

# Let's Build a World Where Everyone Belongs

Including Students  
and Young Adults  
With Autism





## You're More Connected to Autism Than You May Think

Today, 1 in 36 children in America is diagnosed with autism. This significant prevalence means that autism is no longer someone else's concern. It's part of life for all of us. Even if you don't have a child, grandchild or family member with autism yet, you live in a world where you will interact with people with autism in daily life.

We're all connected to autism, and we all have a responsibility to help build a world where everyone belongs.

# How We Empower Students and Young Adults With Autism

Connections is a nonprofit educational center that delivers top-quality, specialized instruction and therapies for those with autism in Palm Beach County. We serve an amazing group of 120+ students and young adults, many of whom may not otherwise have access to the quality support they need. More than 80% of our students live below the poverty line, 94% come from minority families, and almost half come from single-parent households or live with grandparents.

## We Serve:

### Students Ages 3-14



**Connections Education Center** is a charter school specifically designed for students with autism or related disabilities. We use evidence-based teaching strategies paired with targeted therapies to provide functional academics and early intervention.

### Students Ages 15-22



**Connections High School & Vocational Center** -- a private, nonprofit school -- weaves together functional academics and vocational training while building social and independent-living skills to help older students with autism transition into adulthood.

### Young Adults Ages 23+



**The Connections Adult Program** gives young adults with autism the opportunity to continue learning new skills and retain the skills they've worked so hard to master. We focus on social skills, personal care, independent-living skills, recreational activities and more.



## Our Life-Changing Programs

**Functional Academics:** Our students learn functional academics taught by highly trained, caring teachers who use evidence-based strategies designed specifically for students with autism.

**Targeted Therapies:** Our certified, experienced therapists deliver top-quality therapies based on each child's need. This may include speech, occupational and/or behavioral therapies.

**Aquatics:** Drowning is the number one cause of death for children with autism, so we include swim lessons in our curriculum. We've designed an effective approach specifically for children with autism.

**Health & Wellness:** Our holistic approach teaches students about healthy eating, kitchen safety, fitness, functional leisure and more.

**Fine Arts:** We give our students access to music and art activities to activate all centers of the brain, develop creativity and exercise fine motor skills.

**Community Integration:** To apply skills taught in the classroom, we take our students out into the community for real-world integration.

**Family Connection:** We work directly with families to develop effective plans for each student and to reinforce classroom learning at home for greater student success.





## We Face a 30%+ Funding Gap Every Year

The work being done daily at our nonprofit school and center is vital, and we could not do it without the support of our generous donors. Public funding leaves a 30% gap in the actual cost to deliver these life-changing services. Impact makers like you help us bridge this gap and fund important expansions.



## Sponsorship Opportunity

### Need:

Individuals with autism are commonly affected by medical problems that may result in poor overall health. In addition, highly restrictive or poor eating habits, decreased motor skills and behavior problems lead to problems such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure and gastrointestinal issues.

Further challenging their health, children with autism are at a significantly higher risk of drowning than neurotypical children. In fact, drowning is the No. 1 cause of death for children with autism. Research and our experience have shown that children with autism are drawn to water and require specialized, adaptive swimming instruction.

### Solution:

Schools must partner with parents to teach students with autism about healthy foods and daily fitness. The approach enables students to alter their eating habits and leads them to adopt a healthy lifestyle, one step at a time. In addition, water safety training must be a regular part of their education with lessons that are structured the way children with autism learn. Children must be allowed to progress in the order that their skill set allows rather than following a mandated order prescribed for typical children.



### Connections' Program:

Our innovative Health, Wellness & Aquatics Program builds on our highly successful water safety and swim program that combats the high occurrence of drowning among kids with autism. This expanded program now offers every student the opportunity to learn about kitchen safety, healthy eating and fitness

**Healthy eating** – Introduction of new foods to children with autism through an exploratory approach that puts them at ease and helps them be more open to adding healthy foods to their diet over time. Also covers kitchen safety to encourage more independence.

**Fitness** – Daily fitness classes for our students, focusing on strength and coordination activities that enables children to progress at their own pace.

**Aquatics** – We have designed, tested and deployed a highly effective swim program specifically for children with autism. This program is included in our curriculum for all students and our young adult clients. Although this program is groundbreaking and essential, it is not funded by the public school program.

**School Nurse** – A specially trained school nurse on our staff helps manage health conditions that some of our students experience, such as diabetes or severe allergies. Without a school nurse, classroom teachers are put in the role of attending to health issues that are beyond their expertise.



