



**AWS**  
FOUNDATION

2020

COMMUNITY REPORT



2020

COMMUNITY REPORT

TOGETHER



None of us can go it alone. Even Tom Hanks had Wilson in *Castaway*. The same is true for AWS Foundation. We can only achieve our mission through the endeavors of individuals, families, organizations and communities all working together.

This year, arts organizations worked together to maximize access for everyone in the Sensory Collaborative. Schools and businesses worked side by side to replicate skill development for successful transition from graduation to employment. Local government empowered an advisory board to guide community initiatives. Whether loose alliances, collaborative work groups or legal partnerships, AWS Foundation acknowledges that great things are seldom done by a single entity.

It was early in 2020 when we determined to focus our community report on "working together." Then came COVID-19. Uncertainty and anxiety took the front seat for too many non-profits. Shelter in place, quarantine and social distancing were the priority actions. There had never been a greater call for successful collaboration.

COVID pushed us in a direction that we might not have considered otherwise. We recognized that if we lived in an inclusive community, then meeting the needs of the greater population would ensure those with disabilities would be reached. We collaborated with other foundations, churches and non-profits to provide food, ongoing therapies, emotional support and even PPE for frontline workers.

We learn from each other. We build upon each other's successes. A great idea may be even better when viewed from another perspective. Replication almost always yields improvement. This past year has been filled with great collaborations and great accomplishments. Uniting talents and varying perspectives under mutual goals provided a greater harvest for all. Or, to quote Ken Blanchard, "None of us is as smart as all of us".

  
Patti Hays  
CEO, AWS Foundation



TOGETHER  
WE ADD  
MORE TO  
OUR  
COMMUNITY.

In my two-year term as AWS Foundation's board chair, I have been inspired and motivated by the efforts our board, staff and grantees made to improve the quality of life for individuals with disabilities in Northeast Indiana. I am grateful for their dedication and leadership.

The foundation's strategic, proactive focus led to several truly transformative achievements in 2020:

- New scholarship, certification and training opportunities helped local special education professionals and school systems prepare students with special needs for future independence.
- Our free online system navigation program, [IndianaDisabilityResourceFINDER.org](http://IndianaDisabilityResourceFINDER.org), expanded to bring vital disability-related information to more individuals, families and caregivers than ever.
- In January, we debuted our new office. Our building's universal design is a model of inclusion for others to follow.
- When COVID-19 struck, we quickly responded with a streamlined emergency grant process to get funds to those in need within days of receiving their request. We also acquired much-needed face masks and hand sanitizer for direct caregivers working to keep our most vulnerable population safe.

I encourage individuals of all abilities to actively support and promote efforts for a fully inclusive community. We have much to celebrate, but much more still needs to be done. The lasting success of our advocacy and funding efforts depends on everyone working together.

Be well,

*Larry Adelman*

Larry Adelman  
Board Chairman



## BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Todd Jacobs  
Vice Chair



Tracie Martin  
Secretary



Mike Cahill  
Treasurer



Whitney Bandemer



Chris Cathcart



Joe Doust



Ben Eisbart



Susan Trent



Tom O'Neill



Robert Stone



Dr. Tasha Williams



When we opened the doors of our new home in 2019, we opened them to everyone. AWS Foundation's new 7,800-square-foot facility embodies our vision of a truly inclusive community.

During the planning stages, AWS Foundation invited individuals with disabilities to share their invaluable insight with architects and contractors so every guest would feel welcome. Zero-grade entryways and low-pile floors, combined with extra-wide halls and doorways, make wheelchair navigation smooth and easy. Work stations, outlets and light switches are set at varied heights, so they are within easy reach, whether standing or sitting. We even tilted the restroom mirrors to provide a clear vision for visitors of smaller stature and visitors using a wheelchair.

Our new sensory room shows what can be accomplished on a smaller budget. This quiet, soothing space helps individuals overcome conditions like anxiety and agitation.



