



May the 4th Be With You!
Page 10

Legislation
Page 8

Maine

Autism



Winter 2024

Connections

Autism and Online Safety

Individuals on the Autism Spectrum are equally, if not more, intrigued by the Internet compared to their peers. This heightened interest can be attributed to the vast access to information and the opportunity for social communication that the online world provides. When considering the online presence of individuals with ASD, contact risks encompass issues such as cyberbullying, online scams, inappropriate content and sharing.

The Autism Society of Maine and Spectrum Generations wanted to offer a resource to address these issues and are pleased to announce the launch of a new video series titled "**Autism and Online Safety.**"

This series serves as a guide for adults with Autism and their care partners, providing valuable information on how to navigate the internet safely and enjoy a healthy online experience. We are excited to collaborate on this important project and look forward to empowering individuals with Autism to use the internet with confidence and security.

We are incredibly fortunate to have Shannon Moss, from the Maine Department of Public Safety, as the host of this series. The series was created and directed by Dan Lambert of Lambert Films, written by Philip Shelley, and narrated by Kathy Williamson. The graphics were done by Jeaninne Owens and Dan Lambert, while the photography was captured by Dan Lambert and Brandon Atkinson. This series focuses on individuals living with Autism. Individuals living with Autism were consulted with and participated in the development of the video series, both on and off camera. Spectrum Generations and the Autism Society of Maine thank them for their contributions.



Shannon Moss, Maine Dept. of Public Safety

Story continued on Page 3



President's Message

Seasons Greetings!

I hope this message finds you well! I would like to take a moment to introduce myself. My name is Melissa Ponce and I am the President of the Board of Directors for the Autism Society of Maine. I have served on the board for the last two years and it has been my honor to work with the ASM. Speaking for myself and the Board, it is our goal to continue to bring autism awareness to those in our communities and to support children, adults, and families who are neurodivergent.



We aim to bring some new and exciting opportunities to the Society, including trainings, development of a self-advocate advisory board, generate new connections with organizations and agencies throughout the state, and explore additional ways to bring our communities together.

The last few months have been busy for us at the Autism Society of Maine. In September, we held our annual meeting and recognized several individuals who have made a difference in the lives of those on the spectrum. We reviewed what the society has accomplished in the last year and what is on the horizon.

We also welcomed six new Board members and said farewell to our President, Christina Nason. On October 4th, the Society and Spectrum Generations premiered, with a red carpet event, their collaborative creation 'Autism and Online Safety' at the Cohen Center in Hallowell. The night was beautiful and all of us were astounded by the stunning and informative series produced by the Autism Society of Maine, Spectrum Generations, and Lambert Productions! A

As the season turned to autumn, we welcomed Cody Clark to Maine for the 8th Annual Autism Fall Conference at the Cross Insurance Center in Bangor. Thank you to all of those who attended and volunteered at the event.

continued on page 3

ASM's Mission Statement

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

Maine Autism Connections A publication of the Autism Society of Maine

Board of Directors

Melissa Ponce, President
Amber Pingree, Vice President
Treasurer, Roy Ulrickson, III
Kathryn Dobos, Secretary

- Chandler Davis
- Victoria Fisher
- Michele Gonya
- Kristen King
- Jon Palmer
- David Sharp
- Meghan Wilson Duff

Staff

Cathy Dionne, Executive Director
Susan Vincent, Communications
Director
Tara Perry, Office Assistant
Jennifer Frey, Autism Information
Specialist Coordinator

Maine Autism Connections

Quarterly publication of the
Autism Society of Maine
72B Main St., Winthrop, ME 04364
Phone: 1-800-273-5200

Graphic Designer: Susan Vincent
Proofreader: Cathy Dionne
Contributing writers: As bylined

Send article ideas and suggestions
for our newsletter to:
susan@asmonline.org

Disclaimer: This material is being provided for informational purposes only. ASM does not endorse or provide any specific therapies or treatments for Autism Spectrum Disorders. ASM has not validated and is not responsible for any information, events, or services provided by third parties. The views and opinions expressed on our website do not necessarily reflect the views of ASM. If you elect to use providers listed in the material, you assume any risks in doing so, and you are urged to check references and perform your own assessment of the efficacy and risks involved.

President's Message *Continued from cover*

I also want to extend our immense gratitude to the sponsors and vendors. The conference saw over a hundred of you join us for Cody's Dis-Impos-Ability presentation and several informative breakout sessions. It was a great day and we look forward to planning next year's events!

As we find ourselves enjoying the holiday season, spending time with family and friends, taking in the magic and wonder of the holidays, it is important to recognize the stress and pressure that we also experience during this time of year. The strain of the holidays can be insurmountable for those on the spectrum and their families. Christmas lights, decorations, family gatherings, and presents can be a too much for individuals who are neurodivergent. Furthermore, the desire to make each holiday special and memorable for our loved ones can cause angst and uncertainty in the best of us. I have offered some tips and tricks to aid with navigating the beauty and chaos of the holidays on. The Autism Society of Maine's annual virtual visit with Santa and Mrs. Claus. The Clauses are scheduled to visit virtually on Saturday, December 7th!

