



The Island Autism Center



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.



Island
Autism

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 primarily for disabled children.

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.

The Island Autism Team

Kate DeVane is the mother of 17 year-old boy/girl twins. Her son is on the autism spectrum. She has lived year-round on Martha's Vineyard for over 25 years. She and Marcy Bettencourt founded the Island Autism Group when their boys



were in Project Headway preschool together. Kate was the landscape coordinator for Donaroma's Nursery and Landscape for 20 years until she retired to follow her passion of helping people with autism full time.

Kate attended Cornell University, where she earned her bachelor of fine arts degree. She also attended Scotland's St. Andrews University and taught at The Foote School in New Haven, Conn., for five years. Kate is one of the West Tisbury representatives on the Up-Island School Committee and Chair of All Island School Committees. She was previously chair of the Martha's

Vineyard Parent Advisory Council on Special Education and is on the board of the Cape Cod Collaborative representing Martha's Vineyard. She was a runner for the Martha's Vineyard Community Services' Possible Dreams auction for more than 20 years. Kate, her husband, two children, and three dogs live in West Tisbury.

The current IAG Board is made up of nine members who are heavily invested in the work of IAG, and many have children with autism. Please see the list of names and bios on the Board Members page at islandautism.org.

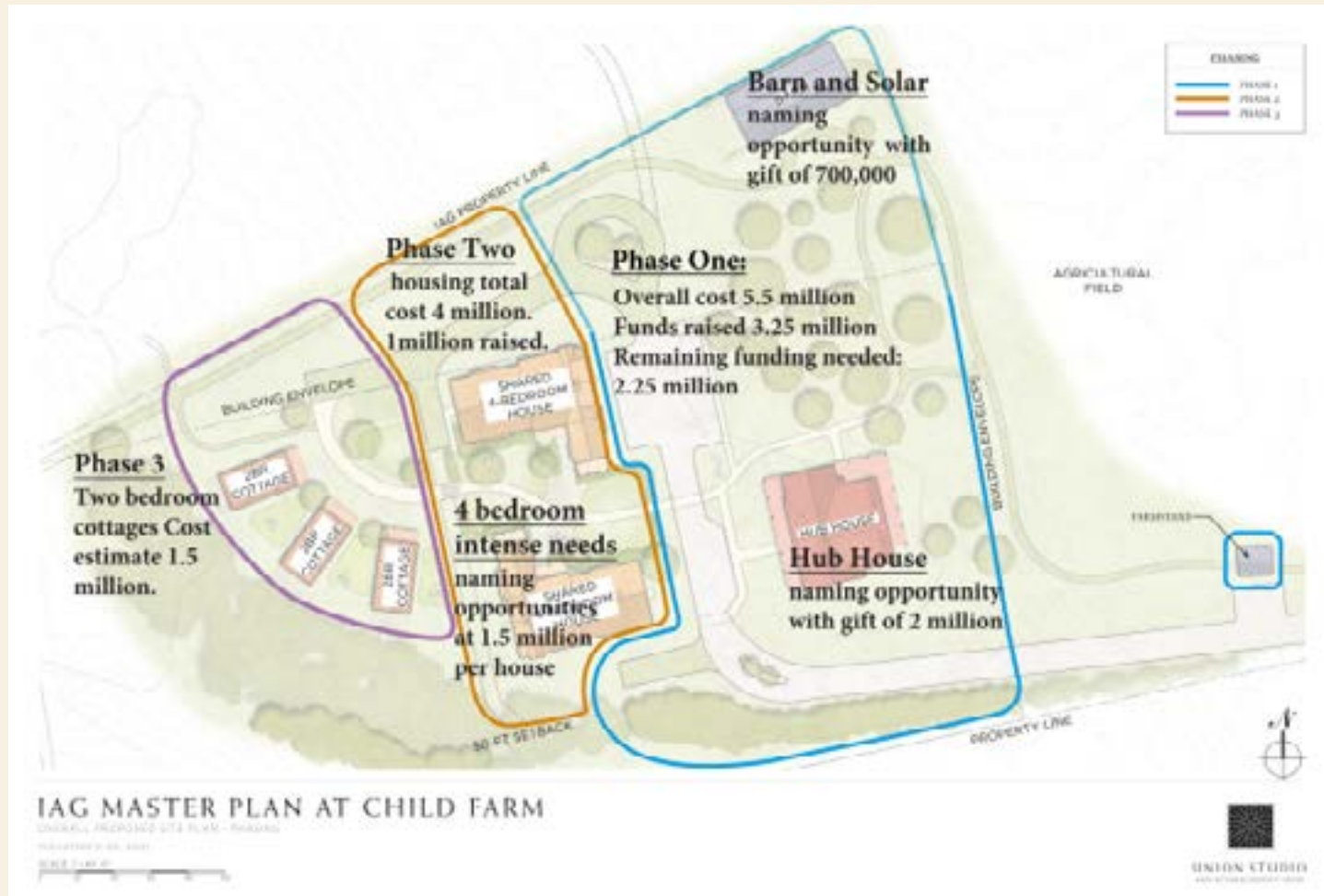
The IAG Advisory Board is made up of eight members who are committed to furthering the work of IAG, and most have backgrounds in special education or family medicine.

