2020 Annual Report

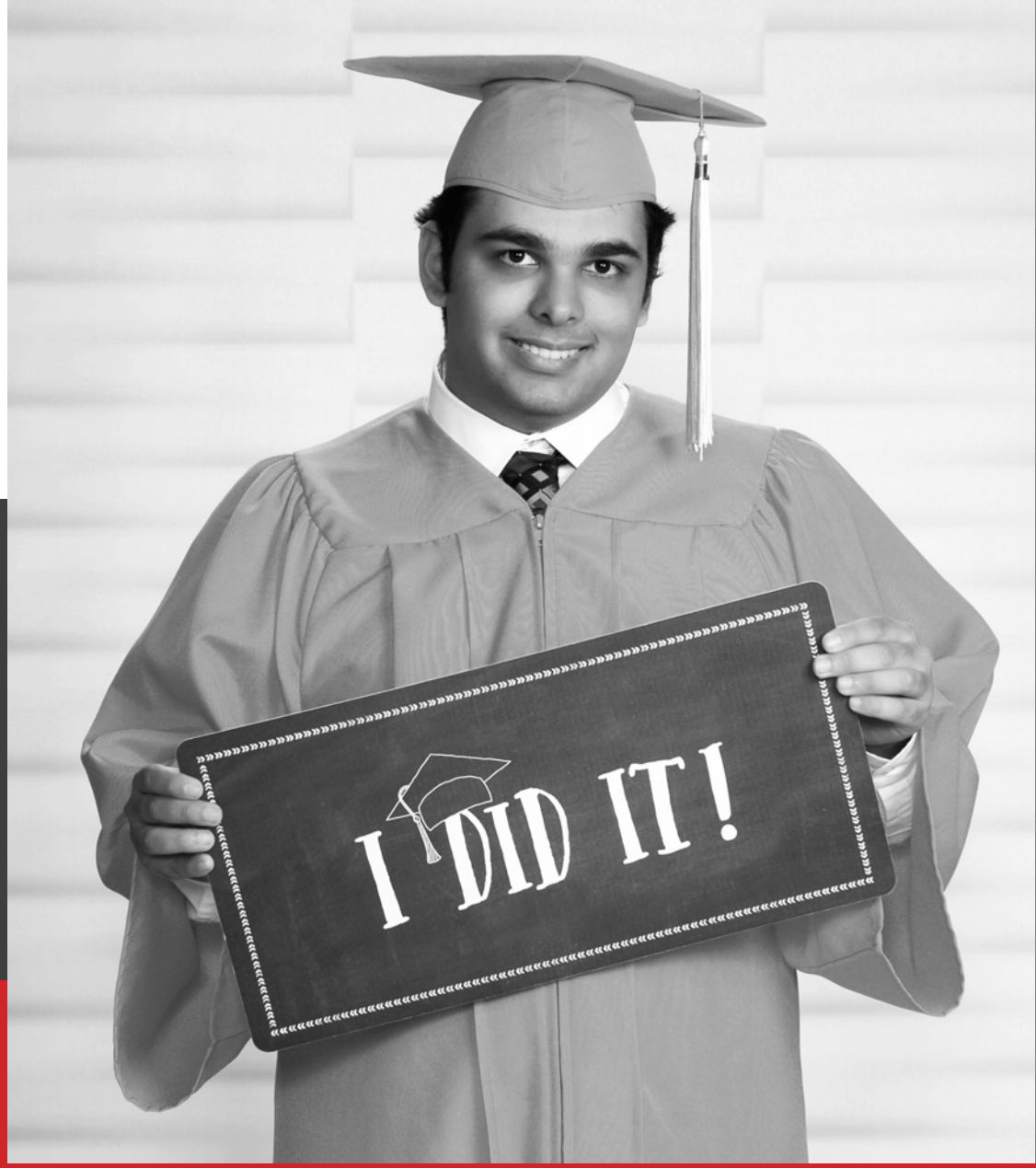
TACA
THE AUTISM COMMUNITY in ACTION

mission

TACA provides education, support and hope to families living with autism.

vision

For every individual diagnosed with autism to lead an independent life.



values

A
Authentic
We are honest, transparent and hold ourselves to the highest level of integrity.

C
Caring
We care deeply about families living with autism.

T
Tough
We help families overcome challenges and take action.

I
Informed
We believe knowledge is power and value families' abilities to make informed decisions.

O
Optimistic
We believe the future is not set and tomorrow is going to be better than today.

N
Never
We will never give up!

what we provide

TACA has been providing services since 2000 and all of the programs and services are provided at little or no cost to families.

