

The **POWER** of **COMMUNITY**



YEAR IN REVIEW 2025

URBAN AUTISM
SOLUTIONS



A Note of Gratitude

Dear Friends,

This past year has reminded us that nonprofit work is never without challenges. Across the country, organizations have faced tighter funding, harder-to-secure grants, and economic uncertainty. And yet, here at Urban Autism Solutions, we have not just endured—we have grown stronger.

That's because of our incredible community, whose generosity and steadfast support make everything we do possible.

From students gaining independence at the West Side Transition Academy, to participants developing job skills at Growing Solutions Farm, to young adults building lasting friendships at social events—your support surrounds them at every step.

Together, we've celebrated first jobs, newfound confidence, and moments of true belonging. In times when resources are scarce, this community has shown us the real meaning of abundance.

Looking ahead, our three-year strategic plan will guide us to:

- **Expand Programs** – Grow capacity by 20% and add mental health supports.
- **Strengthen Partnerships** – Broaden outreach, engage more volunteers, and pilot new collaborations.
- **Build Stability** – Diversify revenue and secure long-term commitments for sustainable growth.

Every success in this report is a testament to what your support makes possible. Thank you for believing in our mission and in the amazing young adults we serve.

With Gratitude,

Maura McCarthy
Executive Director

Barbara Zawacki
Board President

VALUES



COMMUNITY

We reduce isolation and foster growth through meaningful connection.



DIGNITY

We honor every story and recognize the value in every individual.



INDEPENDENCE

We build lifelong autonomy through practical skill development.



RESILIENCE

We equip individuals with tools to face and grow through life's challenges

UAS VISION & MISSION

Vision: Fostering a world where every neurodivergent individual achieves a sense of belonging and independence.

Mission: Changing outcomes for young adults with autism and related disabilities through an integrated community life that advances social and vocational opportunities.

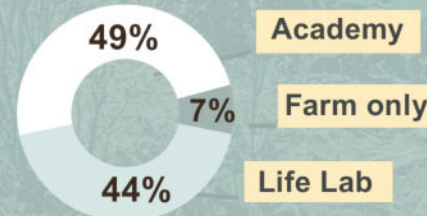
UAS IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

339 Total Classes

- life skills
- vocational training
- social-emotional learning
- internships
- community outings

For low-income households where supports are limited, consistent classes help bridge the transition gap for young adults with autism.

Program Participant Breakdown

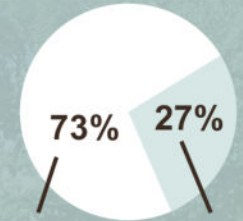


1,187 Young Adults Attended
62 SOCIAL EVENTS

Meetups, Urban Hikes, Game Days, Trivia Days, Hobbies & Highlights, Chicago Outings ...

142 Unique Social Networking Participants

165 Participants



Male

Female

Autism is over 3x more common in boys than girls – yet girls often mask symptoms, leading to later or missed diagnoses.

20% Increase
in Job Placements

12 NEW PLACEMENTS

Just 58% of autistic young adults find paid work in their early 20s – each placement helps change that story.

29% Increase
Unique Participants

About 1 in 4 autistic young adults are socially isolated – our social events create safe places to connect and belong.

1 DEVELOPING PRACTICAL INDEPENDENCE

WEST SIDE TRANSITION ACADEMY



The West Side Transition Academy is more than a program—it's a bridge to adulthood. For many students from Chicago's West Side public schools, that step becomes easier to navigate through clinical and community-based experiences that strengthen skills and foster independence.

Growth begins inside the Academy, where students develop social-emotional awareness, strengthen communication skills, and gain confidence. They then apply these abilities in the community—navigating public transit, exploring new places, and forming meaningful connections. Even the UAS fitness room reinforces how caring for physical health supports emotional and social well-being.

Each step forward moves students closer to self-sufficiency. Through guided, real-world practice in a supportive environment, they build the skills needed for greater independence.

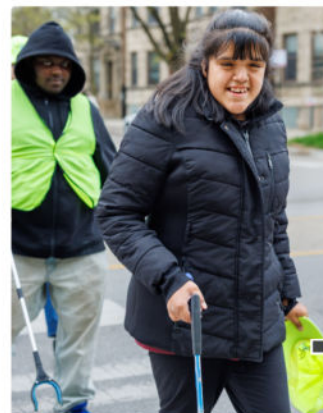
LIFE LAB



Many students with higher support needs arrive at Life Lab with little experience cooking, cleaning, or even managing personal care. Inside our three-bedroom townhome designed to reflect real life, they work on everyday tasks such as preparing healthy meals, cleaning up after cooking, vacuuming, doing laundry, and practicing basic hygiene routines.

Through encouragement and guided practice, these skills move from unfamiliar to familiar. Each accomplishment makes students less dependent on others for their daily needs.

