



2023

BEST BUDDIES ANNUAL REPORT

Joshua, Madison and James, Best Buddies Ambassadors and actors from the film "Champions"

BEST BUDDIES



BEST BUDDIES[®]



MISSION PILLARS

One-To-One	Integrated	Leadership	Inclusive
Friendships	Employment	Development	Living

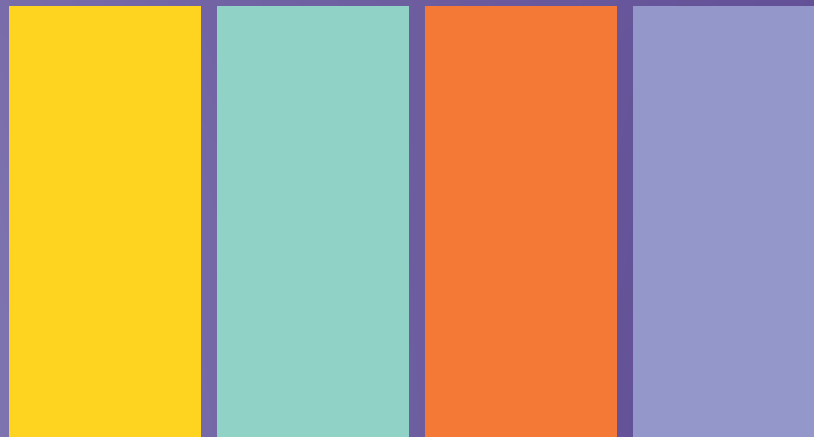


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Anthony K. Shriver,
Founder, Chairman & CEO, Best Buddies International

Message From Our Chairman

Dear Best Buddies Family,

Best Buddies had a remarkable year in 2023, with our events and programmatic activities coming back stronger than ever, both nationwide and globally. As the year concluded, we became even more convinced of the critical and transformative role that Best Buddies programs play in fostering connections and building a more inclusive world for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

In 2023, Best Buddies formed strategic partnerships with several major corporate partners that will have a profound impact on our organization and the people we serve. BODYARMOR became the official water and sports beverage partner of the Best Buddies Challenges, providing hydration products for the organization's national cycling events. Best Buddies also launched a new partnership with our friends at Jersey Mike's Subs. To kick off the partnership, the company generously pledged \$1 million to support the organization, inviting their customers to donate via a round-up campaign at checkout on their mobile app. In 2023, we also welcomed the Boston Celtics' Al Horford, the Atlanta Falcons' Chris Lindstrom, and Celebrity Chef Buddy Valastro as official Best Buddies Global Ambassadors. In these roles, they will use their star power, resources, and connections to promote our mission.

The strength of our business model, combined with our loyal and expanding supporter base, the dedication and focus of our talented employees, and the growth opportunities we see ahead, all reinforce my confidence in our ability to drive towards our long-term growth.

Thank you for contributing to a better world for individuals with IDD. Your continued support will be critical as we strive to move our mission forward, recognizing that there is still much work to be done.

Together, we will rise to the occasion to change lives through the power of inclusion.

In Friendship,

Anthony K. Shriver,
Founder, Chairman & CEO, Best Buddies International

Why We Matter

Society has made undeniable progress in improving the lives of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Yet, we still have a long way to go. Many people with IDD remain unemployed and do not experience the simple joys of genuine friendships and a significant portion of the IDD community still faces access barriers, pervasive social isolation, and discrimination.

This is where Best Buddies International plays a vital role as a model of inclusion and catalyst for change. Best Buddies is the world's largest organization committed to ending the social, physical and economic isolation that 200 million individuals with IDD often experience. For those within the IDD community, Best Buddies represents a pathway to forging lifelong friendships, securing gainful employment, achieving independent living and gaining the skills and confidence to advocate for themselves.

An estimated 84%* of adults (18+) with IDD do not have a paid job in the community. This is where the Best Buddies' Jobs program steps in. The Best Buddies Jobs program has participants employed full time who each have the potential to earn a total income upwards of \$1mm over 30 years and contribute \$250k in taxes back into the economy, rather than costing the government approximately \$750k each in Federal SSI and Medicaid support during that time period.

This is just one of the countless ways Best Buddies improves the lives of individuals with IDD while simultaneously improving whole-of-society outcomes. Through the cultivation of meaningful one-on-one friendships, the pursuit of integrated employment, the provision of inclusive living arrangements and the nurturing of leadership skills, Best Buddies is fostering a world that is full of opportunity for individuals with IDD.

For more information, please visit **BESTBUDDIES.ORG**

Together, we can build a world where everyone belongs.



Madison and James, Best Buddies Ambassadors and actors from the film "Champions"



Hunter with his father William



Hunter, Best Buddies Global Ambassador

A Parent's Perspective

“Being a part of my kids' lives has given me the most joy as a father. Watching them navigate the ups and downs of life, seeing them become close siblings and good human beings who contribute positively to society, brings me immense joy.

Hunter, my son, is one of the friendliest and most positive people I know. He has a huge heart and genuinely cares about others. Hunter loves music and can identify songs and artists just by hearing the beginning of a track. He is also passionate about sports and dreams of visiting every MLB park, especially those in Pittsburgh, where I grew up. Hunter will give me a rundown of all the scores. Who needs ESPN when you have Hunter?

Best Buddies has profoundly impacted both my life and Hunter's. They came into our lives when I was really worried about Hunter, who spent a lot of time alone in his room. Best Buddies showed Hunter that he could have friends outside the family who care about him and want to spend time with him. Now, he has many events that keep him busy and happy. I no longer worry about him making friends or finding his place in life.

The greatest gift people with disabilities have is their uniqueness and ability to accept others for who they are. As Hunter says, autism is his superpower.

Whether you need a friend or want to be a friend, Best Buddies is the place for you. Everyone needs a space outside their family where they feel loved for who they are. I honestly couldn't say what Hunter's life would be like without Best Buddies.”

– **William Hunter**, father of Best Buddies Global Ambassador **Hunter Huff**

2023 Highlights

Launches

- In October, in honor of National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM), Best Buddies hosted the 5th Annual Corporate Partner Summit at the Accenture offices in Chicago. This event brought together corporate leaders to promote inclusion and featured sessions led by Accenture, i4CP, InsightGlobal, and Shutterfly.

Partnerships

- BODYARMOR became the official water and sports beverage partner of the Best Buddies Challenges. The company will provide all water and hydration products consumed by athletes across the organization's national cycling events as part of their sponsorship.
- Jersey Mike's Subs generously pledges \$1MM to support Best Buddies to kick off the new partnership and invites their customers to donate to the organization via a round-up campaign at checkout to amplify the financial support.
- The Boston Celtics' Al Horford, the Atlanta Falcons' Chris Lindstrom, and Celebrity Chef Buddy Valastro became official Best Buddies Global Ambassadors.



BODYARMOR's interactive pop-up at the 2023 Best Buddies Challenge: Hyannis Port presented by Shaw's and Star Market Foundation and the TJX Companies, Inc event



Celebrity Chef and Global Ambassador **Buddy Valastro** with his son **Buddy Valastro, Jr.** and fellow Best Buddies Ambassadors **Matthew** and **Joshua** at the 2023 Best Buddies Challenge: Hyannis Port presented by Shaw's and Star Market Foundation and the TJX Companies, Inc event



Desmond and **Mario**, Friendship Program participants, enjoy Jersey Mike's Subs

Milestones

1987 - 1996

- In 1987, Anthony Kennedy Shriver launches BESTBUDDIES® Colleges by founding the first Best Buddies chapter at Georgetown University.
- In 1988, the iconic Best Buddies logo was donated to Best Buddies by legendary pop-artist, Keith Haring.
- On January 19, 1989, Best Buddies is incorporated as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, becoming America's first national, unified, social and recreational program for people with IDD.
- In 1992, Best Buddies Global Headquarters office moves to Miami, FL.
- In 1993, Best Buddies launches BESTBUDDIES® Citizens to pair adults with IDD in one-to-one friendships with their working peers who do not have disabilities.
- In 1994, Best Buddies launches BESTBUDDIES® Jobs, a supported employment program targeting high-paying, corporate jobs for people with IDD.
- In 1995, Best Buddies launches BESTBUDDIES® High Schools to pair special education students in one-to-one friendships with high school volunteers.
- In 1996, Best Buddies launches BESTBUDDIES® Middle Schools to pair students with IDD in one-to-one friendships with middle school volunteers.

1999 - 2008

- In 1998, Best Buddies hosts the first *Best Buddies Miami Gala*.
- In 1999, Best Buddies launches e-BUDDIES®, a cutting-edge online friendship program.
- In 2000, Best Buddies holds the inaugural *Best Buddies Challenge: Hyannis Port*, a 100-mile bike ride from Boston to Hyannis Port.
- In 2003, Best Buddies has participants in all 50 states on the US.
- In 2004, Best Buddies launches the nationally televised inaugural *Volvo Best Buddies Challenge: Hearst Castle*, a 100-mile bike ride along the Pacific Coast Highway.

2009 - 2019

- In 2009, Best Buddies launches *Best Buddies Friendship Walk*.
- In 2010, Best Buddies has programs in 50 countries around the world.
- In 2011, Best Buddies launches BESTBUDDIES® Ambassadors to teach participants with IDD communication and self-advocacy skills.
- In 2012, Best Buddies launches BESTBUDDIES® Promoters, the first Best Buddies program open to elementary schools; the inaugural of the *Best Buddies Challenge: Miami* takes place and the first *Best Buddies Champion of The Year Gala* is hosted.
- In 2014, Best Buddies celebrates its 25th anniversary and also celebrates 25 years of the *Best Buddies Leadership Conference*.
- In 2017, Best Buddies holds the first *Best Buddies Breakaway Camp: Malibu* and hosts the inaugural *Best Buddies' Celebrating Mothers* in Malibu, CA, with Global Ambassador Cindy Crawford and her daughter, Kaia Gerber.
- In 2019, Best Buddies launches its fourth mission pillar, BESTBUDDIES® Inclusive Living, to provide individuals with and without IDD an opportunity to live independently in a dynamic environment where they can learn, grow and thrive.

2020 - Current

- In 2020, Best Buddies introduces BESTBUDDIES® Ventures, with the first launch being BESTBUDDIES® X Rosetta Bakery in Miami, FL, creates jobs for individuals with IDD and operates as a profit center via a bakery and coffee shop partnership.
- In 2020, Best Buddies launches BESTBUDDIES® Transitions to help prepare young adults with IDD for independence and inclusion in their communities as they move from school into adulthood.
- In 2022, Best Buddies launches BESTBUDDIES® Elementary Schools to teach inclusion to a younger age group to create a lasting effect on societal norms for the next generation.



Cristian

Kristian, Tracy, Melinda, Cristian, Shania and Lisa, Friendship Program participants

Our Impact

3,535

Chapters

137,346*

Participants

1,373,460

Impacted

50

States

46

Countries



One-To-One Friendship

100

Elementary School Chapters

1,622

High School Chapters

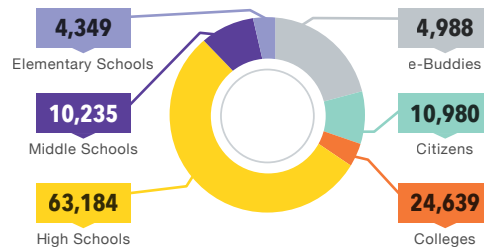
522

Middle School Chapters

500

College Chapters

Program Participants

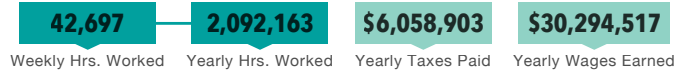


Integrated Employment

2,093

Participants Employed

Average Total Participant Stats



Avg. hrs worked per week 20.40, Avg. hrly wage \$14.48 (in the U.S.).



Leadership Development

409

Elementary Schools Promoters Chapters

104

Middle School Promoters Chapters

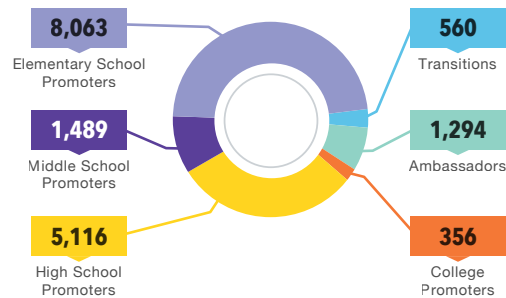
247

High School Promoters Chapters

31

College Promoters Chapters

Program Participants



Inclusive Living

5

Five residences in Washington, D.C. (2), Miami, FL, Atlanta, GA, and Los Angeles, CA

All program stats are as of 12/31/2023, and reflect the most recent Best Buddies program year (July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024).
*Total number of participants does not include residents in Living location(s), not listed.



Angela and Kristine, Friendship program participants Best Buddies Philippines



One-To-One Friendships



Integrated Employment



Leadership Development



Inclusive Living

We are BESTBUDDIES®

Best Buddies is the largest organization dedicated to ending the social, physical, and economic isolation of the 200 million people worldwide with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Our programs empower people with IDD to form meaningful friendships with their peers, secure jobs, improve communication and advocacy skills, and live independently.

Mission

Best Buddies International is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to establishing a global volunteer movement that creates opportunities for one-to-one friendships, integrated employment, leadership development, and inclusive living, for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

Vision

To put Best Buddies out of business. Best Buddies envisions a world where people with IDD are so successfully integrated into schools, workplaces, and communities that its current efforts and services will be unnecessary. Until that vision becomes a reality, the organization will continue to educate middle school, high school and college students, community members, corporations, and employers about the emotional, functional, and natural needs and abilities of people with IDD.

Who We Serve

Best Buddies serves individuals with IDD and their families. The IDD community includes, but is not limited to, people with Down syndrome, autism, Fragile X, Williams syndrome, and other undiagnosed disabilities.

Programs

Best Buddies programs sit on the four key mission pillars below:

- One-to-One Friendships
- Integrated Employment
- Leadership Development
- Inclusive Living

One-To-One Friendships

Builds friendships between people with and without IDD, offering social mentoring while improving the quality of life and level of inclusion for a population that is often isolated and excluded.

BESTBUDDIES. Elementary Schools, Middle Schools, High Schools, Colleges, and Citizens

Creates an inclusive community for students and adults with IDD, helping them become socially integrated with their peers at every age.

e-BUDDIES.

Provides opportunities for participants with and without IDD to form virtual one-to-one friendships, create connections in the e-Buddies social platform, and attend social events online.

Integrated Employment

Secures jobs for people with IDD, empowering them to earn an income, pay taxes, and independently support themselves through their professional accomplishments.

BESTBUDDIES. Jobs

Matches skilled, qualified individuals with IDD with businesses seeking enthusiastic and dedicated employees. Through the Jobs program, Best Buddies develops partnerships with employers, assists with the hiring process and provides ongoing support to the employee and employer.

Leadership Development

Educates and empowers people with and without IDD to become leaders, public speakers, and advocates.

BESTBUDDIES. Ambassadors

Offers people with and without IDD the opportunity to gain the public speaking skills, self-esteem, and confidence needed to successfully advocate for themselves, their peers, and Best Buddies in communities and workplaces.

BESTBUDDIES. Promoters

Empowers youth to become advocates for people with IDD and helps chapters organize special events that promote inclusion and bring awareness to the disability rights movement.

BESTBUDDIES. Transitions

Offers a combination of classroom-based training, experiential learning, and corporate mentorship to help students with IDD explore post-secondary options, prepare for independent living, and identify career ambitions.

Inclusive Living

Provides an integrated experience in which people with and without IDD are active, contributing citizens – living independently in a dynamic environment where they can learn, grow, and thrive.

BESTBUDDIES. Living

Offers individuals with and without IDD an opportunity to live together in a vibrant, educational community that supports all residents in advancing their employment, financial literacy, continued education, and life skills as they work to achieve their personal goals.

Katrelle and Katie, Friendship Program buddy pair



One-to-One Friendships

Without love, support, and friends, life may feel isolating – this is a reality people with IDD have faced throughout history. Best Buddies offers people with IDD the chance to have a friend, gain self-confidence and self-esteem and share interests, experiences, and activities that many other individuals enjoy.

BESTBUDDIES. Elementary Schools, Middle Schools, High Schools & Colleges

Best Buddies offers students with IDD the opportunity to have a friend and enjoy common interests, experiences, and social activities in the Middle School, High School, and College programs. Each friendship pair commits to speaking and spending time together every week throughout the year. These programs create lasting friendships and help facilitate an environment of inclusion throughout the school and in the community.

BESTBUDDIES. Citizens

For people with IDD, the absence of meaningful friendships extends into adulthood. Best Buddies Citizens pairs adults with IDD in one-to-one friendships with adults without IDD in corporate and civic communities. Citizen buddy pairs commit to a one-year friendship in which they will talk once a week and see each other twice a month. These relationships commonly grow into friendships that last a lifetime.

e-BUDDIES.

This program creates social inclusion and friendships for people with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in a virtual space. Technology is an integral part of society and by participating in e-Buddies, participants can develop the skills needed to communicate across a variety of platforms.



Yasmin and Aiden, Friendship Program buddy pair

Yasmin & Aiden

One-To-One Friendships

Thomas A. Edison High School Alexandria, VA

From their smiles, easy conversations, and evident friendship, watching Aiden and Yasmin at the *Best Buddies Friendship Walk* with their high school team perfectly illustrates the Best Buddies mission in action. As seniors at Thomas Edison High School, Aiden and Yasmin have been matched in a one-to-one friendship since freshman year, and Best Buddies has made a lasting impact on their lives. Their commitment is clear through Yasmin's leadership as Chapter President and Aiden's role as Buddy Director over the past two years.

Aiden loves being friends with Yasmin, sharing, "I love to go out to lunch with my buddy, Yasmin, and play games in the cafeteria like Headbands, Spot It, and Jenga." Yasmin fondly remembers their first *Best Buddies Prom*, which was also their first prom ever, as one of her favorite memories with Aiden.

Best Buddies has profoundly impacted the Edison High School community through various events organized by the chapter, including Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month and the *Spread the Word to End the Word* campaign. Seeing so many friendships between people with different abilities from across Virginia and D.C. reminded Aiden and Yasmin that they are part of a welcoming and cherished community.

As Aiden and Yasmin prepare to graduate this year, they have messages for their fellow students. Aiden encourages, "everyone at Edison to keep up the good work," while Yasmin urges members to "stay involved with the Best Buddies community – it is simply the best!"

– Aiden and Yasmin, Best Buddies Friendship Pair

“ I love to go out to lunch with my buddy, Yasmin, and play games in the cafeteria like Headbands, Spot It, and Jenga.” - **Aiden**



Anthony K. Shriver with Jersey Mike's Subs Founder & CEO Peter Cancro and Best Buddies participants

Integrated Employment

Best Buddies Jobs assists participants in finding meaningful employment, earning a competitive income, receiving benefits, and working alongside others in the community. The program offers people with IDD the opportunity to become financially independent, removing the need for government assistance or parental support. A focus on competitive, professional opportunities is what sets the Best Buddies Jobs program apart from other employment services.

BESTBUDDIES. Jobs

Best Buddies Jobs furthers the integration of people with IDD into the community through supported employment. The focus is on facilitating competitive, integrated job placements that allow participants to earn an income, pay taxes, and work in an environment alongside their peers in the community, leading to full inclusion and independence. Coaching is provided in essential job interviewing skills, and once employment is secured, there is assistance with on-the-job training.

The Jobs program prides itself on developing employment opportunities in professional environments and focuses on white-collar jobs such as receptionists, mail room assistants, file clerks, office assistants, front desk assistants, and retail associates. Employers range from some of the top law firms and talent agencies to well-known retail businesses and luxury hotels.



Robin, Best Buddies Jobs participant
Klingman & Associates, LLC

Robin

Integrated Employment

Klingman & Associates, LLC.

New York City, NY

Robin currently works as an office manager at Klingman & Associates, LLC, a wealth management firm, in New York City. She has been with the company for over five and a half years, starting as an intern in January 2019 and transitioning to a full-time role after two months.

At her job, she uses her administrative skills, collaboration, Microsoft Office, customer service, and organizational skills. She has also learned to use programs like Tamarac CRM, a web-based client relationship management system, book travel arrangements, manage multiple calendars, and continues to acquire new skills as she works. Robin works 40 hours a week and enjoys a comprehensive benefits package that includes paid vacation, medical care, a retirement plan, dental care, vision care, and sick days.

Since securing her job, Robin has been able to experience more of the city and travel, feeling supported by her job and close-knit colleagues at Klingman & Associates, who feel like family to her.

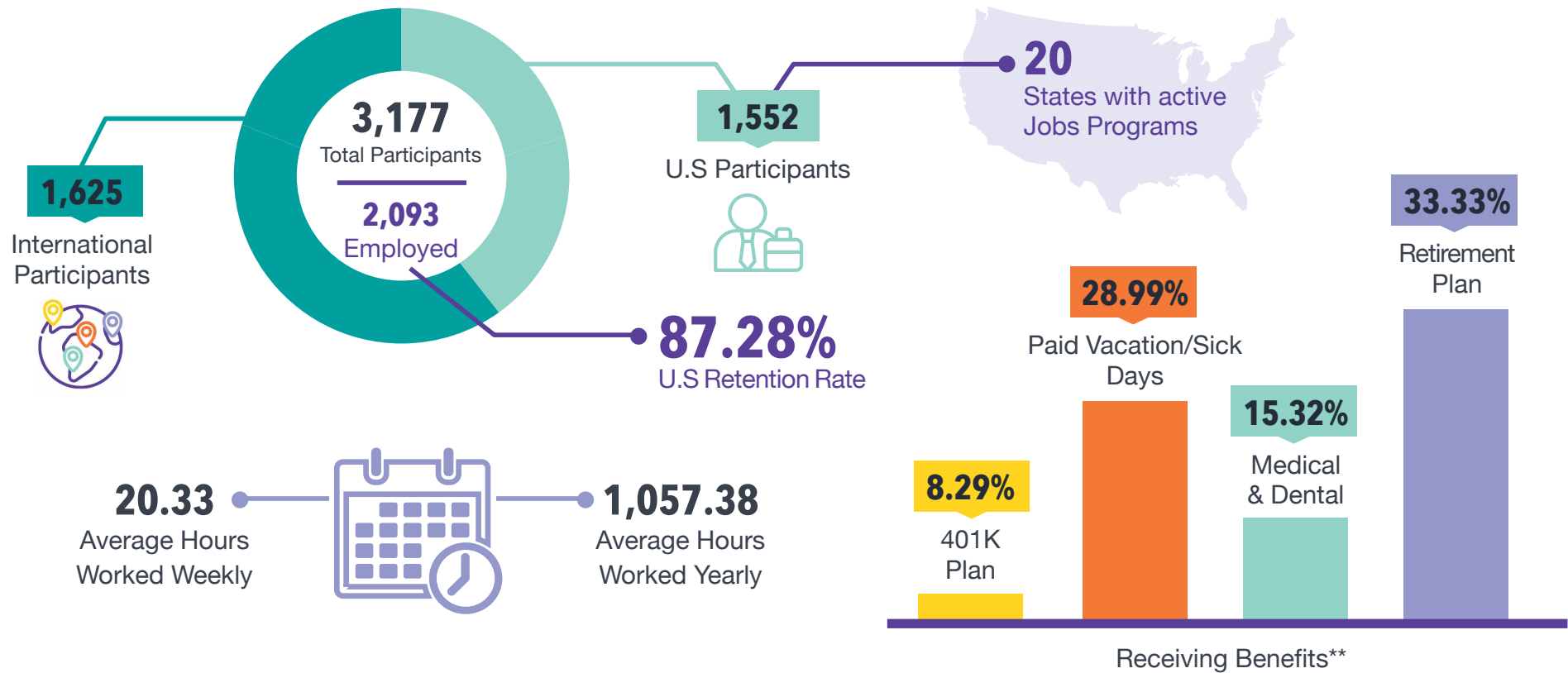
Robin's daily responsibilities include scanning and uploading checks into the system, preparing conference rooms for clients and the team, printing and scanning documents for colleagues, and mailing documents to clients and wholesalers. Before joining Klingman & Associates, she worked at the local Pet Health Store.

Before getting involved with Best Buddies, Robin explored different career paths and job opportunities and was referred to the Best Buddies Jobs program by Access VR, a program that helps individuals with disabilities achieve and maintain employment.

Her future goals include taking courses to further her education, running another marathon or half-marathon, traveling more, learning different languages, and learning how to play golf. Robin looks forward to continuing her education, both in financial planning and other fields.

“For people looking to expand their hiring to include people with IDD, the single biggest piece of advice I could give you is: don't overthink it.” - **Michael Paley**, Chief Operating Officer, Klingman & Associates

Key Jobs Program Stats



Top 4Jobs Participants Highest Salaries With Benefits

Salary	\$71,780.80	\$71,011.20	\$69,992	\$66,560
Name/ State	Andrew C. Los Angeles, CA	Nicole K. Los Angeles, CA	Nathaniel M. San Francisco, CA	Elaina C. Baltimore, MD
Benefits	Holiday Pay, Medical Care	Vacation Pay, Medical Care, Sick Leave, Sick Pay	Vacation Pay, Holiday Pay, Medical Care, Dental Care, Vision Care, Sick Pay	Vacation Pay, Retirement Plans

Top 5 Jobs Participants Highest Hourly Rates

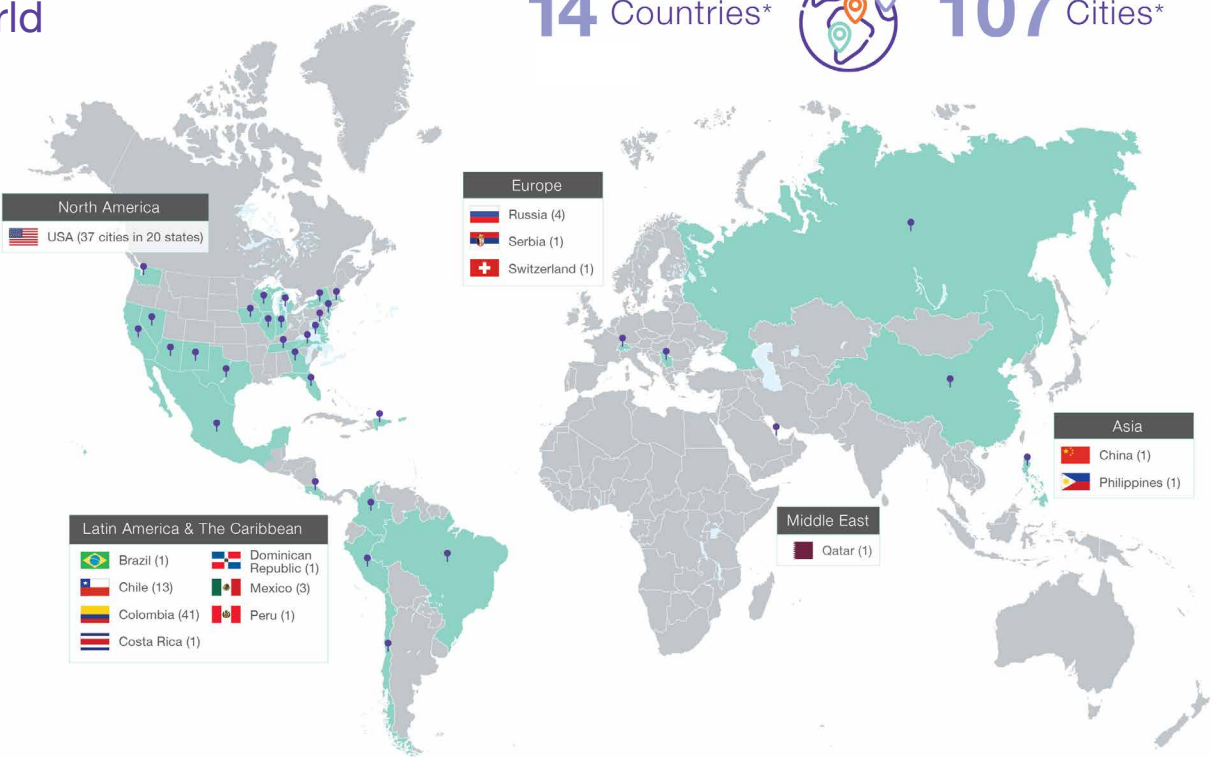


Best Buddies Jobs Around The World



Carlos, Best Buddies Jobs participant
Whole Foods Market

14 Countries* 107 Cities*



* Global jobs stats are calculated based on total jobs participants and U.S. Average hours and wages.
 ** Represents benefits received by US BB Job participants.
 *** All Jobs Program stats are as of 12/31/2023



Leadership Development

Best Buddies educates and empowers people with and without IDD to become leaders, public speakers and change agents. Through the Ambassadors and Promoters programs, participants inspire their communities to build a more inclusive world for people with IDD.

BESTBUDDIES Ambassadors

Best Buddies Ambassadors is a program that provides training for participants with and without IDD in speech writing, public speaking, and self-advocacy. Ambassadors develop the skills to share their life stories, promote Best Buddies programs, network, and, most importantly, advocate.

Ambassadors participate in trainings focused on the art of public speaking and advocacy. Once trained, they share their stories and become more involved and empowered as citizens. Ambassadors are encouraged to speak about opportunities for people with IDD, present at recruitment fairs and Best Buddies events, and develop partnerships in the community.

BESTBUDDIES Promoters

Best Buddies Promoters empowers youth to become advocates for people with IDD by organizing and attending special events that promote inclusion. Students attending a school without a special education program can join a Promoters chapter to develop connections with people with IDD or can start one by contacting their local Best Buddies state office.

Each Promoters chapter is led by a chapter president from the student body and a faculty advisor and is assigned a Best Buddies staff person who offers regular support and guidance. Once formed, Promoters chapters host events, activities, and fundraisers where they advocate for people with IDD, and promote the Best Buddies mission.



Fran, Best Buddies Global Ambassador

Fran

Leadership Development

Global Ambassador

Dallas, TX

It's a bird! It's a plane! It's Flava Fran! Autistic rapping Jew, overcomer, future homeless shelter founder, and Best Buddies Global Ambassador. I live in Dallas, Texas where I work at a preschool, thanks to the Best Buddies Jobs program and my jobs coach, Cheyenne. It is the most amazing job in the entire universe! I hope more people with disabilities will see it is possible to achieve their dream job, and that employers will give us a chance. My job brings so much light to my life and I hope to make your life brighter.

I believe the world is butterflies and rainbows! People try to tell me that it's not, but I try to see the bright side in every situation. When I said I was an overcomer it was because I'm a survivor of 18 years of physical abuse. During my struggles, I learned to find joy in the little things like flowers and pretty colors. Another bright side is that my rough past gave me the drive to help others. A good way to find bright sides is through music. I love to write and perform uplifting raps to spread love and positive messages. Best Buddies has given me an outlet to spread even more love. From the Jobs program to the Ambassadors program to the *Best Buddies Friendships Walks* to hanging out with my buddies, Best Buddies has given me the biggest bright side I've ever had.

Before I conclude, I want you all to know that a big bright side is coming. When I introduced myself at the beginning of the speech I said future homeless shelter founder. My dream is to one day build a homeless shelter and call it the Bright side Homeless Shelter. That's my dream, but I want all of you to know I believe in your dreams, and whether you have a disability or not, you can make your dreams come true; and looking on the bright side sure does help!

Best Buddies is the biggest bright side! Thank you all so much.

- Fran, Best Buddies Global Ambassador

“ Best Buddies has given me an outlet to spread even more love. From the Jobs program to the Ambassadors program to the *Best Buddies Friendships Walks* to hanging out with my buddies, Best Buddies has given me the biggest bright side I've ever had.” - Fran



Inclusive Living

Supporting and empowering individuals with IDD to live as integrated, contributing members in the larger community is the next frontier in the movement to create a more inclusive society. Best Buddies Living fosters a dynamic environment where people with IDD can learn, grow and thrive.

