



ANNUAL REPORT FY2023

Options & Advocacy for McHenry County

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Mission

Empowering individuals and their families through advocacy and education while creating a more inclusive community.

Guiding Values

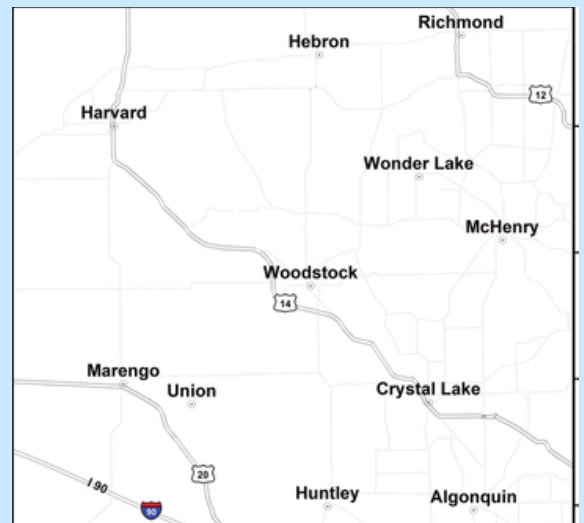
- Community-Centered
- Collaboration
- Resilience
- Empowerment

Vision

Creating an empowered and inclusive community.

Who we Serve

- McHenry County families
- Individuals with autism
- Families with children pre-natal to three years old
- Children with developmental delays up to age three



A Letter from Board of Director's President

We are excited to begin our 29th year of providing services to individuals and families in McHenry County. I've been on the Board of Directors for ten years, but I was first introduced to O&A 18 years ago when my daughter, Katie, was born with Down syndrome. My family needed help right away, and O&A was there for us. The Child and Family Connections Program worked with my family for three years and then helped us transition to public schools. The therapy for Katie and the hours of conversation we had with the team members gave us the tools and confidence we needed. My family was empowered by O&A to meet Katie's needs when we needed them the most.

Besides helping kids ages birth-3 in the Early Intervention Program through Child and Family Connections, we offer support to those on the autism spectrum through the Autism Resource Center. The HUG (Helping US Grow) program is a preventative initiative for at-risk families with young children. The staff at O&A are often scheduling meetings, observations, therapy, and consultations for all of the families we serve. I am amazed at the ability of our staff to make these arrangements with all of today's options: in-person at the family's home, in-person at a school, virtual Zoom meetings, in-person at O&A, and hybrid meetings. I am proud that we can provide support to over 1,500 unique individuals and their families through a variety of options, and we do this regardless of their ability to pay. Although we do receive program funding from the State of IL, almost one-third of our annual budget comes from local grants, our County Government, and fundraising. Our local funding is variable year to year, so we are dependent on our fundraising to bridge the budget gaps. Please consider attending any of our ongoing fundraising events throughout the year; our website has the most up-to-date information about our events.

The dedication of our talented staff inspires me and my fellow Board members to continue to work towards getting the resources needed to keep Options & Advocacy strong. We will continue to be there for the families who need us in McHenry County.

Respectfully,
Dr. Mike Thomas



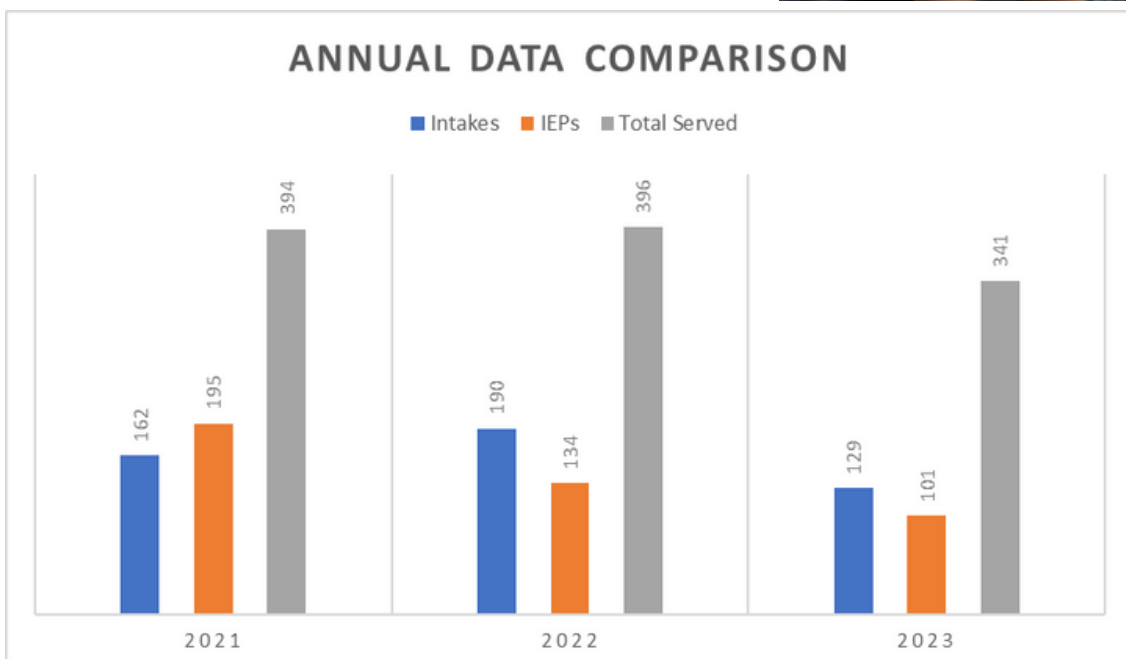
Autism Resource Center

PROGRESS FOR JULY 1, 2022-
JUNE 30, 2023

The Autism resource Center served a total of 341 clients this past year! This is pretty impressive given we did have to put a temporary hold on intakes due to a staff shortage. However, we have been able to rebuild our team and are back on track.