Each of these boards meets on a regular basis, helping IAG develop its vision for the Center and refine its historic services and program offerings to continuously improve services for 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.



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 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 autistic 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.

Phase One

Phase One is already well underway. This first phase includes the acquisition of the property, the build out of the farm structures (including the barn and farmstand), and the construction of the Hub House, which will be the center of programming at Island Autism.

The farmstand, fenced-in gardens, and chicken runs are all completed and will open in June 2023. Our members will work on the farm to develop their skills, spend time with the chickens, collect eggs, and harvest and take our farm products



to the farmer's market twice a week. This programming is open to the older high school group and our new group for members age 22 and up. The younger kids will do planting projects, play with chickens, and have outdoor yoga at the farm.

The barn is a beautiful post and beam kit from the same company that designed our farmstand. If you have not seen the farmstand you should come and visit and see this beautiful building that was generously donated by the West Chop Community Foundation!

The barn is a 30' x 60' structure with space for farm animals. The roof

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.

space will accommodate solar panels to supply electricity to the entire campus. The post and beam kit is already funded. The foundation is due to go in at the end of July or August. We expect the barn

construction to begin in late August and be completed by early October.

The Hub House is the heart and location for all of our programming. The downstairs includes a mud room, a commercial kitchen, a gathering space, a quiet space, a mailroom, and two offices. When young adults come to the Hub House, they might work in the kitchen, meet with a job coach, or have a full person-centered planning meeting with some of our staff and other partner organizations. The gathering space will provide space for our younger campers to meet, relax, read books, and interact with others in a stress-free environment.

On a typical day, our residents might get up in the morning, collect eggs, bring them to the kitchen and have coffee or tea with staff, and then head out to jobs in the community. Some might wait for the van to take them to a job or activity, and some might work on the farm, in the kitchen, or another job on campus. We call this model the "ripple effect". Each person starts at their own comfort level in their own space, then moves up to more public spaces on campus, and finally "ripples out" into the community where they will be well prepared and trained to take on a full and active life.

We expect the Hub House to be completed in January 2024. Along with the barn completion in the fall of 2023 and the farmstand already completed this summer, all of our day programming will be up and running by the summer of 2024.

Phase One is a \$5.5M project - of which \$2.5M has already been raised. The remainder is to be funded by a 501(c)(3) bond mortgage which we hope to pay off with multi-year pledges.

Phase Two

Phase Two is the first of a two-part on-campus residential programming piece. To be clear, many of our members do not need



to, and should not live on campus. The residential component is only for those who need the support and security of such a living situation. More independent members of our community might access the Day Side daily weekly or monthly as needed but phase two is for the most vulnerable of our group.