## Our Health, Wellness & Aquatics Programs include the following components:

- Instructional Staff: Special Needs aquatic coordinator/ instructor, instructional aides, therapists
- Teachers trained in nutrition and eating challenges associated with autism
- Specially trained fitness teacher and assistants
- School nurse specifically trained in pediatric health care and autism
- Transportation
- Cost of pool admission and lifeguards
- Foods, kitchen equipment, fitness equipment, teaching materials and supplies

### Connections' Health, Wellness & Aquatics Programs can be underwritten or sponsored for:

<b>Giving Level A:</b> Full school year, entire school.....	\$427,672
<b>Giving Level B:</b> Full school year, Pre-K through 8th graders .....	\$268,828
<b>Giving Level C:</b> Full school year, high schoolers .....	\$105,896
<b>Giving Level D:</b> Full school year, young adult clients .....	\$52,948
<b>Giving Level E:</b> Full school year, one class .....	\$26,474

- **Recognition – Program Name:** When a donor sponsors this program at Giving Level A (sponsoring the program for the entire school for a school year), the donors' name will be credited when the program is mentioned in print or online (e.g., The "Donor Family Name" Health, Wellness & Aquatics Program).
- **Recognition on the Connections' Website and Annual Report:** When a donor sponsors this program at Giving Level A or B (sponsoring the program for the entire school for a school year or a semester), the donor's name will be credited on the Connections website and recognized in our Annual Report. Donors who sponsor this program at Giving Level C will also be credited on the Connections website.
- **Recognition on Connections' Social Media:** Donors who sponsor this program at Giving Level A, B, C or D will be recognized individually on Connections' social media.



**1 Source:** Effects of Diet, Nutrition, and Exercise in Children With Autism and Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Literature Review, National Institutes of Health, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7815266/>

## Sponsorship Opportunity

### Problem:

1 out of every 36 children in America is diagnosed with autism today. With each diagnosis, the entire family faces an uncertain future and a difficult transition that impacts finances, daily life, education, mental health, marital relationships, sibling interactions and social connections.

Today, there are a wide variety of government- and community-based resources available to families of children with autism. However, it can be challenging to find the right resources for a child's unique circumstances and obtain required referrals, especially for non-native English speakers and the socioeconomically disadvantaged. We have learned that once a family connects to the appropriate resources and support team, less stress is placed on family relationships and mental health, leading to a better environment for the diagnosed child.

At Connections, some 85% of our students live below the poverty line and 42% live in single-parent households. Many of these families live with food insecurity and some live in short-term housing, creating additional strains on the family. While our team is eager to help families, this assistance can reduce the time spent on educational and behavioral goals. As a result, teachers and administrators often spend after-school hours providing resource support for our students' families.

### Solution:

Families would benefit from a bilingual resource professional who understands the resources available to families through local, state and federal sources and is a strong communicator. This professional would help families work through referrals, applications and funding options to secure medical evaluations, autism-related services, respite services, housing assistance and even food sources.

The professional would also work to build continuity between the school and home environments so that effective educational and therapeutic strategies are applied consistently in both environments.



### Connections' Program:

At Connections, we believe family is everything, and our family-focused approach considers the needs of the entire family. This program will strengthen our capacity for family assistance by offering a three-pronged program to:

- empower parents to enable the child with autism to function well within the family
- support the family's mental health and ability to deal with stress
- secure resources to meet basic needs

The Connections Cares: Family Assistance Program will offer a variety of services to help meet the needs of the families including social services to assist in accessing public and private resources. It will also include communication and coordination between teachers, school therapists, outside therapists, family members and other caregivers to drive consistency for the student.



**The program includes the following services:**

- Full-time, licensed, bilingual social/case worker (\$70,000/yr.)
- Part-time behavioral consultant (\$22,000/yr.)
- Materials and supplies needed to complete data collection duties (\$3,000/yr.)
- Travel costs for community engagement (\$2,000/yr.)

**Connections Family Resources & Assistance Program can be underwritten or sponsored for:**

<b>Giving Level A:</b> Full school year, entire school.....	<b>\$105,500</b>
<b>Giving Level B:</b> Full school year, Pre-K through 8th graders .....	<b>\$52,750</b>
<b>Giving Level C:</b> Full school year, high schoolers .....	<b>\$7,535</b>
<b>Giving Level D:</b> Full school year, young adult clients .....	<b>\$1,200</b>

■ **Recognition – Program Name:** When a donor sponsors this program at Giving Level A (sponsoring the program for the entire school for a school year), the donor’s name will be credited when the program is mentioned in print or online (e.g., The “Donor Family Name” Family Assistance Program), including recognition in our Annual Report.