# HOSPITALITY



# UNIVERSAL DESIGN =

# INCLUSION

“WE WANTED TO SHOW HOW SMALL MODIFICATIONS CAN GO BEYOND SUPPORTING ACCESSIBILITY TO PROMOTE INCLUSION AND COLLABORATION,” SAID PATTI HAYS, AWS FOUNDATION’S CEO. “WE WANT TO USE OUR EXPERIENCE TO HELP OTHERS FIND WAYS TO IMPLEMENT INCLUSIVE DESIGN.”



The COVID-19 pandemic turned life upside down virtually overnight. While communities throughout Northeast Indiana were shuttered, many non-profit organizations were still providing vital services and programs to our most vulnerable citizens. AWS Foundation worked with these organizations to make sure funds and information reached those in need.

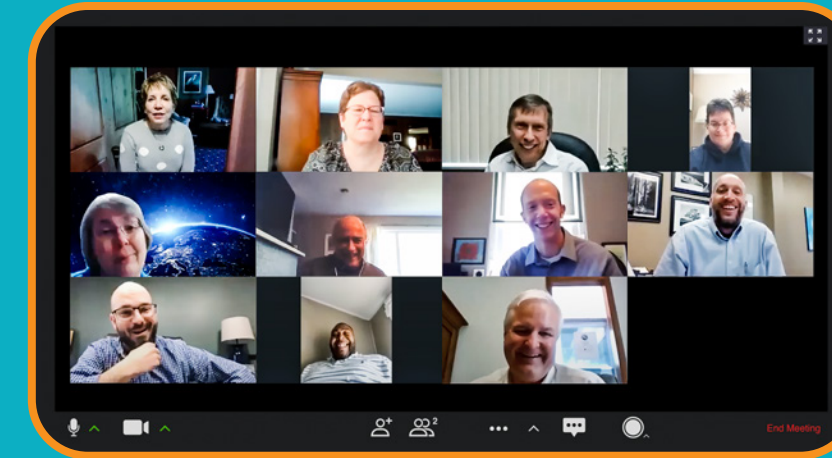
First, we found ways to meet frontline personnel's urgent need for additional PPE equipment. The Foundation distributed 1,600 high-grade masks and 90 gallons of hand sanitizer to 18 Northeast Indiana agencies who provide direct care services to those with disabilities.

In the earliest weeks of the quarantine, we had already awarded \$138,190 in COVID-related Emergency Funding grants to 29 different agencies. We collaborated with other foundations to optimize our philanthropic efforts. We co-sponsored a CARES Act webinar where an expert panel showed non-profit organizations how to apply for relief funding. We also worked with Crosswinds Counseling to offer free counseling sessions to alleviate the stress felt by essential frontline workers serving individuals with disabilities.