Phase Two is the construction of two residential programming buildings for people who require 24/7 care. Each building has four single bedrooms with a private bath and caretaker space for a possible adult foster care position. There is an application process in order to qualify to be part of a pool

from which a lottery drawing will be pulled. The applications will be scored by a committee made of community members. Points will be given for long-term Island residents and all applicants must have low income status and section 8 voucher eligibility.

The six island towns have already committed \$1M to this portion of the project through Community Preservation Funds.

We hope to start Phase two in the fall of 2023 and complete the project in the spring of 2025.



The Center will provide:

Residences

We will provide eight residential units in a variety of configurations, for 12-18 residents, some with 24-hour on-site staff. There will also be a common-house (Hub House) and a barn with space for community meetings, day programming, and a commercial kitchen. The upstairs of the Hub House will have an apartment for a farm manager as well as guest rooms for visiting speakers and relatives.

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 farmstand.

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.



Phase Three

Phase Three is the build of three 2-bedroom cottages that will offer multiple housing opportunities for individuals with autism. It could provide two people with a semi-independent living situation, where they'd live without in-house overnight supervision, knowing that if there was an emergency they are next door to an overnight staff person and help in the event of an emergency. Or, a single an intense-needs individual could live in one of the cottages with 24/7 one-on-one care. Finally, highly independent individuals who worked on site could have a living space, keeping in mind that all applicants must have autism or autism-related disorders.

This portion of the project is not yet scheduled but we will start phase three as soon as phase two is underway and securely funded.

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.

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 re-work the land for micro farming, and build additional residential units in future years.

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. Throughout the next 5 years, we will work with partners at island farms to continue to expand and develop micro farm operations.

Barn & Farm Stand

A multi-level barn adjacent to the house will be designed to support farming as well as functioning as a



community space.

By 2024, construction of the barn will be completed. The farm stand will be fully operational and open to the public, staffed by interested residents and youth program participants.

Development

We will raise \$1,500,000 for each the next five years as we develop the property. We are funded by MVBank, The Life Initiative and Mass Development. This mortgage is combined with donations, grants and Community Preservation funds to cover the costs of the

project. We are currently seeking donations in three year pledges to pay down the debt but are pressing forward so we can use the space we are so lucky to have.

We will finish the housing and begin placing residents in 2025 - 2026. We will populate the farm with sheep and chickens, plant the vegetable and floral gardens, establish the kitchen program and fundraise for a rainy day fund.

The Future

Our five-year 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, both of whom we have consulted with.

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.



A Little Background Info

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 seasonal Vineyard residents return.

It is harder to accurately track the number of adults living with ASD due to a higher number of adults being undiagnosed. 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 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 afterschool activities. 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.

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.

Location and Facilities

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 the Martha's Vineyard Public Charter School, Cronigs Market, Conroy Apothecary, and the West Tisbury Post Office.

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

Operations

Island Autism currently runs year round afterschool and summer programming for school age kids up to age 22. In the summer of 2023 we are piloting our post-22 program, a full day of programming with job training activities in the morning, lunch, and leisure activities in the afternoon with our high school group. We are also working on our preschool fun yoga groups and farm play dates. Both of these groups that bookend our existing programming are designed to further expand our goal to “do what you love and make it a job”.

As the Center is finished, we will continue to provide job training opportunities and social connections with mentor programs, social events and connections with the wider community.

We are at the farmers market and opened our farm stand in late June. Our chicken program continues to thrive as one of our first job training opportunities.

There is so much more to come.



West Tisbury site



Financials

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

Capital Expenditures: \$1.5 million for five years

Annual Operating Costs: \$200,000 (2021)

We are partnering with the Martha's Vineyard Land Bank for the purchase and future housing construction of the Center.

As we enter year two, we have updated our five-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 director, Kate DeVane, at 508-939-0668 or email her at kate@islandautism.org.



IAG - HOUSING AT CHILD FARM
PERSPECTIVE RENDERING, COURTYARD VIEW



Island Autism Group Inc. LLC

islandautism.org

P.O. Box 2786

Edgartown, MA 02539