BESTBUDDIES[®] Living

The Best Buddies Living program encourages people with and without IDD to live together in a vibrant community that focuses on supporting residents in accomplishing their life goals and dreams.

The Best Buddies Living program supports inclusion by:

- Developing programs that foster an opportunity for residents to experience living with friends and colleagues. Programs include weekly shared meals, fitness classes, cultural events, holiday parties, social activities, and sports.
- Offering an environment that encourages the development of independent living skills, life-changing relationships, and educational pursuits in connection with a college or university. Through an affiliation with a nearby school, all residents can immerse themselves in campus life, attending sporting events and enjoying fitness and dining facilities alongside their student peers.
- Matching people with and without IDD in a residential experience, and providing a supportive environment that encourages full-time or part-time employment.



Rubin, pictured in the center, with his housemates at their Best Buddies Living: Miami residence

Rubin

Best Buddies Living Resident

Miami, FL

Before joining Best Buddies Living: Miami in January 2024, Rubin lived with his grandmother, sisters, niece, and nephew. In his new home, Rubin has his own room and bathroom and shares a living and kitchen space. The apartment building is just blocks from the University of Miami, providing residents with access to the campus and all events through a partnership between the school and the program. Residents with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), like Rubin, are also taught independent living skills by an on-site residential manager.

Rubin's favorite aspects of being a resident at Best Buddies Living: Miami includes going out, bonding with his roommates, helping others, and cooking. He enjoys game nights, playing pool, joking and laughing, and having conversations with his housemates. Through the program, Rubin has learned important life and independent living skills. "Through the Best Buddies Living program, I've learned how to be on my own, make better decisions for my life, and how to become a better person," said Rubin.

Since joining Best Buddies, Rubin's life has changed for the better. He became more involved with the organization, including serving as a state ambassador, a role that empowers individuals with IDD to become leaders, public speakers, and advocates. Best Buddies also helped him secure a job with the Hialeah Fire Department. In this position, Rubin supports his boss Nikita with administrative tasks and assists the entire department with their day-to-day duties. He also enjoys greeting people and helping with fire reports. His salary has doubled since being hired, and he receives benefits including paid time off, health insurance, and a 401(k)-matching plan.

Rubin encourages others with intellectual and developmental disabilities to join the Best Buddies Living program:

"Others should join Best Buddies Living to experience independent living and discover more about themselves. At Best Buddies Living, you basically live on your own. You will know how it feels to live on your own and have the opportunity to develop your independent living skills," said Rubin.

“ Others should join Best Buddies Living to experience independent living and discover more about themselves. You will know how it feels to live on your own and have the opportunity to develop your independent living skills.” - **Rubin**

International Programs

In 2023, Best Buddies' International Programs (IP) department set out to establish new regional and global partnerships to enhance revenue, improve departmental and country operations by refining protocols, processes, and tools, and strengthen country programs while expanding global presence. Throughout the year, significant strides were made towards these goals. IP supported 28 international participants to attend the *2023 Best Buddies International Leadership Conference (BBLC)* in Bloomington, Indiana and increased attendance at its annual *Global Staff Forum (GSF)* by 40%. Additionally, IP successfully opened programs in Cyprus, Dominica, El Salvador, Portugal, and Switzerland.

International Programs' compliance for accreditation saw a 17% improvement, and we received grants amounting to \$30,000 from the U.S. Embassy in Macao, \$50,000 from the Philippines, and \$20,000 from Switzerland. IP hosted 12 webinars for 163 attendees covering topics such as Champion of the Year, country highlights, and various program management strategies. The Best Buddies Living Program was extended to country programs, and the department continued forming partnerships with multinational corporations like JLL, Amazon, and Colgate-Palmolive. To promote inclusivity, all content on BB University was translated into Spanish, benefiting the Spanish-speaking community both in the U.S. and internationally. The IP department also met with the U.S. Ambassador in Spain to explore potential collaborations, and Best Buddies' domestic expansion team, which resulted in a unified global expansion strategy, increasing IP support and accreditation revenue.

Goals and Vision for 2024

Looking ahead to 2024, IP's primary goal is to centralize data and training and provide tech solutions such as Salesforce and a training platform, along with more consolidated support to global staff. By centralizing data, enhancing training, and focusing on sustainable growth, IP is confident in its ability to achieve these ambitious goals for 2024.



Best Buddies International program participants with **Anthony K. Shriver** at the 2023 Best Buddies Leadership Conference (BBLC)



Best Buddies Chile participant at BBLC



Best Buddies Philippines participant at the BBLC



Global Staff Forum



Best Buddies Friendship Walk (BBFW): Ghana



BBFW: Greece



BBFW: Peru



BBFW: Mexico



BBFW: Macao

Best Buddies Around The World

46 Countries & Territories



5 Continents



Revised 10.04.23

Signature Events



Anthony K. Shriver with Best Buddies riders Glenn Wright and Carey Daly; Best Buddies Global Ambassadors Christina and James; and Joey Shriver.

The purpose of special events is to garner support, funds, and awareness for the Best Buddies mission. There are numerous ways to get involved with Best Buddies events including attending events, volunteering, and pursuing sponsorship opportunities.



Cyclists at the 2023 Best Buddies Challenge: Hyannis Port, presented by Shaw's and Star Market Foundation and the TJX Companies, Inc.

Best Buddies Challenge: Hyannis Port

June 2-3, 2023 | Boston to Hyannis Port

The *Best Buddies Challenge: Hyannis Port*, presented by Shaw's and Star Market Foundation and the TJX Companies, Inc. returned to Massachusetts for its 24th year. The Challenge weekend kicked off Friday, June 2 with a dinner reception at John F. Kennedy Presidential Museum & Library. On Saturday, June 3, hundreds of riders took to the start line at the JFK Library for the picturesque 100-mile ride portion of the event, from Boston to Hyannis Port. The Challenge was capped off by a celebratory clambake where Celebrity Chef Buddy Valastro presented Best Buddies with a gold medal cake to commemorate the achievements of participants who completed the weekend's bike ride. The event also included a special musical performance by Emmy and Grammy Award-winning Curtis "50 Cent" Jackson.

Best Buddies Challenge: California

October 13-14, 2023 | Marin County, CA

The *Best Buddies Challenge: California*, presented by the Safeway Foundation returned to California for its 20th year. The event kicked off with the welcome reception at the iconic Summit Skywalker Ranch on Friday, October 13, where guests enjoyed cocktails, dinner and a program hosted by Best Buddies International Founder, Chairman & CEO Anthony K. Shriver that highlighted the achievements of the Best Buddies Global Ambassadors and key supporters. During the welcome reception, singer and longtime Best Buddies celebrity supporter Lisa Loeb entertained the crowd. On Saturday, October 14, hundreds of cyclists took to the starting line for a 38- or 72-mile ride through the Marin countryside led by professional cyclists Thomas Pidcock and Magnus Sheffield. The event was capped off with a gourmet lunch, wine tasting and live entertainment.



Cyclists at the 2023 Best Buddies Challenge: California, presented by the Safeway Foundation



Professional Cyclists **Magnus Sheffield**, **Cameron Wurf** and Four-time Tour de France winner **Chris Froome** (center) leading the pack at the 2023 *Best Buddies Challenge: Miami*, chaired by Kenneth C. Griffin Charitable Fund and presented by Andrew P. Barowsky Foundation and Mack Cycle & Fitness

Best Buddies Challenge: Miami

November 17, 2023 | Miami, FL

The *Best Buddies Challenge: Miami*, chaired by Kenneth C. Griffin Charitable Fund and presented by Andrew P. Barowsky Foundation and Mack Cycle & Fitness, was led by Four-time Tour de France winner Chris Froome and professional cyclists Magnus Sheffield and Cameron Wurf. The world-class 80-mile cycling event took over closed roads with a motorcycle police-escorted peloton. The Challenge was followed by the *Best Buddies Miami Gala* that evening.

Best Buddies Miami Gala

November 17, 2023 | Miami, FL

The 25th Annual *Best Buddies Miami Gala* celebrated Best Buddies' programs in Qatar and honored Global Ambassador Tom Brady with the 2023 *Spirit of Friendship Award*, Best Buddies' highest accolade presented to distinguished luminaries who have shown great leadership, generosity, and spirit in supporting the organization's mission. The event also featured a fabulous cocktail hour, a gourmet dinner, live and silent auctions, and a live performance by Nelly.



Best Buddies Global Ambassadors **Tom Brady** and **Katie** at the 24th Annual *Best Buddies Miami Gala*

Best Buddies Breakaway Camp Malibu, CA

November 29 – December 2, 2023

Led by cycling superstar Geraint Thomas and his teammate Cameron Wurf, the *Best Buddies Breakaway Camp: Malibu* provided athletes with a pro-level experience, offering a holistic approach to training. Set in the Santa Monica Mountains of Southern California, the camp hosted 19 cyclists and featured a comprehensive curriculum, including tips on riding efficiently, proper rider nutrition, post-training recovery, and building a foundation for a sustainable healthy lifestyle. Based at the Four Seasons Westlake Village, the camp received support from Pinarello bikes and included a full staff of licensed coaches, Tour de France mechanics, chefs, and massage therapists. This five-star camp helps raise funds and awareness for Best Buddies International and its global mission to support individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.





Holly Robinson Peete, an actress and advocate for individuals with IDD, surrounded by her family and Best Buddies supporters at the 6th Annual Best Buddies Celebrating Mothers event in Pacific Palisades, CA.

Best Buddies' Celebrating Mothers

May 13, 2023 | Pacific Palisades, CA

The 6th Annual *Best Buddies' Celebrating Mothers*, presented by Cadillac, honored actress and advocate Holly Robinson Peete. The celebration featured a performance by Best Buddies Global Ambassador Olivia Culpo and her family, along with singer and Best Buddies Ambassador Marlana VanHoose. Attendees included Best Buddies Global Ambassador Cindy Crawford, NFL star Christian McCaffrey, Aurora Culpo, Sophia Culpo, Courtney Sixx, Garcelle Beauvais, and renowned photographer Brian Bowen Smith, who captured memorable moments from the event.

Best Buddies Friendship Balls & Proms

Best Buddies Friendship Balls and Proms are celebrations of inclusion held across the U.S. While they may appear like any other dance on the surface, they are profoundly meaningful events. Thousands of teens and young adults, both with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities, come together to laugh, dance, sing, and enjoy each other's company. These events are free from judgment, ridicule, or isolation, embodying pure joy, capturing the essence of genuine friendships between individuals of all abilities.



Guests at the 2023 Best Buddies Prom in West Palm Beach, FL



Participants at the 2023 Best Buddies Friendship Walk: Arizona

Best Buddies Friendship Walk

The *Best Buddies Friendship Walks* continued to grow and expand, serving as a significant platform for raising awareness and funds in support of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

In 2023, over 41,000 participants across more than 69 cities joined the cause, collectively raising over \$5.4 million. These walks have positively impacted communities nationwide, creating spaces for new friendships, unlocking promising opportunities, and, above all, promoting inclusion for all.

Best Buddies Champion of the Year Gala

Best Buddies Champion of the Year Gala is a competitive fundraising campaign that brings together and celebrates leaders of inclusion in local communities across the nation. Champion Candidates dedicate themselves to raising funds and awareness for Best Buddies during their campaigns. The culmination of these efforts is the *Champion of the Year Gala*, where the Champions are honored, and the individual who raises the most funds is named the *Champion of the Year*.

In 2023, *Champion of the Year Galas* achieved a record-breaking milestone, hosting 51 events nationwide, with over 425 Champion Candidates, exceeding the fundraising goal by raising over \$8.9 million for Best Buddies. This year saw the highest number of Champions in the history of the campaign, with five top Champions each raising over \$100,000. Tina Gulledge, with support from her Mission Partner Caroline Tyson from South Carolina, emerged as the National Grand Champion by raising \$142,588. Looking ahead to 2024, the goal is to recruit 500 Champions and raise \$9.8 million through 53 events, which will raise critical funds for Best Buddies, and empower community leaders to advocate for inclusion.



Mission Partner **James Masterson** and New Hampshire Top Champion **Jennifer Corriveau**

Best Buddies Leadership Conference

July 21-24, 2023 | Bloomington, IN

The 2023 *Best Buddies Leadership Conference (BBLC)* marked a triumphant return to in-person conference with nearly 2,000 students at Indiana University from July 21-24, under the theme, “Reunited for Inclusion.”

Throughout the weekend, participants engaged in a variety of educational sessions and interactive workshops, designed to equip student leaders with the tools to promote the Best Buddies mission in their communities. The conference also featured a TedTalk-inspired roundtable with notable speakers, providing attendees with innovative ideas to drive the mission forward.

A highlight of the event was the *Baller Bash* pep rally and integrated celebrity basketball game at Simon Skjodt Assembly Hall. The game featured performances by the Indiana Pacemates, Recording Artist Kid Quill, the Indiana RedStepper Dance Team, Ron Fulford Jr., and stars from All Elite Wrestling, creating an unforgettable experience for attendees.

The conference concluded with the Closing Ceremonies on Sunday night, celebrating the incredible impact of student leaders with and without IDD.



Attendees of the 2023 Best Buddies Leadership Conference: Reunited for Inclusion





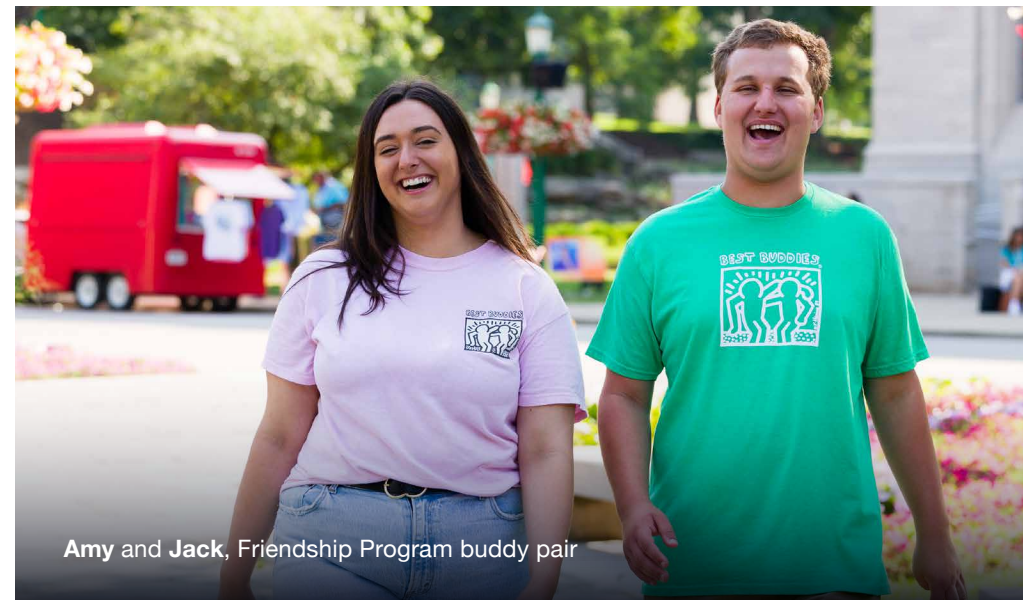
Special Olympics Founder
Eunice Kennedy Shriver and
Special Olympics participants

EKS Day

Created in 2010, Eunice Kennedy Shriver (EKS) Day serves as a unique opportunity to celebrate her legacy, indomitable spirit and life-long commitment to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Even during a time when society did not, Eunice Kennedy Shriver believed in the abilities of people with IDD and led the effort to end the physical and social isolation they endured. EKS Day promotes a global call for individuals to commit to actions of change, inclusion, and acceptance for people with IDD. Across the United States and in 100 countries, EKS Day is celebrated with love, justice, faith, hope, and courage – her five key values. Activities included sports clinics, picnics, leadership trainings, and disability rights awareness efforts.

March Best Buddies Month

What began as a one-day celebration of the Best Buddies mission evolved into a month-long festivity to reflect on the importance of inclusion and acceptance for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities every March. In 2023, the celebration began with the annual *Spread the Word: Inclusion* campaign that encouraged participants to showcase how they promote inclusion in their communities. Throughout the month, participants hosted virtual chapter parties, awareness activities, and engagement campaigns to honor their unity in advancing opportunities for friendship, employment, leadership development, and inclusive living.



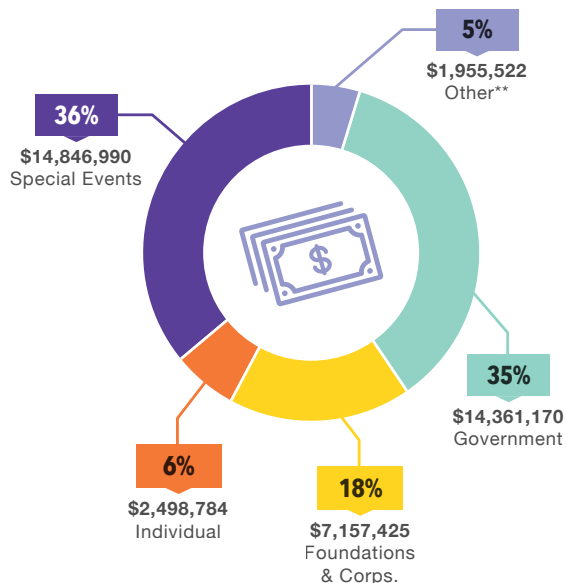
Amy and Jack, Friendship Program buddy pair

Stephanie, Best Buddies Jobs participant and
Bob Friedman, partner at Holland & Knight
and Best Buddies Board Member

Financials

Consolidated Statement of Activities* (as of 12.31.23)

Domestic Revenue



\$40,819,891

Total Domestic Revenue

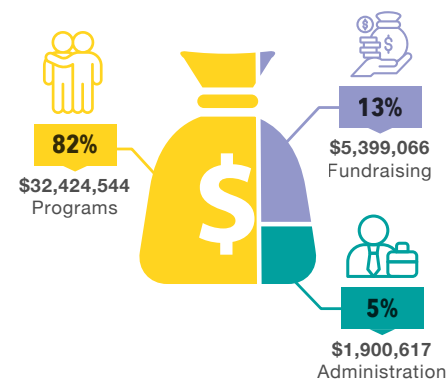
\$33,000,000

Total International Revenue***

\$73,819,891

Total Gross Revenue

Domestic Expenses



\$39,724,227

Total Domestic Expenses

Domestic Net Asset Summary

Net Assets
(beginning of year) **\$32,390,290**

Change in
Net Assets **\$1,095,664**

Net Unrealized
Gains (Losses)
on Investments **2,118,877**

Net Assets
(end of year) **\$35,604,831**

* Statement of Activities for calendar year 2023 based on Best Buddies International's Form 990

** "Other" represents revenue generated from a collection of sources including: Chapter Dues, Annual Best Buddies Leadership Conference, Investment Income and Cause-Related Marketing.

*** Gross consolidation of International Licensees that operate as their own NGOs.

Financials

Balance Sheet (as of 12.31.23)

Assets

Current Assets

Cash and cash equivalents	\$4,938,047
Investments	\$22,352,482
Accounts receivable	\$47,412
Contributions receivable, net	\$1,043,261
Grants receivable	\$5,567,040
Inventory artwork	\$58,361
Prepaid expenses	\$838,526
Total Current Assets	\$34,845,129

Property and Equipment

Computers	\$461,647
Furniture and equipment	\$85,104
Auto	\$61,522
Land	\$1,152,473
Total Property and Equipment, Cost	\$1,760,746
Less Accumulated Depreciation	(\$567,754)
Total Property and Equipment, Net	\$1,192,992

Right-of-Use Assets

Financing lease right-of-use, net of amortization	\$75,598
Operating lease right-of-use, net of amortization	\$3,280,319
Total Right-of-Use Assets	\$3,355,917

Other Assets

Long-term contributions receivable, net	\$1,142,324
Security deposits	\$90,011
Investments - Rosetta Bakery x Best Buddies	\$37,375
Total Other Assets	\$1,269,710

Total Assets \$40,663,748

Liabilities and Net Assets

Current Liabilities

Accounts payable	\$611,906
Deferred revenue	\$706,376
Compensated absences payable	\$173,682
Current portion of financing liabilities	\$25,922
Current portion of operating liabilities	\$1,376,971
Total Current Liabilities	\$2,894,857

Long-Term Liabilities

Line of credit	\$16,533
Security deposit	\$37,497
Long-term portion of financing liabilities	\$50,651
Long-term portion of operating liabilities	\$2,059,379
Total Long-Term Liabilities	\$2,164,060
Total Liabilities	\$5,058,917

Net Assets

With donor restriction	\$7,752,624
Without donor restriction	\$27,852,207
Total Net Assets	\$35,604,831

Total Liabilities and Net Assets \$40,663,748



Rob Backus, EVP, Operations, East Region, Albertsons Companies and **Scott Powell**, Senior Executive Vice President & Chief Operating Officer, Wells Fargo & Company, with Best Buddies Ambassadors

Board of Directors



BOARD SECRETARY
Brad Blank
President/Attorney
Brad Blank & Associates, Inc.



Olivia Culpo
Actress



Mark DeVincentis
Managing Director
Crescent Capital
Group LP



Tamsen Fadal
TV Anchor, Executive
Producer & Author



Joshua Felder
Global Ambassador
Best Buddies International



BOARD TREASURER
Robert Friedman
Partner
Holland & Knight



Aaron Gershenberg
Managing Partner
SVB Capital



Todd Michael Glaser
Developer



Evan Hainey
Partner
Untitled Entertainment



Stephen T. Hearst
VP & GM of
Western Properties
The Hearst Corporation



**Alexander
Hernandez-Dessauer**
VP, International Programs
& Special Projects
Best Buddies International



Jamie Hintlian
Partner/Principal
Ernst & Young



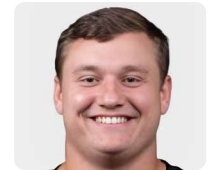
Michelle Klingman
Chief Experience Officer &
Senior Vice President, Human
Resource Capital Management
Jackson Health System



Gerard A. Klingman, CFP
President
Klingman & Associates



Carl Lewis
U.S. Olympic
Gold Medalist



Chris Lindstrom
Professional Football Player
Atlanta Falcons



James Lintott
Chairman
Sterling Foundation
Management



William V. Powers
Founder and Chief
Executive Officer
Cambridge Mobile
Telematics



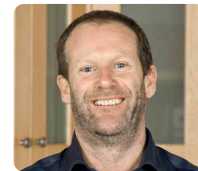
Thomas Quick
Philanthropist



BOARD CHAIR
Anthony Kennedy Shriver
Founder, Chairman & CEO
Best Buddies International



Eunice K. Shriver II
Philanthropist



Tom Sullivan
Founder
Lumber Liquidators



Garrett Tomasek
Young Leaders
Council Chair
Best Buddies International



Ralph Winter
Founder
Corestate Capital Group



Bernie Yuman
President
Bernie Yuman Mgmt.

Executive Team



Jeremiah Angel
Vice President
Web Operations



John M. Carlin
Senior Director
Major Gifts & Planned
Giving



Michael Collins
Vice President,
Best Buddies Challenges



Lisa Derx
Vice President
Government Relations



**Alexander
Hernandez-Dessauer**
VP, International Programs
& Special Projects



Mark Lewis
Senior Vice President
Development, Marketing
& Technology



Nicole Maddox
Vice President
Communications



Stephanie Moore
Vice President
State Operations &
Mission Advancement



Cary Ombres
Vice President
Expansion and Mission
Advancement



Lori Penaloza
Senior Vice President
Finance & Operations



David Quilleon
Senior Vice President
Global Mission, State
Development & Operations



Jessica Schwartz
Vice President
Marketing & Partnerships



Anthony Kennedy Shriver
Founder, Chairman & CEO
Best Buddies International



Julie Torres
Vice President
Human Resources
& Operations



Scott Tracy
Vice President
Challenges, National
Events & Special
Projects



Mark J. Wylie
Vice President
Talent Relations

Honorary Board Members



Eunice Kennedy Shriver
Founder, Special Olympics Int.



Keith Allen Haring
Pop Artist, Creator of the Best Buddies Logo

Our Supporters

CORPORATIONS

\$500,000 and Above

Jersey Mike's Subs
Safeway Foundation

\$250,000 to \$499,000

BODYARMOR
Fanatics Foundation/Michael Rubin
Ansin Foundation/Channel 7
Foundation & WSVN/WHDH
Rolex Watch U.S.A., Inc.
Sephora USA, Inc.
Shaw's & Star Market Foundation
The TJX Foundation, Inc.

\$100,000 to \$249,999

Accenture
Andrew P. Barowsky Foundation
Brauer Material Handling
Hearst Corporation/Steve & Barbara
Hearst
Impossible Foods, Inc.
John Drew/Crossover Ventures
The Kenneth C. Griffin Charitable Fund
Klingman & Associates
Nike, Inc.
PLAN - Planned Lifetime Assistance
Network of MA & RI Inc.
Raymond James & Associates, Inc.
Sterling Foundation Management/Jim
Lintott & May Liang
Sun Capital Partners Foundation/
Marc J. Leder
Sutter Health
The GEO Group Foundation, Inc./
George & Donna Zoley
Wedu, Inc.
Wells Fargo & Company

\$50,000 to \$99,999

A & E Television Networks
Absolute HCBS LLC
Bader Philanthropies, Inc.
Bank of America
Campbell's Soup Company
Capital Group
CenterPoint Energy Foundation
Chevron Products Company
E. & J. Gallo Winery
Eaton Vance Management

Fifth Generation, Inc.
Insight Global
J.P. Morgan
Jackson Health System
Jones Lang LaSalle America Inc.
Kahala Corp
Micky & Madeleine Arison Family
Foundation
MOD Super Fast Pizza, LLC
Morgan Stanley
PHLY Foundation
Pratt Holdings, Inc.
Qintel, LLC
Race Roster
River House 11900, LLC
Shutterfly, Inc - HQ
The Apax Foundation
The Cheesecake Factory
The Dart Group Foundation/Ron Haft
The GivenGain Foundation
The Moody Endowment
The Mosaic Company
The Tom Sullivan Foundation, Inc.
United Way of North Central New
Mexico
Volvo Car USA
Waymo LLC

\$25,000 to \$49,999

All Elite Wrestling
APT Family Charitable Activities
Aspen Sky Trust/Russell Weiner
Bloomberg L.P.
Blue Cross Blue Shield of
Massachusetts
BNY Mellon, N.A.
Braman Motors
Bursor and Fisher PA
Crescent Capital Group, L.P.
Enterprise Holdings
Fort Partners/Surf Club Foundation/
Nadim Ashi
General Motors
Holland & Knight LLP
Janssen
MAG Aerospace
MALS PALS
Mark Edward Partners LLC
Match Group
Mercedes-Benz
Merck - HQ



Anthony K. Shriver with Best Buddies Global Ambassador Fran accepting a \$1.5 million donation from Jersey Mike's Subs founder Peter Cancro at the 2023 Best Buddies Gala: Miami

Midland National Life Insurance
Company
MoneyGram Foundation
Pantheon Venture
PcW US Group LLP
Pfizer, Inc
PwC US Group LLC
PWG Charitable Foundation/Albert
& Amelia Scaglione
Southern Glazer's Wine And Spirits
Charitable Fund
Stanford Health Care
State Street Corporation, State Street
Global Markets, LLC
Sun Communities Operating LP
Team Construction, LLC
Texas Mutual
The Boeing Company
The Ferraro Law Firm/Jim Ferraro
The Leavitt Corporation
UBS Financial Services Inc.
UNUM Group
Vertex Pharmaceuticals Inc.

\$10,000 to \$24,999

Admiral Transfer & Rigging
Ally Financial Inc.
Altria Group Inc.
Arc Stores
ASU PI KAPPA PHI
Atlantic Management Corporation
Avance Investment Management
Bank of Hawaii
Buffalo Sabres Foundation
Buffbunny Collection LLC
Carnival Cruise Lines
Cerberus Capital Management, L.P.
Cetera Investment Services LLC
Cheshire Half Marathon

Cigna Health and Life Insurance
Company
Community Chest of New Britain and
Berlin, Inc.
Compass Group
Cooper's Steel Fabricators, Inc.
Credit Union of Texas
CSAA Insurance Services, Inc.
Csnt Corporate
Delaware North Companies Sport
Services, Inc.
DNICORP
Eastern Bank
EM-Power Services, Inc.
Findlay
Florida Panthers
GBC Food Services, LLC
Greater Horizons
GTE Federal Credit Union
Haribo of America
High Flying Foods
Illumiwear
Inktel Holdings
Interfraternity Council UT Austin
Kendra Scott LLC
Kohl's
Lemonade Insurance Agency, LLC
Los Angeles Dodgers
Magna Seating Systems Engineering
McCormick & Co., Inc.
Meaningful Beauty, LLC
Meijer
Microsoft QSTP
Midstate Mitsubishi/Susan &
Raymond Butler
National Football League
Natixis Investment Managers
Newslink Group, LLC

Northeast Florida Association of
Realtors Inc
Ocean Auto Club
Ocean Mazda
Ole Smoky Distillery, LLC
OrthoIndy Foundation
Participant Media, LLC
Plumtree Partners, LLC
Prairie Meadows
Promoter Line Incorporated Festival
& Concert Division
Quidnet Media, LLC
RBC Capital Markets, LLC
Reyes Coca-Cola Bottling
Robinson Commercial Real Estate
Rock-It Cargo U.S.A., LLC
Ronald Book PA
Round Room Gives, Inc
Sandia National Laboratories
Sandy Spring Bank
Santana Properties Inc.
Security Serves
Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino
- Tampa
Seretta Construction, Inc.
ServiceNow
Seyfarth
Shulman, Rogers, Gandal, Pordy &
Ecker, P.A.
Sonic Automotive Inc.
Southwire Company
Speedway Children's Charities
Struble, P.A.
Suncoast Federal Credit Union
Foundation
Superior Industries International, Inc.
TA Associates Management, L.P.
Tavistock Development Management,
LLC

Tempe Diablos Charities, Inc.
 The Advance Financial Foundation
 The Allendale Womans Club of NJ
 The Bellamy Companies LLC
 The Cellular Connection, LLC
 The Walt Disney Company
 Town of Golden Beach
 Truist
 TUUCI LLC
 Universal Music Group - Santa Monica
 Value Store It Management, Inc.
 Venable LLP
 Ventura Growth LLC
 Walsh Construction
 Wegmans Food Markets, Inc.
 Yummi Sushi

\$5,000 to \$9,999

Abarta CC Beverage LLC
 AbbVie
 ABC Promotions Unlimited Inc.
 Abdo Consulting Group, Inc.
 Aerie Real Foundation
 AETNA INC.
 Airtech International, Inc.
 All Community Events
 Allianz Life Insurance Company of North America
 Annaly Capital Mangement Inc.
 Ansys, Inc.
 Anthem Blue Cross & Blue Shield
 AP Benefit Advisors, LLC
 Aramark Global Business Services
 AT&T
 Atema Partners Corporation
 Automatic Data Processing, Inc.
 AutoZone
 Avnet
 BDO USA, LLP
 Bentley Scottsdale
 BlackRock, Inc.
 Blue Brook Management
 BMO Harris Bank
 BNP Paribas
 Bollore Logistics
 Brabants Enterprises Inc.
 Broadway Hospitality Group
 Brunello Cucinelli USA Retail, LLC
 Buch Construction, Inc.
 Capital One
 Car Crafters Collision, LLC
 Carson's Village
 Christian Brothers Automotive Foundation
 Christopher's Fine Jewelry

Colliers International - WA
 Colorado Housing and Finance Authority
 Commonwealth Edison Company
 Continental Casualty Company
 Corebridge Financial
 Culinary Institute LeNotre
 Dade County Federal Credit Union
 DDA Services, Inc
 Dell Technologies
 Deloitte Services LP
 DHL Supply Chain
 Domino's Pizza LLC
 Evolution Risk Advisors, Inc.
 Farmers Mutual Hail Insurance Company of Iowa
 Flik Hospitality
 Florida Department of Education- Division of Vocational Rehab
 Florida Power & Light Company
 Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson LLP
 Frontstream
 Fryd Robins PB LLC
 Golden State Warriors
 Goodman Campbell Brain & Spine
 Greenberg Traurig
 Guthrie's Garage, Inc.
 H.B. Fuller Company Foundation
 Hand2mind Learning Resources
 Hanover Reserve LLC
 Health Care Service Corporation
 Hilton
 Hinsdale Junior Womans Club
 Host Hotels & Resorts, L.P.
 IMC Financial Markets
 Institute for Corporate Productivity, Inc.
 Intel Foundation
 J.C. Edwards Corporation
 JM Family Enterprises, Inc.
 JOH Kids 360
 Johnson Bank
 Johnson, Mirmiran & Thompson Engineering A Brighter Future
 Junior League of Indianapolis
 Kelly Services
 KFORCE
 Kramer Casey Enterprises
 Lawrence A. Moens Associates, Inc.
 Liberty Bank Foundation
 Lipscomb University
 L'Oreal
 Marriott International, Inc.
 MCM CPAs & Advisors LLP

Megan Aitken Team LLC
 Miami University
 Mikuni Charitable Organization
 Misericordia Home
 MMS US Holdings, Inc.
 New England Biolabs, Inc.
 New York Islanders
 Nicklaus Children's Health System
 Nicor Gas
 OneAZ Credit Union
 Orlando Sandord International, Inc.
 Otis Elevator Company
 Outfront
 Park Hotels and Resorts
 PECO Corporate Relations
 Pentair Management Company
 Pepsi-Cola Company
 PGA Tour, Inc.
 Pittsburgh Penguins Foundation
 PNC Bank, NA
 PNMR Services Co
 Polk County Auditor's Office
 Principal Builders, Inc.
 Principal Financial Group Foundation, Inc.
 Publix Super Markets Charities, Inc.
 Regions Bank
 Rotary Club of Lake Minnetonka- Excelsior
 Scratch Holdings LLC
 Seminole Indian Casino-Immokalee
 SMCP USA Inc
 Smith & Associates Real Estate
 SouthernHealthcareManagementLLC
 Stanley Black & Decker, Inc.
 State Farm Companies Foundation
 Sununu Inaugural Celebration
 Tamiami Ford
 Texas Roadhouse Intermediary LLC
 The Capital Corporation
 The Elder Law Center of Kirson & Fuller
 The J.M. Smucker Company
 The Meltzer Group
 The Morrison & Foerster Foundation
 The Potter's House of Dallas, Inc.
 The Red Sox Foundation, Inc.
 Therapeutic Treehouse, LLC
 Timothy E. McNutt, Sr. D.D.S.
 Township of Riverside
 Trends International Charitable Foundation Inc.
 T-Rex Solutions
 Truist Bank
 Tschetter Group

TTextiles LLC
 Ulta Beauty
 UMPC Changing Medicine
 United Food And Commercial Workers Union
 United HealthCare Services, Inc.
 United Phoenix Firefighters Association, Inc.
 United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County
 UNM Hospitals
 Waterstone Bank
 Wellabe Services Co.
 Wesco Distribution, Inc
 West Bank
 Willis Towers Watson
 Zuckerman Gravely Management, Inc.

