

# THE VOICE



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**Calendar:**

**Board Meetings**

- ASK Office—160 68th St. SW  
Grand Rapids, 49548 — 6:30 pm
- April 8, 2024
  - May 6, 2024
  - June 3, 2024

**Estate Planning Support Group**

- 4/9/24

**Elementary Age Social Group**

- 4/24/24—Flower Pot Painting

**Teen/Young Adult Social Group**

- 4/30/24—Canvas Painting

**GRCM Sensory Friendly Night**

- 4/29/24

**Walk for Autism — 5/19/24**

**Golf Outing — 8/1/24**



## News from ASK

As we step into the vibrant season of spring, ASK has some exciting updates and opportunities for us to come together in support of our cause. April marks Autism Awareness Month, a time dedicated to increasing understanding, acceptance, and inclusion for individuals on the autism spectrum. It's a moment for us to celebrate the unique talents and contributions of individuals with autism and to reaffirm our commitment to creating a world where everyone can thrive.

In honor of Autism Awareness Month, we have an array of engaging activities and initiatives planned. From educational workshops and community events to social media campaigns and outreach efforts, there are countless ways for you to get involved and help spread awareness. But that's not all! I am delighted to announce that at the end of April, we will be hosting a spectacular theater production featuring individuals

from our community. This exciting event not only showcases the talents of our Full Spectrum Players but also serves as a powerful platform for promoting inclusivity and diversity in the arts. Be sure to mark your calendars and join us for an unforgettable evening (and afternoon) of entertainment and inspiration.

And as we look even further ahead, I am excited to announce our upcoming Walk for Autism fundraising event on May 19th. This annual tradition brings together individuals and families from across our community to raise funds and awareness in support of our vital programs and services. Whether you walk with us or support our team fundraising competition, your participation makes a meaningful difference in our work to support those with autism.

As we embark on these exciting initiatives and events, I am filled with a sense of hope and optimism for the future. Together, we have the power to make a profound impact and create a more inclusive and compassionate world for individuals with autism and their families.

Thank you for your unwavering support and dedication to our cause. Your enthusiasm and generosity inspire us all to strive for greater heights and to continue making a positive difference in the lives of others.

Jenn McGeehan  
Executive Director



Autism Support of Kent County (ASK) is bidding farewell to a valued member of our organization as **Doug Domine** retires from the ASK Board.

Since joining the board in 2015, Doug has been an integral part of our organization's growth and impact. As Board Vice President since 2018, he provided guidance and direction that helped shape ASK's initiatives and programs.

Doug was a familiar face at many ASK events, generously volunteering his time and talents. When the ASK Hiking Group was established, Doug stepped up to lead the group on numerous memorable hikes.

Doug's contributions as a speaker at ASK Support Groups were invaluable. Drawing from his extensive knowledge of community services available to young adults with autism, Doug provided valuable insights and his firsthand experience as a parent in this journey has been extremely helpful for so many of our families.

Before ASK, Doug helped kickstart the Spartan YMCA Family Hope program, boosting support networks for people with autism and other special needs.

Doug, you've been a true leader and friend to ASK. Here's to your retirement and all the adventures ahead!

Larry Andrus, Board President

## Celebrating Double Joy!



It's a time of great joy and double blessings for ASK Social Events Director Jennie Miller and her family as they welcome the newest additions to their clan.

Jennie, alongside her husband Jacob and daughter Bria, is overjoyed to announce the birth of twins Sophie Grace and Gary Anthony! Congratulations from all of us at ASK!





# WALK FOR AUTISM

## Sunday, May 19, 2024

### Noon - 3:00 pm

*At LMCU Ballpark - Home of the  
West Michigan Whitecaps*



Join us for a great day of togetherness, fun, games, crafts, resource sharing, and a walk around the warning track of the LMCU Ballpark — home of the West Michigan Whitecaps!

**THIS EVENT SERVES AS OUR BIGGEST FUNDRAISER OF THE YEAR, SO PLEASE HELP US CONTINUE TO FUND THE IMPORTANT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES THAT WE OFFER.**

To participate, each person is asked to raise \$35. Your \$35 gets you entrance into the event, a Walk t-shirt, and lunch at the ballpark. You must register by May 4, 2024, to be guaranteed a t-shirt! Click on this link for registration and more information:

<https://givebutter.com/c/ASKWalk2024>

**Fundraising and Team Prizes to be announced soon!**

We're thrilled to announce an upcoming fundraising event hosted by **Urban Jonny's Salon** in Alger Heights on **Friday, April 26th!** We are honored to share that ASK will be the beneficiary of this special event.