The Board of Directors and I want to wish all of you the happiest of holidays and a prosperous New Year! We look forward to seeing you this spring at our annual walks and summer events!

Sincerely,
Melissa Ponce, Board President

Tips and Tricks for a Great Holiday Season:

- Prepare
- Use social stories to help with what they may anticipate.
- Create an outline for the event.
- Maintain your routine.
- Decorate your home a little at a time.
- Bring toys and sensory sensitive activities.
- Plan extra time for travel, bathroom breaks, and transitions.
- Plan for mealtime and bring back up food, just in case.
- Utilize visual schedules and alternative communication systems.
- Practice opening gifts and taking turns.
- Make a plan for a calm space.
- Allow for breaks and have an exit plan.

Autism Learning Partners 2024 – www.AutismLearningPartners.com

Autism and the Holidays: 10 Tips on How to Prepare 2019

[Autism and the Holidays:](#)

[10 Tips on How to Prepare | Psychology Today](#)

ASM's Annual Meeting & Awards Banquet

ASM's Autism Meeting & Awards Banquet was held on September 27th at the Senator Inn, Augusta. This event marked an important transition this year as the organization welcomed new board members and bid farewell to outgoing members. ASM highlighted the dedication and hard work of individuals who have played a pivotal role in advancing the mission of supporting individuals with autism spectrum disorder.

The new board members bring a wealth of expertise and fresh perspectives to guide the organization into its next chapter, ensuring that innovative strategies are implemented to serve the needs of those affected by autism. As we reflect on the contributions of outgoing members, we are grateful for their tireless efforts in advocating for inclusivity and empowerment within our community.

After the Board Committee's reports, an awards ceremony was held to honor those that have gone above and beyond to enrich the lives of individuals with Autism.



Award Recipient: Susan Cox, for her years of devotion teaching individuals with Autism and living by "Life is for service" motto.

Award Presented by Kathryn Dobos



Award Recipients: The Lancaster Family, Chad, Morgan, Jason (Ryan not present), for their tireless Commitment and Dedication to ASM and Autistic Individuals.



Award Recipient: Jennifer Frey, for her relentless hard work, dedication, creativity, passion, and boots on the ground approach in her community.

Award presented by Cathy Dionne.



Award Recipient: Lucinda (Cindy) Turcotte, for her support of Autistic individuals to help them live their best lives and advocate endlessly for them.

Award presented by Christina Nason.



ASM Staff recognition: Susan Vincent, Cathy Dionne, Jennifer Frey, Tara Perry Presented by Christine Nason and Melissa Ponce



New Incoming Board Members:

Chandler Davis, Michele Gonya, Jon Palmer, Amber Pingree and Meghan Wilson-Duff

Outgoing Board Members:

Mike Dalleo, Jeanne Ives, Jenna Cyr, Jay Richardson and Christina Nason

Current board Members:

David Sharp, Roy Ulrickson (Treasurer), Kathryn Dobos (Secretary), Kristen King, and Melissa Ponce (President)

ASM ANNUAL FALL CONFERENCE



On Saturday, November 2, the ASM proudly hosted its 8th Annual Fall Conference at the Cross Insurance Center in Bangor. We are delighted to report a remarkable turnout, with over 120 caregivers, professionals, and individuals joining us for an inspiring event. The conference featured an impressive lineup of twenty vendors, showcasing a diverse range of resources from sensory toys to employment services, ensuring that every attendee walked away with valuable tools and insights.

We were especially honored to have Cody Clark as our keynote speaker. His powerful story, detailing his journey through childhood and adulthood while living with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), resonated deeply with the audience. His candid discussion of the joys, frustrations, and challenges offered a unique perspective that many found relatable. Cody's engaging magic show, seamlessly woven into his talk, added an entertaining touch that everyone enjoyed. We sincerely hope that this was just the first of many visits to Maine!

Attendees had the chance to participate in several breakout sessions, each overflowing with valuable information. Sessions covered crucial topics such as shared living, building meaningful relationships with those on the spectrum, and effective autism strategies. Additionally, we proudly launched our new video series, "Autism and Online Safety." We trust that everyone left the conference equipped with resources that will make a difference in their lives and the lives of those they support.

Looking ahead, we are already excited about next year's conference! Be sure to keep an eye on our website and Facebook page for updates as they become available. If you or someone you know is interested in presenting at one of our breakout sessions, we encourage you to fill out the attached form and return it to ASM. We would love to hear from you and explore how your insights could enrich our next conference.