FOUNDATIONS

\$250,000 to \$499,000

Diane and Bruce Halle Foundation
 Taft Foundation
 The Tina and Richard V Carolan Foundation
 Tides Foundation
 Ann G. and James B. Ritchey Foundation
 Drew Foundation
 Engelstad Foundation
 Fundacion MAPFRE
 May and Stanley Smith Charitable Trust
 The Frederick A. Deluca Foundation
 The Golisano Foundation

\$50,000 to \$99,999

Community Foundation for Northern Virginia
 Delman Family Fund
 Edith L. Trees Charitable Trust
 Hawaii Community Foundation
 John H. and Ethel G. Noble Charitable Trust
 Micky and Madeleine Arison Family Foundation
 Stavros Niarchos Foundation
 The Apax Foundation
 The Batchelor Foundation, Inc.
 The Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee
 The Genentech Foundation
 The Jim Moran Foundation
 The Moody Endowment

The Pratt Foundation
 The Randall Family Foundation
 The Sharon D. Lund Foundation
 The Taco Bell Foundation, Inc.
 The Tepper Foundation
 United Way of North Central New Mexico
 VoLo Foundation

\$25,000 to \$49,999

APT Family Charitable Foundation
 David and Leila Centner Charitable Foundation
 Embassy of the State of Qatar
 Jeffrey P. Ossen Family Foundation
 Manpower Group Foundation Inc.
 Nashville Predators Foundation
 New York Life Foundation
 Smith Family Foundation
 TD Charitable Foundation
 The 1111 Foundation
 The Anthony R. Abraham Foundation
 The Charles A. Mastronardi Foundation
 The Columbus Foundation (CF)
 The Educational Foundation of America
 The Ernst & Gertrude Ticho Charitable Foundation
 The Greater Kansas City Community Foundation
 The Kenneth T. and Eileen L. Norris Foundation
 The Merancas Foundation Inc
 Thunderbirds Charities
 UNUM Group

\$10,000 to \$24,999

AEGON Transamerica Foundation
 Albuquerque Community Foundation
 Alexander R. Tulloch Trust
 Arizona Community Foundation
 Arizona Coyotes Foundation
 Austin Community Foundation
 Boston Bruins Foundation
 Boston Celtics Shamrock Foundation, Inc.
 Bradbury Stamm Construction
 CareSource Foundation
 Carl Anderson, Sr. & Marie Jo Anderson Charitable Foundation
 Cedar Street Charitable Foundation
 Children's Brain Diseases Foundation

Community Chest of New Britain and Berlin, Inc.
 Community Foundation of Greater New Britain
 Connelly Foundation
 Current Builders Charitable Foundation
 Desert States Charitable Foundation
 Doug Flutie Jr. Foundation for Autism, Inc.
 DuPage Foundation
 Durham Family Foundation
 Enterprise Holdings
 Ernest and Mae Sanctis Foundation
 Feinbloom
 Foundation For the Carolinas Longleaf Fund
 Greater Milwaukee Foundation
 Harper Family Foundation
 Hawaii Community Foundation
 IPA Foundation
 Jack Buncher Foundation
 James & Abigail Campbell Family Foundation
 Jana Foundation Inc.
 Jim & Juli Boenheim Foundation
 John Ruan Foundation Trust
 Luedke-Smith Foundation
 Maine Community Foundation
 Merrill Family Foundation Inc
 New Hampshire Charitable Foundation
 Nora Roberts Foundation Inc
 Nordson Corporation Foundation
 Northwestern Mutual Foundation
 Oconomowoc Area Foundation
 Omaha Community Foundation
 Phoenix Suns/Phoenix Mercury Foundation
 R.J. McElroy Trust
 Renaissance Charitable Foundation Inc.
 Rochester Area Community Foundation Depository, Inc.
 Roles Family Foundation
 RSM US Foundation
 Sandia National Laboratories
 Speedway Children's Charities
 Suzanne Jovin Memorial Fund
 Tempe Diablos Charities, Inc.
 Texas Women's Foundation
 The Aria Covey Foundation Inc.
 The Bishop Family Foundation

The Carl and Ruth Shapiro Family Foundation
 The Chicago Community Foundation
 The Claire & Theodore Morse Foundation
 The Denver Foundation
 The Dodge Family Fund
 The George Preston Marshall Foundation
 The Graham and Carolyn Holloway Family Foundation
 The Healthcare Foundation of NJ
 The James & Juli Boenheim Foundation
 The Jesse H. Oppenheimer & Susan Oppenheimer Foundation
 The Laffey McHugh Foundation
 The Lenox Foundation, Inc.
 The M&T Charitable Foundation
 TheMcSweeneyFamilyFoundation, Inc.
 The Merck Foundation
 The Perkins Charitable Foundation
 The Saigh Foundation
 The Thomas W. Bradley Foundation Inc.
 The William & Sheila Konar Foundation
 Valley Community Foundation
 Vegas Golden Knights Foundation Inc.
 VMWARE Foundation Matching Gift Program
 Walmart Inc. Foundation
\$5,000 to \$9,999
 Ashbritt Foundation Inc.
 Astros Golf Foundation
 Atherton Family Foundation
 Avnet
 Badger Meter Foundation, Inc.
 Bender Foundation, Inc.
 Brewers Community Foundation, Inc.
 Campbell Foundation
 Carl HJ Asplundh, Jr. Family Foundation
 Central Florida Foundation
 Charles & M R Shapiro Foundation Inc
 Child Development Foundation
 Coastal Community Foundation of South Carolina
 Cogswell Benevolent Trust
 Colten Cowell Foundation
 Communities Foundation of Texas
 Community Foundation for the Central Savannah River Area
 Community Foundation Greater Des Moines
 Community Foundation of NE FL
 Community Foundation of Tampa Bay

Cook Family Foundation
 Cralle Foundation Inc
 Crestlea Foundation, Inc.
 Doligale Family Charitable Foundation Inc.
 Douglas County Community Foundation
 Frederick McDonald Trust
 Freeman E. Fairfield Foundation
 G Russell and Constance P Lincoln Foundation
 George and Mary Josephine Hamman Foundation
 George S. and Dolores Doré Eccles Foundation
 Givewell Community Foundation
 Givinga Foundation, Inc.
 Greater Washington Community Foundation
 H.O.P.E. Given Foundation Inc
 Hinsdale Junior Womans Club
 Houston Texans Foundation
 Irish Woods Foundation
 JB and MK Pirtle Charitable Foundation Inc
 Jim Jacobson Charitable Fund
 John Ruan Foundation Trust
 Joseph Briere Foundation
 Joseph J. Schott Foundation
 June Rockwell Levy Foundation
 Junior League of Indianapolis
 K Ten Kids Foundation Inc.
 King's Grant Foundation
 Kiwanis Club of Ann Arbor Foundation, Inc.
 KPMG US Foundation, Inc.
 Legacy Foundation
 Long Island Community Foundation
 Make Waves Family Foundation Inc.
 Marie Lamfrom Charitable Foundation
 Marshall Family Foundation
 Matthew A. and Mildred Hunter Foundation
 Maximus Foundation
 Mundy Family Charity Fund
 National Christian Foundation Houston
 New York Community Trust
 O'Shea Family Fund
 Phillips Charitable Foundation Inc
 Prairie Meadows
 Sandia Foundation
 Sheila, Dave & Sherry Gold Foundation
 Stackner Family Foundation Inc
 Sunmark Charitable Community Foundation

TEGNA Foundation
 The Bloedorn Foundation
 The Cape Coral Kiwanis Foundation Inc.
 The Feigenbaum Foundation
 The Floyd and Barbara Warkol Charitable Foundation
 The Fuller Foundation, Inc.
 The Gheens Foundation
 The Hometown Foundation, Inc.
 The Irene E. & George A. Davis Foundation
 The John E. Fogarty Foundation
 The Katharine Matthies Foundation
 The Lindy Loo Foundation
 The McKay Family Fund
 The Red Coats - THE PLAYERS
 The Sam J. Frankino Foundation
 The Siebert Family Foundation
 The UK Online Giving Foundation
 Valley Kids Foundation
 Variety - The Children's Charity
 Ver-A-Fast by The Hand Foundation
 Waukesha County Community Foundation

GOVERNMENT PARTNERS

\$500,000 and Above

California Department of Developmental Services
 Florida Department of Education
 Illinois Department of Human Services
 Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
 Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission
 Ohio Department of Job and Family Services
 Texas Education Agency
 U.S. Department of Education

\$250,000 to \$499,000

Alta Vista Regional Center
 Indiana Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services
 Iowa Department of Education
 Montgomery County, Maryland Security Department of Human Services
 New Mexico Developmental Disabilities Council
 North Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Services
 San Andreas Regional Center
 Social Security Administration

\$100,000 - \$249,999

Arizona Department of Economic Security
 Boston, Massachusetts Public Schools
 California Department of Rehabilitation
 Central Valley Regional Center
 Connecticut Department of Developmental Services
 Illinois Division of Rehabilitation Services
 Indiana Department of Education
 Maryland Department of Health
 Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services
 McLean County, Illinois
 Miami-Dade County, Florida Office of Management and Budget
 Miami-Dade County, Florida Public Schools
 New York Office of Persons with Developmental Disabilities
 North Carolina Department of Public Instruction
 U.S. Department of State
 Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services
 Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development

\$50,000 to \$99,999

Delaware Legislature
 Harbor Regional Center
 Hawaii Office of Community Services
 Maui County, Hawaii Department of Housing and Human Concerns
 Nevada Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities
 New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
 New York Adult Career & Continuing Ed Services, VR
 Peoria Care and Treatment Board, Illinois
 Rhode Island Office of the Post-Secondary Commissioner
 San Diego Regional Center
 State of Kentucky
 Texas Workforce Commission
 Utah Department of Human Concerns
 Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services
 Westside Regional Center

\$25,000 to \$49,999

Indiana Division of Disability and
Rehabilitative Services
Iowa Department of Education
Montgomery County, Maryland
Department of Human Services
New Mexico Developmental
Disabilities Council
North Carolina Vocational
Rehabilitation Services
San Andreas Regional Center
Social Security Administration

\$10,000 to \$24,999

Bernalillo County, New Mexico
College of New Jersey
Franklin Board of Developmental
Disabilities, Ohio
Gilbert, Arizona
Golden Gate Regional Center
Indiana Division of Developmental
Disabilities Services
Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation
Services
Maryland Division of Rehabilitation
Services
New Jersey Division of Vocational
Rehabilitation Services
New Mexico Division of
Developmental Disabilities
North Carolina Developmental
Disabilities Council
Regional Center of Orange County
Regional Center of the East Bay
St. Louis, Missouri, Office of
Developmental Disabilities
Resources
Tempe, Arizona
Washington, D.C., Rehabilitation
Services Administration

\$5,000 to \$9,999

Butler County, Ohio
Cuyahoga County Board of
Developmental Disabilities, Ohio
Michigan Rehabilitation Services
Peoria, Arizona
Polk County, Iowa

TOP FUNDRAISING TEAMS

\$250,000 and Above

Team Silicon Valley Bank (SVB)

\$100,000 to \$249,000

Team Eaton Vance/MSIM/Parametric

Team Guardino
Team King James Buddies
Team MACK Cycle
Team Natixis

\$50,000 to 99,000

Team Stanford Health
Team Steptoe
Team Webcor

\$25,000 to \$49,000

Team Current Builders
Team Kates & Barlow
Team Macon Friends for Makin' Friends
Team MAG
Team Mals Pals
Team Miami Country Day Upper School
Team New York Life NH
Team Real Fun Content
Team ServiceNow
Team Smart & Horford
Team Sunshine
Team Volvo

\$10,000 to \$24,000

Team 603 Pride
Team Academy of the Holy Names
Team Ashlee Coffman Courage
Team Best Buddies Citizens (VA & DC)
Team Best Buddies Tampa Citizens '23
Team Bike Zone of Cape Cod
Team Blazing Saddles
Team Blue Brook Management
Team Bobcat Buddies
Team Boeing
Team Bonjay & The Funky Bunch
Team Citizens Catch 'Em All
Team Cliff's Crew
Team Creekside High School
Team Cruzin' 4 Inclusion
Team Danielle & Coley's Buddies
Team Dome Construction
Team Dream Team
Team Dylan's Dominators
Team Gallo
Team GOAT
Team Greenberg Traurig
Team Gunnison Consulting Group
Team Henry
Team Holland & Knight Mission:
Possible
Team Jacksonville Citizens Group
Team KIDS 360
Team Mali
Team Malo
Team Marks Buddies

Team Marlowe
Team Meg
Team Merck - North Jersey
Team NovA© p/b PROthirteen
Team Pirtle Construction
Team Plant High School
Team Ratchet and Clank
Team Ravenwood High School
Team RockDJ
Team Seminole Ridge High School
Team Shulman Rogers
Team Tavistock
Team TCNJ!
Team Ten Pins - Cape Cod Cruisers
Team The James Gang
Team THS Best Buddies
Team Tom
Team UF Best Buddies
Team Wyatt - Domestiques
Team Xcitebike Racing

PARTICIPATING EMPLOYERS

Animal Services

Bark Public
Barking Bad
Camp Bow Wow
Doggie Daycare and More
Mayfair Animal Hospital
Nauset Canine Club
Nova Animal Hospital
Paw-some Dog
Pet Resort Dallas
Pet Smart
Pompano Pet Lodge
The Barking Lot
Urban Paws
Wags and Whiskers Stay and Play
Zionsville Country Vet Clinic

Argriculture

A.R.C. Shellfish Hatchery
Devil Mountain Nursery
Empower Farms

Arts & Culture

9/11 Museum
Aurora Hill Library
Blissful Seeds
Broadway at Music Circus
Bryant Park
Capital One Hall
Georgia Aquarium
Houston Museum of Natural Science
Lyric Opera of Chicago
Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth

Museum of Contemporary Art
Old Sturbridge Village
Sacramento Childrens Museum
Shedd Aquarium
The Children's Museum of
Indianapolis
Tradewinds Studio

Automotive

Advance Auto
Advance Auto Parts
Evanston Subaru
Toyota
Land Rover Jaguar
Lithia Subaru of Fresno
Miami Lakes AutoMall
Ocean Mazda

Communications

ActiveCampaign
Atema Partners
Civic Edge Consulting
Conill Advertising
DNI Corp
Dupree Miller & Associates
Gannett Company, Inc
Kel & Partners
Kornit Digital
Kubik
Participant Media
Team One
Williams Lea

Construction

Conсор
Fortis Construction Inc
Johnson Mirmiran & Thompson
Lowe's @ Milford
Mas Tec
Whiting Turner

Education

AAccreditation Council for Graduate
Medical Education (ACGME)
Alcott Elementary School
Alexandria City High School
Alpine Elementary
Ben Davis University High School
Big and Tiny
Bishop Moore Catholic High School
Bright Horizons Newton
Building Block Academy
Catholic University
Childrens Lighthouse Allen
City of South San Francisco-
Siebecker Center
Clark County School District

Coleen Hoose Elementary
Curley Academy
Dana Middle School
Dean College
Dunlap High School Unit 323
Genesee Community Services
Gordan Jewish Community Center
Growing Garden Nursery School
Holy Spirit School
ISP Management at Northeastern
University
Ivy Prep Early Learning Academy
JRE Lee Educational Center -
Miami-Dade County Public Schools
Kerman Unified School District
KinderCare
Learn Up Tutoring
Montessori School in Holmes Run
Montgomery County Public Schools
New York Public Library
New York Public Library - 5th Ave
NYC Board of Education
Port View Preparatory
Promise Child Development Center
Santa Margarita Catholic High School
Scottsdale Unified School District
Springstone Montessori
Sunshine School
The Learning Experience
The Work Family Connection
UC Davis
UCLA Department of Intercollegiate
Athletics
UMASS Lowell
Virtuous Inc.
Wachusett Regional School District
Worcester Public Schools

Facilities Management

ABM Industries - LA
Ally Universal Security
Amazon GREF
Anderson Security
CBRE Microsoft
Cushman and Wakefield
Dayspring Janitorial
ESFM @ Google X
Ibis Golf and Country Club
JLL
Lutheran Rehabilitation and Skilled
Care Center
Modern Salon and Spa
North East Security
PHD Services

Service Systems Associates-Zoo
Miami
Sunnyside Country Club
Vonachen Services, Inc.

Finance & Insurance

Amwins
Bank of America
Boston Private
Credit Union of Texas
Crescent Capital
Eaton Vance
Finaccess Advisors, LLC.
First Citizens Bank - Tempe
H.I.G. Capital, L.L.C.
IMC Financial Markets
John Hancock
Kayne Anderson Capital Advisors, LP
Klingman and Associates
Mapfre Insurance
Mastercard Worldwide
Morgan Stanley
National Tax Group
Natixis Global Asset Management, L.P.
Navy Federal Credit Union
Planned Lifetime Assistance Network
(PLAN) of Massachusetts and
Rhode Island, Inc.
Red Mountain Properties/Ocedan
Properties/US Loan Servicing
Regions Bank
SCN Accounting and Tax Services
Sunstone Partners Management, LLC

Fitness

Blink Fitness
Club Sport Fit
Equinox
Four Seasons Health Club
LA Fitness

Food & Beverage

99 Restaurant
AARP
Amazon Fresh
AMC Dine In Theater
Angel Foods
Apple Bees
Aramark - ASU Tempe
Bahama Buck's
Bertucci's Italian Restaurant
Best Buddies X Rosetta Bakery
Bickford Senior Living Home
Big Bowl
BJ's Restaurant & Brewhouse

Blaze Pizza
Bubba's 33
Cafe Blu
Cafe Joyeux
California Pizza Kitchen - Wellington
Candified
Carrabba's Italian Grill
CAVA
Centerville Pies - Sandwich
Chartwell's
Chick-fil-A
Chili's
Clean Juice
Constellation Culinary Group
Culinart @ Brentwood School
Davios
Denny's
Dion's
E.B. Flatts Restaurant
El Pinto Restaurant
Elior North America
Enchanted Island Amusement Park
Fancy's Market
Fazenda Coffee Roasters
Fiji Water
Five Guys
Flagship at Facebook
Friends Marketplace
Fruit Center of Milton
Fry's
Giant Food
Gundalow Gourmet
Hannaford
Harris Teeter
Harvest Sensations
H-E-B
HMS Host
Jersey Mikes
Jimmy's Famous Seafood
Katella Bakery
Keke's Breakfast Cafe
Kenny's Westside Pub
Keurig Dr. Pepper
Kroger
Kwik Star
Lady Baker
Le Petit Gateau
Levy
Lidl
Lost Dog Cafe'
Mahoney's Bar & Grill
Main Event - Gilbert
Market Basket
Market Street Allen

Maschio's Food Service
McAlister's Deli
McDonald's - Long Beach
Merck
Milam's Markets
Misha's Cupcakes
Mod Pizza
Neighborhood Wal-Mart Market
New City Microcreamery
Nouria Energy Corporation
OVG (Oak View Group) - PBC
Convention Center
Pamilla Senior Living
Pancho & Lefty's
Panera
Papa Johns
Paramount Group
PDQ
Pick N Save
Pieology
Pilo's Street Tacos
Pilo's Tequila Garden
Pizza Hut
Price Chopper
Provider Contract Food Service
Provincetown House of Pizza
Rail Trail Flatbread Co.
Rally's
Ralphs
Restoration Pizza
Rosetta Bakery
Ruby Tuesdays
Shooter McGee's
Sodexo
Sonny's BBQ
Sprouts Farmers Market
SSA Group, LLC at Museum of the
Bible
Starbucks
Stone Creek Dining Company
Stop & Shop
Sunsof Corporation
Sweet Cup
Taziki's
Tedeschi Food Shops
Texas Road House
The Cake Bake Shop
The Cheesecake Factory
The Merchant LB
The Paramount Group
The Virginian
Thomas Cuisine
Tropical Smoothie Cafe
Una Pizza Napoletana

Uncommon Grounds, Students of
Georgetown Inc
Val's Restaurant
Vons
Wawa
Wayside Noodles
Wegmans
Weis
Wendy's
Whitsons Culinary Group
Wild Eggs
Wolfgang Puck Catering

Government

Accenture
Alexandria Library - James M.
Duncan Branch Library
Arlington Central Library
City of Bal Harbour
City of Baltimore
City of Coral Gables Adult
Activities Center
City of Hialeah
City of Indianapolis
City of Los Angeles Mayor's Office of
Economic Opportunity
City of Miami Beach
City of Miami Parks and Recreation
Department
City of New York
City of South San Francisco-REAL
Program
DDS
Department of Rehabilitation
Department of Rehabilitation
Employment Development
Department (EDD)
Exchange Nellis Air Force Base
Federal Aviation Administration
Kane County Judiciary
Marion County Prosecutor's Office
Massachusetts Developmental
Disabilities Council
MVA- Annapolis
Office of Planning and Research (OPR)
Paramus Borough Hall
State's Attorney's Office
Truro Recreation Department
MAG Aerospace
Department of Rehabilitation Services

Health Care

Addgene
Advent Health
Auberge

Autumn Oaks of Corinth
Bickford Senior Living Cener
Blair House of Worcester
Cambridge Nursing & Rehab Center
Cape Cod Hospital
CB Orthodontics
Cecelia Place Assisted Living
Cleveland Clinic
Coastal Medical Transportation
Services, LLC
Community Regional Medical Center
CVS - FLW Scottsdale
Dr. Patricia L. Carolan, DMD, General
Dentistry
Dream Big Pediatric Therapy
edgeMED
Enos Residence
Fairlawn Rehabilitation Hospital
Falmouth Hospital
Fort Harrison Senior Living
Grandview Alzheimer's Special Care
Center
Healthstream
Honeybee Health
IU Health
Jackson Health System
Kaiser Permanente South Bay
Medical Center
Lake Country Landing - Northshore
Healthcare
Liberty Healthcare Corporation
Lifepoint
Morrison Healthcare
North Mountain Medical and
Rehabilitation Center,
NSpire Healthcare
One HomeCare Solutions/Humana
Palm Beach Dermatology
PharmaLink
Somerby
Takeda Pharmaceuticals
TouchPoint
UC Davis Medical Center
UCLA Department of Pathology and
Laboratory Medicine
UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital
Oakland
UMass Memorial
UNM Hospital
Valley Life
Verus Healthcare
Walgreens
Hospitality
Aramark @ Fenway

Block By Block
 Block By Block - Rose Kennedy
 Greenway
 Bluewater Linen
 Century Rio 24
 Chatham Bars Inn
 Compass Group
 Courtyard by Marriot
 Elinor North America (Trio Community Meals)
 Embassy Suites
 Flik Hospitality
 Harvard Maintenance @ Google
 Hilton
 Holiday Inn Express
 Home Instead
 Hotel Albuquerque
 Jani King Cleaning
 La Quinta
 Live Casino Hotel
 Loews Coral Gables
 Marriot
 MGM
 Oakmont of Torrance
 Restaurant Associates
 Richland Country Club
 Seaport Hotel
 SeaWorld
 Somerset Inn
 SunCommunities
 The Gardens of Bellaire
 The Lodge
 UCLA Housing & Hospitality
 Vierra

Law Firms

Barket Epstein Kearon Aldea & LoTurco
 Chasen and Boscolo
 Elder Law Firm of Kirson & Fuller
 Envoy Global
 Fried Frank Harris Shriver & Jacobson
 Gelfand, Rennert & Feldman
 Holland and Knight
 Kates & Barlow
 Latham & Watkins
 Manatt, Phelps & Phillips, LLP
 Pacific Workers' Compensation Law Center
 Rayas Law
 Seyfarth Shaw
 Shuffield Lowman
 The Ferraro Law Firm

Manufacturing & Distribution

ABF Freight
 Amazon
 Baby K'tan
 BrandsMart USA
 Brunswick Land and Sea
 Dove Equipment
 Good 360
 Independent Purchasing Cooperative
 Lake Country Manufacturing
 Northrop Grumman
 Park Street Companies
 Premiere Collectibles
 Printing Partners
 RDS Same Day Delivery
 Sakura Finetek USA, Inc.
 Telamon - Kern Krest
 The UPS Store
 Tuuci

Nonprofit & Foundations

Best Buddies
 Central Park Conservancy
 Chicago Park District
 Community Connections, Inc.
 Goodwill
 Harbor Regional Center
 Infant Welfare Society of Evanston
 Baby Toddler Nursery
 Los Angeles Habilitation House
 National Down Syndrome Society
 Pride Industries
 QSAC
 Second Muse
 Special Olympics Northern California
 St. John XXIII Catholic Community
 Support for Families of Children with Disabilities
 The Mentor Network
 Westside Regional Center
 YMCA

Real Estate

Capital Properties
 Network Community Management
 Starwood Capital Group, L.L.C.
 Tavistock

Recreation

Cat Cay Yatch Club
 Disneyland Resort
 Marcus Theatre-2521
 Mt Pleasant Ice Arena
 National Aquarium
 Presidio Golf Course
 Princeton University Athletics

Sloomoo Institute
 We Rock the Spectrum-North Miami
Retail
 99 Cents Only Store (#266)
 AEG/Merchandising- Staples Center
 Albertsons
 Anthropologie
 Aventura Mall
 Barnes & Noble Cool Springs
 Bass Pro Shop
 Bath & Body Works
 Bath and Body Works
 Big Y
 BJ's Wholesale Club
 Boot Factory Outlet
 Bristol Farms-Santa Monica
 Build A Bear (Store 9)
 Burlington
 Burlington Coat Factory
 Cost Plus World Market
 Costco
 Crate & Barrel
 Dick's Sporting Goods
 Dillard's
 Discount Welds
 Disney Store
 Doug Russell Marine
 El Super
 Goodwill
 Goodwill - Fresno (Blackstone / Sierra)
 Goodwill Marietta
 Goodwill Whitestown
 Gucci
 H-E-B
 Home Depot
 HomeGoods
 Hot Topic
 Hunters Creek- Once Upon a Child
 Hy-Vee
 Jewel Osco
 Jewel-Osco
 Jondie
 Kessler's Diamonds
 Kohls 39
 Kohls 483
 Kroger
 LEGOLAND Discovery Center Boston
 Lowe's
 Lowe's Home Improvement
 Lululemon
 Mack Cycle
 Macy's Furniture Gallery
 Market 32
 Market 32 @ Pullman St.

Market Basket @ Shrewsbury
 Marshalls
 Meijer- Pewaukee
 Michaels
 Nike
 Nordstrom- Espresso Bar
 Nouria Energy
 Office Depot
 Office Max
 Pemberton Farms Marketplace
 Price Chopper @ Webster
 Primark
 Publix
 Ralphs
 Sam's Club
 Sephora
 Shaw's Supermarkets
 Sierra Trading Post
 Smart & Final
 Sprouts
 T.J. Maxx
 Target
 The Fresh Market - Delray
 Thrift on Blackstone (MCC Thrift Shop)
 Trader Joe's
 Urban Decay (L'Oreal)
 Walgreens
 Walmart
 Wawa
 West Marine
 Whole Foods

Sports & Entertainment

AMC Theatres
 Axe Hockey Group
 Charlotte FC
 D.C. United
 Entertainment Industry Foundation
 Grand Ole Opry
 Lionsgate
 MLB
 Monumental Sports & Entertainment
 Nashville Sounds
 New Jersey Symphony Orchestra
 New York Islanders
 NewTV
 NFL
 Planet Fitness, LB
 Prairieville Park
 Propagate Content
 Round1 Bowling and Amusement
 Sodexo Live
 The Preserve at Eisenhower Golf Course
 Topgolf

Universal Studios-Orlando
 Worcester Railers
 Worcester Red Sox

Talent & Staffing

Career Group Companies
 Job Options Inc.
 K Force
 Kelly
 William Morris Endeavor

Technology & Telecommunications

Accenture
 Accenture Federal Services
 Avid
 Avnet
 CIC Boston
 CIC Cambridge
 Genentech
 Google
 Insight
 Rapid7
 Snap Inc.
 TCC
 Walt Disney Television
 Xactly Corporation

Transportation

Brightline
 DASA Transportation
 Dulles International Airport
 Envoy Air
 Exotic Bus and Limo
 FastPark
 Fontainebleau Aviation
 Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd.
 Total Transportation Services, Inc.
 Tower WAW
 U-Haul Moving & Storage

Warehousing & Storage

Amazon
 American Lumper
 Bollore
 D.S. Hull Company, Inc.
 First Class Vending
 Imperial Freight Brokers
 Iron Mountain - Cerritos
 Leadpoint
 LaserShip
 Park West Gallery
 Sebco Books
 Sephora Distribution Center
 TDS Logistics LLC
 Value Store It
 Value Store-It Self Storage



Arizona Year in Review

With a growing staff and program expansion across all of our mission pillars, Best Buddies in Arizona (BBAZ) had much to celebrate in 2023. We reached our pre-pandemic Friendship program member numbers within 63 schools across Arizona. With almost 1,800 members and 274 friendship matches, BBAZ also opened new friendship chapters in two elementary schools, one middle school and two high schools. The Citizens program, our adult friendship program, grew to 139 members with 25 matches. This year the Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) program provided training for 67 young adults from five schools. Our Jobs program, with the hiring of a Job Development Manager, placed 23 individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in competitive and integrated employment with 13 companies who see the value in hiring someone with IDD. And our Leadership Development program recruited and trained five new Ambassadors who acquired skills to self-advocate and, in turn, build the confidence to lead a happy and full life.

