

The Island Autism Center





Please watch our film: islandautism.org/video



Our Vision

The Island Autism Center: a place on Martha's Vineyard where children and adult residents with autism can live life to its fullest potential.

The Island Autism Group envisions a residential setting for autistic adults over the age of 22 years old. It will also be a place where children and adults with autism can enjoy social and therapeutic activities year round.

A common worry among island families is that their loved ones will not have the community resources needed to live a full and productive life.

With the essential support and the accepting spirit of the island community, the Island Autism Center will provide social, physical, and emotional benefits for the island's autistic population, making it more likely that families will stay together.



The Island Autism Group

The Island Autism Group, Inc., (IAG) is a well-established 501(c)(3) non-profit that serves autistic children and their families on Martha's Vineyard. IAG was founded in 2008 by Kate DeVane and Marcy Bettencourt, both mothers of young sons with autism. Since its inception, IAG has helped autistic children on the Island access extracurricular programs, equipment and any other resources necessary and beneficial for their development. IAG works closely with teachers, therapists, parents, friends, and partner organizations interested in supporting those with autism.

IAG funds comprehensive therapeutic services, activities and programs as well as hard goods and equipment — all with the goal of promoting inclusion in the community.

Since 2017, Island Autism has been offering afterschool and summer programming to 20+ students in two age groups: 5-10 years old, and 11-17 years old. Each program offers students afterschool opportunities similar to neurotypical students, to engage in therapeutic, social, and enrichment activities. Our programs serve students with autism and other disabilities. We are one of the only service providers on the island to provide extracurricular opportunities solely for disabled children.

Enrichment Activities and Programming Include:

- Therapeutic horseback riding at Misty Meadows
- Farming and working with animals at the Farm Institute
- Bowling at The Barn Bowl & Bistro
- Sailing through SailMV's SailMobility program
- Arts and crafts at the Edgartown Library
- Swimming at the YMCA
- Therapeutic drumming with Rick Bausman of Rhythm of Life





Our Team

IAG director, Kate DeVane, is an experienced businesswoman and a former teacher, in addition to being a parent of a child with autism. Kate has lived on Martha's Vineyard for more than 20 years and is landscape coordinator for Donaroma's Nursery and Landscape. She attended Cornell University where she earned her BFA, as well as the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. Kate was a teacher at The Foote School in New Haven, Connecticut, for five years. She has assembled a group of partners, advisors and supporters for the Center, who provide a wide range of program and administrative expertise and experience to work with her on this project.

The current IAG Board is made up

of seven members who are heavily invested in the work of IAG, and most have children with autism. Please see the list of names and bios on the Board Members page at islandautism.org.

The IAG Advisory Board is made up of eight members who are committed to furthering the work of IAG, and most have backgrounds in special education or family medicine.

Each of these boards meets on a regular basis, helping IAG develop its vision of the Center and refine its historic services and program offerings to better serve the island population. Many of the board members live and work on the Island and are invested in the community, committed to supporting families impacted by autism and focused on both short and long-term goals.

Our Mission

We strive for the lifelong independence, confidence, and happiness of autistic individuals and their families on Martha's Vineyard, through housing, life skills, enrichment, job training, and therapies.

Building on our work with children and adults since 2009, we are now focused on the following main objectives:

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recently released the results of a long-awaited study estimating the number of autistic adults living in the United States. They found that an estimated 5,437,988 (2.21%) adults in the United States have ASD, and that the highest prevalence live in Massachusetts.

- Raise awareness of autism in the community, including those on the island in current as well as future programs,
- Create and build an Island Autism Center to include farm land and residences in West Tisbury, and
- Provide educational programs and events to our residents, the community, and to summer residents.





The Island Autism Center

Our vision for the Center is to provide a residential opportunity for adults with autism to develop life and job skills through meaningful work and have a structured, purpose-driven life. Our secondary goal is to create inclusive educational spaces so that extended families, the local community and island visitors can all enjoy and benefit from the programs and learning opportunities we will provide.