# PHILANTHROPY



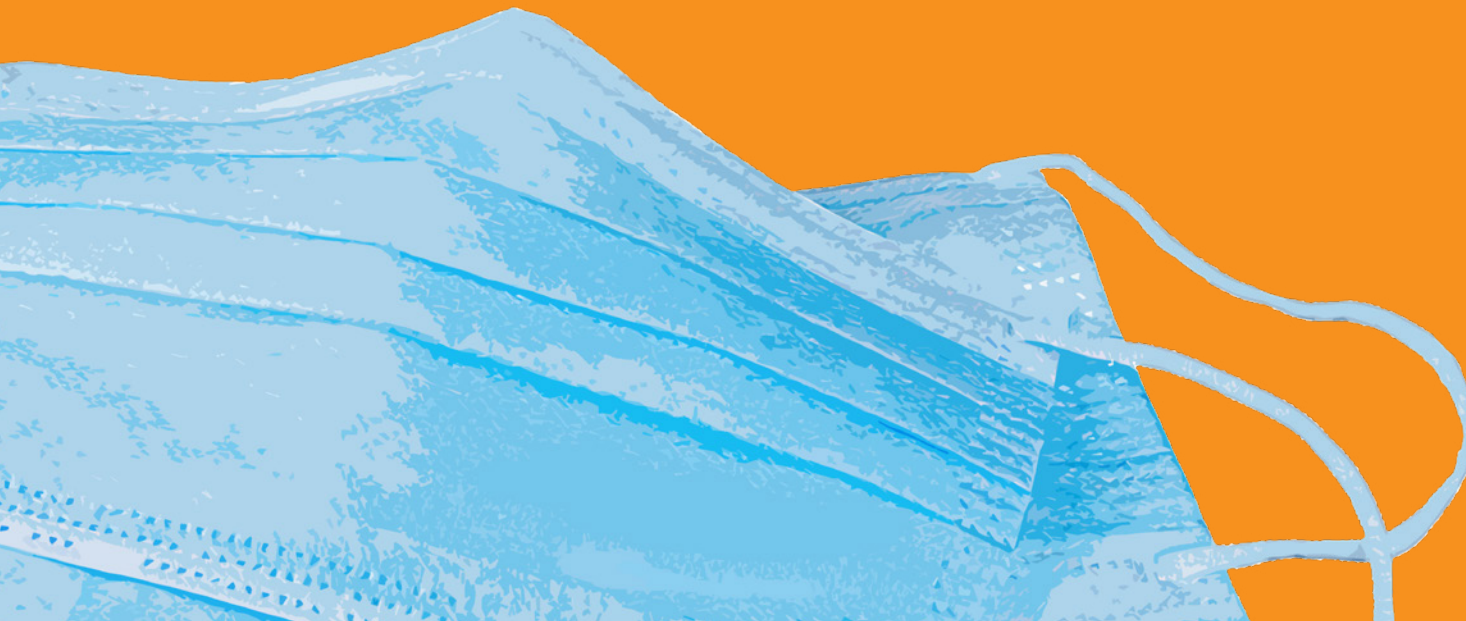
# TEAMWORK = RELIEF



WELCOME  
**RELIEF**

In one of the most exciting moments, we surprised 11 Northeast Indiana non profit disability service providers with emergency operating grants totaling \$550,000. Each organization received \$50,000 to help offset their increased expenses and loss of revenue due to the pandemic. The recipients were:

- Bi County Services
- Cardinal Services
- Carey Services
- Easterseals Arc of Northeast Indiana
- L.I.F.E. Adult Day Academy
- Passages
- Pathfinder Services
- RISE
- The Arc of LaGrange County
- The Arc of Noble County
- The Arc of Wabash County





Across Indiana, there are thousands of professional and volunteer organizations with programs, services, equipment and information that can improve the lives of individuals with disabilities. While they can be found online, most search results are ranked by advertising dollars and popularity, rather than search relevance. There has to be a better way.

**INTRODUCING FINDER, A FREE, EASY-TO-USE ONLINE RESOURCE DESIGNED TO COLLECT AND ORGANIZE CONTACT AND SERVICE INFORMATION FROM PROVIDERS AND GIVE PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES 24/7 ACCESS TO THE HELP THEY'RE LOOKING FOR, CLOSE TO HOME.**



# INFORMATION



Hundreds of times each day, FINDER connects people with the information they need to support individuals of varied abilities. A 23-member Advisory Council brings representatives from leading non-profit organizations, state entities and individuals with disabilities together to keep FINDER current, useful and growing.