The incredible funds raised through our two signature events, the Friendship Walk and the Champion of the Year Gala, have been critical to Best Buddies in Arizona providing this lifetime of inclusion for people with IDD. In the Spring, our Friendship Walk raised over \$123,000 with almost 800 registered participants coming together as an inclusive community! In the Fall, we celebrated 20 years of gala at our annual Champion of the Year Gala. With eight dedicated Champion candidates and 380 guests, we raised over \$391,000, making it the 3rd top fundraising gala in the country!

We ended this year by remembering everything to be thankful for at our 2nd annual Friendsgiving event. With over double the attendees than in 2022, program participants, families and staff enjoyed a delicious meal together, as new friendships were formed and old friendships were made stronger. After all, this is what Best Buddies is all about!

On behalf of our Advisory Board, Junior Advisory Board, and the staff at Best Buddies, I would like to thank our generous sponsors, volunteers, and selfless donors for your support. Moving into 2024, we intend to build on the momentum generated by the success of our programs and events this past year. I look forward to having you join us in this endeavor!



Lisa Cleary, State Director, Arizona

Arizona Office

4527 North 16th Street, Suite 106, Phoenix, AZ 85016

P 602.253.6463



Yessenia and Jessica, Friendship program Buddy Pair

Yessenia & Jessica

One-To-One Friendships

Citizens

Yessenia & Jessica have been part of the Citizens program for a year and a half. Yessenia initially had reservations about joining the program due to her challenging childhood and teenage years, marked by feelings of exclusion, struggles in making friends, and a lack of opportunities to showcase her abilities. However, after meeting with Best Buddies staff members, and being assured of finding the right match, she decided to give it a try.

Shortly after being matched, Yessenia was in the process of being adopted, a significant life change that she leaned on Jessica for support. This timing seemed almost destined, as they both recognized the value of their friendship in navigating life's challenges together. Yessenia shared, "I love that Jess really takes the time to get to know me, we bonded over our love of all things girly and Disney. We have shared a lot of ourselves with each other and it's nice having a friend I can rely on."

Over time, their friendship has flourished, and their bond has grown stronger, and it's evident that their friendship will endure for years to come, enriching each other's lives along the way. Jessica said, "Joining Best Buddies has been one of the best decisions I've made. Through this program, I've not only found a new friend but also discovered a deeper sense of connection and understanding. It's truly amazing how a simple decision to reach out can lead to such a meaningful and lasting friendship."



One-To-One Friendships Key Program Stats AZ

Elementary Schools	Middle Schools	High Schools
10 Chapters	279 Participants	10 Chapters
	182 Participants	41 Chapters
		1203 Participants

Colleges	Citizens	e-Buddies
4 Chapters	63 Participants	141 Participants
		97 Participants



I love that Jess really takes the time to get to know me, we bonded over our love of all things girly and Disney. We have shared a lot of ourselves with each other and it's nice having a friend I can rely on."

- Yessenia



Jacob, Best Buddies Jobs participant
Avnet Electronic Components

Jacob

Integrated Employment

Avnet Electronic Components

Jacob was first introduced to Best Buddies at Higley High School on the recommendation of teachers and friends, where he found a sense of belonging and acceptance among fellow students. When Jacob came to the Best Buddies Jobs program, he was set on becoming a cable wire harnesser for an aeronautics firm. He had taken a class in electrical harnessing but found a lack of experience hindered his chances in this field. When prompted by his Employment Consultant to consider other options, Jacob agreed to expand his options. Jacob then secured a role as a Distribution Center Representative at Avnet Electronic Components. Eager to expand his expertise, he has hopes that he will soon be able to master the intricacies of microchip programming in the Prom Center, known as 'flashing.'

The new job brought with it a newfound sense of independence. "My life has improved a lot now that I am working here! I feel so much more independent – I get myself to and from work on public transportation so I don't have to rely on my mom," Jacob stated. He loves being able to delve into the world of electrical component distribution, which has also brought him coworkers from all over the world. He enjoys learning from his coworkers and having the opportunity to expand his knowledge.

Beyond technical knowledge, the workplace offered valuable lessons in practical skills and cultural understanding. From financial management to intercultural communication, each day presented an opportunity for personal and professional growth. Jacob has desires to begin working full-time and he feels equipped to take that next step. With aspirations to advance within Avnet, Jacob looks forward to the prospect of increased financial stability and the ability to support his family, including saving for future endeavors like a trip to Italy.

His inherent curiosity and aptitude for understanding systems manifested early on, evident in Jacob's eagerness to learn wire harnessing for airplanes alongside his father. As he continued to develop his skills at Avnet, Jacob embraced the attitude of safety and diligence, ensuring not only his own well-being but also the efficiency and success of his team's operations.

“ My life has improved a lot now that I am working here! I feel so much more independent – I get myself to and from work on public transportation so I don't have to rely on my mom.” - **Jacob**



Integrated Employment Key Program Stats AZ

Jobs

26

Participants
Employed

28

Participants



Sebastian, Best Buddies Ambassador

Sebastian

Leadership Development Ambassador

Since 2022, I've been actively engaged in Arizona's Citizens and Ambassadors programs, while also serving on the Junior Advisory Board for Best Buddies. My role involves introducing new ideas, delivering speeches, recruiting members, and organizing efforts and events to further the mission of Best Buddies.

My journey with Best Buddies began in high school. Growing up, I struggled to connect with peers and faced bullying from eighth grade through my freshman year. This left me feeling isolated and unhappy. Everything changed when I was introduced to Best Buddies by fellow students. I was paired with a peer buddy, and from that moment, my social life took a turn for the better. I graduated high school with a scholarship, gained a supportive circle of friends, and pursued an Associate's Degree in Applied Science, eventually becoming a pipefitter/welder.

Best Buddies has profoundly shaped my future, pulling me out of loneliness and sadness. It's a remarkable community that has given me so much. I've returned to the organization because I want to give back and support others facing similar challenges.

My message to others is that challenges are opportunities to discover our strength and courage. It's not just about personal achievements; it's about making someone's life better and giving back to a community that has uplifted us.

Leadership Development Key Program Stats AZ

Ambassadors	Promoters
9	15
Ambassadors	Chapters
	504
	Participants

Transitions
40
Participants

“Many challenges are put in our path, not to stop us, but to call out our strength and courage.” - **Sebastian**



California Year in Review

In 2023, Best Buddies in California celebrated a year of accomplishment, propelled by the unwavering commitment of our volunteers, stakeholders, and staff. Through collaborative efforts and strong partnerships, we overcame many challenges of the pandemic and achieved notable milestones.

The return of an in-person Leadership Conference in Indiana, the revitalization of Best Buddies Living in Los Angeles, and surpassing our goals for Champion of the Year events in all markets demonstrated our resilience and determination.

Across the state, our Friendship programs flourished, with 45 new school chapters established and support extended to 139 existing schools. By year-end, we boasted 184 active school chapters, while our adult matching program, Citizens, facilitated 113 matches, marking a 46% increase from 2022.

Our Jobs program continued to thrive, assisting 251 individuals statewide and securing employment for 59 participants. Notably, our working participants achieved an impressive 88% retention rate in 2023, with industries such as retail and food and beverage experiencing significant growth, constituting over 52% of employed Best Buddies participants.

Best Buddies Signature Events played a crucial role in supporting our programs, with Friendship Walks and Champion of the Year events in Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego, and Sacramento raising over \$750,000. The steadfast funding from foundation grants, corporate partners, and individual donors was instrumental in sustaining and expanding our programs.

As we look ahead to 2024, our commitment remains steadfast in advancing our mission. We strive to enhance program quality, secure diverse funding, and foster a sustainable network of donors and volunteers. With renewed energy and the strength of our partnerships, we passionately believe that together, we are at the forefront of driving a more inclusive California.



Katelyn Quintero, State Director, California

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Max and Karen, Friendship program Buddy Pair

Karen & Max

One-To-One Friendships

Citizens, Los Angeles, CA

Before Best Buddies, both Max and Karen felt like they didn't quite belong to a community. While Max had his family to lean on, Karen was new to the Los Angeles area and didn't know many people. They both separately learned about our adult Friendship program, Citizens, and joined in hopes of finding meaningful connection. In September 2022, Max and Karen were matched in a one-to-one friendship, and their relationship has blossomed ever since.

Max plays the guitar and Karen is a singer and songwriter. They instantly clicked over their shared passion for creating music. Their hangouts often turn into jam sessions where they collaborate and learn to play new songs together. Karen is now no longer just a friend to Max, but she also is a bandmate. She just joined Max's band which is called Spectrum Laboratory.

Karen shared, "When I was matched with Max through Best Buddies, it was the best thing that had happened to me that year! Him and his family immediately felt like my family, and to say my life changed for the better because of them would be an understatement."

Some of the most fun they've had was preparing and performing the National Anthem at the Los Angeles Friendship Walk. It took a lot of practice and dedication to get it right, but they blew away the crowd of 1000+ people at both the 2023 and 2024 walks.

When they're not playing music together, they've had fun going to concerts, taking long walks and going to Best Buddies Citizens group happy hours. Karen said, "One of my favorite things about my friendship with Max is that I think we've both learned new ways to show up for a friend and express how we feel about the other person!" Max agrees with Karen's sentiment and feels that Best Buddies has given him opportunities not just to belong but also to be a leader in the community.



One-To-One Friendships Key Program Stats CA

Elementary Schools	Middle Schools	High Schools
17 Chapters	112 Participants	25 Chapters
	254 Participants	142 Chapters
		3,409 Participants
Colleges	Citizens	e-Buddies
16 Chapters	415 Participants	772 Participants
723 Participants		

“ I think we've both learned new ways to show up for a friend and express how we feel about the other person!” - **Karen**



Paul, Best Buddies Jobs participant
Whiting-Turner, Pleasanton, CA

Paul

Integrated Employment

Whiting-Turner, Pleasanton, CA

Paul turned to the Best Buddies Jobs program to find a competitive employment opportunity with the potential for long-term growth. He wanted to find a career that not only matched his skills and interests but also challenged him. Quickly after starting the job development progress, Paul accepted a job offer for an Administrative Assistant role at The Whiting-Turner Contracting Company and has been there for the past six years.

While his primary responsibilities include ensuring the completion of subcontractor documentation and managing weekly meetings, Paul's impact transcends his job description. Recognized as the "Mayor" of the office by his coworkers, he fosters a sense of community by connecting with colleagues, fostering engagement in company events, and maintaining a deep understanding of ongoing projects. One of his coworkers stated, "Paul has brought all of us together. He also knows everyone, which makes things run smoothly in the office because of his communication and ability to relate to everyone. He is always on task and ready to take on more responsibility. If Paul says that he is going to get something done, he does!"

Paul's tenure at Whiting-Turner hasn't just enhanced the company's operations; it's also been a journey of personal growth. Reflecting on his experience, Paul said, "My job has allowed me to become more professional and social at the same time. It has made talking to others easier." Paul's job is more than just a paycheck; it has allowed him to develop his confidence and self-advocacy skills.

Paul's story serves as an inspiration, showcasing the mutually beneficial relationship our Jobs program strives to build between our Jobs program participants and employer partners. We look forward to seeing Paul continue to take on more responsibilities and continue to achieve milestones in his career!



Integrated Employment Key Program Stats CA

Jobs	
230 Participants Employed	299 Participants

“ My job has allowed me to become more professional and social at the same time. It has made talking to others easier.” - **Paul**



Javier, Best Buddies Ambassador

Javier

Leadership Development

Ambassador, Irvine, CA

"I've been involved with Best Buddies for the last six years at the University of California, Irvine Friendship chapter. I am also in the Orange County Jobs Program and am a California State Ambassador. Best Buddies has helped me build my confidence and independence. Before Best Buddies, I didn't have many friends. In high school, I felt excluded and bullied. Sometimes, I felt I didn't have support in general from anyone. These experiences knocked down my confidence. The bullying would hurt me so much. I would take my frustration out on my friends and family, which wasn't fair to them. I often found myself befriending people who weren't the best influence. They took advantage of my kindness, which made me lose trust in people.

After these friendships ended, I secluded myself and ultimately lost my social skills and self-esteem. I was jealous of people who had true friends. And what is worse, it negatively affected my grades because I couldn't focus. Then my life started to change for the better when one of my oldest best friends introduced me to Best Buddies. I joined Best Buddies at UCI and met a lot of genuine friends who wanted the best for me.

Being surrounded by positive people who wanted to genuinely get to know me helped rebuild my trust in others and myself with confidence. They inspired me to become a leader and serve as a buddy director where I help lead my chapter. My confidence soared! I took my newfound confidence to the Jobs Program, where Best Buddies helped me find employment at a major retail store. Having a job helped build my independence and allowed me to support myself.

Best Buddies has been the greatest gift and has changed all aspects of my life. If I could tell my younger self that everything is so much better now. I have incredible friends. I have a meaningful job. I can speak up for myself, and I am surrounded by so many people who have empowered me."

“ Best Buddies has been the greatest gift and has changed all aspects of my life.” - **Javier**



Leadership Development Key Program Stats CA

Ambassadors	Promoters
53	53 355
Ambassadors	Chapters Participants

Transitions
32
Participants



Lorenzo, Best Buddies Living resident

Lorenzo

Best Buddies Living Resident

Los Angeles, CA

In 2023, when Lorenzo joined the Best Buddies Living program in Los Angeles, he had no idea how much it would change his life. His experience demonstrates how much our program can help people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) gain confidence in their ability to be independent.

“I heard about Best Buddies in 2014 when I was in high school, and I learned that the Friendship program would allow me to make meaningful connections. I got matched in a one-to-one friendship and had two different buddies whom I’m still friends with today. We watched movies, ate lunch, played laser tag, and bowled together.

I was excited when I learned Best Buddies Living was coming to Los Angeles because one of my goals has been to live on my own. I joined the Best Buddies Living program in Los Angeles in July 2023, and it has helped me learn how to live independently. I now know how to cook my own meals, budget and shop for groceries, and clean up my space. Best Buddies has taught me how to be a good roommate and friend to my peers.

I appreciate the community Best Buddies Living has helped me make. I enjoy having dinner with my roommates every week. We go to the park and play football. I also like attending the Citizens Happy Hour every month and other Best Buddies events like the Friendship Walk, Champion of the Year gala, and holiday bowling.

My life changed by living in my very own apartment separate from my parents. I recently got a job working at Vons! What I love most about my job is working with other people and helping customers find what they’re asking for.

My message for people with IDD is to try to believe you can experience the same milestones as our neurotypical peers. Best Buddies Living has taught me I can live alone and support myself!”

“ Best Buddies has taught me how to be a good roommate and friend to my peers.” - **Lorenzo**



Inclusive Living Key Program Stats CA

Living

1

Residences

5

Participants



“ My dream is to work for the State of California and move out. Having a disability does not stop you from working. Go for your dream. Employers need to hire more people with disabilities and Best Buddies is here to help.” - **Katina**

Katina, Best Buddies Ambassador



Connecticut Year in Review

2022 was a year of rebuilding at Best Buddies in Connecticut (BBCT). We remained steadfast in our commitment to spreading inclusion and friendship throughout the state. Despite the remaining challenges from COVID, Best Buddies continued to move its mission forward and grow its programs, participants and supporters. I am incredibly grateful to our participants, staff, board members, sponsors, donors and community partners who made it all possible.

During a time when people were being excluded, our socially distanced mission was needed more than ever. We continued with our virtual events, which are here to stay, and continued to hold in-person events. Despite some challenges, BBCT expanded its school Friendship programs. We also implemented a Transitions program for people looking for a job that taught soft skills for the basics of employment.

The *Best Buddies Friendship Walk* was held at a new venue, Dunkin Donut Stadium, the home of the Hartford Yard Goats, and hosted over 400 walkers. Our walkers, participants, sponsors, partners and friends thoroughly enjoyed the day!

In the fall, we hosted our *Best Buddies Champion of the Year Derby Party*. It was a memorable evening filled with hats, bowties, great food, fun and friendships that culminated with Christine Sullivan and Abby Senich being crowned as our *Champions*. I want to give a special thank you to our sponsors and friends who helped make the event memorable!

As we approach 2023, we have a new team of staff members excited to do great things in Connecticut and move our state forward by growing school and Citizens chapters. Making more matches and developing our funding sources is a priority so Connecticut can stay strong and Best Buddies can become more of a household name.



Lezlye Zupkus, State Director, Connecticut

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Alania and Christian, Friendship program Buddy Pair

Alania & Christian

One-To-One Friendships

JFK Middle School, Enfield, CT

Christian and Alania (Laney) are a part of Best Buddies Middle Schools and have known each other since elementary school. Christian had a lonely early childhood experience despite his early friendship with Laney.

“Before Best Buddies, I did not have many friends,” Christian recalled. “I was bullied in elementary school, and I felt humiliated.”

Laney dealt with similar struggles, but not only has Best Buddies helped her social life -- it also has helped her chart her future.

“Best Buddies showed me what I want to do with my life, which is to work with kids with IDD,” Laney said. “Being friends with people like Christian has brought out the best of me and has helped me see the good in others.”

Christian says his favorite thing to do with Laney is to work together on projects during their shared free period. The duo frequently text and play together inside and outside JFK Middle School’s walls.

Laney admires Christian’s spirit, positivity and resilience and has come to value their friendship deeply.

“Christian is always so positive,” Laney commented. “He is always so kind to me, and he is just a ray of sunshine.”

Christian and Laney both acknowledge that Best Buddies has made their growing friendship possible. Without the program, Christian believes he would still be shy and self-conscious and not the “Mayor of JFK,” as his friends at school call him.

“Being friends with Christian has helped me get out of my comfort zone,” Laney said. “But it is more than that; being friends with Christian has taught me how to be a good friend.”

“Being friends with Christian has brought out the best of me and has helped me see the good in others”
- Alania



One-To-One Friendships Key Program Stats CT

Elementary Schools		Middle Schools		High Schools	
7	318	12	273	35	1,514
Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants
<hr/>					
Colleges		Citizens	e-Buddies		
10	611	156	89		
Chapters	Participants	Participants	Participants		



Jill and Lisa E, Friendship program Buddy Pair



Angelo Santiago, Best Buddies Ambassador

Angelo Santiago

Leadership Development

Ambassador, Willimantic, CT

Angelo was introduced to Best Buddies in 2013 while he was in a post-high school transition program at Windham High School. Before joining Best Buddies, Angelo said that his life was repetitive, involving going to work, going home and sometimes playing in Special Olympics Basketball.

“Prior to joining Best Buddies, I was timid and encased in my own little world,” Angelo said. “Now, Best Buddies has made me feel like I am a champion.”

A former Connecticut program manager approached Angelo to attend an Ambassador training in 2015.

“I had experience in self-advocacy but never thought it would go anywhere,” Angelo recalled.

Angelo’s self-advocacy skills, despite his initial trepidation, went somewhere: straight to the Connecticut *Best Buddies Champion of the Year Gala* in 2022.

“Best Buddies helped me realize there is a lot more to me than I could ever imagine,” Angelo said.

Angelo has since spoken at the Connecticut Friendship Walk, among other events, regaling his tales about his personal development and how he went from being a shy introvert to an outgoing advocate. With many speaking opportunities under his belt, it is no wonder Angelo aspires to become a Global Ambassador.

“If you have the opportunity to join the many programs Best Buddies has to offer, do not pass it up.”

“Best Buddies helped me realize there is a lot more to me than I could ever imagine.” - Angelo



Leadership Development Key Program Stats CT

Ambassadors	Promoters
54	7
Ambassadors	Chapters Participants
	209



Erin and Caroline, Friendship program Buddy Pair

Erin & Caroline

One-To-One Friendships

Auburn University, Auburn, AL

Erin and Caroline have been paired in the Best Buddies program for two years. Erin grew up in Canton, Georgia, and attended Sequoyah High School, where she was in a self-contained classroom. Her friends were mainly the students in her class, and she faced challenges in connecting with other students who didn't recognize her awesomeness. Four years ago, her family moved to Auburn, Alabama, where she became involved with the Exceptional Foundation of East Alabama, which introduced her to the Best Buddies Program.

Caroline has been a very special friend to Erin. They enjoy spending time together playing games and exploring various restaurants in Auburn. Erin loves having buddies who want to hang out with her, go to ball games, get ice cream, attend holiday parties, and simply be her friends. For Erin, Best Buddies represents true friendship.

Now in her third year with Best Buddies at Auburn University, Erin describes the experience as amazing. Her social life has flourished, and she has formed many new friendships.

"This is my third year in Best Buddies at Auburn University, and it has been amazing," said Erin. I have a lot of new friends, and my social life has exploded! Best Buddies at Auburn means more to me than I can put into words. It has given me friends for a lifetime. I hope everyone with disabilities will have more inclusion and we will open more Best Buddies chapters in Alabama. Let's help everyone accept people for who we are. War Eagle!



One-To-One Friendships Key Program Stats Expansion

Elementary Schools		Middle Schools		High Schools	
8	72	5	82	12	193
Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants
Colleges		Citizens	e-Buddies		
4	468	2	11		
Chapters	Participants	Participants	Participants		



Best Buddies at Auburn means more to me than I can put into words. It has given me friends for a lifetime." - Erin



Kat Teston, Best Buddies Ambassador

Kat Teston

Leadership Development

Ambassador, Louisville, KY

Meet Kat Teston, a Best Buddies in Kentucky Ambassador and Advisory Board member. Before Kat found her place as a Best Buddies participant in high school, her life was marked by a sense of social isolation. Born with an intellectual and developmental disability (IDD), Kat often felt like an outsider, struggling to connect with peers and find her place in the world. However, everything changed when she discovered Best Buddies at Eastern High School. Kat became involved in multiple programs offered by Best Buddies, including the Friendship program and Leadership Development program, where she found companionship, purpose, and a sense of belonging.

Kat's journey towards becoming a chapter leader and self-advocate in Best Buddies was guided by a combination of inner determination and her supportive community's encouragement. Inspired by the inclusive mission of Best Buddies, Kat felt compelled to step up and make a difference. Through self-advocacy, Kat strives to empower individuals with IDD, amplifying their voices and advocating for their rights and opportunities.

Since joining Best Buddies, Kat's life has undergone a transformation. No longer feeling alone or marginalized, she discovered a sense of purpose and joy in her interactions with fellow members of the Best Buddies community. Through friendships forged and barriers broken, Kat has found a newfound confidence in herself and her abilities.

With determination and courage, Kat encourages others to embrace their unique gifts and talents, knowing that they have the power to create positive change in the world.

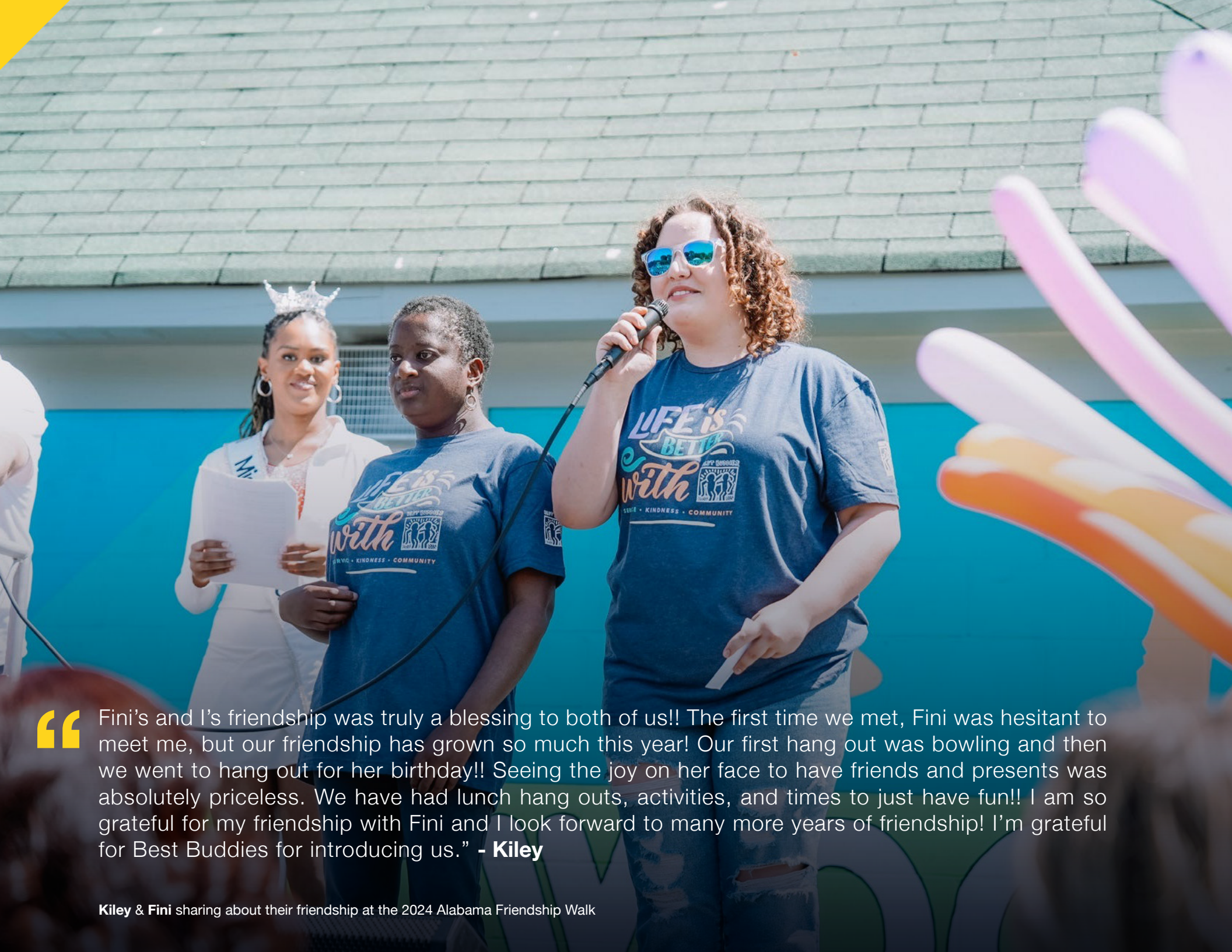


Leadership Development

Key Program Stats Expansion

Ambassadors		Promoters	
8		9	131
Ambassadors		Chapters	Participants

“Inclusion is a big part of Best Buddies and it is important because it is good to let people know what your emotions are and how you are feeling. It keeps you active with someone to talk to and something fun to do to relieve stress. Lastly, you gain friendship and memories that last for life.” - Kat



“

Fini's and I's friendship was truly a blessing to both of us!! The first time we met, Fini was hesitant to meet me, but our friendship has grown so much this year! Our first hang out was bowling and then we went to hang out for her birthday!! Seeing the joy on her face to have friends and presents was absolutely priceless. We have had lunch hang outs, activities, and times to just have fun!! I am so grateful for my friendship with Fini and I look forward to many more years of friendship! I'm grateful for Best Buddies for introducing us.” - **Kiley**



Alyssa, Best Buddies Jobs participant
Bubba's 33, Detroit

Alyssa

Integrated Employment

Bubba's 33, Detroit, MI

Alyssa is a 27-year-old with a passion for cats, drawing, dancing, and traveling. She also loves her job at Bubba's 33, a popular restaurant chain in the Metro-Detroit area.

Alyssa's journey at Bubba's began in 2022 when she was a Champion of the Year candidate for Best Buddies in Michigan. With the support of the restaurant, she and her mother, Sue, organized a give-back night, donating a portion of the restaurant's proceeds to her campaign. To raise funds for Best Buddies, Alyssa sold her "Happy Cards"—handwritten cards featuring drawings and motivational messages. She started making these cards during the COVID-19 pandemic to uplift those around her during a difficult time. Her positive spirit and creative cards caught the attention of the management and team members at Bubba's 33, leading them to collaborate with our Lead Employment Consultant, Natalie D'Angelo, to find a suitable role for Alyssa.

Since joining the team at Bubba's in the summer of 2023, Alyssa has quickly adapted to her responsibilities. She enjoys going to work and loves spending time with her coworkers, brightening everyone's day with her cheerful demeanor. Alyssa is continually learning new skills and has found a supportive community among her teammates at Bubba's.

Outside of work, Alyssa competes in the Miss Amazing pageant, plays Miracle League baseball, and has been a Champion of the Year candidate twice. Her job fits seamlessly into her busy schedule, adding another layer of independence to her life.



Integrated Employment

Key Program Stats Expansion

Jobs

18

Participants
Employed

21

Participants



Florida Year in Review

In 2023, Best Buddies in Florida continued to thrive, offering a multitude of impactful programs that enhance the lives of both youth and adults with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Presently, Best Buddies boasts a presence in 359 elementary, middle, and high schools as well as college campuses, impacting 11,906 participants in 128 cities throughout the State. Moreover, the Citizens program has enrolled over 1,000 adults with and without IDD to foster one-to-one friendships. These initiatives are made possible through a combination of local, state, and federal government funding, alongside contributions from private entities and corporations.

Seven regional offices meticulously orchestrate events and training sessions aimed at fostering the development of Best Buddies student leaders and participants with IDD. In 2023, our participation in the annual Best Buddies Leadership Conference in Bloomington, Indiana, witnessed an unprecedented turnout, underscoring the commitment of both participants and leaders. Over the course of the year, the Best Buddies Ambassador program formally trained more than 250 students. Culminating the year's endeavors, over 2,000 students from chapters across the state convened at Friendship Ball, an annual event reminiscent of a prom, to celebrate the bonds forged throughout the year.



Four years ago, the inception of the Best Buddies transitions program in Broward and Palm Beach Counties was made possible by generous contributions from The Frederick A. Deluca Foundation and The Jim Moran Foundation, respectively. As we embark on our fifth year of delivering transition services to students aged 14-21 with IDD, aimed at equipping them with post-graduation plans encompassing employment, higher education, volunteerism, certification courses, or any path they envision as personally fulfilling, we recognize the pivotal role these services play in preventing post-graduation inertia. We are delighted to announce the expansion of the Best Buddies transitions program into Central Florida, courtesy of The Dr. Phillips Charities, and into Southwest Florida, thanks to the support of the Golisano Foundation.



Best Buddies in Florida operates the Best Buddies Jobs program in six Florida markets, aiding 141 individuals with disabilities in securing or maintaining employment. This program receives support from various organizations including the State of Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Agency for Persons with Disabilities, and the Social Security Ticket to Work program.

Looking ahead, Best Buddies Florida remains steadfast in its support of the IDD community, with a focus on providing quality programs, fiscal sustainability, and increased volunteer engagement. In collaboration with dedicated supporters, Best Buddies Florida is committed to fostering a world of inclusion where individuals are valued for their abilities. None of these achievements would be possible without the commitment of numerous volunteers, including Advisory Board members, event sponsors, donors, corporate partners, and school collaborators. Thank you for your continued support in ensuring the success of Best Buddies Florida in 2023 and beyond.

Andi Allen, State Director, Florida
Best Buddies International

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Kakayla and Dakari, Friendship program Buddy Pair

KaKayla & Dakari

One-To-One Friendships

Titusville High School, Titusville, FL

I joined Best Buddies my freshman year of high school, so I do not know what it is like to experience high school without Best Buddies, and for that I could not be more grateful. Prior to joining Best Buddies, I had not found a particular extra-curricular activity that I truly enjoyed being a part of. Throughout elementary and middle school, I had always spent my time socializing with people in my community, which I feel played a large role in my desire to join Best Buddies initially. In addition, I grew up in a family that taught me how important it is to treat everyone with respect and kindness regardless of our differences. With that being said, I did not have experience being around individuals with IDD, but it was incredibly wonderful to begin my journey with this club.