At ASK, we are deeply committed to supporting individuals and families affected by autism, providing invaluable resources, support groups, and inclusive community activities. We understand firsthand the importance of these services, as they serve as a beacon of hope and education for families throughout Kent County.

Last year, Urban Jonny's Salon raised over \$1,000 for another deserving cause, highlighting their dedication to making a positive impact in our community. This year, we are grateful and excited to partner with them to raise funds for ASK!

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Urban Jonny's Salon for their generosity and commitment to supporting our mission. See the flyers for more information!

The team at Urban Jonny's Salon Presents

# PARTY FOR A CAUSE

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<b>Raffle Prizes:</b> Salon products, local gift certificates, handmade local goods, & much, much more! <small>*You do not have to be present to win</small>	<b>Local Vendors:</b> Linked Lakeshore - Permanent Jewelry 32 Tees - TyeDye Shirts Earthshine Silver
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<b>20% Off ALL Retail</b>	<b>Snacks &amp; Beverages</b> sponsored by the Stylists at UJ's
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ALL RAFFLE & SPECIAL SALE PROCEEDS FROM THE EVENT WILL BE DONATED TO:  
**AUTISM SUPPORT OF KENT COUNTY**

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WEAR YOUR GROOVIEST OUTFIT & GET 10 FREE RAFFLE TICKETS!

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**SATURDAY, APRIL 26TH AT 4PM**  
Urban Jonny's Salon  
810 Alger St SE  
GRAND RAPIDS, MI 49507

## MEET IKE!

Ike is the 7 year old son of our Salon Coordinator, Laura Kenrick & he is Autistic. He enjoys LEGO, tie dye clothes and scorpions! His parents knew from a young age that Ike was "different" but they never expected to have such a beautiful, fearless and loving boy! Parenting a child with a disability has been a struggle at times but Ike has proven he is a gift over and over again. He is often described by many as their "spirit animal".

The Autism Support of Kent County, (ASK) has been a pivotal influence for the Kenrick family, it was their first connection to families of other children and adults with Autism. They offer support groups for elementary children and their families all the way up to adults with Autism. They even have their own theatre group, The Full Spectrum Players. ASK's mission is to provide services that make it possible for individuals with Autism to lead healthier and more productive lives. ASK is 100% donor funded and runs programs worth over \$80,000 for individuals affected by Autism Spectrum Disorder and their families.

All proceeds from Party For A Cause will be donated to ASK.



## HAYRIDE 2023

Ike & Laura attending the 2023 Hayride put on by ASK at Post Family Farms! This was a sensory friendly, family event.



# URBAN JONNY'S

S A L O N



### Parent/Caregiver Support Group

## Estate Planning

Tuesday, April 9, 2024

6:30 – 8:00 pm

Join us this April 9th for an informative event with **Rose Coonen** of Coonen Law, PLLC.

**About Rose Coonen:** Rose is an attorney with Coonen Law, PLLC and focuses her practice on estate planning and business law. Rose brings a holistic approach to serving her clients to ensure that they have estate plans that work when they need it most and to bring harmony in the most difficult times. Her passion is serving children and families with special needs and Rose has authored the book “Estate Planning when you have a Child with Special Needs: Plan Your Estate Well, Protect Their Future” to serve as a guide for parents. Rose will be giving a presentation with handouts followed by a brief Q&A session.

We will meet in our office at the new Special Olympics Center. The Center is located at 160 – 68th Street SW, Grand Rapids, between US131 and Division Avenue. Park in the EAST lot, enter under the triangle roof, and head down the main hallway to our office, room #6.

Please register at:  
<https://www.autismsupportofkentcounty.org/events/2024/4/9/autism-awareness-month-parent-support-group-with-coonen-law>



### The Grand Rapids Children’s Museum has set aside Monday evening, April 29, from 4:00 to 6:00 pm for anyone with sensory challenges!

Register for this free night at the museum! Registration is limited to 150 individuals. ASK and GRKM are partnering to provide a sensory friendly night out every quarter in 2024. This is a free event, but donations are welcome to help ASK continue providing support, resources, and programs to the community.

RSVP at <https://givebutter.com/WVw2e8>




Autism Acceptance Month

## Film Night & Panel

Thursday, April 4, 8 - 10 PM

Join Hope College and Benjamin's Hope for a viewing of "The Reason I Jump" with a panel discussion to follow. Accessible parking spaces can be found by the Kruienza Art Museum off of Columbia Ave.

