little Friends. Other gift plans use estate and tax planning to provide for Little Friends and your family in ways that maximize the gift and/or minimize its impact on your estate.

The benefits of funding a planned gift can make this type of charitable giving very attractive to both you and Little Friends and may include:

- Bequests
- Appreciate Securities
- Retirement Plan Donation
- Donor-Advised Funds
- Charitable Gift Annuities
- Charitable Remainder Trusts

Please contact our Agency Advancement Team to learn more about these strategies.





Positioning for What is Next...

The move of our Adult Day Services program from Downers Grove to Warrenville has created a comprehensive 14-acre Little Friends campus. This investment underscores the commitment to our mission of empowering people of all ages experiencing autism, intellectual and emotional disabilities, and their families to live, learn, work, and thrive in their communities.

“We are delighted to bring the entire Little Friends organization to one campus. The addition of this building will provide a foundation to help us maintain support to those we serve today, and, with the extra capacity, those we will serve in the future.”

- Tom Connors, Chairman

The new building provides an environment that allows our Adult Day Services program to continue to focus on recreation, skill acquisition, community integration, self-advocacy, social-emotional skill refinement, access to novel experiences, and other engaging activities.

Vocational training and supported employment remain a large part of our day program, allowing individuals to continue to enjoy the benefits of developing vocational skills, earning income, and finding meaningful occupation in work.

Additional classroom space has also been designed in this facility to accommodate our newest program focusing on young adults – Connecting Adults with Communities. Programming is being developed to support individuals aged 18-35, providing job training and experiential learning opportunities to foster independence.

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