ARC conducted a variety of virtual support groups during FY2023. These included empowerment groups, hang-out groups, Regulating Together, RUBI groups, and our adult Connections group.

Group Connections: 4
Social Empowerment Groups: 4 six-week sessions
Hang Out Groups: 6
Educational Advocacy Groups: 3 six-week sessions
Research Units in Behavioral Intervention: One bilingual and one English speaking family session



Total Served includes clients engaged in: screenings, 1-1 family education/case management, social-support groups, and trainings.

Autism Resource Center Highlight Story

Approximately one year ago the ARC team became acquainted with a young man we will refer to as Ted. Ted is a 23-year-old, autistic man with limited verbal communication who lives with his parents in McHenry County. He loves all things Christmas, drumming and coloring. Ted had recently finished his schooling and was struggling to adjust to the changes in his routine. He would frequently become aggressive, often targeting his mother, when he was frustrated or upset. As a result of his outbursts, the family reached out to the Lake in the Hills Police Department for help. The LITH PD were sometimes called to their home multiple times a day. They soon grew to know Ted and his family quite well. The Police Social Workers at LITH PD supported the officers who responded to Ted's house and they soon found effective ways to help calm Ted. However, sometimes they were not always able to help calm Ted and he would then need to transport him to the Northwestern (NW) Emergency Department for an evaluation and/or placement in an inpatient facility for stabilization. This, however, is not always as easy as it sounds. As is often the case in these situations, it is difficult for people like Ted to find a hospital that can support him due to his diagnosis, behaviors and limited verbal communication skills. Other potential options that can offer support is a residential facility or day program that can offer parents a rest and where therapeutic interventions can be provided. Ted could benefit from the structure and support to keep him active and his mind engaged. The Autism Resource Center was asked to partner with NW and the LITH Police Social Workers to help the family find placement for Ted. The ARC team then began to mobilize additional community partners to help. However, based on initial feedback from potential residential providers, it quickly became clear that he was not going to be accepted. With residential options looking impossible, day programming options were explored, but most of those programs couldn't take him either. So, the ARC team decided to change tactics in order to find relief for this family. With continued support from the LITH PD and their social workers at home, the ARC team set out to help Ted develop the skills needed to be welcomed into a day program. Because Ted loves coloring, we thought we could start him off with private painting lessons led by Options and Advocacy Joyful Arts program. Soon, Ted was visiting us every Tuesday afternoon. In the beginning, he was only able to stay for 10-15 minutes at a time, but he was gradually able to stay longer as he became more used to the routine and environment. For the first many weeks, Ted's father would stay too; sitting next to him. Over time though, dad was able to sit further away until eventually he could wait outside in his car until his son was done. We were also able to reduce the number of people supporting, add a peer to the environment and offer a variety of activities such as coloring, drumming and sorting. He came every week for several months and was never violent or aggressive with anyone. We had remained in contact with our community partners throughout this time; giving them weekly updates with pictures of him painting. The support and advocacy provided by the ARC Team allowed doors and new opportunities to open up for Ted. It took a network of community providers, who were willing to collaborate and think outside the box to help Ted change the course of his journey. We are so proud of Ted's accomplishments, his loving family, and the amazing providers who have welcomed him into their settings.



Ted where he currently lives.