Programs and Support Services Offered:

- Autism Journey Guides
- Educational Conferences and Events
- Family Events
- Hope and Help Facebook Group
- Parent Mentor Program
- Parent Resources
- Scholarship Programs
- Spanish Outreach
- Webinars
- Weekly Meetings and Coffee Talks

dear friends

Lisa Ackerman

TACA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR &
CO-FOUNDER, MOM TO JEFF & LAUREN,
GRANDMA TO WILL, AND WIFE TO GLEN

OC's 100 Top Influencers for 2020

My favorite part of my job is sharing with you the great work our TACA team is doing as they push forward to help families living with autism. COVID-19 dramatically changed the world, causing a lasting effect on many non-profit organizations, including TACA. We were greatly impacted. This letter aims to share with you our challenges, what we've learned, and our vision for moving autism forward.

TACA's pandemic findings include:

- Due to the the pandemic, three-quarters of our chapter coordinators' families were severely affected, causing them to focus more on their families' needs, which reduced their volunteer commitments
- Four TACA staff members resigned due to personal challenges caused by COVID-19, putting a significant strain on TACA
- TACA's programs shifted to comply with CDC guidelines
- All outreach, family events, and in-person meetings were canceled post March 15, 2020
- We tripled our reach in free parent education services
- 70% increase in website and blog views
- National Conference participation grew by 70%
- Increased scholarship funding by 15% to help the growing needs of families for telehealth medical

We asked TACA families what they felt were their needs going forward. They all shared the most important need was the sense of community. Autism is already isolating, and COVID-19 made this an even bigger issue.

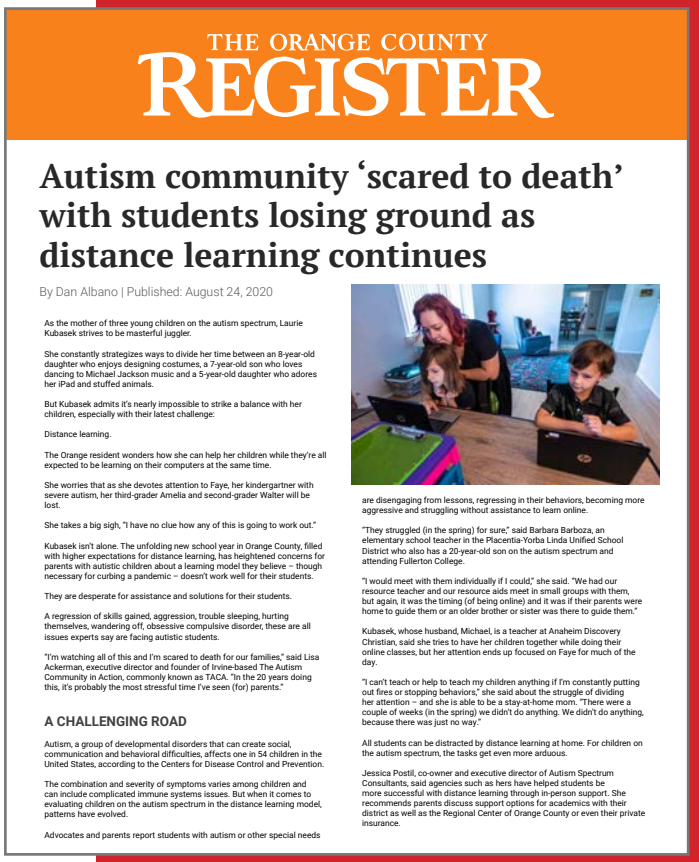
A front-page article in the Orange County Register, clearly shared how COVID-19 is dramatically affecting families with children diagnosed with autism. The pandemic has caused challenges for all children, but for kids with autism, the challenges are heightened because they were already working so hard to be on the same level with their typical peers. They are now experiencing additional, and often intensified behaviors including aggression, OCD, anxiety, and wandering from safe environments. We continue to monitor the needs of families, in addition to tracking strategies on how families can navigate digital classrooms, prepare for the return to in-person classrooms, and normal schedules.

Even though we were limited to virtual meetings, our board members and ambassadors remained focused on helping TACA. Through thick and thin, they worked hard and creatively to help with our first virtual Ante Up for Autism and year end activities. Thanks to their dedicated support we ended the year strong.

In 2020, we didn't get to celebrate TACA's 20th anniversary and years of services. We are celebrating in this annual report with a timeline and accomplishments over our history working with over 100,000 families since our inception.

Our vision moving forward is to continue our virtual efforts, find creative ways to build community, address the growing need for adult services and continue to accelerate our parent learning strategies. In 2021, we will develop our new five-year strategic plan, continue with items stalled due to COVID-19, and plan our strategies to innovate parent education, support, and HOPE.

TACA will continue to be here for families. We are committed to adjusting to serve families in this extremely challenging time and be here until we are no longer needed. Just like the families we serve; we won't give up.



THE ORANGE COUNTY
REGISTER

Autism community 'scared to death' with students losing ground as distance learning continues

By Dan Albano | Published: August 24, 2020

As the mother of three young children on the autism spectrum, Laurie Kubasek strives to be masterful juggler.