■ **Recognition on the Connections’ Website:** When a donor sponsors this program at Giving Level A or B (sponsoring the program for the entire school for a school year or a semester), the donor’s name will be credited on the Connections website and recognized in our Annual Report. Donors who sponsor this program at Giving Level C will also be credited on the Connections website.

■ **Recognition on Connections’ Social Media:** Donors who sponsor this program at Giving Level A, B, C or D will be recognized individually on Connections’ social media.



## Sponsorship Opportunity

### Need:

We all depend on input from our senses to help us understand our surroundings, respond to the world around us and avoid danger. However, 95% of students with autism often experience difficulty processing sensory information, such as sounds, smells, tastes, brightness, textures and movement. Sensory processing difficulties can make ordinary situations feel overwhelming and confusing and can interfere with daily function, impede learning, create dietary challenges, and further isolate impacted children and their families.

### Solution:

Research and experience have shown that targeted sensory intervention can alter how the brain uses the sensations of touch, sound, sight, smell and movement. Research by Autism Speaks revealed that sensory processing intervention is effective in helping to ease sensory difficulties and enhances quality of life. Research analysis showed that children in the sensory intervention group scored significantly higher on attaining their learning goals and required less assistance in self-care and social situations.

### Connections' Program:

**Children at Connections receive both individualized and classroom sensory intervention.** Treatment plans reflect the individual needs, strengths and sensory challenges of each student.

The occupational therapy professional works individually with children on a regular basis (at least weekly) in a specially designed and equipped space to address each child's specific sensory integration needs. The therapist also works with students in the classroom setting to provide environmental adjustments as well as instruction in sensory intervention techniques to both the student and academic teacher.

The sensory room at Connections provides a safe space for the students to obtain the needed sensory input that enables them to return to the classroom more focused, calm and self-regulated.

In addition, we're working to build a sensory-friendly playground where students can strengthen motor skills and gain sensory input that supports the therapeutic goals.

### The program includes the following resources:

- Full-Time, Licensed Occupational Therapist (\$73,000/yr.)
- Part-time, Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant (\$33,000/yr.)
- Materials and supplies (\$3,000/yr.)  
This may include, but not be limited to: Pressure vests, weighted vests/blankets/lap pads, sensory brushes, special seating, body socks, headphones, etc.
- Indoor Sensory Room Equipment (\$5,000/yr.)
- Outdoor Sensory-Friendly Playground (\$150,000 – one-time expense)



**Connections Sensory Integration Program can be underwritten or sponsored for:**

<b>Giving Level A:</b> Full school year, entire school.....	\$175,045
<b>Giving Level B:</b> One semester, entire school.....	\$87,522
<b>Giving Level C:</b> Full school year, one class.....	\$12,503
<b>Giving Level D:</b> Full school year, one student .....	\$1,522

**Connections Sensory-Friendly Playground can be underwritten or sponsored for:**

<b>Giving Level A:</b> Full school year, entire school.....	\$150,000
<b>Giving Level B:</b> One semester, entire school.....	\$30,000
<b>Giving Level C:</b> Full school year, one class.....	\$25,000
<b>Giving Level D:</b> One semester, one class .....	\$10,000

- **Recognition – Program Name:** Donors at Level A will the donor’s name will be credited when the program is mentioned in print or online (e.g., The “Donor Family Name” Sensory Integration Program), including recognition in our Annual Report.
- **Recognition on the Connections’ Website:** When a donor sponsors this program at Giving B (sponsoring the program for the entire school for a school year or a semester), the donor’s name will be credited on the Connections website and recognized in our Annual Report.
- **Recognition on Connections’ Social Media:** Donors who sponsor this program at Giving Level C or D will be recognized individually on Connections’ social media.



## Sponsorship Opportunity

### Need:

Less than one in five adults with autism live independently from their parents, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. In addition, autism services cost U.S. citizens \$236-\$262 billion annually with most funds covering adult services. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than 5.4 million adults in America have autism, and this group experiences double the unemployment rate of their neurotypical peers. These staggering statistics demonstrate the need for teaching individuals with autism independent-living skills and providing vocational training.