Preparing for the 132nd Legislature

As I write this article the roster of members elected this past November to serve in the 132nd legislature has not been posted but by the time you get to read it, the new Legislature will have been seated and be preparing for the session beginning January 2025. As the first of the new Legislature, this will be a full session running January 2025 – June 2025. As such, it will be a busy six months with a large number of Bills proposed and assigned to legislative committees. Additionally, the new Legislature will be a mix of returning members and many serving for the first time. It is likely that a high degree of education of members will be a part of responding to legislative initiatives. The ASM will continue to pay particular attention to activities of the Education, Health and Human Services, and Appropriations Committees as well as following the work of the Housing and Judiciary Committees.

The ASM Legislative Committee will continue its work of reviewing and tracking bills of import to the ASM, its members, and all impacted by legislation and policy related to autism. Using the tracking system adopted last session, and building on our capacity to stay informed with respect to bills being monitored by groups with shared and/or overlapping interests, the ASM will work to have a particular and shared voice with respect to such matters. My work with the Consumer Council System of Maine (CCSM), the Maine Developmental Services Oversight and Advisory (MDS OAB) and the Maine Coalition for Housing and Quality Services (CHQS) continues. These relationships will be an asset as the ASM monitors the ongoing activity concerning:

- 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.

- further development and implementation of the proposed Lifespan Waiver.

- continued expansion and implementation of initiatives to support behavioral health needs including the addition of Receiving Centers throughout the state and the expansion of mobile crisis teams; making sure they adequately address the needs of autistic individuals.[1] Of particular significance will be the establishment of Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHC). Autistic individuals are one of three target populations for whom outcomes will be tracked within the CCBHC.

In keeping with the established tracking system, I also will continue to monitor legislative priorities tracked by the CHQS (as tracked by the Maine Association for Community Service Providers (MACSP)) and the CCSM as well as by Disability Rights Maine (DRM) to ensure that the ASM continues to be aware of shared interests and opportunities for coalition building.

Continued on page 8

In my last article noting highlights from the 131st session, I shared that [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](#) was well-supported and passed. However, it never moved on for funding and so “died” without becoming law. The ASM will continue relationships with interested parties, and engage with respect to any new Bill put forward to renew this process. Additionally, I will continue my work through my membership on the Maine Developmental Services Oversight and Advisory Board (MDS OAB) to monitor and provide ongoing input to developments related to the Lifespan Waiver – 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 also will be organizing around the work to collaboratively draft a proposal and seek legislative sponsor(s) for a bill related to Medicaid (MaineCare) funding of safety items.

As I wrote last Spring, the start of a new Legislature will be a fast-paced and busy period so...stay tuned.

J. Richardson Collins, MTS, MSW
Community Outreach Liaison
commoutreach@asmonline.org

[1] The Cumberland County Crisis Receiving Center was established in 2022 to initiate and measure outcomes for this model, as part of [Maine's initiatives to improve behavioral health services](#). Funding to institute receiving centers throughout the state (in Lewiston, Penobscot County, and Aroostook County with additional funding for Kennebec County to establish a hybrid center) was included in outcomes from the 131st legislative session.

"Magical Pumpkin" Paint Party Fundraiser!

What an amazing evening in October, brimming with creativity and fun for a special paint night fundraiser to benefit ASM!

Each person painted beautifully while we enjoyed music and admired each other's masterpieces. Some beginners discovered a newfound hobby and gained confidence, eager to join another paint party.

All ticket proceeds were donated to ASM by The Inspired Canvas Mobile Paint Parties www.facebook.com/theinspiredcanvas207/



Meet ASM's New AIS



by Jennifer Frey, AIS Coordinator

Last quarter we had an Autism Information Specialist (AIS) training and are pleased to welcome seven new Autism Information Specialists to our team:

Aiden is a certified professional dog trainer with teaching and public speaking experience. They recently relocated from Florida to Cumberland County. Diagnosed with autism at the age of 14, Aiden says that diagnosis has shaped his life in every possible way. Aiden has a bachelor's degree in arts and World Languages and Cultures with a concentration in Applied Linguistics and a minor in Deaf and Disability studies. Aiden's reason for becoming an AIS: There is so much nuance and chaos surrounding autism. If I can learn more and make a difference in how autism is perceived and experienced, I would really like that.

Phyllis brings over 20 years of experience supporting adolescents and adults with autism and developmental disabilities in Massachusetts and now in York county Maine. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education and Psychology and is well-versed in individual coaching and family support. Phyllis' approach to autism centers on this philosophy: I focus on the individual's strengths, skills, interests, and abilities. Through collaborative efforts, individuals build self-confidence, learn to process and express their emotions, and recognize their potential to achieve meaningful goals.