She constantly strategizes ways to divide her time between an 8-year-old daughter who enjoys designing costumes, a 7-year-old son who loves dancing to Michael Jackson music and a 5-year-old daughter who adores her iPad and stuffed animals.

But Kubasek admits it's nearly impossible to strike a balance with her children, especially with their latest challenge:

Distance learning.

The Orange resident wonders how she can help her children while they're all expected to be learning on their computers at the same time.

She worries that as she devotes attention to Faye, her kindergartner with severe autism, her third-grader Amelia and second-grader Walter will be lost.

She takes a big sigh, "I have no clue how any of this is going to work out."

Kubasek isn't alone. The unfolding new school year in Orange County, filled with higher expectations for distance learning, has heightened concerns for parents with autistic children about a learning model they believe – though necessary for curbing a pandemic – doesn't work well for their students.

They are desperate for assistance and solutions for their students.

A regression of skills gained, aggression, trouble sleeping, hurting themselves, wandering off, obsessive compulsive disorder, these are all issues experts say are facing autistic students.

"I'm watching all of this and I'm scared to death for our families," said Lisa Ackerman, executive director and founder of Irvine-based The Autism Community in Action, commonly known as TACA. "In the 20 years doing this, it's probably the most stressful time I've seen (for) parents."

A CHALLENGING ROAD

Autism, a group of developmental disorders that can create social, communication and behavioral difficulties, affects one in 54 children in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The combination and severity of symptoms varies among children and can include complicated immune systems issues. But when it comes to evaluating children on the autism spectrum in the distance learning model, patterns have evolved.

Advocates and parents report students with autism or other special needs are disengaging from lessons, regressing in their behaviors, becoming more aggressive and struggling without assistance to learn online.

"They struggled (in the spring) for sure," said Barbara Barboza, an elementary school teacher in the Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District who also has a 20-year-old son on the autism spectrum and attending Fullerton College.

"I would meet with them individually if I could," she said. "We had our resource teacher and our resource aids meet in small groups with them, but again, it was the timing (of being online) and it was if their parents were home to guide them or an older brother or sister was there to guide them."

Kubasek, whose husband, Michael, is a teacher at Anaheim Discovery Christian, said she tries to have her children together while doing their online classes, but her attention ends up focused on Faye for much of the day.

"I can't teach or help to teach my children anything if I'm constantly putting out fires or stopping behaviors," she said about the struggle of dividing her attention – and she is able to be a stay-at-home mom. "There were a couple of weeks (in the spring) we didn't do anything. We didn't do anything, because there was just no way."

All students can be distracted by distance learning at home. For children on the autism spectrum, the tasks get even more arduous.

Jessica Postil, co-owner and executive director of Autism Spectrum Consultants, said agencies such as hers have helped students be more successful with distance learning through in-person support. She recommends parents discuss support options for academics with their district as well as the Regional Center of Orange County or even their private insurance.

"He didn't want to go (online)," she said. "He would cover his eyes and he would cover his ears. It would be a really big fight and a few times, he started self-harming.

"At that point, I told the teacher, 'Listen, we're trying as hard as we can, but that's my firm line.' When my kid starts self-harming over something, I'm not going to force him to do this."

Other reports of regression follow children with autism like storm clouds.

Ackerman said students with autism have in the past six months experienced a loss of hard-fought skills of one to three years.

"When you have especially OCD or aggression, we're seeing a lot of kids lose skills they acquired," she said. "I'm really, really concerned. These kids were already behind as it is."

quick look

year established **2000**

executive director **lisa ackerman**

employees **19 paid staff**
(8 full-time, 11 part-time)

volunteer contributions **742 volunteers**

hope, help, and information **in 50 States**

www.tacanow.org

theautismcommunityinaction

@tacanow

@tacafoundation

The Autism Community in Action

2020 accomplishments

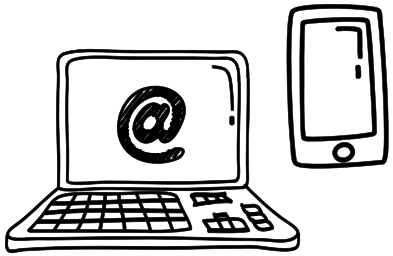
OVER **75,000** MEMBERS

354,636 FOLLOWERS

IN 50 STATES

WITH HOPE, HELP, AND INFORMATION

WE HAVE RESPONDED TO A TOTAL OF 36,892 SUPPORT REQUESTS VIA PHONE AND ONLINE

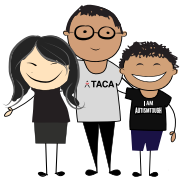


AWARDED MORE THAN **$195,588** IN SCHOLARSHIPS

EDUCATED OVER **2,400** IN **1** VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