The Schaap Auditorium  
Jim and Martie Bultman Student Center  
115 E 12th St, Holland, MI 49423

## SENSORY SHOWTIMES

**Lights Up. Sound Down. Enjoy The Movie!**

Showtimes - Saturdays at 11:00 am (It's always a good idea to check theater listings.)

<https://www.celebrationcinema.com/events-series/detail/Sensory-Showtimes>

**Check the website for current lineup!**

## SOCIAL GROUPS

We currently offer four **Social Group Programs**. Email [ed@autismsupportofkentcounty.org](mailto:ed@autismsupportofkentcounty.org) or call (616) 752-8577 or more information on any of our groups.

### TEEN & YOUNG ADULT SOCIAL GROUP.

This group is run by Jennie Miller, ASK Program Director. This group meets either monthly or twice each month for fun and friendship. It's open to anyone ages 12 and up. Events are publicized on our EVENTS page, email blasts, and on Facebook. A guardian must accompany each individual to the events.

### YOUNG ADULT SOCIAL GROUP—PUZZLE PARTNERS.

This is a closed group that is ONLY for individuals with Level I autism and social challenges. Individuals must be at least age 18 to participate. This group is run by Jennie Miller, ASK Program Director. Contact Jennie at [PuzzlePartnersYA@gmail.com](mailto:PuzzlePartnersYA@gmail.com). This group meets 3 times each month for fun, friendship and support. To participate in this group, you must be verbal and able to communicate back and forth 3-4 times, be

free from behaviors, and be able to attend on your own. To be eligible to join, you must have a short phone call with Jennie. Events are only publicized by an email from Jennie.

**AUTISTIC ADULT MEETUP GROUP.** This is a closed group that is ONLY for individuals with Level I autism and social challenges. This is a group for anyone with diagnosed or suspected autism who is over age 30. This group is run by Ann Mary Dykstra, longtime ASK volunteer and Puzzle Partners Group Leader. Contact Ann Mary at [PuzzlePartners@gmail.com](mailto:PuzzlePartners@gmail.com). To be eligible to join, you must have a short phone call with Ann Mary. This group meets monthly for fun, friendship and support. Events are publicized through emails from Ann Mary only.

### ELEMENTARY AGE SOCIAL GROUP—NEW!

This group is run by Jennie Miller, ASK Program Director. This group meets monthly and is open to any child age 6–11 who has an autism diagnosis or is awaiting diagnosis. Events are publicized on our EVENTS page, email blasts, and on Facebook. A parent or guardian must accompany each child.

### Elementary Age Social Group

Wednesday, April 24 (ASK Office)  
6:00 – 7:25 pm

### Flower Pot Painting



Register at:

<https://www.autismsupportofkentcounty.org/events/2024/4/24/flower-pot-painting-elementary-age-social-group>

### Teen/Young Adult Social Group

Tuesday, April 30 (ASK Office)  
6:00 – 7:30 pm

### Canvas Painting



Register at:

<https://www.autismsupportofkentcounty.org/events/2024/4/30/canvas-painting-teen-young-adult-social-group>

# THE FULL SPECTRUM PLAYERS

## Spring Performances

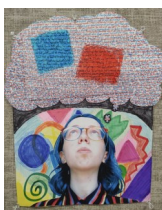
Friday, April 26, 2024 7:00 – 8:30 pm  
Sunday, April 28, 2024 3:00 – 4:30 PM

The Full Spectrum Players will present their 6th season with their performance of **Cross Booted**. *Cross Booted* comprises four short original stories that will take guests on a trip through mash-ups, reboots, and parodies of TV shows from the 60s, 70s, 80s, and 90s. Guests will also be entertained with individual talents by our actors throughout the performance.

Join us on Friday, April 26th at 7:00 pm and Sunday, April 28th at 3:00 pm. Tickets are \$5 at the door. Parking will be available in the east lot with overflow at Legacy Christian School. It will be a fun, nostalgic event. Hope to see you there!



The Full Spectrum Players theater group is thrilled to congratulate **Sydney Dochstader**, one of our very talented actors, for receiving the 2023/24 Scholastic Art Silver Key Award through Caledonia High School for her two pieces, "Method to Our Madness" and "Recall the Dreams of Alice".