During our first year at Titusville High School, both Dakari and I were able to connect at the back-to- school welcome party hosted by our school’s Best Buddies program. We clicked instantly since we are both very outgoing and positive. Dakari and I may not have identical interests, but we have a very similar character. There has never been a doubt in my mind that Dakari is the first person to brighten a room with his smile and genuinity. Ever since our fast track to friendship, Dakari and I have spent time together at all of our Best Buddies events, inside and outside of school. My favorite memory with Dakari is from his birthday party in the summer of 2021. Right after our freshman year wrapped up, Dakari hosted his red- carpet birthday party where I was able to meet his family and spend time with him outside of the structured school terms. Now it is our senior year, and it is easy to say that regardless of where we hangout, it is always a blast.

Being a part of this program has brought in so many fantastic opportunities and friendships for both me and Dakari. Dakari is incredibly talented on many fronts, he is a part of the Titusville High School band program, he is our buddy director for the club, he was on homecoming court our senior year, and this summer he will be dancing at the 2024 Sheriff’s Gala! During football season I always watch Dakari perform on the field so I can show him massive amounts of support. In addition, I have been lucky enough to see him perform at his music concerts. My introduction to Dakari was unknowingly one of the best moments of high school because it marked the beginning of a thousand smiles, all through Best Buddies. Dakari is never afraid to try something new, which is something I have always admired about him. He is so unapologetically himself, that I consider him one of the greatest role models I know.



One-To-One Friendships Key Program Stats FL

Elementary Schools		Middle Schools		High Schools	
52	527	96	820	209	6,882
Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants
<hr/>					
Colleges		Citizens	e-Buddies		
21	1,061	1,111	383		
Chapters	Participants	Participants	Participants		



Jhon, Best Buddies Jobs participant
DigitalBridge, Boca Raton, FL

Jhon

Integrated Employment

DigitalBridge, Boca Raton, FL

I joined Best Buddies in 2019 and immediately thought, “Best Buddies knows how to treat me right.” When I graduated with my bachelor’s degree in graphic and Multimedia Design, I began doing freelance work and received random jobs here and there. I loved working with technology and being creative, but work was inconsistent, and I needed something more stable. I began working with a job coaching agency, but I was unhappy there. I felt as if my skills and potential were belittled and disrespected. The employer I was matched with had little patience in training me and working with the support I needed. I powered through work even though I felt intimidated daily. I wanted to improve my career and my skills. My life coach at the time suggested I make some changes. I left the previous agency and found Best Buddies. I began working at National Tax Group as an Administrative Assistant and found joy through the freedom to manage projects and execute tasks independently. I felt trusted, valued, and respected. After three years at National Tax Group, Best Buddies once again helped me invest in myself and grow. I got hired as an Office Manager at DigitalBridge, a digital investment and infrastructure company. I am excited to be in a field that is constantly evolving, growing, and leaning into the future.

What I enjoy the most working at DigitalBridge are my unique teammates. My coworkers have interesting backgrounds in finance, technology and investing, and I enjoy hearing them talk about their work. I feel involved in interesting ventures, and I want to learn everything I can about this industry. I was also able to transfer my previous experiences into new procedures and learn new ways of doing things. I must hold a certain level of discipline and higher standards when meeting with international clients and creating spaces for large investment meetings. I am also developing my skills in multitasking, as I have to juggle several client requests at once.

My goal is to grow in this company and be part of the changing future of technology. I can see myself at DigitalBridge for a very long time.

“ I am excited to be in a field that is constantly evolving, growing, and leaning into the future.” - Jhon



Integrated Employment Key Program Stats FL

Jobs

195

Participants
Employed

213

Participants



Juana, Best Buddies Ambassador

Juana

Leadership Development

Ambassador, Hollywood, FL

Before becoming a part of Best of Best Buddies, my life was rather mundane, lacking excitement. I attended school and spent time with my sister and her friends, but I never felt like I truly fit in. Thanks to Best Buddies, I've found a supportive community that backs all my aspirations and dreams.

In high school, I participated in the One-Of-One Friendship, Jobs, and Ambassador programs. Now, I aspire to become a home chapter leader and a self-advocate for Best Buddies, driven by my belief in inclusion and my desire to encourage others with disabilities to join the program.

Joining Best Buddies was a transformative experience for me, completely altering the course of my life. Through the organization, I've experienced tremendous personal growth and even secured a prestigious job, for which I'm immensely grateful. Since 2006, I've felt a sense of belonging, knowing that my peers and the Best Buddies Community genuinely care about my well-being and success. I fervently hope that every individual with a disability can access the support and camaraderie offered by this remarkable organization, regardless of their background. Thank you, Best Buddies.

To my fellow individuals with IDD, I urge you not to hesitate in joining Best Buddies. This opportunity has the power to change your life, and I couldn't be happier with my decision.

Inclusive love the people who teach you and is around you!!!!



Leadership Development Key Program Stats FL

Ambassadors	Promoters	
63	113	1,559
Ambassadors	Chapters	Participants

Transitions

105
Participants



To my fellow individuals with IDD, I urge you not to hesitate in joining Best Buddies. This opportunity has the power to change your life, and I couldn't be happier with my decision." - **Juana**



Amari and Nixon, Friendship program Buddy Pair

Amari & Nixon

One-To-One Friendships

Ebenezer Elementary School, Guyton, GA

As a school, Ebenezer Elementary strives for a culture of inclusion for students both with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) from shared student activities to installing adaptive playground equipment. But it wasn't until their Best Buddies Chapter launched in the fall of 2022 did the impact on peer-to-peer engagement fully shine. Currently the largest elementary school chapter in Georgia, Ebenezer Elementary offers regularly scheduled opportunities for the students to engage with and support each other throughout the school year. Countless organic friendships have formed but there are a few whose dynamic goes beyond the typical scope.

Serving in a leadership position as one of the Chapter presidents, Nixon has developed the sweetest bond with his friend, Amari. These two students play basketball together almost every single day. Their friendship is proof of how important inclusion is, not only to students with IDD but students without IDD. They each have unique qualities to offer to one another and that is what makes their friendship so strong!

“ It is unspeakable. I cannot explain in words why our friendship is so awesome. It's just how special Amari makes me feel being friends with him” - **Nixon**



One-To-One Friendships Key Program Stats GA

Elementary Schools		Middle Schools		High Schools	
12	344	8	224	23	901
Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants
.....					
Colleges		Citizens	e-Buddies		
6	221	84	61		
Chapters	Participants	Participants	Participants		



Mike, Best Buddies Jobs participant
Georgia Aquarium, Atlanta, GA

Mike

Integrated Employment

Georgia Aquarium, Atlanta, GA

Mike has been such a wonderful addition to the Jobs program and continues to be a “staff favorite” amongst the group. He’s done a great job learning new skills, adapting to changing roles and learning to manage independence effectively. Best of all, Mike ALWAYS has a smile on his face. Every update I receive from Ashanti when she visits Mike is that he is always so excited to see her!



Integrated Employment Key Program Stats GA

Jobs

6

Participants
Employed

12

Participants



Antonio and Daniel , Best Buddies Living residents

Antonio

Best Buddies Living Resident

Atlanta, GA

The Best Buddies Living (BBL) location in Georgia currently houses four participants on-site and hosts 8 participants during weekly dinners and group activities. These additional 4 members are a part of the membership model (BBLM) also available to our participants. BBL is inclusive of additional hands-on support provided by the Residential Manager. These supports may be in the form of independent life-skills training, development of strategies to address residents' mental/emotional health needs, research and building a curriculum to address individual resident support needs. Unlike BBL, BBLM is not inclusive of housing and hands-on support. BBLM provides members with the opportunity for community through weekly group dinners and socio-educational events!

The Best Buddies Living program is growing tremendously in GA with an effort of capturing solid data points to help measure tangible growth of independence for residents. These categories range from independent living skills, money management, health and wellness, social skills, and healthy relationships. Input from residents on skills and experiences they'd like to focus on is key and the inspiration behind a most recent addition to weekly adventures - Friday Cooking Class!

For the first class, two of the BBL participants, Daniel and Antonio embarked on a journey to become more comfortable in the kitchen! Daniel and Antonio worked together seamlessly to create their very first dishes, Spinach Alfredo Pasta and Black Bean Tacos, which they were very proud of! We are excited to see them building confidence in their independent living skills! Antonio and Daniel are also part of the Best Buddies Jobs program and have acquired gainful employment opportunities working in the hospitality and sporting event industry as well as in a corporate setting through our partnership with JLL.



Inclusive Living Key Program Stats GA

Living

1

Residences

6

Participants



My favorite part of Best Buddies Living is doing all the Best Buddies Living event's. I always know something fun will be happening and I'll be able to practice new things!." - **Antonio**



“ My dream is to work for the State of California and move out. Having a disability does not stop you from working. Go for your dream. Employers need to hire more people with disabilities and Best Buddies is here to help.” - **Katina**

Katina, Best Buddies Ambassador



Hawaii Year in Review

As we look back over the last year, we are grateful for the events and growth that took place for Best Buddies in Hawaii (BBHI). Our staff is thrilled we were able to open a new Elementary School program, 3 new High Schools, 1 new College, and almost doubled the number of Citizens matches.

Best Buddies in Hawaii also offered monthly Ambassador trainings, along with an opportunity to attend a Financial Literacy Workshop with Hawaii State Federal Credit Union in October 2023. We continued to host weekly virtual inclusion activities to bring together members from all chapters. Our Half Hour Heroes was such a hit in 2022, we continued in 2023, to offer participants an outlook of people in the community, build networks, and to explore different volunteer opportunities.

Our annual Best Buddies Friendship Walks on O'ahu, Hawai'i Island, and Maui brought the community together. Nearly 600 Best Buddies participants registered across all three islands, and thanks to our generous volunteers, supporters, donors, and partners, we raised over \$53,000 for our programs in Hawaii.

BBHI traveled to Indiana University with 13 participants for our first in person Leadership Conference since the pandemic. It was amazing to be back in person with Best Buddies participants from around the world. Our advisors, ambassadors, and student leaders in attendance shared ideas and learn strategies to create positive change in their communities.

In 2023, we canceled Friendship Jam due to the unprecedented and devastating Maui wildfires that affected our staff, volunteers, and participants. BBHI looks forward to planning a Friendship Jam for the books in 2024.

BBHI is grateful for our advisory board, government funders, generous individual donors, and amazing businesses partners. We send mahalo's to all grantors who donate through the Hawai'i Community Foundation, the Bank of Hawaii, and the Aloha and Maui United Way organizations. Thanks to funders like you, our goal is to open Best Buddies Transitions, an adapted workforce readiness program in 2024.



Elizabeth Mahoe, Deputy Director, Programs and Operations, Hawaii

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RJ and Urijah, Friendship program Buddy Pair

RJ & Urijah

One-To-One Friendships

Pearl City High School, Pearl City, HI

RJ joined Best Buddies during their freshman year of high school and attending Leadership Conference the following year. Attending conference helped RJ to gain more confidence as the incoming Chapter President. Now a senior, RJ has developed a deeper connection and ability to advocate for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

“Prior to Best Buddies it was a lot harder to know where I belonged,” RJ says. “But now, I don’t have to worry about that because I have found that Best Buddies provides a place of guaranteed acceptance, support and always keeps things positive.”

One of those contributing factors towards belonging was being paired in a one-to-one friendship with Urijah. RJ and Urijah live near each other and being matched in high school has given them both the opportunity to build a stronger connection and to learn from one another.

“I have really enjoyed building a friendship with Urijah,” RJ says. “Supporting him at the Friday Night Primetime, seeing how much family support he has, and doing group activities each month has been inspirational.”

“Urijah is always there to be helpful and get involved at our Best Buddies events,” RJ shares. “When we are planning our monthly events, he has a big smile and always wants to contribute.”

RJ and Urijah set the tone on what meaningful friendships are meant to be!



One-To-One Friendships

Key Program Stats HI

Elementary Schools		Middle Schools		High Schools	
2	1	11	37	20	249
Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants
Colleges		Citizens		e-Buddies	
5	77	66	23		
Chapters	Participants	Participants	Participants		

“Urijah is always there to be helpful and get involved at our Best Buddies events.” - RJ



“

“Best Buddies makes me feel like part of the community. Paolo is such a positive person and encourages me to be happy too. My favorite quote is by Dr. Seuss and explains my friendship with Paolo perfectly. “Life is too short to wake up in the morning with regrets. So love the people who treat you right, forgive the ones that don’t, and believe that everything happens for a reason. If you get the chance, take it. If it changes your life, let it. Nobody said it would be easy, they just promised it would be worth it.” - **Brock**

Juan Paolo & Brock Citizens Friendships, Citizens, Oahu, HI



Timothy, Best Buddies Ambassador

Timothy

Leadership Development

Ambassador, Honolulu, HI

Timothy Renken is a State Ambassador from Honolulu, Hawai'i. A self-motivated man as he describes and individual who lives to serve others. He joined Best Buddies in 2015 as a chapter member at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa college.

"I've always been my own advocate. I have taken leadership positions for other organizations prior to Best Buddies and felt like I could do well by joining the Ambassadors program. My goal is to become a Global Ambassador for Best Buddies. I set high expectations and want to be a mentor for others. Best Buddies has given me the opportunity to work on being a better self-advocate.

I want people with IDD to know to never give up on their dreams and keep going even when things are challenging. We should never let others tell us we can't do something. That's why Best Buddies is great because we can do it all!

Leading by example, being a friend, and helping others when they are in need, will give me the confidence to be a better person and accomplish my goals in life. I told myself that I wanted to attend a Leadership Conference and with the help of Best Buddies and motivating me, I will be going in the summer of 2024 for the first time.

“ My favorite quote by Marty McFly in Back to the Future helps me remember how great we can be. He says, “If you put your mind to it, you can accomplish anything.” - **Timothy**

Leadership Development Key Program Stats HI

Ambassadors	Promoters
53	8
Ambassadors	Chapters Participants



Illinois Year in Review

Best Buddies in Illinois remained a leader in supporting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in 2023. We continue to provide our participants with opportunities and resources to overcome the social and economic isolation that the IDD community faces every day. Our work in Illinois supports social engagement and mental well-being by facilitating friendships, fostering leadership development, and supporting inclusive employment throughout Illinois.

Our total school friendship chapter count ended 2023 at 167. Many of those chapters represented at the first post pandemic BB Leadership Conference in July. The impact of this high-level training for our participant leaders was evident as our school chapters made friendship matches, hosted inclusive events, and promoted inclusion in their school communities.

We also supported new Ambassador leaders through numerous training events, provided supplemental hands-on training to fifty-five students in High School Transition programs.

Best Buddies Jobs placed 28 people into integrated employment in Illinois during 2023. Participants like Lonnie are improving their workplaces and are valuable members of their teams. Our Jobs Team isn't simply finding work for people, we are finding the right work where Best Buddies participants are impactful and included. This has resulted in a tremendous retention rate of over 90% for employee placements.

We were able to make a greater impact due to successful fundraising activities and events in Central Illinois and Chicagoland. Our Friendship Walks in Chicago and Normal brought together over 1,400 walkers for inclusion, the Chicago Marathon included a record sixty runners fundraising for Best Buddies, and the twenty-three Champions drove our Galas in Peoria and Chicago to raising record amounts. The result was that our total revenue surpassed the \$2,000,000 mark for the first time in Illinois. These funds have increased our capacity to support more participants through the addition of two new Jobs program staff and plans to hire an additional Friendship program staff member in the following year.

We are grateful for the support of our Best Buddies participants, company partners, sponsors, foundations, and other supporters who help ensure that our participants are included in all aspects of our communities. Stories about Best Buddies in Illinois participants Jack, Amy, Lonnie, and Breonna are further proof that your support continues to change lives in our state. We excited to reaching new heights by advancing our mission of friendship and inclusion even further in 2024.



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Jack and Amy, Friendship program Buddy Pair

Jack & Amy

One-To-One Friendships

Citizens- Chicago, IL

Jack Mayor joined Best Buddies in high school in 2014. “It was my freshman year of high school, and nothing was easy. I was one of 4,000 kids on a massive new campus, and I was lost. School was hard and navigating my surroundings was harder; socializing was the hardest.” This is where he found his best friend, Josie. Josie holds a special place in Jack’s heart and he credits her for helping him start his incredible Ambassador’s journey. But Jack has another story he loves to share.

On November 1, 2022, a Tuesday, Jack notes, Best Buddies gave him “yet another incredible gift”. Enter Amy Lenefeld. Jack and Amy were matched through the Best Buddies in Illinois Citizens Program. “Our special friendship is just getting started but we’ve done so many fun things already, such as baking Christmas cookies, bowling, watching hockey games and she even tolerates my love for reality TV. Not only do I love my new best buddy but my family does as well. Her positive energy and unconditional support are things that continue to help me in my everyday life.”

While Amy has had a big impact on Jack’s life, Jack has also made a huge impact on Amy’s life. “I am so thankful for Jack; he’s one of my best friends...I can rely on him to be there for me through anything! He appreciates me for who I am.”

These two have bonded over their love of reality television and ice cream. But everyone knew that they were friends at first sight. Seeing them now, they are always laughing together, having a great time, and building each other up. At Leadership Conference this year, the two participated in a photo shoot of their friendship, and it was non-stop laughter. These two bring the party wherever they go and show truly embody the mission of Best Buddies through their friendship.



One-To-One Friendships Key Program Stats IL

Elementary Schools	Middle Schools	High Schools
27 Chapters	364 Participants	42 Chapters
	683 Participants	93 Chapters
		3,464 Participants

Colleges	Citizens	e-Buddies
15 Chapters	596 Participants	588 Participants
		248 Participants



Best Buddies gave me confidence and a purpose in this life. I have become a much happier person living my best life.” - Jack



Lonnie, Best Buddies Jobs participant
Lyric Opera of Chicago, Chicago, IL

Lonnie

Integrated Employment

Lyric Opera of Chicago, Chicago, IL

Before being involved with Best Buddies I was worried about finding a job after college where I would fit in. There weren't a lot of companies interested in hiring people with disabilities. After struggling, my mom recalled discussing the organization Best Buddies with my friend's mom. After having no luck on my own, we reached out to Best Buddies for help in aiding my friend with employment and other needs, and we were able to make an appointment. After completing the initial interview and processing, I was assigned a job coach who understood my educational background. As I hold a bachelor's degree in music and possess extensive classical training as a conductor, I have the job experience but also allow me to pursue my passion for music as a teaching artist.

Since starting at the Lyric Opera, my life has greatly improved. I'm enjoying becoming more independent and dependable. Working with the public allows me to meet people, form friendships with co-workers, and build a sense of community. The best part of my job is the sense of pride and accomplishment I feel after each shift. Being in a high-level musical environment is inspiring. I was promoted from usher to floor monitor within a year.

Now that I have a job, I can focus on advancing my career as a working musician, which includes purchasing better instruments and immersing myself in high-level musical culture. The two main skills that I utilize at my job are connecting with the public and guiding them toward an enjoyable experience. My expertise in musical performance allows me to connect with patrons, improving their overall experience. The skills I learned at my job include problem-solving, addressing patrons' needs, and attention to detail.



Integrated Employment Key Program Stats IL

Jobs

75

Participants
Employed

128

Participants



The best part of my job is the sense of pride and accomplishment I feel after each shift.” - **Lonnie**



Breonna, Best Buddies Ambassador

Breonna

Leadership Development

Ambassador, Peoria, IL

Breonna Knox has been selected to be Central, Illinois Ambassador of the Year for Best Buddies for her continued dedication to promoting friendship, inclusion, and opportunities for all. Despite facing challenges with disabilities such as short-term memory loss and seizures, Breonna perseveres with joy and compassion in our Jobs and Leadership program. Before she joined Best Buddies, her life was lonely, and she was having a hard time socializing. Since joining, so many doors have been opened for her to become a stronger leader and advocate. She has been able to reconnect with old friends and continue making new friends.

Breonna's life changed when she joined Best Buddies. The reason she joined Best Buddies was because of Ryan Lacosse. Ryan empowered Breonna to join the programs to share her story to inspire others the way she inspired him. Breonna hopes to accomplish being an inspiration to others through self-advocacy. Her experiences have taught her the importance of every moment and she strives to make each day meaningful.

Back in mid 2021, Breonna made the life changing decision to join Best Buddies. Since joining, Breonna has been given various opportunities to grow as a friend, employee, and leader. She has gained the skills to advocate for herself and with that, has become an incredible advocate for others. Through sharing her story and experiences, she has become an inspiration to her audiences to never give up and keep persevering.

Breonna's message to those with an IDD is, "My journey has been marked by challenges due to my disabilities, including short - term Memory loss and seizures. Despite these obstacles, I persevere and strive to make each day Meaningful. My experiences have taught me the importance of every moment. I invite you to join Best Buddies to join a supportive and inclusive community."



Leadership Development Key Program Stats IL

Ambassadors	Promoters	
153	49	722
Ambassadors	Chapters	Participants

Transitions
45
Participants



Let's spread the mission of Best Buddies and make a positive difference in the lives of others like Best Buddies did for me." - **Breonna**



Indiana Year in Review

Best Buddies in Indiana (BBIN) continues to promote friendship, leadership development, and inclusive employment for people with IDD. We are proud that our work helps to create a more inclusive Hoosier state. More than 5,000 participants were involved in Best Buddies programs in Indiana. The Friendship program expanded into five new schools across the state, bringing BBIN to a total of 105 school chapters. In addition, we have 164 trained student leaders, and seven participants with IDD are Best Buddies Ambassadors. Best Buddies Jobs also continued to expand, helping 3 adult participants find meaningful employment in the community. The Jobs program served a total of participants 32 participants, with 25 of those employed.

In the spring, we hosted the Best Buddies Friendship Walk in both Indianapolis and Lake County, and the events totaled more than 2,000 walkers. These Best Buddies Friendship Walks brought in \$195,548.14 to support our statewide programs. Best Buddies participants, community members, families, and volunteers walked for Best Buddies, advocating for inclusion and friendship in our schools, workplaces, and communities.

In the fall, we recruited seven Champions from the community that raised funds and awareness for our mission and programs. Reid Brenton, the 2024 Best Buddies Champion of the Year in Indiana, and his Mission Partner, Pete Steinkamp, were recognized at our Best Buddies Champion of the Year Gala in November in Indianapolis. The gala had over 250 guests and raised \$242,700.

As we head into the new year, BBIN remains committed to expanding our Friendship, Leadership Development, and Jobs programs throughout the state, serving more youth and adults with and without IDD. We will continue working alongside our volunteers, participants, employers, donors, corporate partners, and supporters who make our mission a reality. Together, we can continue to make an impact across Indiana and move our mission of inclusion forward!



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Abby and Taylor, Friendship program Buddy Pair

Abby & Taylor

One-To-One Friendships

Carmel High School, Carmel, IN

When asked about her life before joining Best Buddies, Abby explained that she was incredibly shy. Through Best Buddies, she has become much more outgoing and has had the opportunity to strengthen her leadership skills through being the Chapter President at her High School and speaking at state events. She shared her experiences with other leaders at the Back to Best Buddies training and spoke alongside her buddy, Taylor, about their friendship at the Champion of the Year Gala. Best Buddies has provided opportunities for Taylor with public speaking, some of her favorite memories such as a trip to the pumpkin patch, Friendship Walk, and dance parties, and best of all: a meaningful friendship with her buddy, Abby.

Abby and Taylor are both a part of the friendship program through Carmel High School's chapter (previously Clay Middle School), and Abby is a 1st year member of the BBI Young Leaders Council. Some of Taylor's favorite things to do with Abby are going out to eat, dancing, and shopping at Clay Terrace in Carmel. Taylor expressed that she values having a friend to say hi to in the hallways and have conversations with at school. Abby's favorite activities include jamming out with Taylor in the car and her amazing pool parties in the summer. "Having a friend who truly cares about me and my life" is what she enjoys the most about their friendship. She detailed that "Taylor remembers the silly little things I tell her and when she sees me in the halls at school her jaw drops like she didn't just see me the day before."

Abby and Taylor have been matched since 7th grade/2018 and are now both seniors in high school. Abby shared "since joining Best Buddies, my confidence has grown immensely, and I've learned so much! I have been brought into a world of advocacy, leadership, and fun, where I get to meet like-minded people and make new friends. Taylor is my best friend. She never fails to put a smile on my face and pushes me to try new things!" Taylor highlighted that she likes the way she and Abby Facetime frequently, do carpool karaoke and sing together, make funny jokes, and make each other laugh. Best Buddies majorly impacted Taylor's life because she "met Abby and lots of new people and friends."

“ She makes it clear that she values our friendship just as much as I do and will always be there for me no matter what.” - Abby



One-To-One Friendships Key Program Stats IN

Elementary Schools		Middle Schools		High Schools	
23	572	33	873	50	2,568
Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants

Colleges		Citizens	e-Buddies
12	721	199	115
Chapters	Participants	Participants	Participants



Evan, Best Buddies Jobs participant
Taziki's, Indianapolis, IN

Evan

Integrated Employment

Taziki's, Indianapolis, IN

Evan's journey with Taziki's is more than just a job; it is a testament to the power of community and inclusion. As he bustles through the restaurant, his cheerful demeanor is infectious, drawing smiles from customers and coworkers alike. Each work day, Evan strides into Taziki's, his Best Buddies spirit shining bright. His fist bumps and enthusiastic greetings are like sunshine breaking through clouds, warming the hearts of those around him. With his coworkers, he shares more than just tasks; they share laughter, camaraderie, and even special routines—like their impromptu dances and playful finger guns.

But Evan's story didn't start here; it began years ago in high school, where he was an integral part of the Best Buddies program. His dedication and leadership as the Student Buddy Director had left an indelible mark on his peers and teachers alike. So, it was no surprise that upon graduation, he seamlessly transitioned into the Best Buddies Jobs program.

Evan's journey to Taziki's was serendipitous. With the help of friends from Tennessee, a new opportunity emerged in Indianapolis. And just like that, Taziki's welcomed him with open arms. Amid the pandemic, when uncertainty clouded the horizon, Evan persevered. With virtual meetings and unwavering support from his job coach, he honed his skills, eagerly awaiting the day he could return to the job he called home.

In 2022, Evan and his supervisor, Anh, took center stage at the Champion of the Year Gala, capturing the hearts of all who listened. And when Anh ran for Champion of the Year a year later, Evan stood proudly by her side, embodying the spirit of partnership and solidarity.

But amidst the accolades and celebrations, Evan remained grounded in the simple joy of his work. Whether he was busing tables or ensuring every corner of the restaurant sparkled, he did it with pride and passion. And when he received tips from customers, his joy was palpable. Even his parents couldn't help but smile at his infectious enthusiasm, especially when he proudly declared, "I had a good day, so I tipped myself!"

For Evan, Taziki's isn't just a place of employment—it is a haven where he found his tribe, where friendships blossomed, and where every day was a celebration of inclusion and belonging. And as he celebrated his five year work anniversary, surrounded by his extended family at Taziki's, it was clear that Evan's journey is not just about work, but about the profound impact of community and acceptance.

“That's just how Evan makes you feel; like you're the most important person to him.” - **Evan's General Manager**



Integrated Employment Key Program Stats IN

Jobs

27

Participants
Employed

51

Participants



Michael, Best Buddies Ambassador

Michael

Leadership Development

Ambassador, Indianapolis, IN

Dear Community Members, I hope this letter finds you well. My name is Mike, and I want to share with you a little about my journey with Best Buddies.

Before I became involved with Best Buddies, my social circle mainly consisted of friends from church and my neighborhood, but most of them had different disabilities. I longed for deeper connections with both individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and those without. That's when I discovered Best Buddies. I became a part of the Best Buddies Friendship program Citizens and later joined the Ambassadors program.

My journey with Best Buddies began in Florida in 1995 when I heard about it on the radio, before I was initially matched with Joe. Sadly, Joe passed away in 2015, but I continued my journey with his son, Paul, until I moved to Indiana in 2020. Here, I was matched with Steve in 2021, and our friendship has been nothing short of perfect.

The decision to become a self-advocate in Best Buddies stemmed from the encouragement of the Best Buddies Florida staff, who saw potential in me due to my ability to connect with others and speak well. In 2012, I joined the Ambassadors program and have since honed skills in storytelling, leadership, and professionalism. My goal now is to become a global ambassador, spreading the message of friendship and inclusion far and wide.

Since joining Best Buddies, my life has undergone significant changes. Not only have I formed meaningful friendships that I otherwise wouldn't have, but I've also gained a newfound sense of self-confidence. My involvement has allowed me to make a positive impact on other families, children, and business leaders offering them hope and encouragement.

To my fellow individuals with IDD, I want to extend a message of encouragement. Reach out to your local Best Buddies office and get involved. It truly is life changing.

In conclusion, I want to emphasize that the four most important things in my life are Family, God, Country, and Best Buddies. Thank you for taking the time to read my story, and I hope it inspires you to join me in spreading the message of friendship and inclusion.

Warm regards. - **Mike**

“ Since joining Best Buddies, my life has undergone significant changes. Not only have I formed meaningful friendships that I otherwise wouldn't have, but I've also gained a newfound sense of self-confidence.” - **Mike**

Leadership Development

Key Program Stats IN

Ambassadors	Promoters
1	32
Ambassadors	Chapters
	Participants
	768



Maine Year in Review

Best Buddies in Maine (BBME) set ambitious goals in all areas for 2023 and proudly surpassed them all. From fundraising to program expansion, we exceeded expectations and finished the year with 36 total chapters, 572 participants, and over 5,000 Mainers impacted by our programs. We expanded to a staff of 4 full-time employees, which helped us not only strengthen our current programs, but also grow in both Penobscot and Kennebec Counties. Maine also sent 15 student leaders to the Best Buddies Leadership Conference in Indiana, empowering them with hands-on training and inspiration to ensure their chapters will grow and succeed in the '23-24 school year.

BBME hosted two Friendship Walks in 2023, representative of the growth and excitement statewide for our mission of inclusion. In Portland, Cheverus hosted our primary walk for its third year, welcoming over 500 walkers who helped raise just over \$67,000 and represented 20 local school chapters. Our inaugural Friendship Walk in Bangor was held in the heart of the city at Bass Park, raising \$8,000 and attracting many new Best Buddies supporters. The two walks celebrated countless friendships developed throughout the school year, and 2024 promises to be bigger and better in both areas.

After the difficult decision to postpone our annual Champion Gala after the tragic shooting in Lewiston, the community rallied around our mission, and we had over 600 guests join us for our rescheduled evening at Brick South on November 17th. It was a beautiful, mission-focused evening highlighting student leaders and ambassadors who inspired the crowd to support our programs. When the evening came to a close, we had raised \$285,000, shattering our original \$190,000 goal. This support can only be attributed to the fantastic work of our Champions and Mission Partners, as well as the undeniable truth of our mission.

As we look to 2024, BBME will build on last year's momentum and continue to expand our programmatic reach. This includes a focus on elementary programs so we can offer district-wide programs that impact students at every grade level. As we grow, we will empower our volunteers to help us move our mission forward, as we know they are our biggest asset. And as always, we promise to create a more inclusive Maine, one friendship at a time.



Rebecca Williams, State Director, Maine

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Isaiah and Magnolia, Friendship program participants

Isaiah & Magnolia

One-To-One Friendships

Greely Middle School, Cumberland, ME

Isaiah and Magnolia were officially matched through the Best Buddies chapter at Greely Middle School just over two years ago, and faculty advisor Siobhan Bogle says it was a perfect match from the start. This duo has a quiet connection with one another, with Magnolia making it a priority to stop by Mrs. Bogle's classroom every day to see Isaiah. Their friendship has continued to strengthen as they grow up together, demonstrating the “five to forever” friendships that we strive to create at Best Buddies in Maine.