PRIOR TO COVID-19, TACA SUPPORTED **1,600 PEOPLE** IN **21** FAMILY AND OUTREACH EVENTS

DISTRIBUTED **1,379** JOURNEY GUIDES



WE HAVE **742** AWESOME VOLUNTEERS

WHO LOGGED IN ALMOST **8,285** HOURS TO CONTINUE TO HELP PEOPLE AND DELIVER OUR MESSAGE

WE HAD **594** COFFEE TALKS, VIRTUAL MEETINGS, WEBINARS, AND FB LIVES, EDUCATING OVER **18,000**

OVER **445** MENTOR/MENTEE MATCHES

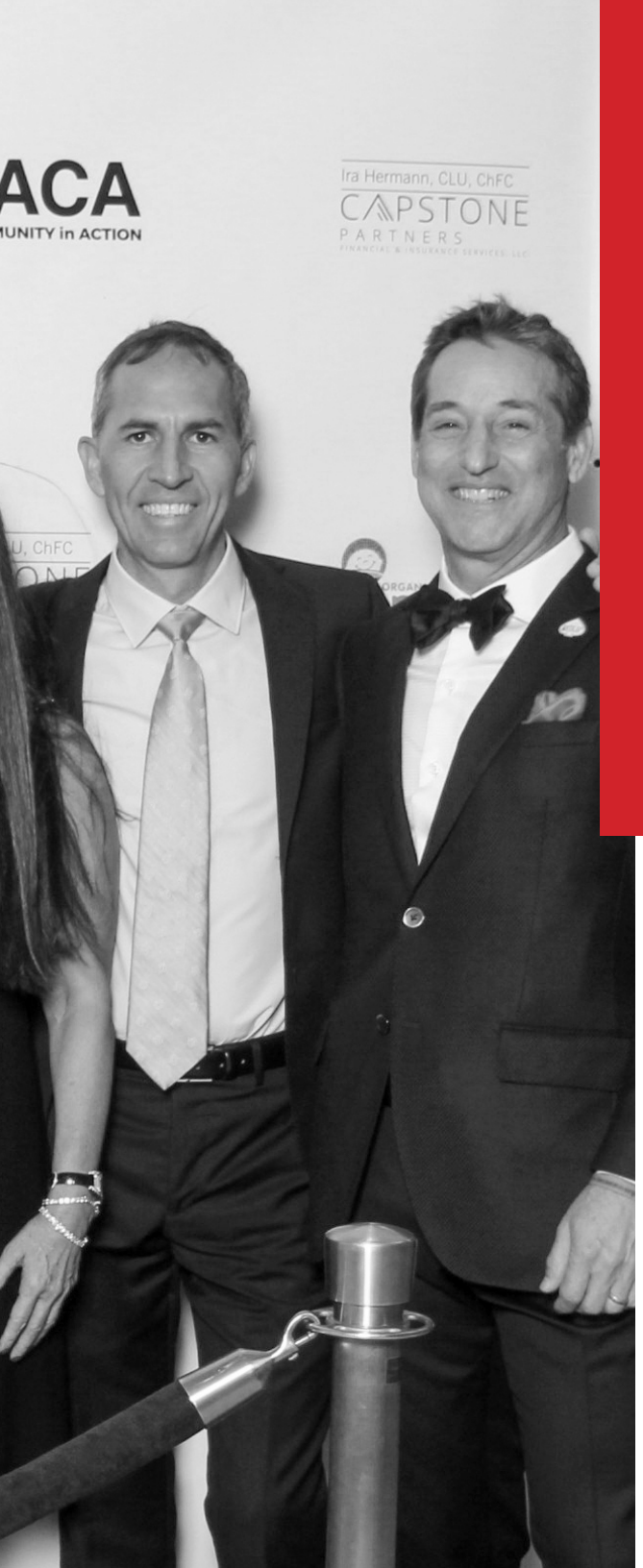
MORE THAN **2.2 MILLION** WEBSITE PAGE VIEWS

WITH OVER **70** NEW/UPDATED ARTICLES AND BLOGS

HOPE & HELP

FACEBOOK GROUP SUPPORTS **OVER 12,000 MEMBERS** AVERAGING **87** NEW POSTS WITH **1,723** COMMENTS PER WEEK

ORGANICS
HappyFAMILY
TACA
THE AUTISM COMMUNITY in ACTION
CAPSTONE
PARTNERS
ORGANICS
HappyFAMILY



board of directors

- Dan Carney
- Keith Banning
- Inna Kassatkina Jones
- Robby Saggu
- Elizabeth McCoy
- Lisa Ackerman
- Kim Yang-Uk
- Erich Kreidler
- Glen Ackerman

physician advisory

We are honored to have the following Board-Certified pediatricians and medical specialists serve as Physicians Advisory Board Members:

- Dr. David Berger
- Dr. Richard Frye
- Dr. Elizabeth Mumper
- Dr. Nancy O'Hara
- Dr. Dan Rossignol
- Dr. Cindy Schneider
- Dr. Robert Sears
- Dr. Anju Usman

key programs and services

TACA provides education, support and hope to the autism community

volunteer coordinators

Coordinator Spotlight

At approximately 18 months old, Tiffany's two sons started to regress, losing their speech and various motor skills. Their doctor led them in the direction of autism and eventually both boys received an autism diagnosis. After making changes and seeing positive outcomes with her boys, Tiffany went to conventions and conferences to share her autism journey with other parents. Her first encounter with TACA was at their annual National Autism Conference. She felt as though the people at TACA were kind and supportive and really listened as she shared her story. Tiffany then started diving into all the resources TACA had to offer and after a few years of being involved with TACA, she became one of the Colorado Chapter Coordinators. She has now been a TACA Chapter Coordinator for more than three years, helping provide support, resources, and hope to families in her community.