Life Lab provides the structure and support for students to build greater self-sufficiency and contribute in meaningful ways at home and in the community.



Taylor Sweep is a UAS internship that keeps Little Italy's streets clean while building transferable job skills. For Life Lab students who may not pursue competitive employment, it fosters greater confidence and independence at home and in the community.

TAYLOR SWEEP

2 BUILDING JOB-READINESS SKILLS

At Growing Solutions Farm, students turn uncertainty into confidence. They learn to follow instructions, practice teamwork, and adapt to real-world challenges. For many, this is where they come into their own, discovering strengths not always visible in the classroom.

The farm offers more than agricultural skills: a consistent work routine, clear goals, and the satisfaction of seeing the direct fruits of their labor. Tasks like growing, harvesting, and preparing produce for sale coincide with workplace expectations—teaching teamwork, persistence, and accountability.

With hands-on experience and staff guidance, students move from building vocational skills to using them in their first paid job.



GROWING SOLUTIONS FARM



From Preparation to Competitive Employment

For students ready to take the next step, UAS staff walk alongside them to that first job—building resumes, practicing interviews, and connecting them with openings through community partners. We stay involved through interviews and the critical first 90 days, helping them not only secure their first job but keep it.

Autistic adults face lower competitive hiring. About 48% got their first job via competitive hiring vs. 95% of non-autistic peers.

(SpringerLink)

Getting a First Job

begins with the support of our community, where vocational practice, peer support, and job coaching help turn skills into lasting employment.

From Learning to Earning

The first time Jonathon asked, “Paper or plastic?” his classmates stood in a mock checkout line at the Academy. What looked simple was actually training in confidence: turning classroom learning into workplace readiness.

When Jonathon arrived at UAS, the confidence and vocational skills needed for employment were still forming. That began to change at Growing Solutions Farm, where each task drew out a quiet resolve already within him. As he worked, that resolve deepened while he learned to follow instructions and meet workplace expectations.

But Jonathon didn’t do it alone. He had the support of his peer community. At the farm, Solmaris walked him through the cash register step by step. At the Academy, classmates lined up so he could practice customer interactions until they felt natural. With the right support, learning turned into progress . . . and progress into job readiness.

That readiness carried Jonathon into his first job at Jewel-Osco. One year later, he’s still employed—proof that determination, guided practice, and a supportive community can turn learning into earning that lasts.

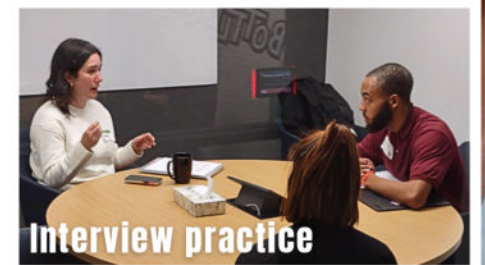


From Practice to Paycheck

Ferrara Candy Company welcomed our students for a series of mock interviews to sharpen job-readiness skills. Students built confidence by answering common questions and receiving one-on-one feedback from Ferrara team members.

The impact was immediate: during the sessions, Robert received a call for a real interview—and soon after landed his first job.

Experiences like this show how practicing essential skills in a supportive, community setting translates into real-world success.



From Farm Stand to Sales Floor



Initially, Solmaris worried she didn’t have the skills or confidence to get and keep a job. Working at the GSF farm stand changed that.

Frequent interactions with staff, peers and the community not only built up her skills but gave her the confidence to land a seasonal job at Ross clothing store—and turn it into a permanent one.

“When possible, find the right community to help you—the right friends, the people who stand by what you’re aiming to do. —Solmaris

3 FOSTERING COMMUNITY CONNECTION

Community connection is an extensive part of our programs. Through experiences like *Know Your Chicago*, students venture into the city to explore neighborhoods, cultural sites, and public spaces – all while gaining practical skills for using public transit. Each outing builds more than navigation skills. It opens the door to belonging and participation in the wider community.

By stepping beyond the classroom, students learn how to confidently take part in city life. These experiences turn community connection into something lasting, helping young adults better see themselves as active members of the community they live in.



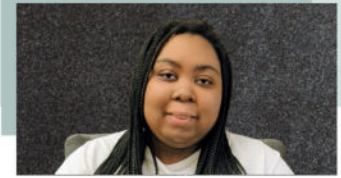
Young Adult Advisory Council

Representation matters.

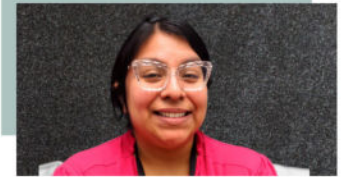
The Young Adult Advisory Council (YAAC) ensures that young adults' voices remain central in shaping our work through their leadership and lived experience.

This past year, their guidance strengthened our Social Networking Program. Members offered valuable insight on planning events, ensuring they reflect the needs and interests of their peers.