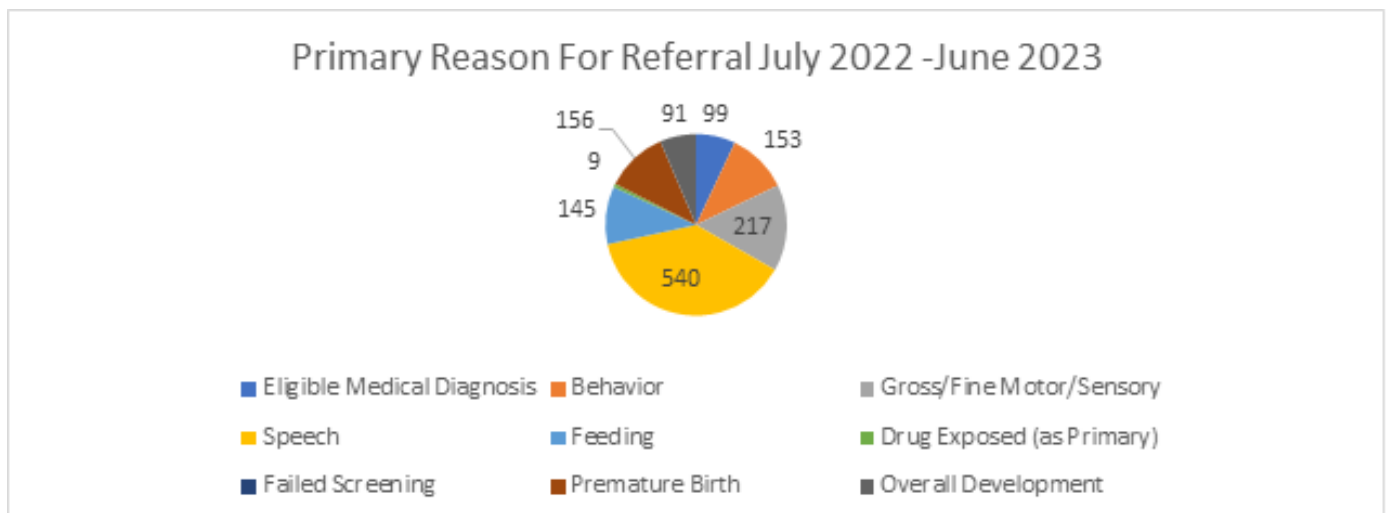
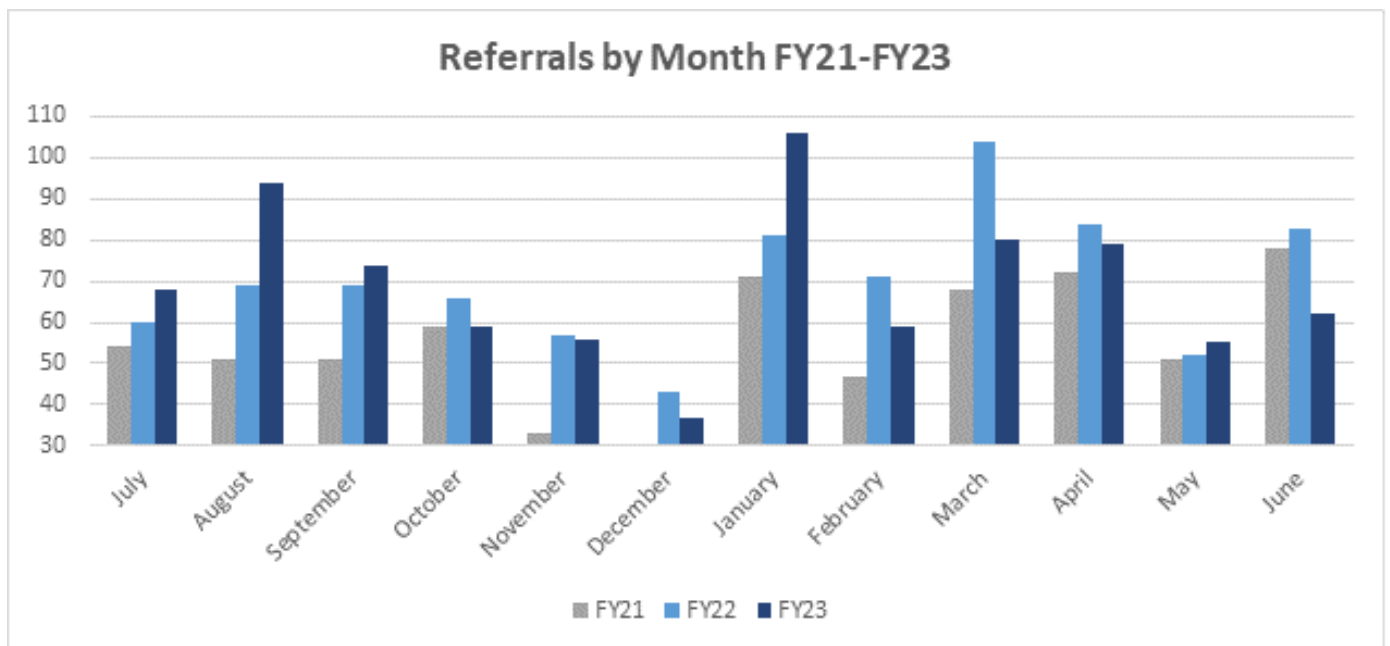


ARC team with LITH thanking them for their work with Ted by giving them one of Ted's paintings.

Child and Family Connections

PROGRESS FOR JULY 1, 2022- JUNE 30, 2023

From July 1, 2022 through June 30, 2023, we received 829 new referrals, which is similar to last year's numbers. Our referrals have been steady over the past few months. Referrals continue to be primarily for speech concerns, though we are seeing more referrals for younger children with motor concerns. We are also seeing more children referred because of prematurity, social/emotional and feeding/swallowing concerns. We served 1,349 total children (unduplicated) in FY23.



Child and Family Connections Highlights

We brought back our community playgroups in March of 2023. We currently collaborate with Gigi's Playhouse in McHenry to host playgroups twice a month.

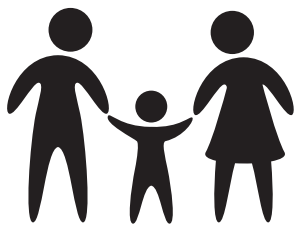


We hosted our first holiday drive for families at Options & Advocacy. Families were able to sign up for a time to drive through the decorated holiday wonderland; receiving cookie kits (donated by Uprising Bakery), crafts (Donated by Meijer), and a special gift (donated by Toys For Tots). We even had special Elves and Santa Claus!

