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**Maine**

# Autism



Summer 2024

## Connections

### Best Buddies Maine: Building Bridges of Friendship and Inclusion

Brooke and her classmates at Thornton Academy are just a handful of the many students and adults involved with Best Buddies Maine, a local nonprofit dedicated to fostering friendships, promoting inclusion, and empowering individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) to lead fulfilling lives and connect with their communities.



*Gabe Brewington & Ron Manizza competing in the 20-mile race at the 2023 Best Buddies Hyannis Port Challenge*

BBME is a subset of Best Buddies International®, founded in 1989 by Anthony K. Shriver at Georgetown University. Today, Best Buddies' formal pillars — One-to-One Friendships, Leadership Development, Assisted Employment, Inclusive Living, and Family Support — engage participants in each of the 50 states and 56 countries and territories, positively impacting the lives of over 1.3 million people with and without disabilities around the world. In many cases, as a result of their involvement with Best Buddies, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities secure rewarding jobs, live independently, become inspirational leaders, and build lifelong friendships.

"Some of the students may have different abilities, but we are all teenagers going to the same school. Hanging out at hockey games, magic shows, and the movies made me realize how fortunate I am to be around happy, funny, honest, and kind people."

- Brooke Helgesen, Chapter President at Thornton Academy

Story continued on Page 3

**The Connection is you.**

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**Editorial Notes:** Maine Autism Connections and Autism Society of Maine programs and services are made possible by donations from people like you and funding from the Maine Department of Health & Human Services. We hope you will also visit us online at [www.asmonline.org](http://www.asmonline.org), where we have a great deal of information available about autism, programs, resources, news, a calendar of events, legislation and more.

Hello Fellow ASM members,,

Happy summer. As I am sitting here writing this note to you all it is warm and muggy, so it really feels like summer. I hope this note finds you all well. I know this can be a fun time of the year, but also stressful for our autism community. ASM will be holding some fun things to help families this summer.

First, we will be holding some playground pals meet-ups for families. These are scheduled for Wednesday in the Bangor region. We are looking to get some set up for the Winthrop region soon. If you would like more information, please reach out to Jennifer at [infospec@asmonline.org](mailto:infospec@asmonline.org).

ASM will be holding our family retreat weekend in June. We are excited to have Christopher Banks, the CEO of national joining us at the retreat this year. The retreat is always a fun and exciting time for families. If you have not joined ASM on Facebook please do, we post summer fun things that are happening in Maine as we find out about them.

We would like to thank everyone who came out for the autism walks in Westbrook and Bangor. We had the most we have ever had at the Bangor walk. Both walks were a fantastic way to see everyone. We have a benefit golf tournament which will happen on July 20th. If interested, please reach out the society.

Hopefully, everyone can find some time to enjoy the summer in Maine. Whatever activities your family enjoys I hope you have time this summer. Find time to relax and recharge, because as we know in Maine summer is short and we will be thinking about going back to school and fall before we know it.

Be Safe, Sincerely, *Christina Nason, Board President*



## ASM Membership

**Join the growing number of families,** professionals and community members that make up the Autism Society Maine.

Together we can bring meaningful resources in our community.

The connection is you. [ASM Membership](#)

### ASM's Mission Statement

The Autism Society of Maine creates connections, empowering everyone in the Autism community with the resources to live fully.

# Best Buddies Maine: Building Bridges of Friendship and Inclusion *Continued from cover*

Best Buddies only recently found its way to Maine, but its impact in the past few years has already been visible and long-lasting. At the core of BBME is its Friendship program, a transformative initiative that encourages interaction between people with and without disabilities. Through carefully curated matches based on shared interests and compatibility, the program creates opportunities for genuine connections to blossom. These friendships extend beyond surface-level interactions, providing buddies with a sense of belonging, support, and camaraderie



*"Everyone deserves a Buddy like mine. Becca is accommodating, kind, and responsive to me. We love going to breakfast and spending time together. With your hard work and dedication, we can make friendships like ours a reality for all Mainers with IDD."*