The Island Autism Group has identified approximately 200 year-round residents, including 56 school-aged children diagnosed on the autism spectrum, undiagnosed adults, and family members impacted by autism. We also serve individuals and families who are summer visitors to the island. We estimate the potential number each summer to be 50-100 children

or adults with autism or other disabilities who would benefit from the programs to be offered at the Center.

The Martha's Vineyard community as a whole is one focused on sustainability. The Center aims to contribute by offering programming and activities on the benefits of micro farming and animal husbandry.

A major focus of the Center will be to prepare adults with autism for employment and therefore their independence.

The recent pandemic that caused schools and other programs to close highlighted the importance of high school seniors with autism having well defined support for their transition to a job-training program or additional schooling.

The country has also seen an increase in the number of autistic students and hence, the need for

support in school, and expanded programs after school and after graduation from high school.

Having a transition plan in place removes the stress and the unknown for both the adult and for the family. The support that has allowed the student to complete high school by their 22nd birthday must continue in order to increase the probability of achieving an independent and fulfilling life.

We will staff the Center with experienced Islanders already working with our island population. During the summer months, we will also welcome graduate and undergraduate students seeking practical, hands-on experience within their special education programs of study.

By collaborating with existing and future partners in the community, our micro farming activities and events will help promote inclusiveness.

The Opportunity

The real need we see now is to help children and adults with autism learn how to be independent and productive members in the community where they already live.

To accomplish that, we need to train and educate participants in vocations, such as (but not limited to) farming, so they can live and work in their community. By collaborating with existing and future community partners, our micro farming activities and events will help promote inclusiveness.

To reach our goals, we will need a considerably larger budget, additional staff and new partnerships that can offer us expertise in micro farming and residential housing programs.

Our goal is to provide educational, physical, emotional, social, and community support to persons with autism and their families right where they live, providing families with an alternative to the heart-wrenching decision to be separated because they need resources, programs or support not available on the Island.

The Strategy

We have been focused on collaborating with multiple interested island organizations and individuals to create the best approach and a sound plan to:

- Secure the funds needed to purchase a specific property in West Tisbury,

- Re-work the land for micro farming,
- Renovate an existing building for offices and build new residential units, and
- Build additional residential units in future years.

Our two primary partners for the acquisition and development of the Center are the **Island Housing Trust (IHT)** and the **Martha's Vineyard Land Bank Commission (MVLB)**.

We are working with IHT and the MVLB to negotiate the purchase, build-out and future improvements for the 17.5 acre property.



The Center will provide:

Co-Housing

Through our collaboration with the Island Housing Trust, we will provide eight residential units in a variety of configurations, for 12-18 residents as well as 24-hour on-site staff. There will also be a common-house and a barn with space for community meetings, a kitchen, an exercise studio, a media room, and a library.

Programming

We will continue and expand upon our support for adolescents and adults on the autism spectrum with therapeutic and enrichment programs and opportunities tailored to the individual needs of residents. The Center will be the hub of IAG's summer camp and afterschool programs. Adult residents will interact with younger children with autism in a way that builds positive connections and community, serving as positive mentors and role models. There will be many opportunities for community integration through transportation

and ongoing year-round partnerships with island organizations and businesses. Community spaces in the house and barn will facilitate collaboration and critical coordination among family, friends, schools, and community members.

Community Micro Farm

Guided by the horticultural expertise of our founder and other community farmers, we plan to create a community farm that will grow a variety of fruits and vegetables. The farm would provide hands-on opportunities for all members of the Center to participate in and learn about planting, harvesting, and conservation. There will be job opportunities in the barn, in the kitchen, in the camp store, and in the farm garden.

We envision community-centric endeavors at the Center, where autistic members of the Island community lead enriched lives by the day-to-day activities and contact within and outside of the Center. We hope to have visitors come to purchase our produce, eggs, artwork, and other items. Our adult residents could also sell what they harvest and make at the Farmers Market.

Our Three Year Plan

Phase 1: 2020

- IHT will fund the purchase and own the 7.5 acre portion that includes the barn, house and open fields. IHT as a Community Land Trust is part of the logic of IHT holding land ownership.
- MVLB will fund the purchase

and own 10 acres abutting the 7.5 acre property, and advise IAG on the future use of the undeveloped land, including woodlands.