Helping Us Grow

PROGRESS FOR JULY 1, 2022-
JUNE 30, 2023

In FY23, the Family Support Specialists conducted 797 personal visits, which is slightly higher than the number of visits conducted in FY22. The Helping Us Grow program served 86 families and 107 children. In comparison to last year, we served four more children and five more families. 96% of the families we served reported one or more high-risk family stressors, with 28% of families having two stressors, 21% having three stressors, and 22% of families having four or more high-risk family stressors. Some of the most common stressors HUG families face include low income, child(ren) with a disability or health condition, DCFS involvement, a caregiver with a mental health condition, and children in foster care. Luckily, because of the way our weighted eligibility form is written, we can find families eligible and provide support for those that typically would fall through the cracks, such as families that have been turned away from other services because their child is not “delayed enough” or the family is not “poor enough” can find support in HUG.



86 Families Served

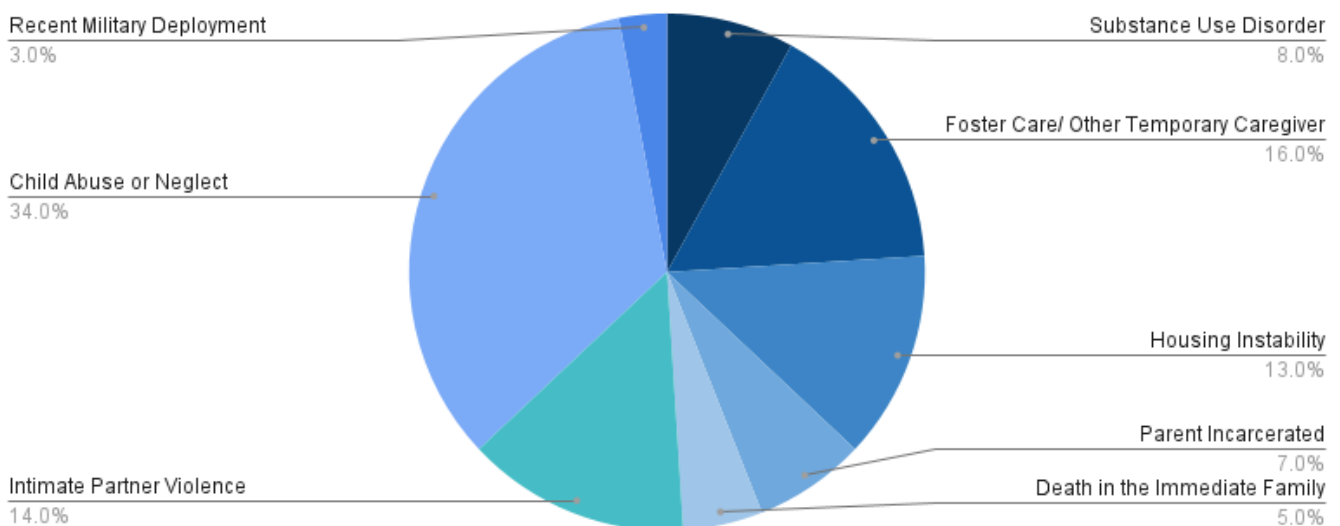


107 Children Served



797 Personal Visits

Types of Stressors (%)



Helping Us Grow Highlights

Group connections are most of our families' favorite aspects of the Helping Us Grow program. Although a lot of planning and preparation goes into the events, the families absolutely love them, making all the work worth it. Last year we were able to host 10 Group Connections, which provided a variety of age-appropriate activities for the families with the goal of strengthening family bonds and promoting social interaction for caregivers and their kiddos.



Holiday Party



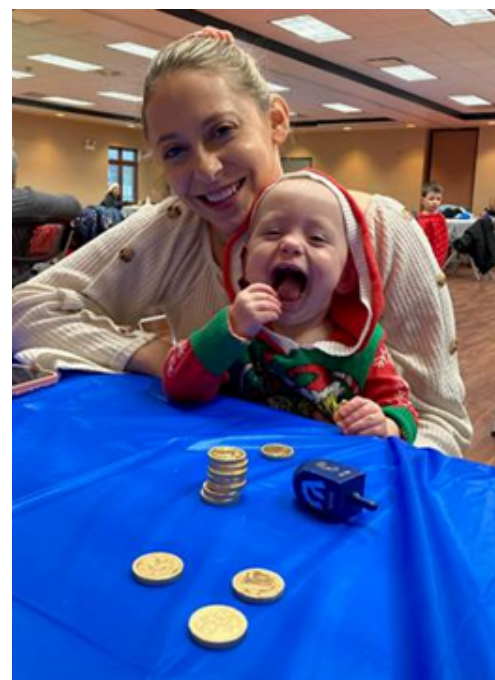
Nature in the Park



Summer Bash



Graduation



Holiday Party

- **August** – Kick Art Your Day (everything painting!)
- **October** – Nature in the Park (fall-themed activities in the park)
- **November** – Pizza Party (make your own pizzas)
- **December** – Holiday Party (Pancake Breakfast and Santa)
- **February** – Valentine’s Day Party (valentines themed activities and infant massage demonstration)
- **March** – Open Gym at Firehouse Gym
- **April** – Crystal Lake Nature Center + Hike
- **May** – Community Picnic and Resource Fair
- **June** – Graduation
- **June** – Summer Bash

The Stefanie Sullivan Joyful Arts program completed its first year in June. The initial vision for the program was to provide accessible, low-cost art classes to young people with various disabilities. We assembled a remarkable crew of 4 volunteers, who were at every class and certainly instrumental to our success. We also were able to receive support from the Best Buddies program at Cary-Grove High School. While we did not exactly know what to expect - we had successes that we never thought possible.