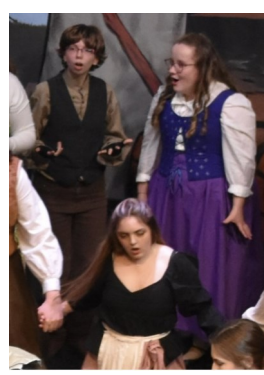
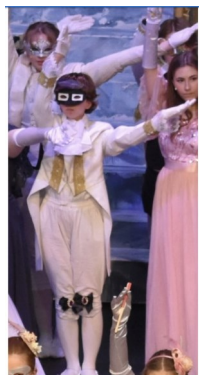
Sydney recently performed in Caledonia High School's production of "Cinderella", taking on dual roles within the ensemble cast as both villager and ball attendee.

Sydney's contributions to our theater group have been invaluable, having already acted in three of our produc-

tions. We are honored to have her as a guest performer in our upcoming production, "Cross Booted," where her talent will undoubtedly shine once again.

As a Senior at Caledonia High School, Sydney has continuously impressed us with her talent and commitment. Her upcoming journey at Oakland University is filled with promise, and we have no doubt that she will continue to thrive and inspire others with her passion for the arts.

Please join us in congratulating Sydney on this remarkable achievement. We can't wait to see where her journey takes her next!





*On March 4th, we were honored to host our second annual **Art Gala and Auction**. It was an evening filled with creativity, generosity, and heartfelt support for our cause.*

*We extend our sincere thanks to our event sponsors, **Purposeful Wealth Strategies** and **Hearts for the Arts Studio**, for their generous support and belief in our mission.*

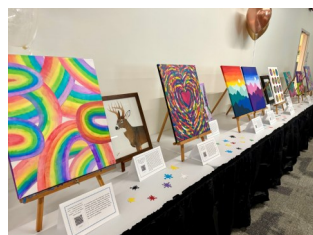
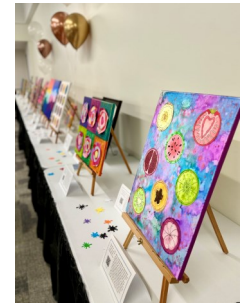
*Thanks to Committee Members Celia Andrus, Shannon Andrus, Jenn McGeehan, Tasha Oltman, and Renee Walter for their dedication and effort in making sure every single detail was carefully thought out and flawlessly executed. We couldn't have done it without you!*

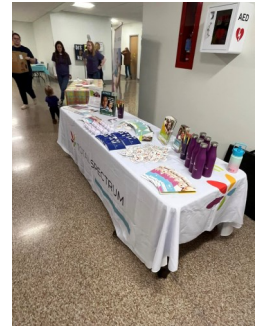
*Special thanks to our Board Members whose tireless efforts in setting up for the event truly made a difference. Your support and enthusiasm are invaluable to us, and we are grateful for your continued involvement.*

*Of course, none of this would have been possible without the incredible talent and generosity of our featured artists, who graciously donated their beautiful creations to the auction. Your artistry not only enriched the event but also helped us raise vital funds for our cause.*

*The night got even better with the awesome tunes from K-Rock (Keenan Miller and Keegan Russell) and Connor Folkertsma. Your music really set the mood and made the evening one to remember for everyone there.*

*We also thank all of the other donors who contributed to our silent auction. Your contributions will enable us to continue making a meaningful impact in the lives of those we serve. Thank you for helping us spread joy, inclusion, and opportunity through the power of art!*





Thank you for everyone who hopped over to our Easter Egg Hunt on March 23rd! The snow may have filled our courtyard, but we had so much fun exploring our auditorium egg hunt, playing games, and making arts and crafts.

Special thanks to the **Grand Rapids Junior Chamber** for volunteering and organizing our event, sponsor **Total Spectrum** for bringing a fun craft and information about their services, and **Kopka Pinkus Dolin** for sponsoring our donuts and coffee!




**United Way**  
**Heart of West Michigan United Way**

Heart of West Michigan United Way investors can choose to designate all or part of their annual contributions to Autism Support of Kent County. To designate your gift to ASK, use the *United Way Designation Form* and write: *Autism Support of Kent County, Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

Visit our website to view and/or download the ASK Community Resource Directory:  
[www.autismsupportofkentcounty.org](http://www.autismsupportofkentcounty.org)





## CLUBHOUSE GROUP

### Upcycling T-Shirts into Dog Toys for a Local Animal Shelter



## ELEMENTARY SOCIAL GROUP

### DIY Toolbox Kit



## TEEN/YOUNG ADULT SOCIAL GROUP

### Bowling at Spectrum Lanes



## Conferences, Workshops, and Webinars

### Michigan Alliance for Families On-Demand Free Webinar Series

A webinar is an online presentation you can attend without having to leave your home or office. It's an opportunity to hear an expert speak for about an hour on a topic that interests you. These webinars can be viewed at any time on the Michigan Alliance for Families YouTube Channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/MichiganAlliance/videos>

