



Autism Society

Howard County

President's Address

The Year In Review: Howard County Autism Society

December 16, 2022

The Howard County Autism Society has done some absolutely spectacular things this year, to say the absolute least.

When the pandemic began, we noticed the number of calls and requests for assistance had risen by more than 40%, compared to the previous year. We thought, well that's because of the pandemic. But when COVID infection rates slowed and people began to go back to school, work, shopping centers and social activities, the increase in our call volume remained tremendously high.

And the call volume was not just coming from Howard County citizens. We were getting calls from Montgomery County, Anne Arundel County, Prince Georges County, Baltimore City and County, and even from a group of parents with Autistic children in Salisbury. And we couldn't really turn those people away, because that is not what we do. We are here to try to be of assistance to whomever we can. That kind of activity, that kind of charitable attitude is what has marked our nearly 30 years of service.

All of that growth was done on an informal basis. There was not yet any strategic plan to expand the organization. We were simply doing what we needed to do to help people who were in need.

On top of all that, we continued to advance Patuxent Commons, the inclusive, supporting housing project that is slated to break ground in the summer of 2023.

We also began further the Autism Hiring Program, connecting Autistic adults to employers around the area. These are companies that may have never hired a neurodiverse employee before, and are very, very grateful now that they have.

There has been incredibly good advocacy done with the school system and Board of Education led by our VP of the Board of Directors, Andy Stettner, and others on our Education Committee. It's that's a huge but critical undertaking and with more work to be done.

We have reached out and made headway creating partnerships with others who share our values, working arm in arm with people like State Sen. Guy Guzzone and others in the legislature. And we have forged new alliances and working relationships with organizations like the Columbia Association, Howard County General Hospital, and the Howard County Local Care Team to increase opportunities and support for the Autism community.

A lot of what we're doing here tonight is to congratulate the Howard County Autism Society for the good work it has done over the past year by our staff and consultants, and I would ask everyone to join me in a round of applause all of them.

We also have a stellar Board of Directors, who are heavily involved in working with HCAS to help guide it, support it and devote their time and personal resources to the cause. But three of them are leaving us this year: Nora Hart, who has been with the organization for a number of years, providing guidance to me for one, and who has worked on a number of varying capacities, including recruiting and helping orient new Board Members; Jim Curran, our Treasurer for several years who will continue to work with us on financial issues, even though no longer on the Board; and Lisa Wilson, giving her time in particular to fundraising activities, and who is still involved – and hopefully will continue to be so.

Our new Board members for 2023 are:

- Eric Cha, an Autism dad who is a former HCAS Board member and Treasurer and working in the financial/investment industry.

- Brianna Gaddy, a Baltimore-based employment/labor attorney, who was introduced to HCAS as a result of the Autism Hiring Program.
- And Jimara Kocik, an Autism mom who serves on the Education Committee, and has been an advocate with the Latino Parents Support Group.

But tonight, we also need to congratulate and thank hundreds of people, many of whom are in this very room, who have supported us with their actions and with their wallets. We cannot do the work that has been done without your personal efforts and financial support. You have stood by us during some exceedingly tough times, and, yes, I am talking about the pandemic. Other nonprofits have not been so fortunate.

Frankly, we are going to need you even more in 2023, because the growth that we have experienced is going to continue. We need to have more volunteer participation, hire more staff, and provide more services, and all of that is going to take not only some strenuous work, but more financial support.

Many of you have given all that you absolutely can, and we recognize that. So, we ask you to reach out to anyone and everyone you know that may have an interest in working with us, to help us in continuing our mission to serve the Autism community.

In closing let me say that I have met some incredible people here. And I want to thank each and every one of you again for all you have done the organization, and to tell you how incredibly grateful I am to be with you here tonight. Thank you and happy holidays, to all!