"We're there to support, encourage, and learn with them. You don't have to have all the answers, we don't have to tell them what to do, we're on the journey with them."

Tiffany Jenkins, Colorado Chapter Coordinator

mentor program

“Autism can be very isolating for a caregiver, and it can be a very lonely experience, so that mentor is the person throwing out the rope when you’re out at sea all by yourself and pulling you back in and saying, ‘Nope you are still connected. We still got you. You’re not at sea by yourself.”

- Christa Robaina, TACA Mentor

Mentor Spotlight

Christa’s son was born prematurely, and after not meeting some milestones, she had growing concerns that something wasn’t right. Doctors dismissed the concerns as being a result of his prematurity and encouraged her to give it time. After months of no one listening to her suspicions, she was able to find someone to give her son an autism screening. When her son began having what was thought to be absence seizures, and she was told it would be months before they could get an EEG, Christa began researching the underlying medical issues of autism. She began connecting with other moms, one of which shared TACA with her. Once she got involved with TACA, “the lid blew off”, and she couldn’t believe the number of like-minded parents researching and sharing their extensive knowledge about autism. Christa has now been a TACA mentor for over three years, being that connection that an autism parent desperately needs, whether it be by giving some advice or just needing a hand to hold. One thing that she has learned from her experience with TACA is that “No one is alone. Someone is beside you to walk you through this”.

conference

In 2020, we held our 35th autism conference virtually, resulting in 2,409 registrations, a 70% increase from the prior year. Individuals from 47 states, 21 countries and 6 continents actively participated.

"This was my first conference. I feel more confident and better prepared. I feel like if it weren't for TACA I would be getting nowhere with my son. Our family is so thankful for everyone who contributed and for parents' excellent questions on Facebook as well. The month-long conference was just what we needed."