### Solution:

The goal of the Connections Life Skills and Vocational program is to prepare our young adults with autism for a full life after school. This program teaches our young adults the skills necessary to function as independently as possible and to engage in meaningful work activities adapted to their individual abilities. Our hope is that this training that closely resembles the real-world environment will transfer to work and leisure activities in the community. The areas included are as follows:

- Personal Care & Safety Skills
- Food Preparation and Kitchen Safety Skills
- Functional Independence Skills
- Vocational Skills
- Job & Volunteering Skills
- Self-Advocacy



### Connections' Program:

Our high school and young adult team includes specially trained teachers who teach independent-living skills to students in an apartment-style learning space on our campus. This teaching is focused on maximizing the students' strengths and then generalizing the skills into a typical environment. Teachers collaborate with parents for generalization so parents can practice in the home environment to ensure greater success.

The vocational program involves community partners who provide actual work activities to the students. Not only do the students learn necessary work and self-regulation skills, their self-esteem and confidence increase. These skills can then be transferred to work or volunteering in the community. Activities include clerical work, culinary training, packing and shipping, and restaurant preparation.



## The program includes the following resources:

- 3 Full-time, trained life skills coach (\$50,000)
- 9 Part-time, trained life skills coach (\$120,000)
- Part-time bus driver/bus maintenance (\$10,240)
- Materials and supplies (\$40,460)  
May include groceries, kitchen equipment, cleaning supplies, textiles, vocational training materials, personal care items and more.

## Connections Family Resources & Assistance Program can be underwritten or sponsored for:

<b>Giving Level A:</b> Full school year, entire school.....	<b>\$423,493</b>
<b>Giving Level B:</b> One semester, entire school.....	<b>\$211,746</b>
<b>Giving Level C:</b> Full school year, one class.....	<b>\$30,249</b>
<b>Giving Level D:</b> One semester, one class.....	<b>\$15,124</b>

- **Recognition – Program Name:** When a donor sponsors this program at Giving Level A (sponsoring the program for the entire school for a school year), the donor’s name will be credited when the program is mentioned in print or online (e.g., The “Donor Family Name” Independent-Living & Vocational Program), including recognition in our Annual Report.
- **Recognition on the Connections’ Website:** When a donor sponsors this program at Giving Level A or B (sponsoring the program for the entire school for a school year or a semester), the donor’s name will be credited on the Connections website and recognized in our Annual Report. Donors who sponsor this program at Giving Level C will also be credited on the Connections website.
- **Recognition on Connections’ Social Media:** Donors who sponsor this program at Giving Level A, B, C or D will be recognized individually on Connections’ social media.



**Sources:** 1 in 5 have not lived independently from parents.  
<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/2017AutismReport.pdf>

## Sponsorship Opportunity

### Need:

The arts stimulate the brain in unique ways while activating more mental pathways. While more than 40% of individuals with autism are nonverbal, research has indicated that individuals with autism can communicate and express themselves through the arts. Opportunities for artistic activities enable individuals with autism to express themselves. Socioeconomics may prevent the students at Connections from having opportunities to enjoy cultural arts in the community.

### Solution:

Connections aims to provide our students with opportunities to experience enrichment through art, music and dance. These activities will focus on individual talents, adaptation for sensory needs, enhancement of motor skills, building communication and social interaction, and managing behavioral response. Specially trained teachers can enable students with autism to experience cultural arts successfully through field trips to cultural arts activities in the community.

### Connections' Program:

1. Provision of individually based art experiences with a specially trained teacher who will enable students to express themselves freely.
2. Weekly music therapy.
3. Music experiences with professionals at Lynn University.
4. Field trips. We have developed strong relationships with a variety of community groups who welcome our students. This includes venues like the Kravis Center, Lynn University Conservatory of Music, Palm Beach Zoo, museums, Island Dolphin Care, Costco, The First Tee and many more. Field trips occur twice a quarter.



**The program includes the following services:**

- Admission to venues (\$54,850)
- Transportation (\$20,480)
- Fine arts materials for use at school (\$12,200)