One of the reasons that students like Isaiah and Magnolia are cultivating successful friendships is the leadership of Siobhan Bogle and the other Greely Middle School chapter advisors. These educators allow the students plenty of space to engage with one another, rather than over-engineering friendship between kids with and without IDD. “I love seeing their friendship blossom,” Siobhan says. “They really look forward to their time together at school and during Best Buddies events.” Their friendship is genuine and self-sustaining, as the two are much more likely to find similarities than differences between one another.

The Greely Middle School chapter not only does a great job at making Buddy pairs within their school chapter, but they also uplift and support other communities through their consistent fundraising efforts. They raised over \$5,500 for the 2023 Portland Friendship Walk, allowing new chapters to open in the following school semester. Their school administration and culture have also rallied around the mission of disability inclusion and acceptance, celebrating Spread the Word Day with other school clubs every year. As Best Buddies in Maine continues to grow, we hope to connect with passionate advisors and administrations like the ones at Greely. This full-school engagement makes for successful chapters and friendships like Isaiah and Magnolia's, and we look forward to seeing their relationship further develop as they grow up alongside one another.



One-To-One Friendships Key Program Stats ME

Elementary Schools		Middle Schools		High Schools	
9	71	8	132	13	295
Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants
<hr/>					
Colleges		Citizens	e-Buddies		
5	90	129	15		
Chapters	Participants	Participants	Participants		

“Every morning Magnolia comes to my classroom, says good morning to all of us, and walks Isaiah to class, catching up on all things like friends do.”
- Siobhan Bogle, Chapter Advisor



“

My time with Irina is one of my favorite parts of my week. It is a true friendship. When we get together, we catch each other up on our lives. Irina is great at giving advice and is funny and sarcastic. My friendship with Irina is genuine, and I know I can rely on them whenever I need.” - **Grace**

Grace and Irina, Friendship program Buddy Pair
Best Buddies Citizens, Portland, ME



Tucker Conley, Best Buddies Ambassador

Tucker

Leadership Development

Ambassador, Portland, ME

Hello, everyone! My name is Tucker Conley, and I've been a member of Best Buddies since I joined my college chapter at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, where I graduated in the spring of 2013 with a bachelor's degree in English. Before I joined Best Buddies, I struggled to make friends in high school and community college. I wasn't confident in my ability to make new friends and usually kept to myself. However, since school, I have continued with Best Buddies in Maine as an Advisory Board Member, State Ambassador, and Portland Citizen participant. I have also been an Officer and Chapter President for Speaking Up for Us, another nonprofit organization that amplifies the voices of people with disabilities.

I enjoy building my confidence by speaking in front of large crowds, and I had the chance to attend my first national Best Buddies Leadership Conference in Bloomington, Indiana, last year. I had a great time! I enhanced my confidence overall during BBLC by having my Ambassador photos taken. I also got to prepare and present a written speech in front of a class with the encouragement and support of the Best Buddies Maine staff. It is important for Maine to attend the conference to network with different state directors to come up with other ideas on how to improve Best Buddies Maine in the future. I cannot wait to attend future conferences and become an even better ambassador for Maine, and I want more people to be able to go to BBLC each year!

The community's support of Best Buddies made it possible for me and fifteen students to travel to BBLC for free, and it also allows for the Portland Citizens chapter to host fun events. Citizens provides friendships for adults with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities. Everyone deserves a Buddy like mine, Becca McCann. Becca is accommodating, kind, and responsive to me. We love going to breakfast and spending time together. I know that 2024 will be the best year yet for Best Buddies in Maine, and we will bring more people than ever together through friendship and inclusion!

“With your hard work and dedication, we can make friendship possible for everyone.” - Tucker



Leadership Development Key Program Stats ME

Ambassadors	Promoters
14	7
Ambassadors	Chapters Participants
	92



Maryland Year in Review

2023 marked a year of profound growth and expansion for Best Buddies in Maryland, characterized by strong friendships, meaningful employment, and compelling leadership. It underscored the transformative power of inclusion and belonging.

Our school friendship program reached new heights, serving numerous students and facilitating countless one-to-one friendships. Notably, we returned to Indiana University for the Best Buddies Leadership Conference for the first time since 2019. This gathering, attended by thousands globally, empowered participants with new skills and lasting memories, fostering leadership in schools, workplaces, and communities.

Throughout the year, our Chapters flourished, hosting events like the spirited Best Buddies Buddy Ball and the engaging Firefighter for a Day in Anne Arundel County, attended by diverse participants. These initiatives fostered connections and celebrated the contributions of our Chapters, Advisors, participants and community partners.

Our Ambassador program thrived, training numerous ambassadors, some of whom were honored as State Ambassadors. Multiple Ambassador Summits and trainings facilitated skill development and camaraderie among participants.

The Best Buddies Friendship Walk, a cornerstone event, surpassed expectations at the University of Maryland with record-breaking participation and fundraising. It was bolstered by remarkable corporate support, including from our founding sponsor, Shulman Rogers.

An unforgettable highlight was the Champion of the Year Gala, which attracted over 200 guests and raised substantial funds. The fundraising duo, Brandon Funk and Brandon Winpigler, known as “Team Brandon,” emerged as the top champions, epitomizing the enduring legacy of commitment to our cause.

Our achievements in 2023 were made possible by the dedication of our team members, advisory board, partners, donors, and passionate community members. Together, we made a significant impact on fostering inclusion throughout Maryland.

As we embark on 2024, we anticipate even more significant accomplishments. With your continued support, we are poised to build upon our successes and create an even more inclusive future.

Laura Nicolini, State Director, Maryland

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Anthony and Elaina, Best Buddies Jobs participant
Kubik, Odenton MD

Anthony

Integrated Employment

Kubik, Odenton, MD

In 2022, we highlighted the beginning of a partnership with kubik when they hired Elaina as their receptionist. As we approached the end of the year, we checked in to see how things were going with Elaina and if kubik would be interested in potentially hiring a second Best Buddies Jobs participant. They mentioned having warehouse positions, and we had a participant interested in this kind of role. We were promptly connected to a new HR contact, and he was able to interview at the beginning of 2023. He was immediately hired and started in Elaina's office but in their warehouse department.

Anthony was quickly brought into the team and invited into team bonding events like an Orioles game. Anthony's job as a warehouse associate meant that his primary task was warehouse inventory and computer data entry, creating invoices, and uploading payment documents into various databases. His managers were pleased by his coachable attitude, and he was able to help his coworkers find what they needed in the warehouse. His manager Vinny says, "Anthony has been a joy to work with. We have increased his work substantially since day one. He is a vital part of our warehouse, and he continues to improve every day." Kubik was and still is Anthony's dream job. He likes that he gets to stay busy and be productive. The easy-going and positive environment means he does not feel stressed or pressured at work. His team works hard and allows him to grow as a person, a communicator, and an employee.

Kubik had said they were hoping to increase their inclusive hiring practices when they hired Elaina, but they put their words into action when hiring Anthony.

Kubik remains the kind of workplace we hope for in the Buddies Jobs program. They see the value in hiring inclusively and consistently challenge Anthony and Elaina to do more. We cannot wait to see where this partnership will lead in 2024.

“Anthony has been a joy to work with. We have increased his work substantially since day one. He is a vital part of our warehouse, and he continues to improve every day.” - **Vinny**, Anthony's manager



Integrated Employment

Key Program Stats MD

Jobs	
41	59
Participants Employed	Participants



“ My dream is to work for the State of California and move out. Having a disability does not stop you from working. Go for your dream. Employers need to hire more people with disabilities and Best Buddies is here to help.” - **Katina**

Katina, Best Buddies Ambassador



Hari, Best Buddies Ambassador

Hari

Leadership Development

Ambassador, Baltimore, MD

My name is Hari Kannan and I've been involved with Best Buddies since I was a freshman in high school.

When I was in high school, our Best Buddies Chapter put on an Inclusion night. Our chapter president Catherine asked me to give a speech focused on inclusion. This was the first time I had really thought about the importance of inclusion. I also saw what I could be: a great public speaker. From that experience, I joined the Ambassador Program and am now an official Maryland State Ambassador. This gave me many opportunities to spread inclusion. I have a TikTok series called Friendship Matters, I spoke at the 2023 Friendship Walk, I have led and attended trainings, and so much more.

This year had a lot of firsts for me! I graduated college from the University of Maryland. I attended the Best Buddies Leadership Conference in Bloomington Indiana as a state ambassador for Best Buddies Maryland. It was a blast and a great experience. I also joined the Best Buddies Jobs program, and I had my first job interview last week and I can't wait to start a job working in fitness.

I also spoke at the Maryland Champion of the Year Gala. Being a Champion means you advocate, defend, and carry others. Champions inspire all of us and lead by example.

There are a lot of champions out there that I look up to when I need motivation. Dwayne 'the rock' Johnson, The King Lebron James, Patrick Mahomes, and Our current President Joe Biden, they became champions in their own way.

Their leadership inspires others to do what's best. Right here today there are champions who equally inspire us to do more. The champions here today are supporting the mission of Best Buddies. We are an inclusive program help people with disabilities to develop friendships, find jobs, and be included in society. They are standing up to support people with disabilities through Best Buddies.

“Remember, we are all made for something, and we share our love with others, and the love for others is how champions are born.” - Hari

Leadership Development Key Program Stats MD

Ambassadors	Promoters
45	26 202
Ambassadors	Chapters Participants

Transitions

16

Participants



Massachusetts & Rhode Island Year in Review

Best Buddies in Massachusetts (MA) and Rhode Island (RI) continued to grow and thrive in Best Buddies in Massachusetts (MA) and Rhode Island (RI) continued to grow and thrive in 2023.

Our Friendship programs served 225 chapters, impacting over 55,000 individuals from early childhood through adulthood and helping to build friendships and social inclusion for people with and without IDD. For individuals ages 14-22, our Pre-Employment Training Services (PreETS) worked in 14 schools with 80 students with IDD on career exploration, self-advocacy, and workplace readiness. Best Buddies Jobs continues to facilitate a more inclusive workforce in Massachusetts, now serving over 205 adults with IDD with 80 employer partners. Best Buddies Jobs staff work with participants on job development and ongoing support and work with our employer partners to provide diversity, equity, and inclusion training and best practices for inclusion in the workplace. Our Leadership pillar continued to thrive, notably attending the Best Buddies Leadership Conference at University of Indiana in July 2023. We had over 100 chapter leaders and job participants attend in order to gain skills to take back home with them.



We hosted three Friendship Walks in 2023: one in Boston, one in Worcester, and one in Providence. These walks collectively raised over \$180,000 and involved over 1,800 people. Other events, such as our Evening of Opportunity and Hyannis Port Golf Tournament, alongside our teams at the Boston Marathon and Falmouth Road Race, helped raise funds to support our programs. The money raised from the Friendship Walks and other local events directly supports and expands our programs in MA and RI.

We fostered programmatic growth and served more people than ever across both states and Best Buddies in MA and RI, and 2023 was one of our strongest years. The strides we make every day in the community would not be possible without this support. I sincerely thank all our supporters for helping us foster inclusion in our communities for people with and without IDD to make MA and RI more welcoming for all.



Kara Falcone, State Director, Massachusetts & Rhode Island

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Shauna and Josh, Friendship program Buddy Pair

Shauna & Josh

One-To-One Friendships

Billerica Memorial High School, Billerica, MA

Before Shauna and Josh met each other, Shauna had trouble connecting with students at her school and longed for more meaningful friendships. One of her teachers recommended Best Buddies and everything changed from there.

Since being matched in September, Shauna and Josh have attended various sporting events, enjoyed Friendsgiving together, competed in a speech competition, and eat lunch together. Shauna cheers on Josh at all his home volleyball games. It is clear to everyone that Shauna and Josh have become fast and great friends.

"I love being able to see Shauna come out of her bubble and be herself," Josh said. "It has been a pleasure becoming her buddy this year and getting to know her."

Josh has felt himself become more altruistic and empathetic. He is the co-president of his Best Buddies chapter and a student voice on the Billerica Inclusion team. He is now excited to go out into the community and advocate for individuals with disabilities. Shauna feels she has gained more confidence and made a true, long-lasting friendship.

Shauna said, "Best Buddies introduced me to Josh and many other new friends. I feel like I have a real friend now."

Shauna and Josh have a very special connection that is just beginning. Even though Josh is graduating this spring, Shauna is confident their friendship will continue and grow even stronger.



One-To-One Friendships

Key Program Stats MA & RI

Elementary Schools	Middle Schools	High Schools
27 Chapters	402 Participants	38 Chapters
	889 Participants	141 Chapters
		4,513 Participants

Colleges	Citizens	e-Buddies
28 Chapters	1,086 Participants	273 Participants
		290 Participants

“ It has been a pleasure becoming her buddy this year and getting to know her.” - **Josh**



Nick, Best Buddies Jobs participant
Rail Trail Flatbread Co., Hudson, MA

Nick

Integrated Employment

Rail Trail Flatbread Co., Hudson, MA

Nick first became a part of Best Buddies in Middle School and has been involved ever since! Best Buddies helped him secure a job right after he graduated school, leading to a smoother transition. Nick has been with Rail Trail Flatbread since and does not plan on leaving anytime soon.

Rail Trail Flatbread has given Nick many great opportunities to learn new skills. Nick hopes to become a host and food runner, and someday a bartender.

“I work and meet all kinds of new friends,” Nick said. “The thing I love most about my job is working with great people.”

Nick’s future goal is to continue being the best employee he can be. He also hopes to use his paycheck to visit his sister and treat his family and friends as a thank you for all their support.

Nick has learned to be efficient at work while also being kind to others. He likes to tell jokes to keep everyone happy and in a good mood. A new skill he is trying to learn is managing his time at work. Nick is very excited to work on these skills and use them in his everyday life.

Rail Trail Flatbread and Nick have both learned so much from each other. The restaurant is committed to advocating for individuals with intellectual and development disabilities by spreading the word throughout the community and supporting Nick on his employment journey.



Integrated Employment Key Program Stats MA

Jobs

177

Participants
Employed

207

Participants



The thing I love most about my job is working with great people.”

- Nick



Melinda, Best Buddies Ambassador

Melinda

Leadership Development

Ambassador, MA

“Before I became involved with BB I was lost. I couldn't find a job, I had low self-esteem, confidence and motivation. I didn't know what to do, but that was over 10 years ago. 10 years later, I have been working in UMass Memorial hospital for 7 years, became a statewide ambassador for five years and now I just recently became a member of the advisory board.

Throughout my BB journey I have learned to never give up and not be ashamed to ask questions. Asking questions led me to getting a job, into driving school and it even got me my driver's license! I hope that someday I can tell my story to show people that I never gave up and hopefully will send a message that no matter what you go through, never give up on yourself!

My dream came true three times unexpectedly. June 3rd, 2023, I was at the Best Buddies Challenge giving medals to the cyclists, took a picture with Cake Boss and I saw 50 Cent perform. On June 1st, 2024, I will be on the tandem bike for 20 miles, and I am so excited about it! On July 19th, I will be going to the Leadership Conference with my Best friend Cassidy.

Best Buddies has also built up my self-esteem, my confidence and motivation. I love to experience inclusion with my friends. Don't let your disability define you. You have the ability to do whatever you put your heart into, and your dreams will come true.

Leadership Development

Key Program Stats MA & RI

Ambassadors	Promoters
7	48
Ambassadors	Chapters
	691
	Participants

Transitions

91

Participants

“ No matter what, never forget you are beautiful. You are strong, confident, motivated and unstoppable.”
- Melinda



Minnesota Year in Review

2023 was a historic year for Best Buddies in Minnesota! We opened 11 new school friendship chapters, continuing to expand in the Rochester and Sherburne areas. With all our growth, we added an additional Best Buddies Citizens chapter in Sherburne County. We now have more than 260 participants in our two adult friendship chapters. We continued to train Ambassadors to be self-advocates and public speakers while creating impactful volunteer opportunities for companies and community members. We also hosted our second annual Best Buddies Friendship Ball, an inclusive prom-like event for Best Buddies student members across the state, and our first summer picnic to celebrate International Friendship Day.

We were able to spread awareness about our mission and raise funds for our programs through our two signature community events. On May 20th, more than 600 supporters joined us for our fourth annual Best Buddies Friendship Walk, where we raised just over \$99,000 to support our programs in Minnesota. It was a crisp spring day at Weaver Lake Park with music, activities, food, and friends.

The Minnesota Champion of the Year Gala was an incredible event. We welcomed 450 guests at our sold-out event, cheered on ten Champion candidates and their mission partners, and named Sara Messerli our 2023 Champion. Altogether, this tremendous event raised over \$334,000.

These huge accomplishments speak volumes about our volunteers and supporters, but they are also a testament to the need that still exists. As we continue to serve our friends with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) throughout Minnesota, we must remember that connection, belonging, and social inclusion are imperative for creating vibrant, healthy communities.

On behalf of our advisory board and the staff at BBMN, I would like to thank you for supporting our mission to make friendship and inclusion a reality for every person in Minnesota. Because of you, we were able to achieve these amazing milestones in 2023 to set us up for success and look forward to more growth in 2024. Thank you for believing in the power of inclusion.



Katey DeMarais, State Director, Minnesota

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Sofia and Lila, Friendship program Buddy Pair

Sofia & Lila

One-to-One Friendships

Eastview High School, Apple Valley, MN

“Best Buddies makes me feel like I’m making a difference” Sofia, an Eastview High School chapter president said. “I believe that everyone should get the opportunity to make friends and Best Buddies allows students to do that.”

Sofia has been around people with disabilities for her whole life. Her mom is a special education teacher, and her dream is to be one as well someday. “I knew I wanted to join Best Buddies right away because it sounded like something I would love to do. It’s an amazing club and I was so excited to make new friends” Sofia said.

Sofia was matched with her buddy, Lila. They have been matched for over a year now and enjoy doing all kinds of things together. They attend their chapter events together every month as well as try to hang out outside of school. Some of the things they have done together include going out to get ice cream, going on walks, bowling, playing games together and baking at Sofia's house.

“Lila makes any activity enjoyable and never fails to put a smile on my face”. Sofia said. “Best Buddies has impacted me in so many ways. It has taught me how to be a leader and given me lifelong friends. Because of Best Buddies, I’ve learned how to be accepting of other’s differences and how to build a more inclusive community at my school.” Lila and Sofia enjoy attending chapter events at Eastview High School. Eastview’s chapter has grown significantly over the years, and now has over 70 members in the club.

When Lila was asked about her buddy match with Sofia, her answer was short and sweet -- “Best friends” she said.



One-To-One Friendships Key Program Stats MN

Elementary Schools		Middle Schools		High Schools	
10	190	7	245	18	449
Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants
.....					
Colleges		Citizens	e-Buddies		
2	83	216	66		
Chapters	Participants	Participants	Participants		

“ It makes me so happy to see how big our chapter has grown because of all the amazing friendships being made. When I look around at a chapter event, everyone is smiling and hanging out with their buddies. I think Best Buddies creates a space where everyone is accepted for who they are.” - Sofia



“

My friendship with Barb is awesome! I love the fact that she is always willing to listen to me and help when I need it. I always have fun doing any activity together!” - **Kerri**

Kerri & Barb, Friendship program Buddy Pair
Twin Cities Citizens, Wayzata, MN



Elizabeth, Best Buddies Ambassador

Elizabeth

Leadership Development

Ambassador, Plymouth, MN

Hello, I'm Elizabeth and I am a Best Buddies Minnesota State Ambassador. I'm so excited to represent Best Buddies and I'll tell you why.

First, it's fun! I started my Best Buddies experience in 9th grade where I met a ton of close friends who I am still connected with today. We had monthly chapter events where we got to know one another and would then hang out at lunch, during and after school, and doing fun things like going to parades, proms, bowling, sledding and attending football games. When I graduated from high school, I continued with the Best Buddies Citizens program for adults and went to super fun events like the apple orchard, Twins games, museums, mini golfing, and the summer picnic. I also participate in our annual Friendship Walk every May. It is so fun to connect with everyone that I have met through Best Buddies AND make new friends. The walk is filled with fun activities, entertainment, music, free food and everyone is invited.

Secondly, along with the fun, you make a lot of friends! Best Buddies is designed to create one-to-one friendships that last a long time. I remember when I was in middle school, I was sitting by myself at lunch and one of the Best Buddies came and sat with me. Her name is Lizzy, and we became super close friends and she introduced me to her friends. Through Best Buddies, I met even more friends and really felt accepted and loved for who I am.

Lastly, Best Buddies opens the door for lots of opportunities! They have ambassador trainings you can attend that teach you different skills, like how to write speeches and practice public speaking like I am here today. My favorite opportunity with Best Buddies is when we partnered with the Minnesota Vikings and got to meet a lot of really famous players and get their autographs! Fun fact – I have the same birthday as Harrison Phillips! Best Buddies is like a family, and I encourage you to get involved. It's so easy, you just have to say YES!

“ I remember when I was in middle school, I was sitting by myself at lunch and one of the Best Buddies came and sat with me. Her name is Lizzy, and we became super close friends and she introduced me to her friends. Through Best Buddies, I met even more friends and really felt accepted and loved for who I am.” - **Elizabeth**



Leadership Development Key Program Stats MN

Ambassadors	Promoters
9	9
Ambassadors	Chapters
	151
	Participants



Missouri Year in Review

2023 was a monumental year for Best Buddies in Missouri (BBMO). Our programs team opened fourteen new school Friendship chapters, including ten elementary chapters, three high school chapters, and one middle school chapter, bringing Best Buddies in Missouri to 52 friendship chapters in 2023.

In addition to a great programmatic year, we had a wonderful time celebrating the fundraising success of our amazing supporters! On April 24, over 475 walkers gathered at Kirkwood Park to celebrate the Friendship Walk. These passionate individuals walked with purpose, raising both funds and awareness to champion inclusion in their communities and commemorate the remarkable achievements of BBMO programs throughout the academic year. Through the support of chapter members, community leaders, and corporate sponsors, BBMO raised over \$70,000 at the Friendship Walk! In November, we proudly hosted our Champion of the Year Galas, where our community came together to celebrate champions of inclusivity and generosity. Through these galas, we were able to raise over \$80,000 to support our programs. This money will be invested directly back into BBMO, allowing us to open new school chapters, build friendships, develop leaders, and create community programs for individuals with and without disabilities across the state.

We are so proud of the growth in 2023 and are eager to push forward into continued expansion. In 2024 we are so excited to be launching Best Buddies Job in Saint Louis. The Best Buddies Jobs program represents one of our organization's five key mission pillars – Integrated Employment. This program secures jobs for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), allowing them to earn an income, pay taxes, and continuously and independently support themselves. The Jobs program places focus beyond the typical jobs in which a person with IDD might be placed. Best Buddies focuses on finding work that matches the job seeker's interests and talents. Our team is committed to educating and empowering students, corporations, employers, and communities on the Best Buddies mission and working towards creating a truly inclusive Missouri. To bring this vision to life, we need your support. Help us identify leaders in schools, businesses, and communities throughout Missouri who could raise awareness of the Best Buddies mission. Partner with us in making Missouri a state where people with disabilities are not only included but can truly thrive.

Kelly Gardner, State Director (Interim), Missouri
Missouri Office

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Maggie and Bridget, Friendship program Buddy Pair

Maggie & Bridget

One-To-One Friendships

St. Louis University, St. Louis, MO

Before Best Buddies, Bridget spent life in Cleveland Ohio where she would spend most of her time with her sister ironically named Maggie, who also has down syndrome. Meeting Maggie has been Bridget’s sister away from home and when she found out her Buddy’s name was Maggie, she knew it was meant to be.

Maggie and Bridget have done numerous activities with each other from bowling, going to SLU basketball games, and making Christmas cookies. “I think our friendship is so special because she just has such warmth about her and she’s so compassionate and kind.” Maggie and Bridget have a goofy and silly friendship which makes them the unique pair that they are. “She has been a huge part of my year.” Bridget also states that Maggie is the best person to be around and whenever you’re around Maggie, it’s hard not to smile.

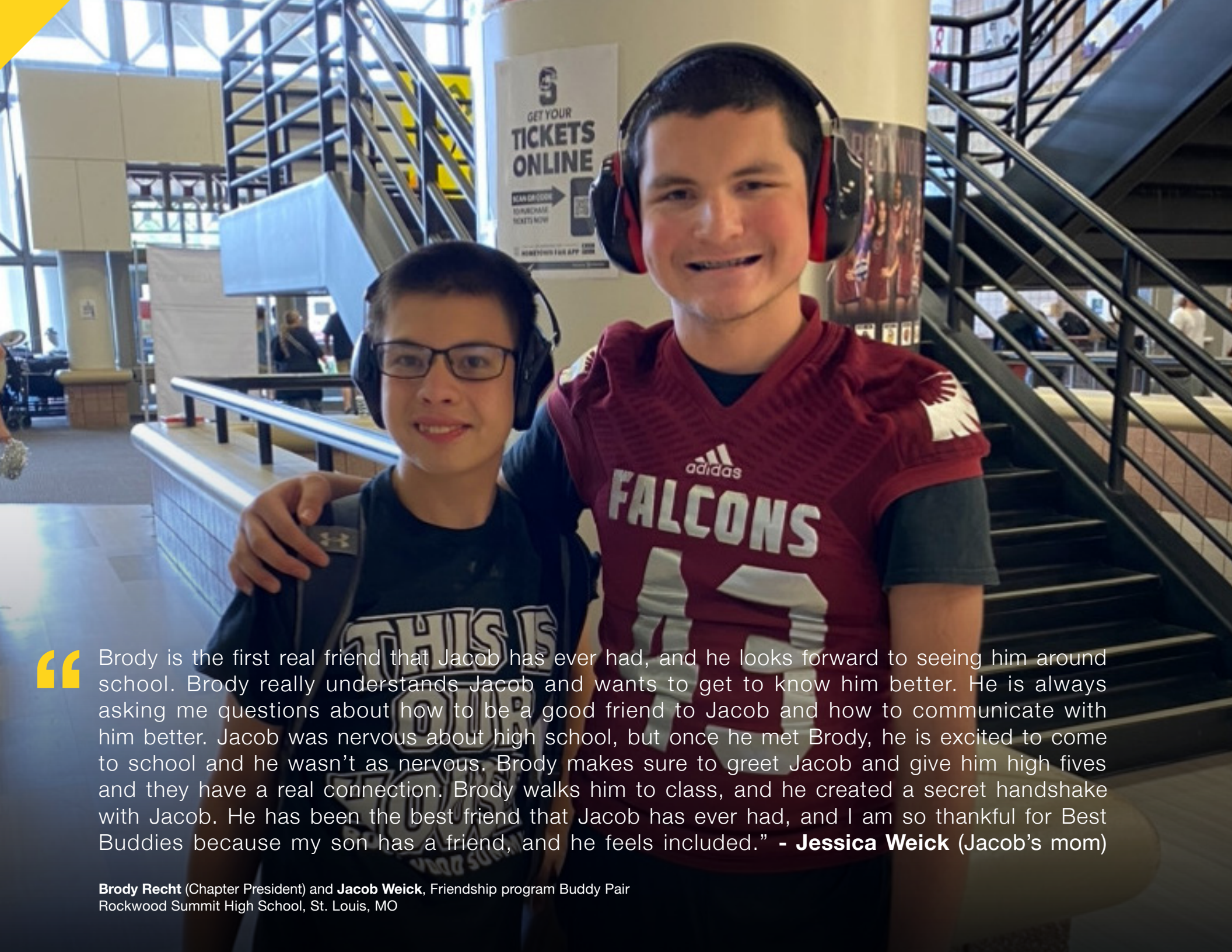
“Being around best buddies in general is just the best environment to be in, and everyone’s so welcoming and kind and inclusive.” Bridget explains that Best Buddies is important because people with IDD can just show up and be themselves and feel accepted. “And I think that’s what I’ve realized throughout this and we all struggle with different emotions and feeling different than other people and finding friendship... Best Buddies is just such a wonderful environment to foster that.” Maggie has been a part of Best Buddies since high school and Bridget joined the Best Buddy chapter at Saint Louis University 2022.



One-To-One Friendships Key Program Stats MO

Elementary Schools		Middle Schools		High Schools	
13	529	13	202	19	783
Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants
.....					
Colleges		Citizens	e-Buddies		
7	323	28	49		
Chapters	Participants	Participants	Participants		

“ Meeting Maggie has changed my life, and I am so happy that we have grown our friendship over the years. I am so lucky to know her.” - **Bridget**



“

Brody is the first real friend that Jacob has ever had, and he looks forward to seeing him around school. Brody really understands Jacob and wants to get to know him better. He is always asking me questions about how to be a good friend to Jacob and how to communicate with him better. Jacob was nervous about high school, but once he met Brody, he is excited to come to school and he wasn't as nervous. Brody makes sure to greet Jacob and give him high fives and they have a real connection. Brody walks him to class, and he created a secret handshake with Jacob. He has been the best friend that Jacob has ever had, and I am so thankful for Best Buddies because my son has a friend, and he feels included.” - **Jessica Weick** (Jacob's mom)

Brody Recht (Chapter President) and **Jacob Weick**, Friendship program Buddy Pair
Rockwood Summit High School, St. Louis, MO



Rachel, Best Buddies Ambassador

Rachel

Leadership Development

Ambassador, St. Louis, MO

What was your life like before becoming involved with Best Buddies? What program(s) are you a part of?

“It was kind of normal. I got involved with some work at my high school and engaged with friends at lunch but then sometimes would sit and hangout by myself or even with my sister since we both went to high school together. I had never even heard of Best Buddies around that time. I am a part of Lindenwood University chapter of Best Buddies.”

Who or what led you to become a chapter leader or self-advocate in Best Buddies, and what do you hope to accomplish, either in your chapter or through self-advocacy?

“The idea of leadership and changing the way that people see people like me and willing to extend friendships. Also to get to know more friends and broaden my social circle and be able to share the mission of Best Buddies. I hope to accomplish the spreading of awareness of autism and defining what it may or may not be and being a representative for people in the autism community.”

How has your life changed since joining Best Buddies?

“It’s given me a broader perspective and understanding about what people can do together regardless of their disability. The different activities and engagements that people can socialize over. It changed my life in how I live and how I see myself and how I function as a human being. Learning about the mission of Best Buddies and the impact that it has is something I never thought I would be able to get but it changed my life. It’s exciting to have all these different things we get to do together. I joined Best Buddies in 2018.”

What message do you have for other people with IDD?

“I want them to feel heard and understood and know the different things that they can do. I want to be a role model for them and show them that they can do anything, that they can be a good leader and be a leading example of the people in their community. They can change the perspective of how people see and understand them.”

“ Best Buddies changed my life in how I live, how I see myself, and how I function as a human being. - Rachel

Leadership Development

Key Program Stats MO

Ambassadors	Promoters
1	30
Ambassadors	Chapters
	813
	Participants



New Hampshire Year in Review

With a growing staff and expanding programs, 2023 was a fantastic year for Best Buddies in New Hampshire. We engaged over 915 students and over 10,000 parents, siblings, teachers, and volunteers, whose invaluable contributions have been instrumental in furthering our mission of friendship and disability inclusion.

We expanded into a new region in our state and hired an area director to grow programs and provide support on the Seacoast of New Hampshire. In addition, we hired a Director of Communication and Stewardship, allowing us to expand our social media presence, develop an individual giving campaign, and work on securing more grants for our state. We ended the year with 37 Friendship Chapters, 13 new Citizens Matches, 16 trained Ambassadors, and two new State Ambassadors.

Because of our expansion and Concord Friendship Walk, we added a second Friendship Walk in Exeter, NH. Both walks exceeded goals, raising a combined \$168,000 and having over 1,000 attendees. Global Ambassador and star of the Champions Movie, Joshua Felder, joined us. The outpouring of support and interest from the state was inspiring!

In the Fall, we held our 8th annual Champion of the Year event in Nashua. What an incredible evening! Twelve Champions raised a combined \$258,000, with our first-place Champion and Mission Partners, Jennifer Corriveau and James Masterson, raising over \$50,000! This was our largest fundraising event to date, with over 400 people in attendance, and we exceeded our fundraising goal by \$10,000. You could feel the magic in the air!