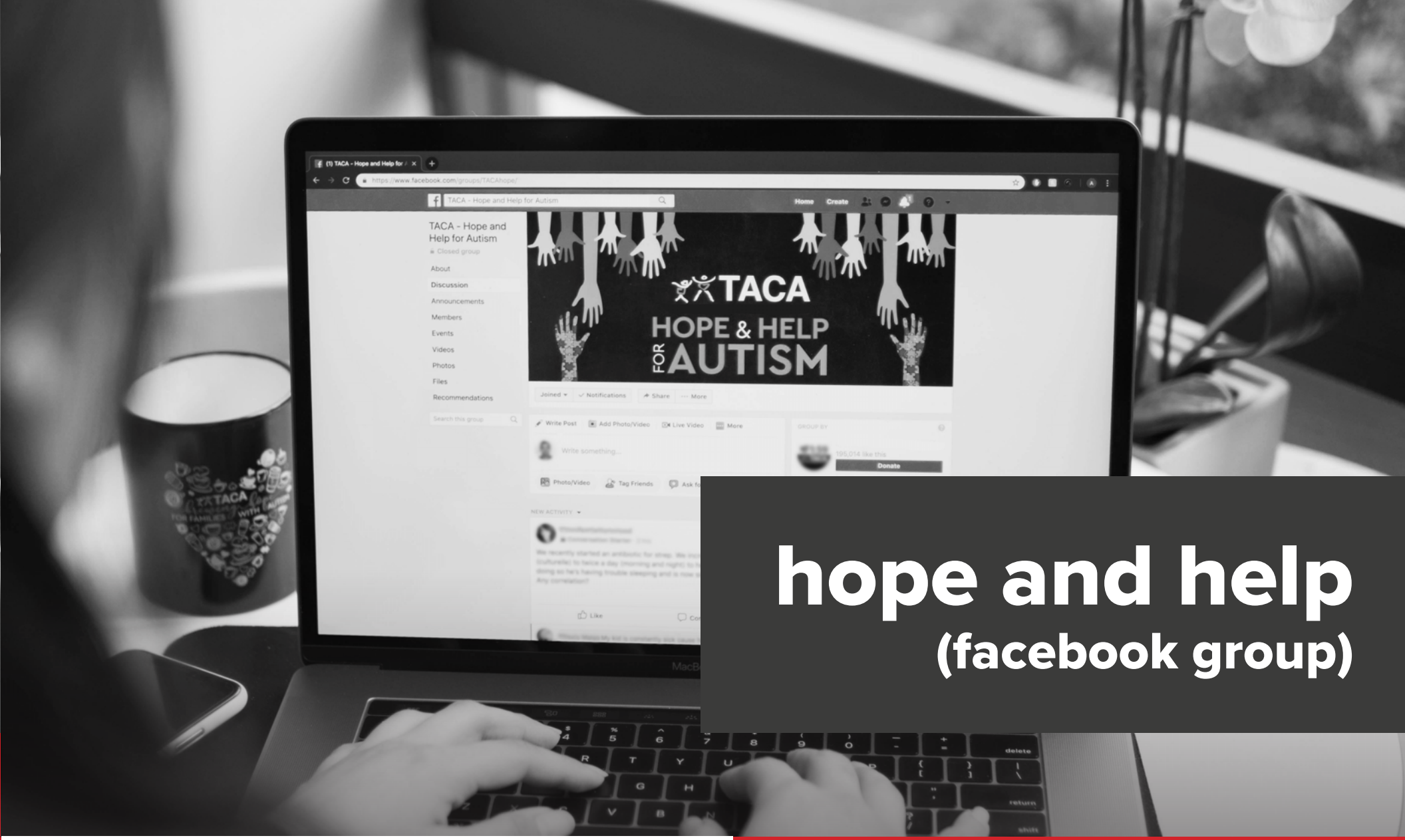
- Virtual Conference Attendee

"THANKFUL is an understatement for all the volunteers and all the professionals who put together this conference. My husband and I have learned practical and theoretical steps of what else we can do, and more questions to ask our MAPS doctor at the next appointment. By building foundations for our daughter to heal, you have also helped our family have healthier relationships. THANK YOU!!!"

- Virtual Conference Attendee

"Even though being at the conference is an awesome experience and I'm able to connect with families with children on the autism spectrum, having it online is also a great experience to learn more on how I can help my young adult. Thank you for having it a month long and online support.

- Virtual Conference Attendee



hope and help
(facebook group)

Hope and Help for Autism is a private, moderated Facebook Group for TACA members to look to for support. TACA launched the Hope and Help Group in 2018 and now has over 12,000 members in all 50 states.

"I have learned more here (Hope & Help) in the last week than I have in the last three months dealing with doctors, specialists, and therapists."

- TACA Parent

covid-19

2020 was a year unlike any other. As a result of COVID-19, TACA and the families we serve have been greatly affected.

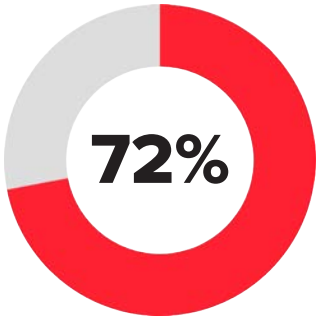
In response to the pandemic, TACA pivoted to all virtual parent support meetings, creating website resources for navigating the pandemic and ways families could continue a productive autism journey.

During this phase, TACA experienced a shift in how our programs were delivered. Those program delivery changes are outlined in the chart on the right with notes below.

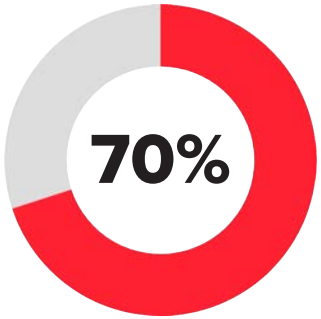
Notes:

- All in-person meetings, family events, and outreach were canceled on March 6, 2020, for the remainder of the year.
- Conference attendees are a comparison for one conference in October. We had two conferences in 2019. During the shutdown, we canceled our east coast conference scheduled for March.
- Meeting attendance in 2020 includes live viewers from newly added Facebook Lives.
- The number of scholarships for events has decreased. More scholarships have been awarded to families in need of telehealth and immunity.
- On the 2020 accomplishments, Hope & Help support and staff support are combined.
- The Hope & Help statistics are based on three - one-week samples. We are seeking regular reporting from Facebook.

	TYPE	2019	2020	Growth	% Growth
Growth	Meeting Attendance	6,812	16,919	10,107	148% ▲
	Webinar Attendance	90	1,400	1,310	1456% ▲
	Hope & Help Group Size	10,000	12,138	2,138	21% ▲
	Hope & Help Support	0	15,000	0	0% —
	Staff Support	20,371	21,892	1,521	07% ▲
	New Articles	5	68	63	1260% ▲
	Web Page Views	1,300,000	2,204,914	904,914	70% ▲
	Conference Attendees	1,409	2,429	1,020	72% ▲
	Members	72,000	75,000	3,000	04% ▲
	New Members per Month	474	600	126	27% ▲
Down Due to Covid-19	Mentors	779	445	-334	-43% ▼
	Guides	3,668	1,379	-2,289	-62% ▼
	Outreach Attendance	20,745	1,577	-19,168	-92% ▼
	Family Events Attendance	6,739	50	-6,689	-99% ▼
	Volunteer Support	33,575	8,313	-25,262	-75% ▼
	Scholarships	616	594	-22	-4% ▼