### Online Learning Opportunities

<https://www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org/upcoming-events/>

### Autism Alliance of Michigan List of Virtual and In-Person Community Events:

<https://autismallianceofmichigan.org/events/>

### Autism Speaks On-line Events and Webinars

[https://www.autismspeaks.org/events?event\\_type=All](https://www.autismspeaks.org/events?event_type=All)

### Autism Research Institute

Free Online Webinars — Autism Education for Individuals, Parents and Professionals

<https://autism.org/webinars/>

### 2024 Virtual World Autism Conference

Friday, April 19 - Sunday, April 21, 2024

**Keynote Speakers:** Temple Grandin, Ph.D., Stephen Shore, Ed.D., and Raun K. Kaufman

<https://worldautismconference.org/>

### 23rd Annual START Conference

April 22, 2024

Kellogg Hotel & Conference Center at MSU  
219 S Harrison Rd, East Lansing, MI 48824

<https://www.gvsu.edu/autismcenter/start-conference-167.htm>

### Michigan Autism Conference

October 10-11, 2024

Radisson Plaza Hotel  
Kalamazoo, MI

<https://michiganautismconference.org/about/>



### RELAXED ENVIRONMENT PERFORMANCES

A Relaxed Environment performance is perfect for anyone who benefits from being able to make noise, leave and return to their seat or access the toilets during the performance. This would include customers who have dementia, anxiety, Tourette's, bowel and bladder conditions, those on the autism spectrum, or a learning disability. Relaxed Environment performances have no adjustments made to the performance. They are not suitable for customers with sensory sensitivities.

### SENSORY BACKPACKS

Our theatre has Sensory Backpacks available for check out at every performance. These bags include items such as weighted lap-pads, earplugs, fidget cubes, dark glasses, maze mats, memory foam stress balls, chew necklaces, and clothes pins. Please see the Help Desk on the night of your performance to check out one of these tools, free of charge.

### Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*

Wednesday, 4/24/24 at 7:30 pm



### Beautiful: The Carole King Musical

Wednesday, 6/12/24 at 7:30pm



## We Need Your Support

Autism is the fastest-growing developmental disability in the United States, with 1 in 36 children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Autism Support of Kent County (ASK) works every day to measurably improve the quality of life for individuals and families affected by autism in our community. By donating today, you can help us in our mission to create connections and empower everyone in the autism community with the resources needed to live fully.

Your tax-deductible gift to ASK will help support our many life-changing programs and enable us to assist families living with autism. Can you please join us to make life better for the special and capable people we serve? All amounts make a huge difference to us! Here are ways to donate:

- Via our website at:  
[www.autismsupportofkentcounty.org/donate](http://www.autismsupportofkentcounty.org/donate)
- You can mail donations to:  
Autism Support of Kent County, Inc.  
P.O. Box 150348, Grand Rapids, MI 49515

**Donations to ASK are tax deductible  
(Tax ID #27-0292064).**

***Thank you for your support!***

*Autism Support of Kent County (ASK) in Grand Rapids, Michigan, is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization of parents, school staff, and others who actively seek to support and advocate for persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and their families.*

*ASK is committed to partnering with local schools and agencies to promote the welfare of individuals with ASD in our community.*

*Please note that ASK does not endorse any specific therapy, product, treatment, strategy, opinion, service, or individual.*

**Autism Support  
of Kent County**

**Autism Support of Kent County (ASK) is on Facebook, so visit our page for updates on our programs and events. Don't forget to "like" our page to stay up to date on what's happening. Click [here](#) to visit us on Facebook.**



### ***Remember ASK in Your Estate Plan***

We often receive gifts in memory of an individual who has been touched by autism. Thank you to these special families who think of ASK at such a sad time.

Please remember ASK in your estate plans too. These gifts are treated with the utmost care and respect. Contact us for more information on how you can include ASK in your charitable giving plans at 616-752-8577.

#### **Disclaimers**

Articles, conferences, workshops, presenters or information contained in this newsletter or at meetings are not endorsed by Autism Support of Kent County.

Articles occasionally offer information about medical/pharmacological research, treatment and therapies or legal issues. This information is given for informational purposes and is not intended to act as a substitute for professional advice. Readers are encouraged to consult with their own practitioners for individual or specific advice.