As we step into 2024, we are filled with excitement and anticipation. We intend to continue building on the momentum generated by our volunteers and supporters, open new Friendship Chapters, make more adult matches in our Citizenship Programs, expand our Ambassador curriculum, and start laying the groundwork to add Pre-Employment Transition Services to our list of programs. Together, we can achieve even greater heights!



Sarra Dennehy Lynch, State Director, New Hampshire

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Jenna and Belle, Friendship program Buddy Pair

Jenna & Belle

One-To-One Friendships

ouhegan Cooperative High School,
Amherst, NH

Jenna and Belle have known each other since elementary school, but their friendship hadn't blossomed until high school was nearly over. Matched in 2022, neither Jenna nor Belle were very active in their community prior to joining their school chapter. Belle found a place where she could make friends, and Jenna found a place where she could immerse herself in a community and begin advocating for a mission she is passionate about.

Through their friendship, both Jenna and Belle experience an active social life, highlighting their weekly lunch dates, going to the movies, and sending each other messages both in and out of school. Belle says her life is so much more fun and active in Best Buddies, and that Jenna is "the best Best Buddy!" Jenna speaks on their bond saying, "Belle's friendship brings me constant joy, renewed energy, and a fulfilling social life. She truly brightens my day with her smile and has taught me to become brave in taking risks. Without her, my high school experience would not have been nearly as enriching."

The impact Belle has made on Jenna's life has resulted in Jenna's role as Co-President of their chapter, and a drive to spread awareness for inclusion of people with IDD; additionally, she finds herself seeking out Best Buddies programs to get involved with once she graduates high school.

The impact of this friendship goes beyond the close bond of the two girls.



One-To-One Friendships Key Program Stats NH

Elementary Schools	Middle Schools	High Schools
4 Chapters	77 Participants	4 Chapters
	32 Participants	21 Chapters
		548 Participants

Colleges	Citizens	e-Buddies
5 Chapters	176 Participants	140 Participants
		40 Participants

“ Our friendship is important because we have each made a lifelong friend but even more so because our community has gained insight into the importance of inclusion.” - **Jenna**



“

Joining Best Buddies introduced me to Alex, who is not just my buddy but a remarkable individual in my life. Our friendship quickly blossomed from shared interests, humor, and openness about life's ups and downs. It's a bond based on mutual respect and care, transcending labels and limitations, and is a true blessing for both of us.” - **Mackenzie**

Mackenzie Whittet and **Alexandria Knox**, Friendship program Buddy Pair



Katelyn, Best Buddies Ambassador

Katelyn

Leadership Development

Ambassador, Londonderry, NH

Hi! My name is Katelyn McKivergan and I joined Best Buddies in 2018. Before Best Buddies, I had friends at dance class and school, but I only saw them in class. When I joined Best Buddies, I got to talk to my new buddy on FaceTime and to see my new buddy at events. We go out to eat also, so I get to see them outside of Best Buddies events. I also made other friends in addition to my buddy.

Through being a leader and State Ambassador, I want to tell people, “Be yourself.” Best Buddies has helped me to be confident, and other people should be confident in who they are too. People with IDD should be seen for who they are, not as their disability. In my speech I always tell people “See me for what I CAN do.”

Since joining Best Buddies five years ago I have made so many new friends, attended lots of different events and I always look forward to seeing other participants. I have had multiple buddy matches and have met so many people that I would not have met before. One of my favorite ways that I have met people through Best Buddies is at Best Buddies Leadership Conference at Indiana University. I had the opportunity to meet people from all around the world. Now that I am a State Ambassador, I hope to impact more people and promote inclusion everywhere. In Best Buddies, people see me, Katelyn, and they don’t define me by my disability.

Leadership Development Key Program Stats NH

Ambassadors	Promoters	
21	10	161
Ambassadors	Chapters	Participants

“ I want people with IDD to know it’s cool to have IDD. It is not a bad thing, because it’s just a part of you.” - **Katelyn**



New Mexico Year in Review

2023 was a year of continued expansion for Best Buddies in New Mexico. Statewide, our programs impacted the lives of 7,940 individuals with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in 2023 with 58 total school chapters, the second year of a Pre-ETS program which impacted 142 high school students, and growth of our Citizens Program from one chapter in Albuquerque to a total of three statewide, expanding into Farmington and Las Cruces. We saw Friendship Chapters blossom in the Four Corners Region, Eastern New Mexico in Clovis and Portales, and continued growth in Southern New Mexico in and around Las Cruces. We are well on our way of my goal to make Best Buddies a household name in New Mexico!

BBNM Jobs Team served 66 participants, 38 of which were successfully employed in 2023. As the Supported Employment partner of the Project SEARCH program, we served 15 student interns split between UNM Hospital and Embassy Suites. This is an increase of five interns from the previous cohort.

Our Friendship Walk was a great success in June at Albuquerque Academy with over 400 attendees coming out to celebrate our community. We raised \$45,532 in support of our program expansion.

The NM Champion of the Year event was held at Bien Shur at Sandia Resort with the theme “Desert Nights” with 140 attendees helping us to nearly get to our fundraising goal of \$65,000, bringing in \$59,453, still the most money raised at any Champion event held here in New Mexico, and we’re proud of that fact.

Best Buddies in New Mexico is a resourceful, talented team, and our Advisory Board and volunteers are truly dedicated. On behalf of all of us at Best Buddies in New Mexico, I would like to thank you for your support of friendship, access, and inclusion. Because of you, we have been able to expand our staff’s capacity to reach across New Mexico in 2023, and we have no plans to slow down in 2024 when so many New Mexicans truly need and want our programs to achieve social and economic inclusion.



Tessah Latson, State Director, New Mexico

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Jonah and Leah Friendship program Buddy Pair

Jonah & Leah

One-To-One Friendships

New Mexico State University (NMSU), Las Cruces, NM

My life before Best Buddies was my freshman year of high school. I had just recently joined public schools after being homeschooled up till then. I had a hard time finding friend groups and fitting in. I didn't know what kids liked, how they interacted, or how to create connections. Best Buddies created a safe haven for me, of friends, people to talk to, and it also taught me I wasn't the only person experiencing the struggles of finding friendship. Best Buddies allowed me to create long-lasting friendships, but it also allowed me to help others who were in a similar position as me.

We do a lot of different activities together: we go on friend dates to get food, we have days where we go swimming, and we also like to go play arcade games. We like to try different things every time we hang out!

Leah enjoys the deep connection created over the past 7 years of being friends. They met in high school and while Jonah didn't have Best Buddies at his school, that didn't stop them. She says that they are so close that he is pretty much family to her.

Jonah says he enjoys going to the Best Buddies dances with Leah the most. He loves being able to spend quality fun time and getting to show off his sweet dance moves.

Jonah and Leah both joined the NMSU Best Buddies chapter in 2022 and have been officially matched since then. Leah is Chapter President and Jonah is an officer.

Leah: My life and Jonah's life has changed drastically for the better because of Best Buddies. It has opened up so many new friendships, connections, and happiness for us both.



One-To-One Friendships

Key Program Stats NM

Elementary Schools		Middle Schools		High Schools	
13	95	10	33	35	374
Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants
<hr/>					
Colleges		Citizens	e-Buddies		
3	21	26	22		
Chapters	Participants	Participants	Participants		

“ Life is better when we're together.” - Leah



Michael, Best Buddies Jobs participant
St. John XXIII Catholic Community, Albuquerque, NM

Michael

Integrated Employment

St. John XXIII Catholic Community, Albuquerque, NM

Michael is a 2015 Project SEARCH graduate who is currently working at St. John XXIII Catholic Community since January 2019. Michael expressed that before he found Best Buddies, his life was very isolated. He would sit in his room all day on his iPad watching YouTube videos. If he was not watching videos, he would be at doctors' appointments or therapies. Michael first learned about Best Buddies when he joined Project SEARCH in 2015.

Michael states, "Since getting my job, I feel happier in my daily life. I also feel more confident when talking to other people, even people I just met." One of the things Michael loves about his job is using his computer skills, which have gotten better over the years through classes at CNM or just by using his computer every day. He enjoys using his computer skills, such as creating Excel spreadsheets, as well as keeping databases up to date. Some new skills he has learned are working with Google Sheets, Google forms, and inputting pictures into Google Drive. He expressed he likes being able to establish connections with co-workers and provide assistance with whatever they need.

A goal Michael has since he obtained employment is to be able to pay for bills such as his cell phone and other necessities that are needed to function in everyday life.



Integrated Employment Key Program Stats NM

Jobs

38

Participants
Employed

73

Participants



“ Since getting my job, I feel happier in my daily life.” - **Michael**



Azariah, Best Buddies Ambassador

Jordan

Leadership Development

Ambassador, Albuquerque, NM

Before Best Buddies, I loved making new friends and I could talk to new people, but speaking in front of people was kind of hard for me. The idea of lots of people looking at me while trying to remember what I wanted to say was overwhelming. Through the ambassador trainings, we found a way to make public speaking suit me specifically. The speech coaches helped me break down the words I found difficult to pronounce, and they got to know me in order to make my speech unique to me. We talked about what I loved to do, and I LOVE to sing. When I gave my ambassador speech and Friendship Walk, I got to sing part of it! In front of so many people!

I hope to encourage more people to join Best Buddies, make friends, and become more confident in front of crowds.

I joined Best Buddies in 2021 and have been part of it ever since. The biggest way Best Buddies has changed my life was that I was able to get a job at a major retail store and the help I get from them to improve my future is priceless!! I love all the support and opportunities Best Buddies provides, but most of all, I've been able to make great friends!!! Thank you, Best Buddies, for all you have done for me, my family and the community!!

“ Join Best Buddies! The possibilities are endless!" - **Jordan**



Leadership Development Key Program Stats NM

Ambassadors	Promoters
8	14 76
Ambassadors	Chapters Participants

Transitions

72
Participants



New York Year in Review

Reflecting on Best Buddies in New York's achievements in 2023, the first word that comes to mind is progress. Our expanding team was dedicated to more than just maintaining our active programs – we were driven to expand. We are delighted to announce that we achieved this goal, increasing programming across New York by nearly 25%. Our efforts in Albany, New York City, Long Island, and Western NY resulted in the establishment of 34 new School Friendship chapters, bringing our total to 165 schools statewide. Furthermore, the team facilitated nearly 100 more matches of adults in one-to-one friendships through the Citizens program, offering continued opportunities for socialization, inclusion, and friendship for more than 430 adults within our communities.

Support from our generous constituents propelled us forward in 2023, enabling us to hire two additional staff members and launch a brand-new program: Best Buddies Transitions. This innovative program now operates in New York City and Western New York, providing youth with IDD opportunities to acquire crucial career-readiness skills and develop post-secondary plans. The demand for these skills-based programs has been expressed by parents, teachers, and caregivers for years, and Best Buddies is proud to meet this need. We are especially excited to expand this program and build a pipeline into the Best Buddies Jobs program. The NYC Jobs program secured integrated, competitive employment for 16 adults in 2023 bringing the total to 62 participants served, and we were proud to partner with 36 employers who have committed to inclusive hiring practices.

Many of these achievements were made possible through our successful signature events, including the four Best Buddies Friendship Walks held across New York. Collectively, the events hosted 2,000+ people and raised more than \$340,000 in the name of inclusion. The Champion of the Year galas in Albany and Rochester raised over \$100,000 and brought together nearly 450 guests, and NYC's Party for a Purpose was once again hosted at The Bowery Hotel where more than 250 guests came together to raise over \$340,000. Lastly, 15 dedicated runners not only completed the 26.2 miles for inclusion but also raised over \$70,000 to support our local programs through the TCS NYC Marathon.

Looking ahead, Best Buddies is committed to building on the momentum of 2023. Our focus remains on expanding our reach, enhancing our programs, and fostering a more inclusive community for individuals with IDD. In 2024, we hope to establish even more School Friendship chapters, expand our Transitions program to reach more youth, and increase the number of adults placed in competitive employment through Best Buddies Jobs. With our community's continued support, we are confident that we will achieve these goals and continue to positively impact the lives of individuals with IDD. Together, we will build a future where everyone is included, valued, and celebrated for who they are.

Sophie Dubuisson, State Director, New York

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Caroline and Teagan, Friendship program Buddy Pair

Caroline & Teagan

One-To-One Friendships

Saratoga Springs High School,
Saratoga Springs, NY

Caroline and Teagan aren't just matched in a one-to-one friendship – they're best friends. As Vice President and Buddy Director, respectively, the two high schoolers have been inseparable since they first met through Best Buddies in 2020.

"We do everything together," Caroline says. "Whenever I'm with Teagan, I'm always smiling 24/7...when I'm with her, I always feel energized and happy."

"She understands me. Trustworthiness, honesty, and kindness are now in my life – those are the qualities my best friend has" Teagan adds.

Before the two met, Teagan survived multiple types of cancer. As she fought through remission and struggled at home, she was thankful to have a friend like Caroline in her corner.

"She's a role model to me. It meant a lot that I had a best friend to help me get through those hard times," Teagan says.

In 2023, the pair became Best Buddies Ambassadors and won Champions of the Year, raising more than \$9,500 for inclusion. Next year, they'll graduate high school together.

"Teagan is definitely my person," Caroline says. "She will always continue to be in my life no matter where we go to college or where we end up. I truly feel like she is a lifelong friend of mine and someone I will continue to have new experiences with. I want to make sure that all of these new experiences I'm having, I have with Teagan."



One-To-One Friendships Key Program Stats NY

Elementary Schools		Middle Schools		High Schools	
33	1,054	30	589	81	3,329
Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants

Colleges		Citizens	e-Buddies
25	1,071	415	311
Chapters	Participants	Participants	Participants

“Trustworthiness, honesty, and kindness are now in my life – those are the qualities my best friend has.” - **Teagan**



Manny, Best Buddies Jobs participant
Amwins Insurance Brokerage, New York, New York

Manny

Integrated Employment

Amwins Insurance Brokerage, New York, NY

Before joining Best Buddies, Manny's day-to-day life felt monotonous, unsupportive, and challenging. He spent his days at a day habilitation program and had a tough time working at a chain restaurant. The constant management changes and lack of support from sometimes harsh managers made his job difficult. When the restaurant closed in 2017, Manny found himself jobless and back at his day program full-time.

Manny first discovered Best Buddies through e-Buddies in 2015. He was paired with someone from Miami, and they became pen pals. Manny then learned about the New York Chapter. Manny has since made numerous friends through Best Buddies, creating lifelong bonds. Initially joining Best Buddies due to a lack of friends and social activities, Manny found his life transformed by the friendships and support he gained from Best Buddies Jobs.

"Now I've met a lot of friends through Best Buddies that I can count on for life. What I love most about my job are the friendships I've made."

Manny always dreamed of working in an office, so he reached out to Best Buddies Jobs, hoping for a change. He landed a job at Amwins Insurance Brokerage in April 2023. At his current job, Manny's responsibilities include scanning and shredding papers, ensuring the kitchen is stocked, and maintaining the office printers and copiers. He's also developing his computer skills, particularly with spreadsheets. Having his own desk, ID badge, and computer makes Manny incredibly happy. His job has not only provided him with an income but also a sense of fulfillment and joy. He enjoys the camaraderie with his coworkers, who are always ready to help and share a laugh.

"For the longest time I was dreaming of working in an office setting but, I never would have dreamed possible it could happen one day."

Looking ahead, Manny has ambitious goals. He wants to save money to visit friends who have moved out of state. He dreams of a lifelong career at Amwins, where he can continue to grow professionally and personally. Through his job, Manny has learned to use Excel, send emails, and manage office supplies. The skills he's gained and the friendships he's formed have made a significant positive impact on his life, proving that with the right support, dreams can become a reality.

“What I love most about my job are the friendships I've made.”
- Manny



Integrated Employment Key Program Stats NY

Jobs

53

Participants
Employed

71

Participants



Sydney, Best Buddies Ambassador

Sydney

Leadership Development

Ambassador, Long Island, NY

“Hello everyone! My name is Sydney Alper, and I’ve been a member of Best Buddies for four years. I was born with a rare chromosome disorder called chromosome 18q- proximal deletion and bilateral clubfoot. I’ve had many challenges. I wasn’t reaching milestones normally when I was 9 months old. The doctors doubted me and told my parents I wouldn’t be able to walk or talk. But I proved them wrong and started walking and talking at 4 years old. I also struggled in high school and couldn’t keep up with my classmates. But in 2020, I got my diploma!

My life before joining Best Buddies was very hard. I had issues advocating for myself and I always used to cry if I held in my emotions. Since I joined, I have been on podcasts talking about my story with chromosome 18 and I’ve also been more of an advocate for people with disabilities! I also have an Instagram account for people with disabilities to have a space where they can meet people with the same differences they have! I am also now a Best Buddies Ambassador for New York!

Best Buddies has greatly impacted my life. I’ve gotten more into public speaking and am more of an advocate for people with disabilities. Best Buddies also has encouraged me to inspire other people with disabilities to be a part of this wonderful organization. You are unique in your own way. Do not doubt yourself because of your disability. Your disability is your superpower! It’s what makes you unique!

I want to thank Best Buddies for giving me the courage to be an ambassador and for giving me so many opportunities. You’ve made a big impact on my life. I wouldn’t be where I am today without this organization. Thank you so much! I love Best Buddies forever!”



Leadership Development Key Program Stats NY

Ambassadors	Promoters
72	47
Ambassadors	Chapters
	1,529
	Participants

Transitions
87
Participants

“Your disability is your superpower! It’s what makes you unique!” - **Sydney**



Maya and Sarah, Friendship program Buddy Pair

Maya & Sarah

One-To-One Friendships

Charlotte, NC

While in search of more social connections and opportunities, Maya and her family learned about the NC Best Buddies program in 2022. Maya soon applied and met virtually with Marissa to start the process of finding a Best Buddy. After meeting with Marissa in January 2023, Maya was soon connected with her best buddy, Sarah! Sarah and Maya had their first meeting March 2023.

Over the past year, Maya and Sarah have developed a friendship in which they have had many fun times together. They spend time talking over FaceTime, meeting at local fun spots in the Charlotte area and going to dances. They most recently spent time together at the Best Buddies Friendship Walk and going for a meal together afterwards.

Maya and Sarah are committed to continuing to grow their friendship and look forward to all of their future adventures together!

Fun Times Together... Bowling, Putt Putt, Golf, Arcade, Dancing, FaceTime Calls, Best Buddies Friendship Walk.

One-To-One Friendships

Key Program Stats NC

Elementary Schools		Middle Schools		High Schools	
6	172	5	158	21	812
Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants
.....					
Colleges		Citizens	e-Buddies		
11	773	133	111		
Chapters	Participants	Participants	Participants		



Robert, Best Buddies Jobs participant
Northrop Grumman Synoptics Charlotte, NC

Robert

Integrated Employment

Northrop Grumman Synoptic Charlotte, NC

My life before Best Buddies was stressful, hard, and a big struggle. I worked in a lot of different places that were not the best fit for me and my needs. Once I had a choice of supported employment programs, I chose Best Buddies for its name. The name made me feel they would be supportive, and they've done that so far. My career goal is to be at Northrop Grumman Synoptics till I retire.

Since getting my job at NGS, I have been much happier and much less stressed. I love my job because I have awesome support from my job and my employment consultant, Kelsey. I feel like I can make a difference and be a part of a great team. While work is fun, it's even more fun to get paid and make new friends. I have a friend to go out to lunch with each week and we get to have fun together.

Now that I'm making great money and have a great job, I plan on working to find a place to live independently. I also would like to continue to grow in my role and keep improving my production goals. I've learned a lot about math, paying attention to small details and product knowledge on the various types of lasers. I love my job and I love Best Buddies!

This year I received a birthday card from my whole department. I am so grateful that everyone remembered my birthday. My other jobs didn't do this for me! I'm glad to be a part of Best Buddies and appreciate what they do for individuals like me.



Integrated Employment Key Program Stats NC

Jobs

13

Participants
Employed

17

Participants



Now that I'm making great money and have a great job,
I plan on working to find a place to live independently."

- Robert



“ My dream is to work for the State of California and move out. Having a disability does not stop you from working. Go for your dream. Employers need to hire more people with disabilities and Best Buddies is here to help.” - **Katina**

Katina, Best Buddies Ambassador



Maggie, Best Buddies Ambassador

Maggie

Leadership Development

Ambassador, Charlotte, NC

Hi, my name is Maggie Fitzgerald. I live in Mocksville, NC and was glad to find out that Best Buddies works in rural communities. I joined BB in September 2023 and went to an Ambassador training on how to tell my story to everyone in different settings. In March I was matched with my perfect Best Buddy. Madison is an amazing woman and I love my new friend! We go out together and share coffee and conversations and love!

Before Best Buddies, my only friends were other people with IDD. I worked hard at a sheltered workshop for very little pay. But, I wanted to be able to do things I saw my 5 sisters doing, like working real jobs and having friends that would help them grow and not being restricted to events for people with special needs.

In April 2024 I gave a speech at the Charlotte Best Buddies Friendship walk about inclusion. I have Down Syndrome, but I still want to be a part of everything life and other people have to offer me. And I want to help to others as well. I want to tell everyone that life is better when we do it together. We all have something to offer no matter who we are!

Since I have joined Best Buddies I have become more confident I. My Buddy, Madison and I do things together as equal friends. My goals are becoming bigger and I want to help everyone try new things, even if they are scary at first.

I want to tell people who are like me to reach out and try new experiences, meet new people in their communities and trust that life is better when we all support one another.

“ I want to tell everyone that life is better when we do it together. We all have something to offer no matter who we are!” - **Maggie**



Leadership Development Key Program Stats NC

Ambassadors	Promoters
1	10
Ambassadors	Chapters
	210
	Participants



Ohio Year in Review

2023 was a year of tremendous growth and increased engagement for Best Buddies in Ohio. We opened Best Buddies Friendship Chapters in 12 schools across the state and launched Best Buddies Citizens in Franklin County. We were elated to be back in person for the Best Buddies Leadership Conference in Bloomington, Indiana, and brought a delegation of 30 students, teachers, and community leaders from Ohio. Between our programs, we served more than 1,600 people in 35 cities and 18 counties across Ohio.

The Best Buddies Friendship Walk was the most well attended event since we launched programs in Ohio! More than 800 people walked for inclusion in Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati. Participants, families, and businesses came together to raise \$125,985 between all three events. We were recognized by Best Buddies International for the Friendship Walk: Cincinnati achieving the top percentage over goal across the organization. This incredible event raises awareness of our mission, provides a wonderful experience for our members, and would not be possible without the incredible volunteers who make it happen. A very special thank you to our event Chairs: Kate Malo and Connie Mehlman.

Community leaders championed inclusion again in Cleveland and Columbus at our Champion of the Year Galas. 17 community leaders competed for the title of Grand Champion of the Year, raising \$245,444. The generosity of more than 350 attendees laid the foundation for the success of our friendship and leadership programs, catapulting us toward our expanding goals. Congratulations to our grand champions in Columbus, Sharla Thomas and Alex Rogers as well as our grand champion in Cleveland, Katie Klimek.

All of us at Best Buddies in Ohio extend our deepest appreciation to our wonderful participants, families, volunteers, donors, and corporate sponsors for a successful 2023! Your support and dedication to our mission helps our programs grow, creating more inclusive communities throughout the state. We are excited to build on this contagious momentum in 2024.



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Brooklynn and Tiffany, Friendship program Buddy Pair

Brooklynn & Tiffany

One-To-One Friendships

Edgewood High School, Trenton, OH

When Best Buddies came to Edgewood High School in August of 2022, Tiffany was excited to spend more time with her friends with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Tiffany became a Chapter Leader and looked forward to inspiring more of her classmates to include students with disabilities.

For her buddy Brooklynn, inclusion looks like learning American Sign Language (ASL). Brooklynn, who is deaf, communicates with her classmates mostly through an ASL interpreter, making it more challenging to form 1-1 friendships with her peers. Tiffany, as it so happens, had been learning ASL. Having a common language motivated Tiffany to improve her ASL and helped Brooklynn be more included at school. Tiffany shares,

“High school is a tough time, but it has made it easier with my buddy’s support. Having friends at school who care about you makes all the difference in the world. The other day Brooklynn saw me in the hallway and hugged me. I didn’t realize until that moment that I needed a Brooklynn hug.”

Brooklynn and Tiffany enjoy playing thumb war, talking in the hallway, drawing pictures, and making Christmas cards together. They even attended the Edgewood High School Day Prom and Best Buddies Friendship Walk together with their Best Buddies Friendship Chapter. Brooklynn shares,

“Tiffany is a great friend because she is fun, funny and she knows sign language.”

Tiffany credits Brooklynn with inspiring other students at Edgewood to learn ASL even influencing teachers to use more ASL in their daily instruction. Brooklynn and Tiffany’s friendship flourished and inspired others through their participation in Best Buddies. Tiffany shares,

“Not only can you make new friends, but you can also learn more about yourself and who you want to be. There’s a lot we can learn from others, and these friendships can help inspire growth and an everlasting bond that is irreplaceable.”

“These friendships can help inspire growth and an everlasting bond that is irreplaceable.” - **Tiffany**



One-To-One Friendships Key Program Stats OH

Elementary Schools	Middle Schools	High Schools
5 Chapters	24 Participants	6 Chapters
24 Participants	100 Participants	20 Chapters
619 Participants		
Colleges	Citizens	e-Buddies
15 Chapters	1,057 Participants	137 Participants
		127 Participants



“

When I first moved, I was sad because I felt like I didn't have any friends. Since joining Best Buddies I have made a lot of friends. Katie picks me up and takes me out to eat, and to other events. We text and talk all the time. I can tell her anything because she is like a big sister to me. She just loves me, and I love her. If it weren't for Best Buddies, I would've never met Katie because she isn't in any of my classes except for choir.” - **Aamaris**

Aamaris and **Katie**, Friendship program Buddy Pair
Upper Arlington High School, Upper Arlington, OhioThe Ohio State University, Columbus, OH



Alex, Best Buddies Ambassador

Alex

Leadership Development

Ambassador, Westlake, OH

“Hello everyone! My name is Alex Krystynak and I am Best Buddies in Ohio’s designated HYPE MAN. As a child, I was diagnosed with a learning disability. I had trouble making friends and succeeding academically. A friend told me about Best Buddies and said that I should join. Despite the other interest groups I have been involved in, it has always been hard for me to build and maintain a one-to-one friendship.

I joined Best Buddies Citizens in March of 2023 and met my buddy, Matthew. Since being matched with Matthew, we have been to a Cleveland Guardians game, watched the movie Champions, participated in the Best Buddies Friendship Walk, and attended a Cleveland Monsters hockey game. The amazing part of Best Buddies is that it's a friendship group and connection is at its core.

This summer I attended the Ambassador Track at Best Buddies Leadership Conference with five other participants with IDD from Ohio. We attended a speech writing workshop and learned self-advocacy skills that I can use throughout life. I even got to jam out with the conference DJ!

I love Best Buddies because it allows me to build leadership skills, build relationships with people, and have fun while representing an amazing organization. I'll be the hype man forever! Go Best Buddies!”

“ The amazing part of Best Buddies is that it's a friendship group and connection is at its core." - Alex



Leadership Development Key Program Stats OH

Ambassadors	Promoters
19	21
Ambassadors	Chapters
	195 Participants



Oregon Year in Review

Everyday, hundreds of individuals with a disability spend hours alone, wishing they had a friend or someone to talk to. Others have friends, but don't have a job or steady income. We are on a mission to change that with Best Buddies Oregon. With a growing community of supporters by our side, we believe we will end the isolation of individuals living with an intellectual or developmental disability.

Our work this past year focused on new local community members and showing them the importance of why what we do, matters. As we reached new heights in Oregon, we also focused on caring for those in our schools and identifying new community partners. Our friendship program operated in 10 schools, including 1 elementary school, 3 middle school, 4 high schools and 2 colleges. Across our leadership development trainings, we were able to empower leaders in the Oregon community and name additional state ambassadors!

We continue to be inspired by our community of passionate supporters, fundraisers, influencers, and partners. In 2023, they grew stronger than ever with one of Oregon's signature event in the Spring, the Best Buddies Friendship Walk. This event brought over 100 people together in the name of inclusion and raised over \$10,000.

In the fall, we hosted Oregon's 3rd annual Best Buddies Champion of the Year Gala. With the help of our community sponsors, volunteers and advocates the event raised over \$110,000 raised. With over 270 guests we surpassed our goal.

As we head into 2024, we intend to build on the momentum in the past year and grow our community and continue our efforts to create lasting partners and friendships.



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Sarah and Skylar, Friendship program Buddy Pair

Sarah & Skylar

One-To-One Friendships

Pacific University, Forest Grove, OR

Sarah’s journey with this IDD community began when she was just 13 years old, volunteering at an inclusive camp. It was the first time I really felt I had a gift.

Sarah’s buddy Skylar has Phelan McDermid Syndrome, a rare genetic condition.

Together, Sarah and Skylar have shared unforgettable memories like traveling, indoor skydiving, attending school events, and countless car rides.

Skylar and Sarah enjoy listening to music, nature, adventuring around college campus and cities.

Sarah and Skylar are so happy to be apart of Best Buddies, a community that’s all about making genuine friendships.

Sarah is Chapter President at Pacific University in Forest Grove, Oregon.

Sarah believes that together we all can make a different in the lives of those with IDD, the impacted population and our communities.

“ I have learned invaluable lessons in leadership, interdependence and grit through Skylar and am so thankful for our friendships and Best Buddies!" - Sarah



One-To-One Friendships

Key Program Stats OR

Elementary Schools		Middle Schools		High Schools	
3	19	3	40	5	50
Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants
Colleges		Citizens	e-Buddies		
1	47	20	27		
Chapters	Participants	Participants	Participants		



Sarah and Skylar, Friendship program Buddy Pair
Pacific University, Forest Grove, OR



Pennsylvania Year in Review

The year 2023 marked a significant milestone for Best Buddies Pennsylvania as we continued our mission of fostering inclusion and friendship across the state. Our primary goals for the year were to expand our reach, deepen our impact, and raise awareness about the importance of inclusivity. Throughout the year, we witnessed remarkable growth in all areas of our organization. Our chapters flourished, with an increase in the number of schools and community groups participating in our programs. We were able to open 10 new friendship chapters across the Keystone State bringing our total to 138 schools. This expansion allowed us to connect more individuals with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), creating meaningful friendships and breaking down barriers in communities across Pennsylvania.

One of the highlights of the year was our annual Best Buddies Friendship Walk (BBFW). We hosted our Friendship Walks in both Pittsburgh and Philadelphia which saw overwhelming support from participants and donors alike. With the enthusiastic participation of over 2,300 walkers, we raised a record-breaking \$222,500 which directly contributed to supporting our programs and initiatives throughout the state. The camaraderie and spirit of inclusion displayed during the events were truly inspiring, and it served as a testament to the power of friendship and unity.

Similarly, our Fall Signature events were a tremendous success, bringing together individuals from all walks of life to celebrate inclusion and honor those who have made a significant impact in promoting acceptance and understanding. In Philadelphia we hosted our annual Champion of the Year Gala where we recognized the community's most active leaders in the name of inclusion. In Pittsburgh, over a thousand people gathered for TasteBuds; a unique tasting event that features talented chefs serving signature dishes and demonstrating the power of friendship. Chefs are paired with individuals with intellectual & developmental disabilities (IDD), who serve as sous-chefs for the evening. The generosity of our sponsors and the dedication of our volunteers made these events possible, resulting in another year of meaningful connections and lasting friendships. Collectively, the events raised \$437,000.

In closing, I want to express my gratitude to everyone who has contributed to the success of Best Buddies Pennsylvania in 2023. Your dedication and passion have made a difference in the lives of countless individuals with and without IDD. Together, we will continue to create a more inclusive world for future generations. As we reflect on our achievements this year, we also look forward to celebrating a momentous milestone: the 30th anniversary of Best Buddies in Pennsylvania in 2024. This anniversary serves as a testament to the enduring impact of our organization and the unwavering commitment of our supporters. Here's to another year of friendship, growth, and positive change, as we embark on the next chapter of our journey towards a more inclusive and accepting society.