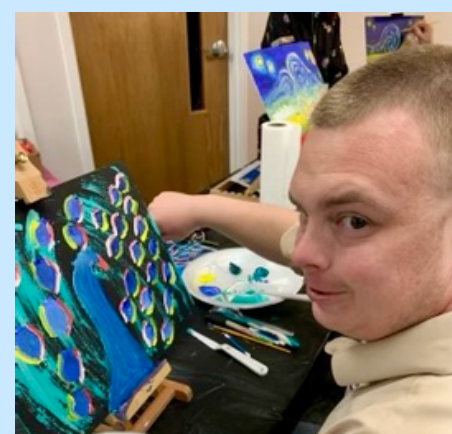
We averaged 6 students in each class. These students ranged in age from 15 years old to individuals in their 30's. We had students who were deaf and non-verbal, students with an autism spectrum diagnosis, to students with down syndrome and more. We created an environment that was welcoming, inclusive and what was most important to Stefanie, F-U-N! We created a community of artists who grew in their art skills each week. They grew in their ability to express themselves uniquely through their art. They very enthusiastically spoke about their art at the end of each class. They grew in their self-confidence. They developed friendships. Students who did not speak or make eye contact were laughing and smiling at the end of the class.

We culminated the year by having the first Annual Stefanie Sullivan Joyful Arts Show. It was held at a church in McHenry, and we drew over 100 visitors. Our students displayed their art and sat at their tables to talk about their art and their experience with those who attended. We made cards from each student's artwork and sold them to support the program. We made \$894 at the event.

We kicked off this year with a special outdoor art experience on August 19 in the parking lot of O&A by painting a giant canvas that we plan to auction off at next year's art show planned for Spring 2024.

My heart is filled with gratitude and joy at the success of this program. Our team of Pat Kerin, art instructor; Andi Bedell, interpreter/ fairy godmother to deaf and hearing impaired, and Joy Osakada, our amazing hands-on worker bee - make this program possible!

- Cindy Sullivan



Coming Soon!

Neuro Inclusive Counseling Program

The Neuro Inclusive Counseling Program (NIC) will serve those who are dually diagnosed. NIC will service children, adolescents, and adults who are neurodiverse and navigating a mental health diagnosis. Our goal is to hire staff, train them and provide quality therapeutic support to the community. We will provide individual, group, and family therapy. When we are up and running, we will first start by providing sliding scale supports, then become paneled with the most major insurance companies within the first three years.



Sibshops

Sibshops are lively, engaging celebrations of the many contributions made by brothers and sisters of kids with special needs. Sibshops acknowledges that being the brother or sister of a person with special needs is, for some, a good thing, for others, a not-so-good thing, and for many, somewhere in-between. They reflect a belief that brothers and sisters have much to offer one another — if they are given a chance. Sibshops are a spirited mix of new games (designed to be unique, offbeat, and appealing to a wide ability range), new friends, and discussion activities. Sibshops are not therapy, although their effect may be therapeutic for some children. Sibshops acknowledges that most brothers and sisters of people with special needs, like their parents, are doing well despite the challenges of a disability or illness. Consequently, while Sibshop facilitators always keep an eye open for participants who may need additional services, the Sibshops model takes a wellness approach.

Goal 1—Sibshops will provide brothers and sisters of children with special needs an opportunity to meet other siblings in a relaxed, recreational setting.

Goal 2—Sibshops will provide brothers and sisters with opportunities to discuss common joys and concerns with other siblings of children with special needs.

Goal 3—Sibshops will provide siblings with an opportunity to learn how others handle situations commonly experienced by siblings of children with special needs.

Goal 4—Sibshops will provide siblings with an opportunity to learn more about the implications of their sibling's special needs.

Goal 5—Sibshops will provide parents and professionals with opportunities to learn more about the concerns and opportunities frequently experienced by brothers and sisters of people with special needs.



Buddy Break

Buddy Break in collaboration with First Church in Crystal Lake is a free respite program where kids with special needs (we call them VIP kids) make new friends, play fun games, enjoy crafts, stories, music, activities and more! Siblings have fun too! Meanwhile, their caregivers get a break from their ongoing care-giving responsibilities for three hours.

The weight and stress of a special needs child can be overwhelming. Those responsibilities, along with the never-ending demands of daily caregiving and life in general leave little opportunity for caregivers to take time for themselves, run errands, or spend time with a spouse or other children. Buddy Break provides a safe place for VIPs and their siblings to have fun and establish meaningful friendships with other kids and adults while their caregivers get a break.