*— Tucker Conley, State Ambassador & Advisory Board*

Currently, Best Buddies Maine has 43 school friendship chapters for students ranging from elementary to collegiate, as well as 4 "Citizens" chapters for adults, community members, and corporate volunteers. These chapters meet regularly and pair their members in friendship matches as they present themselves, as well as participate in several statewide Best Buddies events like the [Friendship Walks](#) in Portland and Bangor, the annual [Hyannis Port Challenge](#), and the [Best Buddies Leadership Conference](#) at Indiana University. Maine also has an active Ambassadors program that offers leadership training and public speaking opportunities for people from and supporting the IDD community, encouraging people to share their stories with disability and why inclusion is important to them. As the organization continues to grow year after year, BBME is excitedly working towards expanding its offerings to include the rest of the BBI pillars, mainly Transitions and Assisted Employment services, in the near future.

Behind the success of Best Buddies Maine is a dedicated team of staff, volunteers, and supporters who are passionate about making a difference. From program managers and faculty advisors who facilitate buddy matches to volunteers who lend their time and expertise, everyone plays a vital role in advancing the organization's mission.

If you or a loved one is looking to get plugged in with your local disability community, or is simply looking for a friend, you can find more information at [www.bestbuddies.org/Maine](http://www.bestbuddies.org/Maine) or on social media at Best Buddies Maine and @bestbuddiesme.

## ASM Award Nominations

### Do you know someone who is deserving of recognition?

Let the Autism Society of Maine recognize them with an award. Deadline for submissions no later than September 1, 2024

More information and [Nomination form here](#) or call ASM for the form: 1-800-273-5200.



### Following are the categories of awards ASM presents:

- Professionals - not in the field of Autism, but contributing to it
- Family Members or Persons with Autism
- Professionals Providing Services

# 131st Legislature Highlights

The ASM Legislative Committee spent time during this session working toward developing a process for reviewing and tracking bills of import to the ASM, its members, and all impacted by legislation and policy related to autism. We instituted a tracking system, and increased our capacity to stay informed with respect to bills being monitored by groups with shared and/or overlapping interests including the Consumer Council System of Maine (CCSM), Disability Rights Maine (DRM), and the Maine Coalition for Housing and Quality Services (CHQS) as tracked by the Maine Association for Community Service Providers (MACSP). I participate on the CCSM Legislative and Issues Committees and regularly attend the CHQS meetings. The ASM Legislative Committee, on behalf of the Board, hopes to build on such relationships during the upcoming 132nd Legislature which will convene for its first session in January 2025 (following Fall elections).

During the session which concluded this past April, the ASM Legislative Committee monitored a number of bills; testifying on two. Written testimony was submitted neither for nor against LD 345 An Act Regarding Educational Policies and Programs – renamed and funded as An Act to Transition the Responsibility for Child Find and for ensuring a Free, Appropriate Public Education for Eligible Children from the Child Development Services System to School Administrative Units. The ASM's and other constituent input was well reflected in the final (renamed) version of LD 345 which provided the language and funding criteria as adopted in the updated State budget.

For LD 2166 An Act to Establish a Grant Program to Increase Postsecondary Educational Opportunities for Students with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities or Autism Spectrum Disorder, written testimony was submitted in favor. While LD 2166 was well supported and passed, it never moved on for funding and so “died” without becoming law. Many interested parties likely will renew a process to seek passage of such legislation in the upcoming 132nd Legislature. Additionally, my position on the Lifespan Waiver Development Stakeholder Group and membership on the Maine Developmental Services Oversight and Advisory Board (MDS OAB) allowed for ongoing input to discussions related to the Lifespan Waiver development process – introduced in the 131st Legislature as LD 659 An Act to Promote Seamless and Flexible Home and Community Supports Across the Lifespan for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities or Autism, and ultimately incorporated into and funded by the updated State budget.

The ASM Legislative Committee's Tracking Sheet offers a full outline of each bill tracked including the title, sponsor(s), assigned committee, bill summary, and final status as well as relevant links to text and related documents. *Continued on page 5*

# 131st Legislature Highlights

*Continued from page 4*

Additional highlights from the 131st Legislature are reflected in other components of the updated State budget.