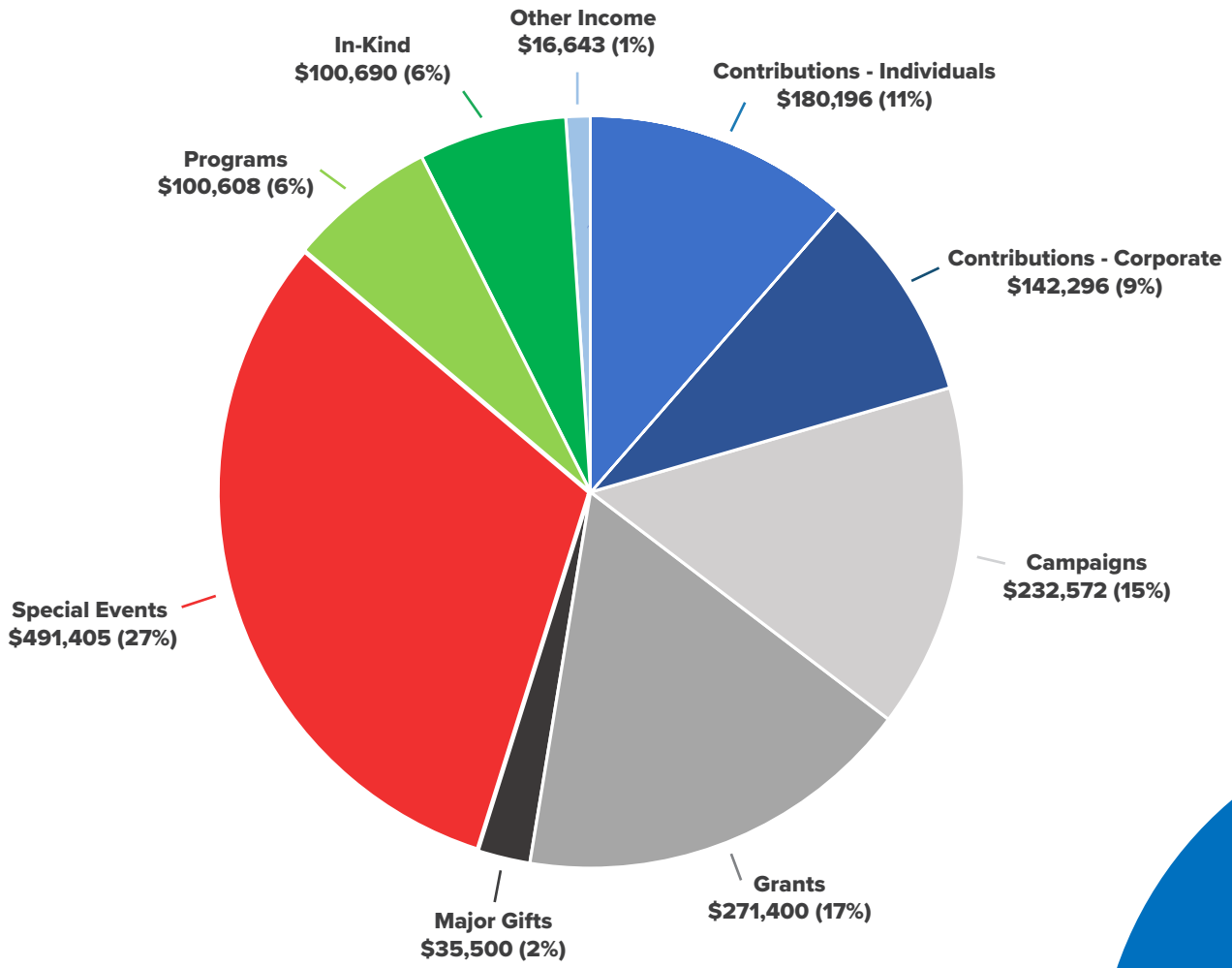
Increase in Conference Attendees



Increase in Web Page Views

revenue breakout by type

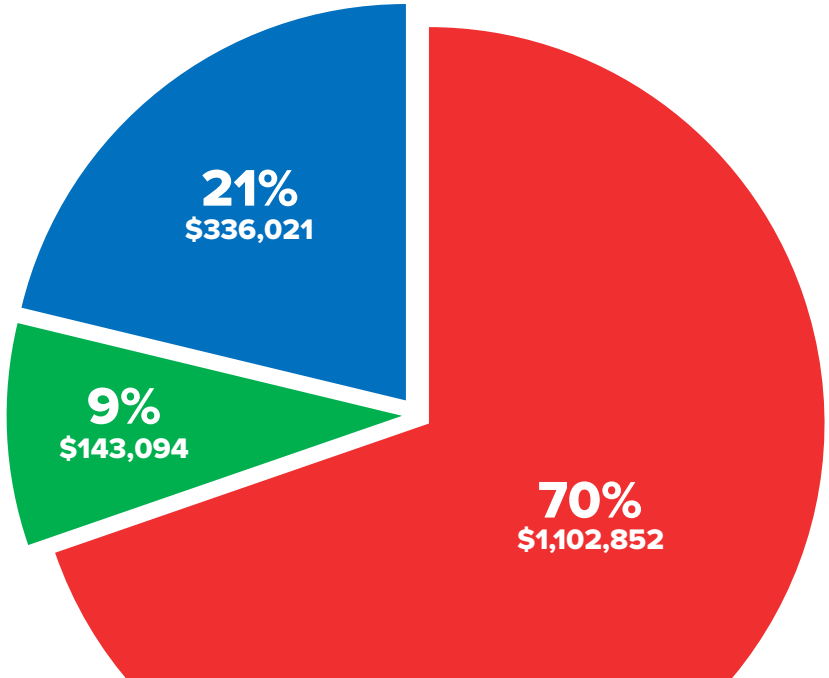
2020



- Contributions - Individuals
- Contributions - Corporate
- Grants
- Campaigns
- Major Gifts
- Special Events (Net)
- Programs
- Other Income
- In-Kind

expense by breakout type

- Programs
- General & Admin
- Fundraising



featured story tyler larsen

Tyler Larsen, the center for the Carolina Panthers, chose The Autism Community in Action (TACA) as the organization for his My Cause My Cleats. My Cause My Cleats allows NFL players the opportunity to choose a cause that is important to them and represent their chosen organization on custom-designed cleats.

Tyler and his wife began noticing that his speech was regressing a few months after Ty was born, and he wouldn't look at them in the eyes. Initially, they were in denial but soon realized this was not normal, and Ty was diagnosed with autism following an evaluation.

Tyler and Samantha were not willing to accept that nothing could be done for their son. Samantha started researching autism and found TACA. In a short amount of time, their son made great advances.

Tyler wishes to bring more awareness to autism and wants others to know that there is hope after diagnosis. He wants to help other fathers find a way to be active in their child's autism journey.

"People need to know that there is hope. I can't express that enough. People need hope to get through this." -Tyler Larsen, Carolina Panther Center

My Cause My Cleats featured on NFL game day in December 2020 with millions of viewers

How has autism played a role in your life?

“Autism has been very hard, not only for our son, but for our entire family. For example, our daughter had to grow up in the middle of therapies. Often, Andreass’ behavior prevented us from attending social events, or we had to leave them. It has been a constant learning process of how to help our son, but also very rewarding seeing changes and improvements that have allowed him to be a happier child. No doubt autism changed our lives, but it also brought us a new family, TACA.”

What brought you to support TACA specifically?