Who We Help

MCHENRY COUNTY, ILLINOIS



INDIVIDUALS WITH
AUTISM



CHILDREN WITH A
DEVELOPMENTAL DELAY
OF 30% OR MORE



FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN
UNDER 3 YEARS OLD
FACING A SIGNIFICANT
STRESSOR



FAMILIES ACCESSING
PUBLIC ASSISTANCE



CHILDREN WITH A
MEDICAL DIAGNOSIS

Options and Advocacy is proud to support families of all backgrounds, abilities, and structures who live in McHenry County.

We serve families in need of Early Intervention service coordination, in-home support to pregnant women and young children, and individuals on the autism spectrum and their families.

O&A has been a part of the McHenry County community since 1994 and has provided support to thousands of families since then.

Supporting the Community

Get Connected-Caregiver
Conference
February 27, 2023

Keynote Speaker: Shira Greenfield,
Positive Psychology

Breakout Sessions:

“The Emotional Journey of a New
Diagnosis”, Elizabeth Krotser

“Accessing PUNS Funding & Adult
Services”, Emily Fencil (Clearbrook)
and Kristin Molyneux (Services Inc)

“Making Sense of Sensory
Processing”, Dr. Carleigh VanDetta,
OTD, OTR/L, MA

“SSI & Special Needs Trusts, ABLE
Accounts”, Sherri Schneider

“Guardianship”, Melissa Wick

“Toilet Training”, Misty Ernest

“Understanding Behavior -Providing
Guidance That Is Positive and
Supportive”, Katie Krug

“Educational Advocacy”, Darbi
Carbone

“Emotional Regulation”, Susan Perkins

Adult Sibling Panel, Facilitated by
Emma Fisher



Supporting the Community

Community Picnic & Resource Fair
May 19, 2023

WOODSCREEK PARK
1420 WILLOW TREE DR.
CRYSTAL LAKE, IL

FRIDAY MAY 19TH
11 AM TO 4 PM

Options & Advocacy
for McHenry County
IS HOSTING
ITS
**ANNUAL RESOURCE FAIR
AND FAMILY
PICNIC**

Kingpins
DRUMLINE

BUSY BRAINS
Children's Museum

- WIC
- YWCA- La voz latina
- 4-C
- Headstart
- Birth to Five
- The Break
- McHenry county Dept. of Health
- AID
- Buddy Break
- Illinois Migrant Council
- Pioneer Center
- Greater Health Family Clinc
- New Directions
- Occupational Therapy Services at HLC Therapy Group
- And many more.....

BRING FAMILY & FRIENDS
ARTS & CRAFTS, FOOD,
FUN GAMES, MUSIC & COMMUNITY RESOURCES



DEI Statement

Diversity Equity Inclusion (DEI) Beliefs:

Options & Advocacy **respects** that diversity in all facets of identity *creates a strong* community.

Options & Advocacy **honors** how the intersectionality of identities fundamentally shapes a person's experience within our community.

Options & Advocacy **recognizes** that people have been systemically discriminated against in society on the basis of their identities, leading to inequitable outcomes and opportunities.

Options & Advocacy **believes** that acknowledging implicit biases and challenging societal norms is what will lead us toward creating safe, welcoming environments.

Options & Advocacy **understands** that building spaces where people can bring their voices and authentic selves lead to a true sense of belonging.

Options & Advocacy **views** this dedication to DEI as critical to achieving our mission of empowering individuals and their families through advocacy and education while creating a more inclusive community.

Options & Advocacy **acknowledges** that building an inclusive, accessible, and equitable community requires an ongoing commitment to cultural humility as society learns, grows, and changes. Options & Advocacy commits to this continual process.

At Options & Advocacy, a diverse, inclusive, and equitable workplace is one where all employees, volunteers, and recipients of our services, whatever their gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, age, sexual orientation or identity, education, or disability, feel valued and respected. Options & Advocacy is committed to a nondiscriminatory approach and provides equal opportunity for employment and advancement in all of our departments, programs, and worksites. Options & Advocacy respects and values diverse life experiences and heritages and believes that all voices are valued and should be heard.