DHHS -

- funding to continue 125%/AAAA initiative for Direct Care Service rates and annual COLA for rates that have not been adjusted under the new Rate Setting System
- allocated dollars to clear the Section 29 waitlist by June of 2025, and additional money to support people on Section 21 waitlist (level 1)

DOE/CDS -

- allocations to support the 55% state funding for K - 12 education
- funding requirements for ed techs and other school support staff to increase pay by establishing a base minimum wage
- a funding plan over 2 years for additional preschool programming to “bring Maine into compliance with IDEA”
- one-time funding to Child Development Services (CDS) in Fiscal Year 2024 to pay for the educational services provided by special purpose preschools while the Department of Education (DOE) establishes a daily rate for the 2024-2025 school year

Other -

- establishment of an Office of Violence Prevention
- additional Crisis Receiving Centers - in Lewiston, Penobscot county, and Aroostook county - modeled off the evidenced-based model piloted in Portland; and direction for the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to proceed with a plan to create a statewide network of such centers
- funding for Mobile Crisis Support Teams

As developments with all of the State budget components and related initiatives/expansions move forward, the ASM Legislative Committee will need to monitor the outcomes of the CDS transition as well as the capacity/effectiveness of the Receiving Centers and (Mobile) Crisis Response services to meet the needs of autistic individuals. The Committee also is preparing to work collaboratively to draft a proposal and seek legislative sponsor(s) for a bill related to Medicaid (MaineCare) funding of safety items.

With the start of a new Legislature, it will be a fast-paced and busy period from January – June 2015 so...stay tuned.

Reported on behalf of the ASM Legislative Committee,  
J. Richardson Collins, MTS, MSW, Community Outreach Liaison

# WALK FOR AUTISM - BANGOR & WESTBROOK

For many, the Walk for Autism event is an annual ritual that marks the start of spring and getting outside after the long winter season.

Two Walk for Autism events were held in April and in celebration of Autism Acceptance Month. The first Walk for Autism was held at the Westbrook Riverbank Park on April 21st and the second in Bangor on April 28th. Both events sparked with vibrant music, vendors showcased their resources with activities & giveaways, and Free games were offered with small prizes. Face painting, popcorn and games set up on the green in a cloud of bubbles made it a festive affair!

A special shout-out goes to our dedicated team of volunteers who generously share their time with us. We depend on these wonderful individuals for various tasks, and their support is invaluable. Thank you for being there for us.

We also extend a heartfelt thank you to everyone who registered, formed teams, created fundraising pages, and donated. Your involvement is truly priceless, and we deeply appreciate your support for the Autism Community. [Visit ASM's photo gallery for more pics!](#)



**Westbrook  
Riverbank Park, April 21st**

**Westbrook Walk  
\$22,780 364 Participants  
at event Top Individual:  
Matteo Williams  
Top Team: Foothills  
Flooring and Tile**



**Bangor  
Waterfront Park, April 28th**

**Bangor Walk \$16,357  
606 Participants at event  
Top Individual:  
Backing Brynn  
Top Team: Ian the  
Incredible**



# Thank You!

*The Walk for Autism is made possible by our Corporate Sponsors,  
We value their participation and give our heartfelt appreciation.*

## PRESENTING OUR DIAMOND SPONSORS



Foothills Flooring & Tile  
*Home of the crawling craftsmen*



SPURWINK



BULL RUN STRIPING

## PRESENTING OUR PLATINUM SPONSORS



Maine Behavioral  
Healthcare  
MaineHealth



Heartleaf ABA

## PRESENTING OUR GOLD SPONSORS



# A 'Sea of Blue' runs through Northeast Harbor to raise funds for Autism

by Faith DeAmbrose, Mount Desert Islander

NORTHEAST HARBOR — With 36 runners and 100 walkers, the annual Sea of Blue 5K took place on April 27 under bright, blue skies.

The race, now in its ninth year, raised approximately \$10,000 to fund programs that help support families and individuals with autism. With donations still coming in and being tallied, Susan Heel, who organizes the race with her son Christopher and husband Matt, said she was pleased with the turnout this year.



Cathy Dionne, ASM & Chris Heel

Heel said the family already has their eyes set on the 10th running of the race next year and hopes to expand the race offerings to include a 10K and children's run.

The scene inside The Neighborhood House, where the race begins and ends, was lively as racers got ready and community members bid on silent auction items that spanned the room. From a large Webber grill to gift certificates to local restaurants, there were dozens of items to bid on.