- IAG will lease the 7.5 acres from IHT, and operate the programs, collaborating with IHT of the build-out and enhancements to the buildings and the farmland. IAG will hold ownership of the existing

house, and the land lease will be in perpetuity.

- We will work closely with our partners, investors and donors to secure total funding of \$650,000 and purchase the West Tisbury property: \$400,000 for our 33% contribution to the land purchase by October 2020, and \$250,000 to renovate the existing house.



Phase 2: 2021

House Renovation

We will begin with a renovation of the existing house on the property. It will be used for IAG offices, as a common-space for residents, and as our programs hub.

Residences

Spearheaded by IHT, planning, design and permitting will be completed for 8 residential units. We will onboard 10-15 residents.

Micro Farm

Working with partners in the island farming community, a micro farm program will be designed. Re-work of the fields will be completed and ready for implementation.

Barn & Farm Stand

A multi-level barn adjacent to the house will be designed to support farming and animal husbandry, as well as functioning as a community meeting space. The existing farm stand will be renovated and ready to operate.

Programming

We will continue to expand our existing year-round extracurricular activities and after-school programming.

Activities such as farming, therapeutic drumming, arts & crafts, yoga, cooking, and more will take place at the Center for children as well as adults.

Staff

We will onboard four new full-time positions: executive director, human resources manager, development manager, and an office administrator.

Development

We will raise \$2,800,000 needed to complete the Center work and fund operations.

Phase 3: 2022

House

We will explore an expansion of the house depending on need.

Residences

Construction of residences will be completed, and residents will move in, late in 2022.

Micro Farm

We will work with partners at island farms to continue to expand and develop micro farm operations.

Barn & Farm Stand

We will complete construction of the barn. The farm stand will be fully operational and open to the public, staffed by interested residents and youth program participants.

The Future

Our long-term vision for the Center includes expanding with additional autism-friendly co-housing for autistic adults. We look to successful models such as Sweetwater Spectrum in Sonoma, California and Farmsteads of New England in Hillsborough, NH.

We believe the Center itself will serve as a model, building upon the island community's unique acceptance of abilities and differences to show how it's possible to fully integrate residents and participants in employment and social settings.

Who We Serve

The Market

Unfortunately, our "market" is enormous and growing fast. In a recent estimate, the Center for Disease Control, CDC, stated that 1 in 54 children is currently diagnosed with autism, and the number increases every year. While innovative interventions and therapies and assistive technologies emerge every year to help those children learn to become independent adults, too few receive them. Services are inconsistently delivered due to budget constraints nationwide.

In Massachusetts alone, an analysis of basic Census and CDC numbers and an adjustment for age categories tells us that there are approximately 19,569 school age children between the ages of 5 and 22 on the autism spectrum. On the Island itself, we currently have 450 children with special needs, we know of approximately 50 children who are likely day camp candidates for our first summer. The autistic population regularly swells to over 200 in the summer as summer Vineyard residents return.

It is harder to accurately track the number of adults living with





ASD due to a higher number of those undiagnosed, that there is no tracking system for those over 22-years old. However, we now know there is a significant and growing population of young adults who have recently turned 22, or who will be in the next few years.

We have been focusing on the group of autistic children on the Vineyard who have nowhere to go for summer camp or for after-school activities and their families. These young residents are in dire need of programs that can help facilitate their social, emotional, and physical development. Only occasional programming or support is currently available on the Island outside of the school system. Moreover, as these children move towards adulthood, programs for their housing, training, and vocational opportunities are desperately needed to help them

gain independence, realize their potential and contribute to their community. IAG is seeking to address these urgent needs.