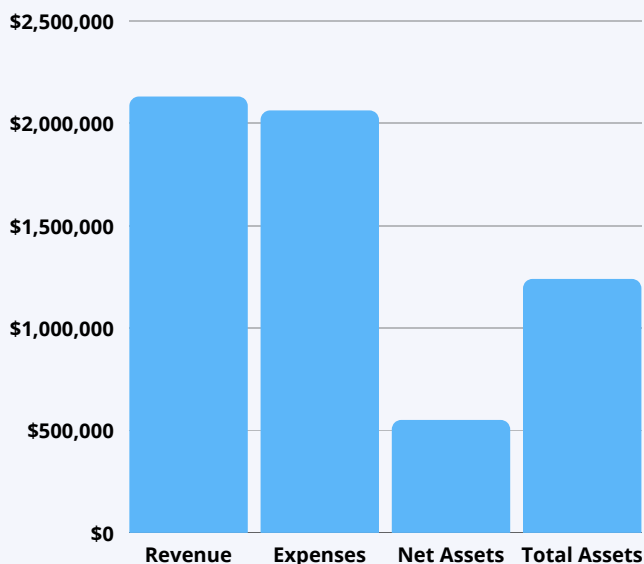
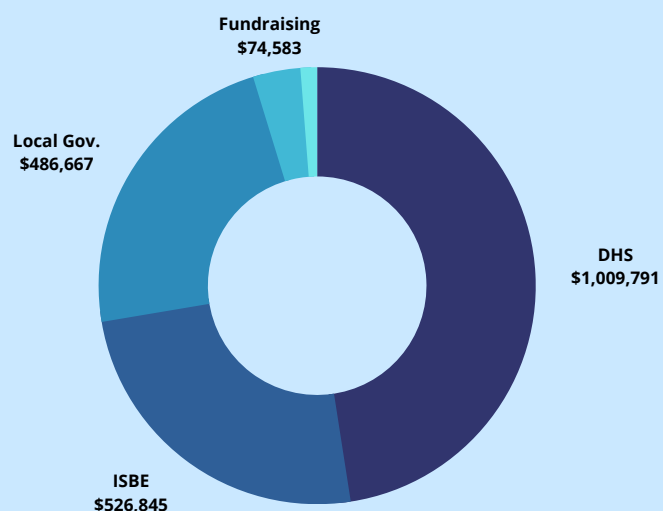
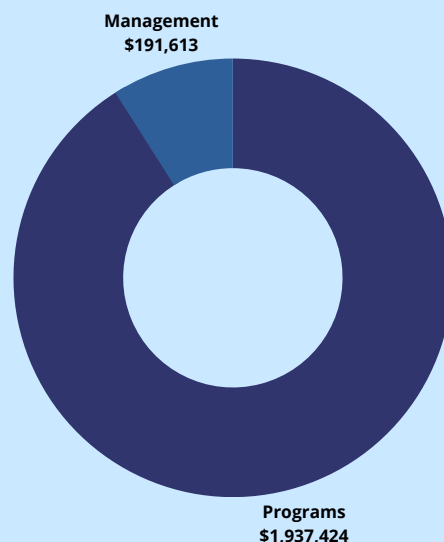


Financial Overview

During Fiscal Year 2023, Options and Advocacy received funding from a number of different sources.

The State of Illinois - Department of Human Resources (DHS), and Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) - funded 72% of Options and Advocacy's total revenue. The other 28% originated from the local government, fundraisers, and other grants/miscellaneous funders.

Our three programs, ARC, CFC, and HUG, received 90% of our total revenue leaving the other 10% for management and other general expenses.



Options and Advocacy's total revenue from July 1, 2022-June 30, 2023 was \$2,129,037. From that, our expenses totaled \$2,061,192.

Our net assets came to \$735,248, leaving our total asset amount at \$1,282,230.

Family Stories

AUTISM RESOURCE CENTER (ARC)



My Child has learned...

- How to speak up for herself and look at the things she can do, not just things she can't do.
- More about himself.
- Acceptance
- That he is special, and it may take him a couple tries to get it properly done.
- Not to be afraid to ask for what they need, even if it's asking us as parents.
- How to talk to peers.

CHILD & FAMILY CONNECTIONS (CFC)

It was October 2019 and I was at my son's 18 month well check visit. I was going through the ages and stages questionnaire and discussing his development, when I was asked "Is he saying at least 50 words?" I stopped in my tracks. Why had I never realized until this moment that he was not talking! This immediate wave of guilt rushed over me. He is my third child; how did I miss this? The doctor gave me this little yellow card with the phone number for early intervention. This is when life changed for me and early intervention was introduced into our lives. I saw as a parent what an amazing program Early Intervention is. I wanted to be a part of something that helped me and my family so much. If I could help other families and support them like I have been supported, how amazing and rewarding would that be! I met with a wonderful group of women that just during the interview process made me feel like I was already a part of the team. About a week later I was offered the position as service coordinator. I was so excited and so scared all at the same time. I have been with Options and Advocacy for three years now and I am so glad to be a part of this family. I have learned so much and I work with a really supportive team of people! My little guy has now left EI, completed the early childhood program and starts Kindergarten in August! We would have never gotten here without Early Intervention. I will forever be grateful for this program and what it has done for my little guy and our family. Now I am in this position where I was an EI parent and a service coordinator. It gives me this unique perspective to advocate for our families and families that are not sure if they should call the number on that little yellow card.



Family Stories

HELPING US GROW (HUG)

“The enthusiasm it creates for both child and family. [HUG is] a welcome relief in reducing stress over the parenting process. [They always have] additional creative suggestions and solutions on ways to overcome some typical parenting milestones.”

“Cheryl has been really helpful not only to my son but to me as well! When she initially came to our house, I already felt comfortable with her that I was able to release what’s been bothering me for months; I felt relieved coz I was able to share with someone the struggles that I’d been having during that time. I will never forget that day. She’s really been very helpful, always asking if we need assistance with anything.”

“It’s a great resource to understand a child’s development. Also gives great ideas on games to encourage growth in both the child and parent/child relationship.”