## Autism Board of Directors

**Would you like to become part of a team that helps navigate services in Maine for children and Autistic adults?**

Think about becoming a board member for the Autism Society of Maine and that is what you will be doing. The board helps determine what bills to follow or testify on to which group ASM needs to participate with. The board belongs to many stakeholder groups with the Office of Ageing and Disability Services.

The Autism Society of Maine (ASM) Board of Directors (BOD) consists of fifteen members. The BOD has members from all over the state. There are Autistic Adults, Parents, Caregivers, and Professionals. BOD serve a 3-year term and voted in by the paid membership of ASM.

Our mission is to create connections, empowering everyone in the Autism community with the resources needed to live fully.

The vision for the Autism Society is to create a world where everyone in the Autism community is connected to the support they need, when they need it.

Once you fill out the application a member of ASM will call and set up an interview. After the interview ASM will review the candidates and determine who is the best fit according to a matrix.

BOD application

If you would like more information about the Board of Directors, please email [boarddirectors@asmonline.org](mailto:boarddirectors@asmonline.org)





# Upcoming Events



**Save Date!**  
**ASM'S FALL CONFERENCE**

**Saturday, November 2, 2024**  
**Cross Insurance Center**  
**Bangor, ME**



**RIDE FOR AUTISM**  
**Saturday, September 14, 2024**  
**Kennebunk Conservation Trust**  
**Kennebunk, ME**  
**Registration is open!**



**BENEFIT GOLF TOURNAMENT**  
**July 20, 2024**  
**495 Hunting Hill Rd.**  
**Litchfield, ME**  
**Registration is Open!**

**18th Annual**  
**RIDE FOR AUTISM**  
**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2024**  
**KENNEBUNKPORT, ME**  
**50, 25, 10 MILE RIDES!**

**10 miles**  
**25 miles**  
**50 miles**

**REGISTRATION IS OPEN!**





**BENEFIT GOLF TOURNAMENT**  
**4-PERSON SCRAMBLE**

All Proceeds go to the Autism Society of Maine




**Lunch Provided**  
**50/50 Raffle**  
**Top 2 Gross/Net**  
**Closest to Pin**  
**Long Drive**  
**Putting Contest**  
**Beat the Pro**

**495 Huntington Hill Road Litchfield, ME**

**25 Team Max \$500/Team Register by 7/08/24**

<b>SATURDAY</b>	<b>Registration</b>	<b>Shot Gun</b>
<b>20th JULY 2024</b>	<b>8AM</b>	<b>9AM</b>

<https://bit.ly/3QAWz2K>      ASM: 1-800-273-5200

**ASM ANNUAL MEETING - SAVE DATE!**

**Are you a paid member of ASM?** Please join us for our Annual Meeting at the Senator Inn and Spa, 284 Western Ave. Augusta, ME. The meeting will begin @ 6pm, with a delicious dinner.

Come hear all that ASM has accomplished this year, meet our Board Members, welcome the new members, and meet ASM staff. We will also be announcing the winners of the ASM Awards.

This is a great opportunity to learn more about ASM and the services we provide for children, families and individuals here in Maine.

**The Annual Meeting is open to paid members of ASM and is also an RSVP event. Please call the office @ 800-273-5200 to reserve your seat. We really hope to see you there!**

# Homeschooling Workshop



## Join us at the Autism Society of Maine in Winthrop

Get to know Kat & Jen and why they homeschool. They will share their experiences and lessons learned that they wish they had known when starting out. Plus, learn hands-on as they guide you through creating your own portfolio, which you'll be able to take home with you! Topics include:



- Homeschool Requirements
- IEP's and school involvement
- Resources
- What Homeschool Looks Like
- Curriculum
- Portfolios vs Testing
- Tips & More



Workshop recommended for people starting to homeschool for the first time



RSVP: Jennifer [infospec@asmonline.org](mailto:infospec@asmonline.org) 1-800-273-5200

Limited seats available! Reserve yours today!

\*Disclaimer: This workshop is for informational purposes only. Consult with educational professionals for personalized advice.

# ASM GROUPS

Autism Society Maine **VIRTUAL** Suggested Ages 8-14

**MEET-UP FOR KIDS SUMMER FUN**

July Summer Jam Party!