Competition

Competitive Day Camps

For our target population, there is virtually no competition here on Martha's Vineyard. Camp Jabberwocky, a well-established camp for children and adults with cerebral palsy does not consider us a competitor because the needs of our two populations are different. Furthermore Camp Jabberwocky has 100 campers on its waiting list, and the current director has indicated that they could make referrals to IAG for appropriate individuals. While Camp Jabberwocky accepts campers with autism, it was founded as a camp for children with cerebral palsy and the specific needs of children with autism are neither its focus

nor its particular mission. Camp Jabberwocky also does not provide a family camp experience.

For the 20,000 children who have autism in the rest of Massachusetts, there are approximately 15-20 camps, each which serves an average of about 200 campers during the summer. If we round those numbers up grandly, we have only about 4,000 camping spaces available for about 20,000 children. This estimate is useful in a general sense — there are nearly five times as many young people on the autism spectrum in Massachusetts as there are camp spaces to serve them.

Moreover, those camps are difficult





for parents to find, access, and apply to. Because of the huge range of needs and abilities among individuals on the autism spectrum, camps are careful to specify eligibility requirements.

Camps that serve multiple disabilities are less selective, but also less specifically therapeutic in a way that can help youth on the autism spectrum gain specific social and behavioral tools they need.

The “come as you are” approach to special needs camps, generous as it is, can be merely a holding pattern for autism spectrum youth capable of progress in a different, more specifically tailored, type of environment.

Marketing and Development

In order to meet our ambitious fundraising and expansion goals, IAG will leverage social media, our donors, local networks and our partnerships with island organizations and businesses to expand the awareness of the need for support for children and adults with autism.

More importantly, we will utilize our business plan and our management team to educate potential funders and partners about the project and how we can work to make it a reality over the next three years.

Management and Personnel

The Center will be led by the IAG’s president, Kate DeVane. As the full-time executive director of the Center, Kate will oversee all aspects of its operations and will be part of a team of dedicated individuals devoted to the Center’s success and mission.

We envision hiring additional employees, including an executive director, a human resources manager, a development manager, and an office administrator to work with our current programming director and part-time staff.

We have already spoken to representatives at Mass General, Children's Hospital, and Lesley University, about our staffing needs and we believe these institutions, among others, are fertile ground for us to recruit appropriate summer staff. Kitchen, grounds and maintenance staff will also be needed.

Location and Facilities

The Center will be located in West Tisbury, where we will have 17.5 acres to allow for both seclusion and inclusion. We anticipate that we will have a large main building with accommodations for guest speakers, meeting space, dining space, office

and a professional kitchen where young adults can learn cooking skills and where meals and snacks will be prepared for campers and families.

The location of the property in West Tisbury is ideal. It is just off one of the island's main roads in the North Tisbury business district, including Island Gymnastics, the Martha's Vineyard Public Charter School, Cronigs Market and Conroy Apothecary.

It is also a 5-minute walk from a major bus route and only 10 minutes from the Vineyard Haven ferry terminal.

Additional facilities include

adequate space for camp activities such as arts and crafts, drumming, music, yoga, and others. A barn with stalls for horses, goats, chickens, etc. would be ideal. There will be open space for group activities and team building. The property will be large enough to accommodate added structures as the Center expands.



West Tisbury site

We are asking donors to take a big leap with us – trusting in our experience, expertise, resources and commitment. Our goal is comprehensive, wraparound services with well-coordinated support and activities designed to enable individuals with autism to lead the best lives possible. Please contact us to review the detailed financial projections for the Center and see how you can help!



Financials

Our growth plan includes two categories of expenses: capital expenditures and operating costs.

Capital Expenditures: \$6 million

Operating Costs (Approximately \$600,000 in Year 1)

We are partnering with The Martha's Vineyard Land Bank and the Island Housing Trust for the purchase, house renovation and future housing construction of the Center. The property will then be leased to IAG for \$1 a year.

We have projected an additional \$2.5 million will be needed for renovations, furnishings, fencing, engineering fees, and other miscellaneous costs.

We will be responsible for contributing one third of costs to purchase land, buildings and for new construction.

We have just completed our three year growth plan, which includes details on funding, costs and the build-out of the Island Autism Center.

To hear more about the plan details, please contact our president, Kate DeVane, at 508-693-2568 or email her at kate@islandautism.org





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