Kathleen is a lifelong educator and retired school principal with extensive firsthand experience in the IEP process, ABA classrooms, and teaching children with neurodiverse needs. She is also an involved grandmother to her remarkable 16-year-old autistic grandson. Kathleen's motivation for becoming an AIS: After 25 years in California, I recently returned to York County, Maine. As a retired educator, I'm eager to apply my knowledge and skills to support an organization dedicated to meaningful advocacy work. I am particularly passionate about helping families navigate the IEP process.

Star brings invaluable lived experience to ASM. Currently residing in Knox County, Star is in the process of seeking an ASD diagnosis after a lifetime of experiencing ASD-related symptoms. They have developed close relationships with numerous individuals diagnosed with autism, encompassing professional, platonic, and romantic connections. Additionally, they have been diagnosed with several chronic conditions that often co-occur with autism and possess a deep understanding of intersectional autistic identities, including those related to LGBTQIA2S+, ADHD, and addiction. Reflecting on their motivation to become an Autism Information Specialist (AIS), Star shares: While I've only recently recognized ASD symptoms in myself, I have watched many people close to me struggle—not just with their symptoms but also with stigma, gatekeeping, bullying, substance abuse, and a flawed medical system. I understand the challenge of trying to function in an allistic world, and I want to support anyone who is facing the same struggles I have.



Kristine, hailing from Cumberland County, brings an impressive 27 years of professional healthcare experience combined with 29 years of personal lived experience. As a mother to two young adults on the autism spectrum, she has embraced roles as a Direct Support Professional (DSP) and a shared living provider. Her journey has made her well-versed in various supports and services, including MaineCare waivers, transition planning, and IEPs. When asked about her interest in further training, Kristine shared: I want training in all areas and as much as possible. I want to learn as much as I can, please.

Laurie comes from a family with generations of neurodiversity, with her children, grandson, and nephews all being autistic. She has dedicated her adult life to caregiving and expanding her knowledge in mental health and human services. Laurie is an employment specialist in York county and has worked with the TRIO program. She has extensive experience in rehabilitation support and substance use disorder as well. Laurie is passionate about providing services that are tailored to each individual's unique needs. Her motivation for applying is rooted in her deep desire to assist and empower others.



Kay was diagnosed with autism at 21 and has since dedicated herself to understanding and supporting the neurodivergent community. She previously worked as a Behavioral Health Professional (BHP) with children on the spectrum and is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in psychology and community studies. Kay has also collaborated with her professor on a project exploring their shared experiences as autistic individuals and engaging with the broader autistic community.

Some of Kay's perspective on services and her aspirations as an AIS: Treatment and therapy should be a personalized process, with each individual having the right to autonomy and agency over their journey. It is my hope to provide social and recreational opportunities for neurodivergent individuals in the future.



Autism and Online Safety

Continued from cover

The whole series is now available freely for public use on the [**Autism Society of Maine's YouTube Channel**](#).

Pictured Right: Philip Shelley, Danielle Lambert, Tarsha Rewa, Cathy Dionne and Jeffrey Johnson



Safety and Online Video Segments:



- [Module 1: Introduction](#)
- [Module 2: Basic Online Safety](#)
- [Module 3: Identifying Common Scams](#)
- [Module 4: Using Social Media](#)
- [Module 5: Sexual Content and Adult Website](#)
- [Module 6: Basic Usage Guidelines](#)

Save Date!

WALK FOR AUTISM EPISODE XXIII

May the
4th
Be With
You!



BANGOR Waterfront Park - April 27th
WESTBROOK River Bank Park - May 4th

*STAR WARS THEME: Vendors, Coffee,
Popcorn, Games, Prizes, Music, & MORE...*

We would be honored if you would join us!

Donations

Donations / Sponsorships / Employee Matches / Grants

Northern Light Pharmacy
Charities Aid Foundation
Jillian Barnard
Penobscot Foundation
Maine Developmental Disabilities Council

Hannaford, Winthrop
Joel Oshansky
Palmira Carvalh
Peter & Cheryl Wilkins

Membership Renewals

Mark & Cathy Simonson
Kate Brix
Alice Haines
Kelly Gray
Tamera Shrum



In Memory of:

Jeannette Chandonnet

By The Kalwall Corporation
Gail Stubbs
Tina Morgan
Christina Stringos



We want to express our heartfelt appreciation to those who have organized online facebook fundraisers to support ASM, as well as to all the generous individuals who have made donations.

Lydia Cooley, Jennifer Sargent, Mitch Woodbury, Jean Dee-Coslop-Ivey, Danielle Gauvin, Sara Elizabeth, Manda Wright and H Steven Ferris.



The ASM website has trusted Autism information and resources.



Autism news and updates delivered to your email inbox from ASM!



Join our Facebook Community for all things Autism.



Make a donation to ASM



Visit our channel on YouTube for recorded webinars.



If you are not already following our Instagram page, welcome you!