August Gamer Night!

**FIRST WEDNESDAY OF THE MONTH 4PM-5PM**

Beat the Heat & Join us Online this Summer!  
We'll be playing 'Name That Tune', Trivia, Sharing Favorite Songs & Swapping Gamer Tags!

Chat will be moderated by Autism Society of Maine  
FMI Email: [infospec@asmonline.org](mailto:infospec@asmonline.org)

Autism Society Maine

**BANGOR AREA TEEN GROUP SUMMER HAPPENINGS**

A group for Autistic teens offering a safe space to socialize! Join us to talk, play games, and do crafts while we plan fun activities to do out in the community.

**June 6th**  
4:30-5:30pm  
**Boardgames!**  
Bangor Public Library  
3rd fl. Teen Study Room

**July 1st**  
11am Cascade Park  
\*Bring your own Lunch.  
Snack, or Coffee and join us for a picnic with an optional Hike through Saxl Park after.

**August 1st**  
4pm Fielder's Choice in Bangor  
Come Play 18 Holes of Mini Golf then treat yourself to Ice Cream!  
Golf-\$7.50 / Ice Cream Varies

FMI Call Jennifer 1-800-272-5200 | OR Email [info@asmonline.org](mailto:info@asmonline.org)

**ASM BOOK CLUB SUMMER READS**

1st Friday of the Month 10am-11am  
In-person at Bangor Public Library Board Room

June 7th: *The Journal of Best Practices* by David Finch  
July 5th: *Autism in Heels* by Jennifer Cook O' Toole  
August 2nd: *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night* by Mark Haddon

Autism Society

**Playground Pals Meet-ups Bangor Area**

- June 12th Brewer Playground 318 Wilson St.
- June 26th Bangor Capehart Playground & Splash Pad 161 Davis Rd.
- July 17th Hampden Playground 108 Western Ave.
- July 31st Old Town Playground & Splash Pad 151 Perkins Ave
- Aug 7th Bangor Stillwater Park 325 Howard St.
- Aug 21st West Enfield End of Summer Beach Party 11am-4pm  
Morgan's Beach Rd. meet under Pavillion!

**Playground Pals Meet-ups Winthrop**

Last Monday of the Month  
11am-1pm  
June 24th, July 29th, & August 26th  
United Methodist Church Playground 58 Main Street, Winthrop  
(Beside the Autism Society of Maine)

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

Call ASM: 1-800-273-5200

Email: [infospec@asmonline.org](mailto:infospec@asmonline.org)

[Support Groups Page](#)



# Donations / Sponsorships / Employee Matches / Grants

United Way of Kennebec Valley  
Bull Run Striping  
Sanford Elks Lodge # 1470  
Geddy's Pub- Bar Harbor  
Tyler Industries  
Allenfarm Fence Co.  
Hannaford - Waterville  
Winthrop Federal Credit Union  
PayPal Giving Fund  
Stephen Wilde Insurance (Allstate)

Darling's Ice Cream for a Cause  
Hannaford Union St. Bangor  
Hannaford - Brewer  
Carol & Matthew Sullivan  
Holy Trinity Philoptochos Society  
Andrew Bryant  
Frank's Restaurant and Pub  
Oceanside High School  
Hannaford - Whitten Road, Augusta



## In Memory of:

**Jacqueline "Beth" Thebarge**

Susan Gregoire

## In Honor of:

Michael Potvin

Marie Pottle

Teresa Potvin

Liam Smith by Deb Sugerman

**Facebook Fundraisers Mid-March  
through beginning of June hosted by:**

Bobbi Gammon, Jenna Woods, Kayla  
Loveitt, Chris Watters, Matt Heel, Beth  
Weiss, Kelley Frey, Rober Lou Beltejar,  
and Jenni Allyson

## Membership Renewals

Laurel Gerry-Porter

Roger & Sharon Crosby

Karen Lipiatos

Dr. Matt & Emily Siegal

Maurice & Rita Dionne

Lisa Vaillancourt

Sheryl Rogers

Karen Rea

Peggy Broekel

Melissa Fanjoy

Keith Pillsbury

Raffe Hopping

Donna Anderson

Spurwink

Beth & Ryan Whitehou