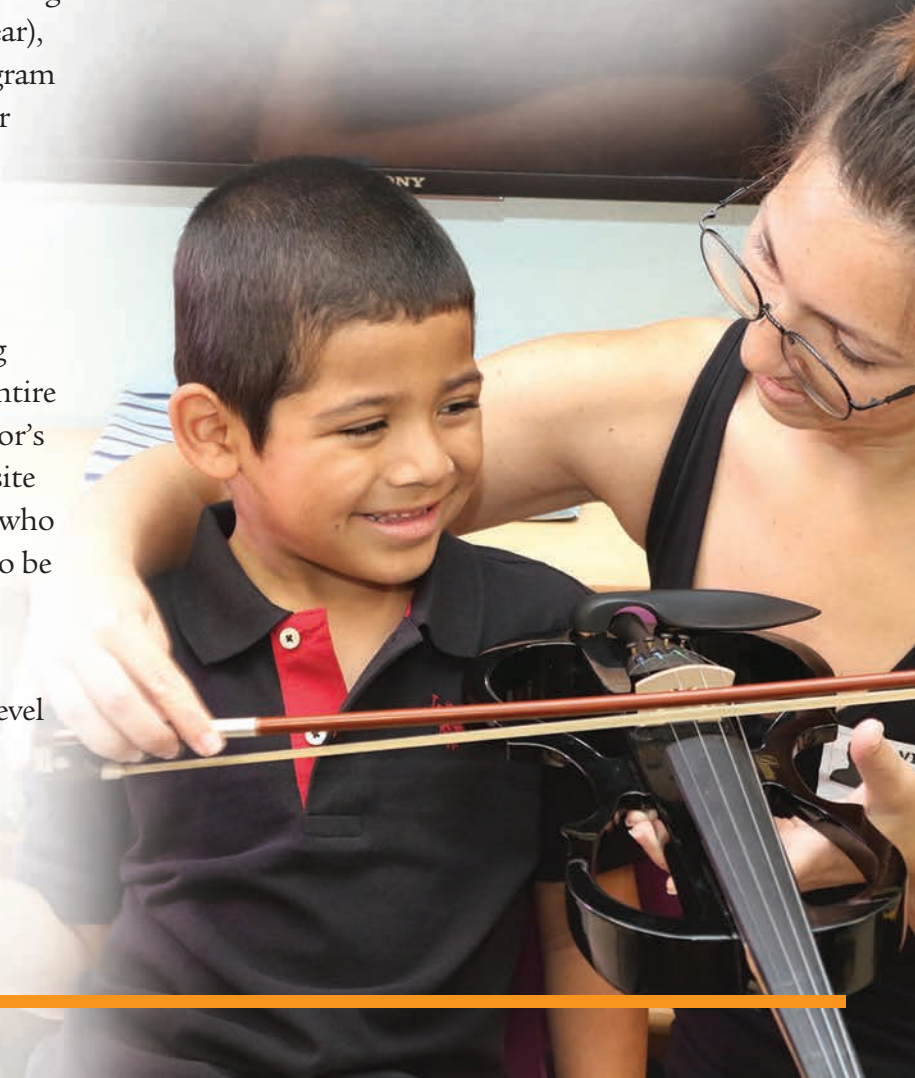
**Connections Cultural Arts & Community Programs can be underwritten or sponsored for:**

<b>Giving Level A:</b> Full school year, entire school.....	<b>\$127,530</b>
<b>Giving Level B:</b> One semester, entire school.....	<b>\$63,765</b>
<b>Giving Level C:</b> One quarter, PreK-8th classes .....	<b>\$22,317</b>
<b>Giving Level D:</b> One quarter, high school classes .....	<b>\$9,565</b>

■ **Recognition – Program Name:** When a donor sponsors this program at Giving Level A (sponsoring the program for the entire school for a school year), the donor’s name will be credited when the program is mentioned in print or online (e.g., The “Donor Family Name” Cultural Arts & Community Programs), including recognition in our Annual Report.

■ **Recognition on the Connections’ Website:** When a donor sponsors this program at Giving Level A or B (sponsoring the program for the entire school for a school year or a semester), the donor’s name will be credited on the Connections website and recognized in our Annual Report. Donors who sponsor this program at Giving Level C will also be credited on the Connections website.

■ **Recognition on Connections’ Social Media:** Donors who sponsor this program at Giving Level A, B, C or D will be recognized individually on Connections’ social media.



# How You Can Help

*Please consider joining our community of supporters and making a lasting impact. Here's how you can help.*

- ✓ **Become a Sustaining Donor:** Establish a recurring donation at your preferred timeframe to impact programs across Connections.
- ✓ **Sponsor a Program:** Select a specific program to sponsor by funding it for a year or more.
- ✓ **Make a One-Time Donation:** Give a one-time amount to help us continue delivering life-changing services.
- ✓ **Refer a Corporate Sponsor:** Introduce us to a corporate sponsor that cares about children and education.

There are many other ways you can directly impact the lives of our students and their families. Please contact us to discuss planned giving, endowment legacies, employer matching gifts, life insurance gifts, charitable annuities and more.



DONATE



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Connections is a 501(c)3 organization that serves students with autism spectrum disorder and their families by providing high-quality education and therapeutic services through collaboration, communication and integration of evidence-based best practices in a unique learning environment.