YAAC members like Alejandro, a former UAS student who now thrives in his job, show the lasting impact of our programs and the power of peer leadership. By elevating their voices, YAAC affirms that young adults are not only participants but leaders guiding the future of our programs.



"I love being a part of this community. You have an amazing group of people, with all different interests and all amazing skills, who come together to make UAS special." – Allyah R., YAAC



"I think that by ourselves we struggle to come together. We struggle to find each other. We struggle to create spaces. UAS is helping us do that so it's not as hard." – Norma N., YAAC

SOCIAL-NETWORKING-PROGRAM



For young adults with autism, one of the greatest challenges after high school is the loss of social opportunities. Without structured ways to meet people, isolation can take hold. Our Social Networking Program changes that by creating consistent opportunities to connect, make friends, and share experiences.

Participants include current students, alumni, and many who find UAS through friends, family, or an online search. They discover a welcoming community where interests are shared and experiences understood.

Over the past year, we offered a full calendar of social events—Monthly Meetups, Game and Trivia Days, Hobbies & Highlights, and Urban Hikes—each creating opportunities to connect and build lasting friendships.

Autistic adults report higher loneliness than non-autistic peers.

(Drexel)

Community Partners

GSF Volunteers

Volunteers keep Growing Solutions Farm flourishing. This year, groups from corporations, schools, and community organizations joined us to weed, plant, harvest and handle other essential maintenance tasks—efforts that directly strengthen the work we do every day at the farm.



This year we launched an individual volunteer program, and the response was tremendous. From harvesting produce to weeding beds, these volunteers tackled essential tasks that kept the farm running smoothly. We're deeply grateful for everyone who showed up and gave support throughout the growing season.

WE WELCOMED
160+
VOLUNTEERS

Community Partnerships

Our success grows through collaboration. These partnerships have opened doors, strengthened programs, and shaped futures.

Our partnership with **Marillac St. Vincent** creates meaningful opportunities that support growth and guide students toward independence. Students gain hands-on experience at the Marillac food pantry, building life skills and job readiness while giving back to the community.



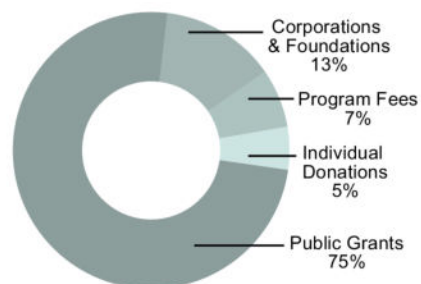
In partnership with the **West Central Association Chamber of Commerce**, we launched Clean Sweep, an employment initiative that demonstrates the value of inclusive workforce opportunities. Participants receive meaningful paid employment while local businesses and residents of Fulton Market benefit from cleaner, more welcoming streets.



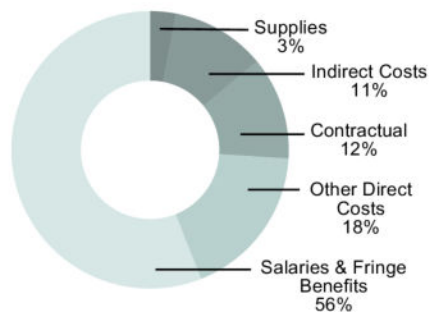
Our partnership with **Apologue** extends well beyond the farm into the community. For years, they've used our celeriac in their handcrafted liqueur. When rain threatened our Carrots & Cocktails event, they opened their new venue, **Hoste**, ensuring its success—a strong demonstration of the impact of community partners who support one another.



Financial Summary



Income



Expenses

2025 Fiscal Year* (July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025)

Income

Public Grants	\$	1,057,684
Corporations and Foundations	\$	191,340
Earned Income	\$	97,463
Individual Donations	\$	71,126
Income Total	\$	1,417,613

Expenses

Salaries & Fringe Benefits	\$	672,908
Other Direct Costs	\$	224,928
Indirect Costs	\$	136,916
Contractual	\$	141,095
Supplies	\$	32,487
Expense Total	\$	1,208,334

*These financial statements are unaudited.

UAS Leadership

Co-Founders



Julie Tracy



Michael Tracy



Maura McCarthy

Executive Director

Board Members



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Zawacki
President



Joe
Froehlich
Treasurer



Andi
Trubiano
Secretary



Grace W.
Cheng



Meghan
Davison



Aine
O'Brien



Warren
Ribley



Mary
Walsh

Young Adult Advisory Council



Norma
Noriega



Aliyah
Rich



Alejandro
Sanchez



Jayson
Hallberg



John
Tracy

Corporate & Grant Partners



C. GALLUCCI REALTY, INC.

**LAUGHING ACRES
FAMILY FOUNDATION**

Donors

We are deeply grateful for everyone who gave so generously to support our students and programs.

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