“Autism can be a lonely and challenging journey. Aside from providing help for our son, TACA also made us feel like we were part of a community. It introduced us to incredibly inspiring parents who have been through the same journey. Despite all the challenges, they are always willing to listen, share knowledge, and make sure moms and dads do not feel alone. Being a part of this community was so inspiring that we immediately knew we wanted to aspire to someday be one of these “Rock Star” parents. We found our tribe with TACA.”

What is your favorite program or support service TACA offers?

“I love the mentor program! It is invaluable to have the opportunity to have another parent helping you with questions and guiding you through an unknown journey when starting. To have someone who gives you hope and understands your feelings. The coffee talks are also great. During these sessions, you will get real-time help, learn from other parents, and help those who have been through similar situations.It always gives me so much hope when I hear from one of my 20 mentee relationships having success with their child!”

donor spotlight
erich and jaya kreidler

Erich and Jaya have been involved with TACA since their son Andreas was diagnosed with autism nine years ago. Erich is an engineer involved in high tech startups and an industry faculty at the University of Southern California who has been a TACA board member for five years. Jaya has been a TACA mentor for nine years. The Kreidler’s reside in Costa Mesa, CA with their son Andreas and their daughter Mischa.

donor honor roll

We would like to recognize and thank our generous contributors

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Arylessence Foundation Inc

Leaders ($25,000.00 - $49,999.99)

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4999.99 level ($2,500.00 - $4,999.99)

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First Harvest Foundation
FlowerChild Holding Company LLC
Manny and Leyla Khoshbin
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Kathryn Morris
Norman and Susan Abazoris Foundation
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The Bulow Group
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Ivo Tjan and Commerce West Bank
UnitedHealth Group
Shawn and Lonna Washer

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Shell Matching Gift Program
Jonathan Smith
Speech Kingdom
Josh and Carol Speyer
Summer Shirt Project
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James and Melissa Tash
The Darin and Lori Anderson Foundation
Thomsen Homes LLC
Terry Taylor
Tustin Toyota
Douglas Wonnenberg

We are families with autism helping families with autism.

TACA

THE AUTISM COMMUNITY in ACTION

www.tacanow.org