Samantha Civitate, State Director, Pennsylvania

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Ella and Bella, Friendship program Buddy Pair

Ella & Bella

One-To-One Friendships

Beaver High School, Beaver, PA

My life has undergone remarkable changes since becoming involved with Best Buddies. Prior to joining, I was reserved and lacked confidence in expressing myself and connecting with others. Although I attended Beaver Area High School, I wasn't active in any clubs, but I felt a strong desire to engage more. My knowledge about the IDD (Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities) community was limited, and I was eager to learn more.

Upon joining Best Buddies, I was paired with Bella, and our friendship blossomed quickly. Bella and I participate in a variety of activities together, such as walking, playing basketball, bowling, and training for the Special Olympics during our gym class outside of Best Buddies. At Best Buddies events, we enjoy playing games, coloring, doing crafts, sharing stories, and even coordinating our outfits!

One of the most rewarding aspects of our friendship is our shared enthusiasm for Taylor Swift and the color purple. Bella appreciates my warm and lighthearted personality, and we both cherish our time together in gym class and during Buddy parties engaging in crafts and activities.

Bella and I joined Best Buddies during the 2021-2022 school year when Beaver Area High School launched its chapter. Our pairing officially began in September 2022, and since then, Bella has brought immense joy and brightness into my life. Her infectious smile and laughter are truly uplifting.

Through my relationship with Bella, I've experienced profound personal growth. Helping her articulate her thoughts and emotions has enhanced my ability to express myself more openly. Best Buddies has significantly shifted my perspective on those around me and on myself.

In summary, Best Buddies is a transformative organization that I am grateful to be part of. It has not only enriched my life but has also provided me with invaluable experiences and connections.

“Through my relationship with Bella, I've experienced profound personal growth. Helping her articulate her thoughts and emotions has enhanced my ability to express myself more openly.” - Ella



One-To-One Friendships Key Program Stats PA

Elementary Schools		Middle Schools		High Schools	
25	641	45	986	61	3,302
Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants
Colleges		Citizens		e-Buddies	
26	1,702	216	211		
Chapters	Participants	Participants	Participants		



“

Before Best Buddies, my life was all about school and home. Now, being involved with Best Buddies means loads of fun activities! I enjoy crafting and going to different events, which brings excitement into my life. Since joining Best Buddies, my life has become more joyful and engaging. I have made new friends, explored new activities, and discovered a sense of belonging. My buddy Lil and I have been matched for over two wonderful years. We attend all events together, like the Buddy Ball and leadership training days. We enjoy crafting, playing games, and just having fun together!.” - **Eric Tong**

Eric and Lil, Friendship program Buddy Pair



Taylor, Best Buddies Ambassador

Taylor

Leadership Development

Pittsburgh, PA

Before joining Best Buddies, my social circle was limited. While I participated in special needs sports like Challenger baseball and basketball and attended Watson Institute camps during middle and high school summers, I hadn't developed many lifelong friendships outside of Allie, Lexy, Noah, and John, some of whom later joined Best Buddies with me.

The post-secondary program at Duquesne St. Anthony's introduced me to Best Buddies. Prior to this, I wasn't very social and occasionally behaved in ways I regretted. Best Buddies has played a crucial role in improving my social skills, and as a Best Buddies Ambassador, my goal is to continue expanding my circle of friends and assisting others in their personal growth.

Since becoming involved with Best Buddies in fall 2012, I've participated in numerous events like TasteBuds, Spread the Word, Friendship Walks, and talent shows. Beyond these activities, my mom and I have hosted friends we've made through Best Buddies for cooking sessions, Halloween candy giveaways, and cookouts.

My message to you is to be friendly show genuine interest in being a true friend. Many people with disabilities are being bullied and outcasted by society. Our goal at Best Buddies is to create one-to-one meaningful and lasting friendships and make the world a place where everyone can be happy. Let's work together to make this dream a reality.



Leadership Development Key Program Stats PA

Ambassadors	Promoters
21	31
Ambassadors	Chapters Participants



Best Buddies has played a crucial role in improving my social skills, and as a Best Buddies Ambassador, my goal is to continue expanding my circle of friends and assisting others in their personal growth." **-Taylor**



Texas Year in Review

2023 was an exciting year of growth in Texas. The Texas Legislature supported our mission by doubling our funding for friendship programs in public schools throughout the state. This allowed us to hire an additional four Program Managers as well as a Manager of Stewardship and Communication. We ended the year with 131 school chapters from Elementary through College. An extra special highlight of the year was receiving a commitment from the head of Special Education in Frisco ISD to open Friendship Chapters in every one of their 77 campuses. FISD also has one of the largest populations of Asian students, fulfilling the goals of our Orchid Giving Circle grant. Eanes ISD in Austin became the first school district in the country to have Best Buddies Chapters in every school in the district.

Our Citizens (Adult Friendship) Program officially launched in all three regions, with 45 matches just in Q4. Our jobs program worked with 63 participants this year, placing 41. Employees worked an average of 18 hours/week earning an average of \$12.24/hour.

Texas was truly excited to have two participants selected to be Best Buddies Global Ambassadors! In addition to our 21 State Ambassadors, we are excited to also train and certify new ambassadors in Central Texas. We held over 200 group activities and provided Ambassador and Leadership training to over 200 high school students across the state.

83 delegates represented the great state of Texas at our first in-person Leadership Conference since 2019! Two of our Ambassadors were also selected to give a speech to the entire delegation of nearly 3,000 attendees.

Spring Friendship Walks throughout the state celebrated the end of the school year with 2216 registered participants and 146 teams that raised \$252,650, exceeding goals in every region!

With great glitz and glamour, our Champion of the Year Galas were hugely successful! Engaging 22 Champion/Mission Partner teams throughout the state, we collectively raised \$673,000! With themes like “Dream Big”, “Buddies Around the World” and “Carnivale!”, nearly 800 guests engaged and supported our mission of inclusion for people of all abilities.

With the amazing growth we experienced this year, Best Buddies in Texas is poised to have an even greater impact in 2024. We are especially excited to launch Pre-Employment Transition services, bridging our Friendship Programs and our Jobs Program. The social skills gained through our Friendship and Leadership programs naturally lead into our participants’ desire for a career just like their peers. This program provides the opportunity for career exploration, soft skills development, and work observation- skills critical to not only securing, but also maintaining meaningful employment. We are truly grateful for the support of individuals, foundations and corporations dedicated to impacting the lives of people of all abilities.



Linda Kordek-Milton, State Director, Texas

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Smeet and Kyleigh, Friendship program Buddy Pair

Kyleigh & Smeet

One-To-One Friendships

Heritage High School, Frisco, TX

Smeet and I have been friends since the 6th grade, and our friendship has continued into our senior year of high school. Before Best Buddies, I was just someone Smeet saw in the hallways at school. We met each other through a mutual friend. After our friend moved away, we began talking to each other about how much we missed him. Soon we realized how much fun we could have together!

We hung out at football games. I was on the varsity cheerleading squad, and Smeet was on the varsity football squad. During the games, I loved cheering on my friend. At the game, Smeet always heard me because I am the loudest. I love supporting Smeet on the team, but I believe Smeet is louder than me!

This year, Smeet asked me to go to homecoming with him. He did not ask lavishly because he wanted it to be more about two friends having a good time rather than a grand gesture. It was a great way to end our senior year.

I enjoy Smeet as my friend because he is always there for me. Whenever I need advice on social norms or relationships, I know I can turn to him without feeling embarrassed. He offers guidance without hesitation, making him a great friend.

Smeet says, "I enjoy being Kyleigh's friend; she is super friendly to talk to. Her presence is very energetic, and she brings so much light into any room. Our friendship has grown over the past years. I care for her, and I protect her like she would be my sister."

"Best Buddies has changed my life. Before joining, I, like most students, did not have much interaction with students with IDD, but through the program, I have come to realize that everyone has a beautiful soul, and everyone desires to have a friend to talk to.



One-To-One Friendships Key Program Stats TX

Elementary Schools		Middle Schools		High Schools	
19	500	25	543	74	2,936
Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants
<hr/>					
Colleges		Citizens	e-Buddies		
17	949	232	227		
Chapters	Participants	Participants	Participants		

“ Best Buddies has taught me that we need to connect with people, regardless of differences. - **Smeet**



Ritika, Best Buddies Jobs participant
Gucci, Houston, TX

Ritika

Integrated Employment

Gucci - Houston, TX

Before coming to Best Buddies, I was shy and had a hard time making connections with people. I got involved in Best Buddies because I had wanted to break out of my shell and socialize. I first started in the Friendship program before coming to jobs. I also worked hard to challenge myself, by becoming an Ambassador. I was able to speak in front of large groups of people with confidence. I began to make new friends and spent time volunteering at local colleges and libraries before deciding I was ready to work.

It wasn't easy looking for a job. I knew what I wanted and was not willing to settle. I worked hard with my employment consultant, Britney, to prepare myself for work. And with lots of patience, I was able to find employment at Gucci!

I definitely had a lot to learn when I first started. I struggled with taking bathroom breaks and eating in front of coworkers. It was new territory for me to understand that I could utilize the restroom and hydrate as needed without asking for permission.

I have been working for Gucci for about a year now. I am told continuously that I am hardworking and dedicated. My coworkers tell me I am a quick-wit and am very honest. I truly feel like I have become part of the team.

I eventually would like to work as an administrative assistant; however, I am happy to gain the current experience at Gucci. There I learned how to integrate into a team for the first time. And eventually, I would like to work full time to become financially independent.

“ My favorite part of working is having more independence, and the 50% off employee discount doesn't hurt either!”
- Ritika



Integrated Employment Key Program Stats TX

Jobs

49

Participants
Employed

65

Participants



Latasha, Best Buddies Ambassador

Latasha

Leadership Development

Ambassador, Austin, TX

Hello, my name is Tasha Johnson. I am an Ambassador for Central Texas Best Buddies!

Life before Best Buddies was very difficult for me. I experienced bullying from my classmates and most people underestimated me. I joined Best Buddies at St. Edwards University in 2005. I started in the school friendship chapter then I progressed to being part of the leadership team. Currently, I am part of the Austin Area Citizens chapter, e-Buddies, Student Advisory Board, Central Texas Advisory Board, and the Ambassador program!

I wanted to become an advocate with Best Buddies after seeing videos of others speaking about Best Buddies and sharing their stories. Furthermore, there was an ambassador that came to speak at an event, and they inspired me to seek out the Ambassador program for myself. My ambassador goal is to speak at BBLC to help and inspire others with IDD.

My life has drastically changed for the better since joining Best Buddies! For the past 19 years, I have learned to be more outgoing, how to create friendships, and I have learned how to be a self-advocate.

An important message I have for others within the IDD community is to never use the word “can’t”. When I stopped telling myself and others that I “can’t” do certain things, that is when I started accomplishing my goals and making a difference in my everyday life.

“ Best Buddies has changed my life and I look forward to what the future holds for me! - **Latasha**

Leadership Development

Key Program Stats TX

Ambassadors	Promoters
43	20
Ambassadors	Chapters
	654
	Participants

Transitions

23

Participants



Virginia & D.C. Year in Review

As our team expanded and our commitment to all four pillars of Best Buddies grew stronger, a wealth of opportunities unfolded for Best Buddies in Virginia & Washington DC. We are delighted to share that we seized these opportunities, connecting with nearly 4,500 volunteers, students, and participants across our region. Alongside our robust presence in the Washington DC Metropolitan Area, we extended our reach to previously untapped communities in Virginia, making a meaningful impact in the greater Richmond and Virginia Beach areas. Our programs now span across 38 cities and 28 counties, ensuring our footprint continues to grow and our impact deepens.

In tandem with our geographical expansion efforts, we prioritized engaging more students, both with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). By the close of the year, we opened our 100th Friendship school chapter. Our Citizens Friendship program witnessed remarkable growth, boasting a membership of 350 individuals across our Washington DC metropolitan chapter and seeing the launch of our Richmond, VA Citizens Chapter. Moreover, our programs team consistently facilitated numerous new 1:1 matches throughout the year.

We take pride in reporting that Best Buddies Jobs in Virginia & DC secured its fourth consecutive 3-year accreditation from CARF International; after navigating through a rigorous review process, affirming the quality and effectiveness of our supported employment program. Our jobs program, spanning across five local agencies, consistently facilitates placements in fulfilling jobs - we made 12 new placements and supported others through promotions this past year. Our Ambassador leadership program has been enhanced, resulting in the appointment of 11 State Ambassadors in 2023.

The cornerstone of our achievements lay in our hallmark events, beginning with the spring's Best Buddies Friendship Walk on the National Mall in Washington DC—an unparalleled gathering that stands as the largest Best Buddies Walk nationwide. We brought together a record-breaking 1,800 individuals for a chorus of inclusion, while also raising over \$400,000 in support of local programs.

Our Best Buddies Homecoming: Two Parties, One Purpose event captured the hearts of our community, eliciting an outpouring of remarkable support. Homecoming is a uniquely joyous affair: Our students revel in an evening of dance, pizza, and camaraderie, while our adult supporters indulge in their own celebration, featuring culinary delights crafted by local restaurant chefs alongside their Best Buddy Sous Chefs, and the crowning our Champion of the Year. Thanks to our champions' dedication and the generosity of their guests, Homecoming surpassed our revenue goal by an impressive 20%, raising \$270,000.

As we step into 2024, we are determined to harness the momentum generated by the triumphs of the past year. With a dedicated team, empowered student leaders, and steadfast supporters, we are poised to propel our mission of friendship and inclusivity to unprecedented heights in the very birthplace of Best Buddies – the Capital Region of Virginia & DC.

Molly L. Whalen, State Director, Virginia & D.C.

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Yasmin and Aiden, Friendship program Buddy Pair

Yasmin & Aiden

One-To-One Friendships

Thomas A. Edison High School, Alexandria, VA

From their smiles, their easy conversations and their clear friendship, watching Aiden and Yasmin, both seniors at Thomas Edison High School who have been matched in a one-to-one friendship since freshman year, walking together at the Best Buddies Friendship Walk with their high school team, you truly see Best Buddies mission in action. Best Buddies has made an indelible mark on these two friends. Their commitment to Best Buddies has been evident through Yasmin’s leadership as the Chapter President and Aiden’s role as the Buddy Director for the past two years.

Aiden loves being a friend “I love to go out to lunch with my buddy, Yasmin and play games in the cafeteria like Headbands, Spot It, and Jenga.” One of Yasmin’s favorite Best Buddies memories with Aiden was going to the Best Buddies Prom; in fact, it was the first time either of them went to any Prom!

Best Buddies has had a profound impact on the Edison High School community through the many events the chapter organizes, including Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month where they highlighted different disabilities and the Spread the Word to End the Word campaign. Seeing so many friendships like theirs between people with different abilities from all over Virginia and DC reminded them that they are a part of a welcoming and treasured community.

As Aiden and Yasmin both graduate this year, they have their own messages to their fellow students. Aiden wants “Everyone at Edison to keep up the good work” and Yasmin echoes that sentiment and encourages members to “stay involved with the whole Best Buddies community – it is simply the best!”



One-To-One Friendships Key Program Stats VA & D.C.

Elementary Schools		Middle Schools		High Schools	
13	189	20	143	62	1,961
Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants
<hr/>					
Colleges		Citizens	e-Buddies		
14	571	390	199		
Chapters	Participants	Participants	Participants		

“ Stay involved with the whole Best Buddies community – it is simply the best!” - Yasmin



Clay, Best Buddies Jobs participant
TJ Maxx, Washington, DC

Clay

Integrated Employment

TJ Maxx, Washington, DC

Clay is a motivated employee, kind friend, incredible advocate, and valued member of the Best Buddies community. From Best Buddies Jobs to Ambassadors, and from Living to Friendship, Clay is involved with every Best Buddies pillar.

Clay joined the Best Buddies Jobs program in 2022 and began to get “job-ready.” He refined his resume, crafted a cover letter, practiced mock interviews, and much more! During the entire process, Clay was committed to growing his skillset and professionalism.

“It was a good opportunity for me to develop new skills. Best Buddies Jobs has helped me work on many skills like professionalism, navigating public transportation, and interviewing.”

After working hard to get job-ready, Clay landed a job at a major national retailer in 2023.

“Best Buddies Jobs helped get a job in the shoe department where I assist my team with analyzing and sorting products.”

Clay approaches his role with organization, creativity, and dedication, which was shown when Clay decided he wanted to increase his workload and weekly hours and advocated for himself to his managers to make that happen.

Clay’s dream doesn’t stop there. With his professional drive and motivation, he is excited to continue improving and gaining new skills to land his dream job as a museum historian. Best Buddies supports him in pursuing and achieving his professional goals!

“ Best Buddies Jobs has helped me work on many skills like professionalism... and interviewing.” - **Clay**



Integrated Employment Key Program Stats VA & D.C.

Jobs

43	45
Participants	Participants
Employed	



Jhiya, Best Buddies Ambassador

Jhiya

Leadership Development

Ambassador, Washington DC

Hello, I'm Jhiya, and I've been involved with the Best Buddies Jobs and Leadership programs for two years and have never looked back.

In 2023, Best Buddies helped me find my dream job in retail. Anyone who knows me knows that I love shoes, especially sneakers! I currently work in the shoe department, which means I see new shoes daily.

Getting a job is challenging for everyone, especially for people with IDD. I worried I wouldn't get the support I needed to succeed. That's where Best Buddies Jobs stepped in. My job coach helped me practice for my interview and reminded me to ask all my important questions. We celebrated together when I got the job, and she supported me during my new hire training sessions. I am now completely independent at work and graduated from the Best Buddies Jobs program.

As a State Ambassador, I attend ambassador trainings and spread awareness about Best Buddies in my community. My proudest accomplishments include speaking about inclusion on Good Morning Washington, my Champion of the Year candidacy at the 2023 Gala and giving a speech in front of 1,900 people at the Friendship Walk.

I use my voice to speak up for our mission of inclusion and disability rights. I gained so much confidence from my experiences with Best Buddies that I traveled out of state on an airplane for the first time just to attend the Best Buddies Leadership Conference (LC). I loved traveling and experiencing LC with my Best Buddies family. Most importantly, that experience helped me gain a sense of independence that I will carry forward.

I'm so proud of all my accomplishments this year, and I cannot wait to see what is in store for me as I continue this journey with Best Buddies.

“I use my voice to speak up for our mission of inclusion and disability rights.” -Jhiya



Leadership Development Key Program Stats VA & D.C.

Ambassadors	Promoters
32	38
Ambassadors	Chapters
	465
	Participants



Hannah and Catherine, Best Buddies Living residents

Hannah & Catherine

Best Buddies Living Residents

Georgetown, Washington, D.C.

Hannah and Catherine, both outgoing and long-time Best Buddies participants are now roommates at Best Buddies Living at Georgetown and love every minute!

Hannah moved in a month after securing a full-time job at Amazon and shared that, “Having independence is a big step, and sometimes it’s not easy.” Catherine echoes this sentiment: “Random roommates can be scary. I graduated early, and moved to a new city, so most of my friends were still in college. Best Buddies Living helped me meet new people and become involved in the community and I got to meet Hannah!”

“My roommates and I do a lot of fun group activities together like going out to eat, watching movies, and visiting museums. I also like to visit the rooftop pool to sunbathe,” Hannah shares.

Hannah enjoys her independence and hopes to pay her own rent one day. “It doesn’t matter if you have a disability or not; everybody should be included and treat others how they want to be treated.”

Catherine feels similarly, “Learning independent living skills is very rewarding, we have house rules and a chore chart which hold us accountable and encourage us to try new tasks, knowing we have support from our roommates.”

Hannah appreciates the chore chart because she’s a visual learner. “I like seeing the tasks instead of just being instructed on what to do. I do my laundry, clean the dishes, mop, sweep, take out the garbage, and clean out the fridge weekly — or whenever it gets stinky.”

“Best Buddies Living is such a great opportunity to live in a beautiful apartment while building friendships with different individuals,” Catherine shared. “Living with different people can be difficult, but Best Buddies Living makes it easy.”



Inclusive Living Key Program Stats VA & D.C.

Living

2

Residences

15

Participants



“ My dream is to work for the State of California and move out. Having a disability does not stop you from working. Go for your dream. Employers need to hire more people with disabilities and Best Buddies is here to help.” - **Katina**

Katina, Best Buddies Ambassador



Owen and Hannah, Friendship program Buddy Pair

Owen & Hannah

One-To-One Friendships

University of Washington, Seattle, WA

Hannah joined Best Buddies in 2015 and has been involved ever since. She was first introduced to Best Buddies when she started high school in Massachusetts, and her participation in the organization has lasted over 9 years and a move across the country. Hannah’s motto is “just be happy and make new friends!”

Since 2021, Hannah has been a part of the University of Washington’s Best Buddies chapter and for the past year has been matched with her buddy, Owen. They have instantly become great friends and Owen shared, “What I enjoy most about my friendship with Hannah is that she reminds me just how important it is to try new things! I’m definitely prone to remaining fixated in different areas throughout my life, but Hannah’s commitment to trying new things has pushed me to try new things for myself too!”

The same can be said for Hannah. Hannah shared, “Before Best Buddies, I was very shy and it was very hard for me to make new friends.” Since getting involved with the mission, Hannah said, “I have met so many new people and I stay in contact with them! My buddy Owen is such a nice guy, he is so kind, and he makes me happy when I see him!”

Their friendship and engagement with Best Buddies has inspired both to keep striving towards a more inclusive future. Owen said, “I’ve discovered just how passionate I am about furthering Best Buddies’ mission to further increase awareness, opportunities, involvements, and friendships for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities

One-To-One Friendships Key Program Stats WA

Elementary Schools		Middle Schools		High Schools	
6	18	1	4	10	160
Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants
.....					
Colleges		Citizens	e-Buddies		
3	121	120	54		
Chapters	Participants	Participants	Participants		

“ Best Buddies has taught me that if you want to really change the world, you CAN, and you WILL, change the world!” - **Owen**



Austin, Best Buddies Jobs participant
JLL, Bellevue, WA

Austin

Integrated Employment

JLL, Bellevue, WA

Austin has been a trailblazer for Best Buddies in Washington as a Champion for Inclusion, a member of our Advisory Board, and a State Ambassador, so it was fitting that he was also one of the first participants of the newly launched WA Jobs program.

When Austin began working with the Best Buddies Jobs team, he shared two goals for his future employment. He wanted to find an opportunity where he could develop a career rather than just a job. He also wanted to work in an environment where he could be an advocate for workplace inclusion, helping others with IDD build fulfilling careers.

Austin landed an interview with an amazing employer partner, JLL, and it was apparent from their very first meeting that it would be a great place to work! JLL shares Best Buddies vision of workplace inclusion and they were excited to hire Austin to join their team as a Facilities Coordinator in August of 2023. Austin shared, “I now have a career that I love where I earn a great salary and have the opportunity to be a voice for inclusion in the workplace for future generations.”

Austin brings his Aloha spirit to the workplace every day and appreciates having a fulfilling career where he feels valued. It is clear Austin feels both supported and empowered by his team. He said, “I believe we all have the ability to succeed if we support one another and continue to be champions for inclusion.”



Integrated Employment Key Program Stats WA

Jobs

3

Participants
Employed

9

Participants



I now have a career that I love where I earn a great salary and have an opportunity to be a voice for inclusion in the workplace for future generations.”

- Austin



“ My dream is to work for the State of California and move out. Having a disability does not stop you from working. Go for your dream. Employers need to hire more people with disabilities and Best Buddies is here to help.” - **Katina**

Katina, Best Buddies Ambassador



Michael, Best Buddies Ambassador

Michael

Leadership Development

Ambassador, Seattle, WA

Michael is a great advocate for inclusion and accessibility both in his own life and for others in his community. He has been involved in Best Buddies programs since 2020 and became an ambassador in 2023.

Michael believes advocacy is how our society will become more accessible and inclusive. Michael shared that “I’ve had CP for 56 years and have now worked in the disability field for 28 years.” With that being said, Michael’s relationship with disability is still evolving. Initially Michael said he felt “like my disability got in the way of me,” but after joining Best Buddies programs, he said “I realized that I wasn’t a burden because of my disability. I see myself differently- it’s a strength and not a burden.”

Michael has participated in numerous ambassador events this year, from attending the Best Buddies Leadership Conference to speaking at a supported employment conference. He believes, “Being a self-advocate is how things get better.” In the future, Michael wants to run his own business and be a consultant.

Michael has already done such great work to engage members in his community, both with and without disabilities, to strive towards a more accessible future. Michael shared that since joining Best Buddies, “It has made me realize that my disability isn’t negative or a burden- it is something that can be celebrated.”

“ Being a self-advocate is how things get better” -Michael



Leadership Development Key Program Stats WA

Ambassadors	Promoters
1	6
Ambassadors	Chapters Participants
	18



Wisconsin Year in Review

2023 was an exciting year for Best Buddies in Wisconsin. We continued to spread inclusion across the state with expanding chapters, jobs and volunteers. We impacted over 3,000 students with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities in 75 schools. We expanded our school chapters and opened 4 new schools around the state. Our jobs program has continued to grow and we currently have 50 participants in our program. We have successfully placed 24 individuals with IDD in jobs. Leadership Conference was particularly exciting this year with the first time being back at Indiana University. BBWI brought 29 students. Our students learned leadership skills, how to run a successful chapter and collaborated with other students on successful events.

In late May we had our Friendship Walk at The Rock Snowpark in Franklin. The event grew to over 900 of our closest friends and exceeded our goal by over \$5,000 raising over \$90,000 to support our mission. We had 80 teams registered including many schools from near and far.

Our Friendship Walk was followed by our Golf Outing at Ironwood Golf Course held in June. We had a sold out golf course with 144 golfers raising over \$46,000! Fun was had by all with games on the course, raffles, prizes and food and drinks afterwards.

Our final event of 2023 was Champion of the Year held in November at The Pfister Hotel in downtown Milwaukee. We had a just over 300 guests and 9 champions. Collectively we raised just over \$199,000. We couldn't have done it without our generous sponsors, friends, donors and volunteers.

In closing, I would like to thank our talented and dedicated staff, volunteers, teachers and board members for making 2023 a truly successful year. We continue to learn and grow and reach new strides every year because of our amazing community. We are hoping to expand our citizens program into Madison and open a transitions program for our future jobs participants. I know 2024 will bring even more reward, expansion and most importantly more inclusion.



Laura Brackett, State Director, Wisconsin

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Jake and Ryon, Friendship program Buddy Pair

Jake & Ryon

One-To-One Friendships

Citizens, Wauwatosa, WI

What was your life like before becoming involved with Best Buddies?

Ryon: I never really had a lot of friends to hang out with and I was kind of lonely.

Jake: I had just moved to Milwaukee before I was involved in Best Buddies. I had moved here as my girlfriend (now wife) and had a few friends, but not many. I was a few years out of college and starting my career. One of my wife's friends worked for Best Buddies and asked if I'd want to get involved. It was obviously a great decision as I was matched with Ryon almost 8.5 years ago now and we've had a great time with each other ever since then.

What activities do you do with your buddy?, What do you enjoy most about your friendship with your buddy?, What program(s) are you a part of?

Ryon: We go to sporting events. We text, bowl and golf. Jake is easy to hang out with.

Jake: Ryon and I both love sports. Whether that's watching them, playing them or talking about them. We've done multiple golf outings together and also gone to all types of sporting events in the Milwaukee area. We'll also participate in the Best Buddies Citizens events in the area to meet and connect with other people in the organization. We have volunteered at events as well such as the All-Chapter Dance doing coat check. I really enjoy Ryon's ability to go with the flow and enjoy the events and activities we do. Ryon is generally quiet, but once you get him to open up he is really funny and has a great sense of humor. He is also a very caring person who loves his family and friends very much.

How has your life changed since joining Best Buddies? Tell us about your buddy and what you like to do together.

Ryon: I look forward to hanging out with Jake. I started Best Buddies in 2010 with my High School program. We have been matched for several years. We both love sports and are both laid back.

Jake: Since joining Best Buddies I have gotten a very good friend in Ryon and also been able to meet hundreds of other individuals in the Milwaukee area that share a passion for Best Buddies. I have been a member of the Advisory Board as well for the past few years and learned more about the organization and ways I can support it through that involvement. Ryon and I were matched in October of 2015.

“ I have gotten a very good friend in Ryon.” - Jake



One-To-One Friendships Key Program Stats WI

Elementary Schools		Middle Schools		High Schools	
8	186	14	330	46	1,419
Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants	Chapters	Participants
Colleges		Citizens	e-Buddies		
10	680	173	76		
Chapters	Participants	Participants	Participants		



Carlos, Best Buddies Jobs participant
Whole Foods Market, Wauwatosa, WI

Carlos

Integrated Employment

Whole Foods Market, Wauwatosa, WI

Before becoming involved in Best Buddies I was struggling to find a purpose along with finding employment independently. I felt like I had no support when I was exploring employment. I am illiterate and when looking at a job application I felt lost and had no understanding of what was being asked. I was led to Best Buddies by my case manager who thought it would be a good fit for me. Since getting a job my career goal is to move from being a dishwasher to a prep cook.

Since getting a job my life has improved greatly and I feel like I have a purpose in life and am contributing to a great company. I have more confidence and independence when it comes to riding the bus and being able to access the bus schedule independently. What I love most about my job are my co-workers. I feel like I am part of a community at Whole Foods Market. All my co-workers make sure to include me and engage with me in any team meetings or activities. I also enjoy my manager's trust and that they trust me to train all the new dishwashers that get hired.

My future goal since earning a paycheck is to be able to continue to pay all my bills. I am also saving up to move out into my apartment. The skills that are used when working are communication, time management, flexibility, and self-advocacy. The new skills I had to learn were how to remove and clean the floor drains and how to train new employees in dishwashing.



Integrated Employment Key Program Stats WI

Jobs	
26	58
Participants Employed	Participants

“ Since working with Best Buddies I have had my life changed by getting the perfect job for me.” - **Carlos**



Kiontis, Best Buddies Ambassador

Kiontis

Leadership Development

Ambassador, Milwaukee, WI

In the past, I have had some tougher experiences because of being bullied. Best Buddies helped me gain more confidence. My goal is to bring people together to help each other experience the things I have experienced through Best Buddies in the Ambassador Program and through my school chapter. As people in the disability community, it's important to be here today, supporting the cause and each other. We can't change the world unless we change ourselves.

The reason I got involved with Best Buddies was because one of my teachers from West Allis Central High School. She saw something in me that I did not see in myself at the time, which was my potential to help others. Because of her, I've been in Best Buddies since I was 17 years old. She helped me discover friendship through Best Buddies. I was also asked to be a Chapter President, much like many of you here today. This gave me an amazing leadership opportunity to support individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Being involved in Best Buddies has allowed me to meet lifelong friends that I keep in touch with regularly. The buddy I was matched with my senior year will always hold a special place in my heart. I love Best Buddies because people are friendly, and I get to meet new people. I mostly love that Best Buddies allows me to help motivate and uplift people through the message of inclusion as an Ambassador.

As people in the disability community, it's important to be involved today, supporting Best Buddies and each other.



Leadership Development Key Program Stats WI

Ambassadors	Promoters	
1	11	355
Ambassadors	Chapters	Participants

“We can't change the world unless we change ourselves.” - Kiontis

A photograph of three people laughing joyfully in front of a bright yellow wall. On the left is a woman with blonde hair and a blue headband, wearing a white t-shirt with '1989' printed on it. In the center is a woman wearing a pink bucket hat and a pink t-shirt. On the right is a man with short dark hair and sunglasses, wearing a white t-shirt with a 'Best Buddies' logo. The background is a solid yellow wall.

Thank You!

The Communications, Marketing and Strategic Development Department thanks Best Buddies International Headquarters, state offices, and International Programs staff for their collaborative effort in creating this report. Individuals listed below played a major role in its development:

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Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Mark Lewis'.

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