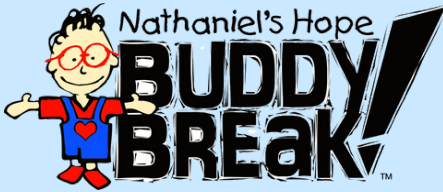


JOYFUL ARTS

Jasmine enjoys the Joyful Arts because it gives her an opportunity to learn a new skill of painting. She "loves" every class. It's a fun place to meet new people and grow friendships.

Nathan says his time in the Joyful Arts program has been a stress reliever that brings out his creativity and inner child. He describes classes as a "nice break from reality when you have hard times to deal with."

Community Partners



THE DIAPER BANK OF NORTHERN ILLINOIS

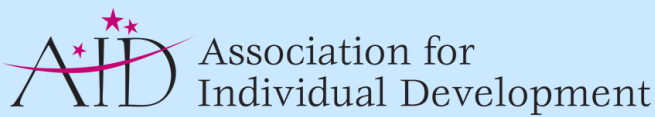


Division of Specialized Care for Children

Community Partners Continued



The
**Community
Foundation**
for McHenry County



Community Partners Continued



Kiwanis[®]



**Center for Independence
Birth to Five**



Ways You Gave



WEBSITE

optionsandadvocacy.org

Donations through the "How Can I Help" tab on the O&A website.

GIVE BUTTER

Giving Tuesday Fundraiser

Donations from generous community members in honor of Giving Tuesday 2022.



RESTAURANT NIGHTS

Local restaurant fundraisers

Various local restaurant fundraisers who donate a portion back of proceeds to O&A.

PARTICIPATION

Fundraising Events

Attendance at the Holzlager Oktoberfest, Family Fall Festival at Kingston Lanes, and our inaugural Mardi Gras 5K Run

DONATIONS & VOLUNTEERS

On-Site

Friendly volunteers and donations of clothes, toys, diapers, and more help us assist families across the county.



Fundraisers

Buy a Holzlager Oktoberfest brew and O & A gets a \$1 per pour
Order food from Antioch Pizza and O & A gets 15%

BREW & CHEW

FUNdraiser for a good cause

OCTOBER 27TH • THURSDAY
5 PM - 10 PM
150 S. EASTWOOD DR.
WOODSTOCK

Oktoberfest—October 27, 2022

FALL Festival

PRESENTS ENTERTAINMENT BY:

1330 S Eastwood Dr, Woodstock, IL
Leigh Ann Walberg, local music therapist, with puppets & immersive instrument experience!

SUNDAY, **SEPTEMBER 25TH**
12PM-5PM FREE ENTRY

LIVE MUSIC • RAFFLES
FOOD • DRINK • FUN

for more information or to register go to
www.optionsandadvocacy.org

Family Fall Festival—September 25, 2022



Matthew & Ethan's Ornaments—Fall/Winter 2022



Thank You
Gracias
감사합니다
شكرا لكم
Merci
ありがとう
धन्यवाद
dziękuję

Options & Advocacy logo

Giving Tuesday—November 29, 2022

Mardi Gras 5K Run
for the Beads

MOHAWY COUNTY

Mardi Gras 5k Run—April 2, 2023

Options & Advocacy is appreciative of everyone who has donated between July 1, 2022 and June 30, 2023.

Alba Garcia Adams

Amanda Yablun

Amy Schreiber

Angela Krambeer

Ashley Bouchard

Ashton Gangemi

Bob Meschewski

Brandon Drew

Brooke McKenna

Cara Rehoff

Carl & Dorothy Schmelzer

Carla Voss

Carolyn Suwanski

Caryn Shiel

Casey Kruz

Cindy Sullivan

Colleen Altenbernd

Constance Mascillino

Darbi Carbone

Debbie Krizanovic

Debi Mori

Delora Gerhardt

Denise Nichols

Desiree Peterman

Dina & Steve Dermont

Doreen Berndt

Elizabeth Axtell

Elizabeth Petropoulos

Fay Wilson

Frank Sanzeri

Gilbert High

Grace Schwartzlow

Gregory & Patricia Lofgren

Heather Buffington

Helen Lopez Strom

Holly Wendt

Ina Schneiderman

Jacqueline Feare

Jeanine Wang

Jeffery Scharringhausen

Jen Thomas

Jennifer Thompson

Jerry Jones

Jill Kinser McGehee

Jim Hendrix

Jonathan Kaufman

Judith Kieper

Judy Prince

Kameryn Schneider

Kathy Kornely

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Kevin Kurtz
Kevin Lyons
Kiera Parpart
Kimberly Doerr
Laura Bently
Linda Greaves
Louise Kowalski
Mari Loustaunau
Maria Ramos
Marie Humphrey
Mark Matula
Mary Webb
Melissa Rajcevich
Melissa Reynoso
Melissa- Ann Evanchik
Mike Thomas
Nancy Lebda
Patrick Flanagan
Patrick Kerin
Rebecca Lee
Rich Duran

Rich Voss
Roberta Wilk
Russ Foszcz
Sandra Costello
Sandra Lebar
Sara Erdmann
Sheri Hell
Sheryl Graff
Silvana Gilbert
Star Stagg
Star Underwood
Stephanie Brunner
Stephanie Prince
Steven Singh
Susan Carter
Theresa Lynn
Tim Thielen
Toby Steagall
Tom Pierce
Tricia Vasis
Winter Noe

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Community Sponsors

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