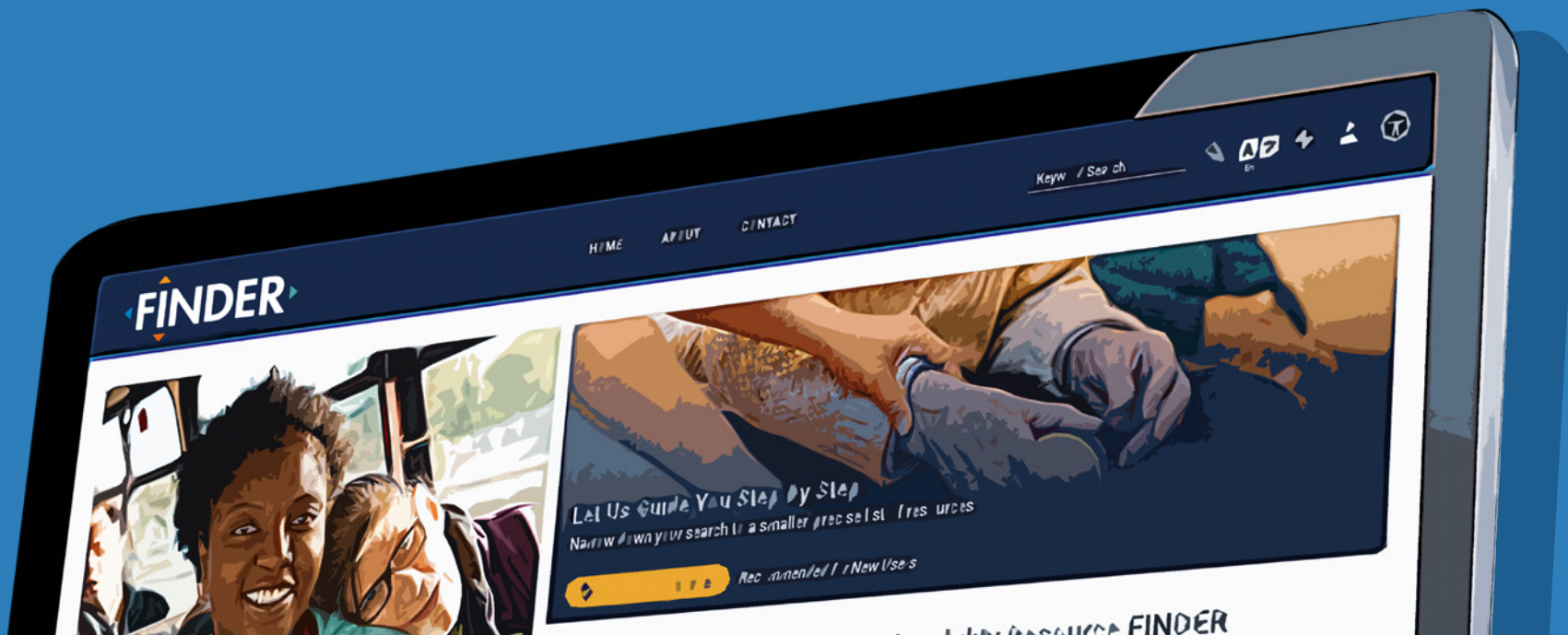
We are collaborating with Indiana Institute on Disability and Community (IIDC) at Indiana University Bloomington to transition FINDER's day-to-day operations to the IIDC team.



# SUPPORT = ANSWERS

INDIANADISABILITYRESOURCEFINDER.ORG

As the state's Center of Excellence for disability information, IIDC is in a unique position to help communities, the university and government entities share disability-related information. The collaboration will improve and expand FINDER's ability to provide training, technical assistance, service, research and information to the disability community and those that support them.



**EVERYONE LOVES A GOOD IDEA. IT'S EVEN BETTER WHEN OTHER ORGANIZATIONS JOIN IN TO IMPROVE THE IDEA AND MAKE IT PART OF EVERYDAY COMMUNITY LIFE.**

AWS Foundation recognized a need for sensory-friendly kits to be available at local venues. The goal was to help sensory-sensitive individuals relax and enjoy concerts, plays, festivals and other community events — without becoming overwhelmed by loud noises, bright lights and close spaces. Kits were developed and made available at no cost for use at several major public venues in Northeast Indiana. The popularity of these kits sent a message that inclusion was attainable through collaboration and minor alterations to programming.



**UNDERSTANDING**



**COLLABORATIVE ACTION = TOGETHERNESS**



of actionable sensory-friendly techniques to help every public event and venue become more accessible and enjoyable for all people — all the time.

**“ WE WERE EXCITED TO HAVE THIS RESOURCE AVAILABLE TO OUR FANS.”**  
MIKE NUTTER, TINCAPS TEAM PRESIDENT





**LOOK AT THE MOST EFFECTIVE EDUCATORS, AND YOU WILL SEE AN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM WHERE EVERY STUDENT CAN ACHIEVE THEIR PERSONAL BEST. THIS REQUIRES TEACHERS WITH A UNIQUE COMBINATION OF DEEP PERSONAL COMMITMENT AND SPECIALIZED TRAINING.**



The need for specialized training is especially true for teachers who work with children of varied abilities that face a wide range of challenging medical, developmental and emotional needs. It is not surprising that these gifted teachers are in high demand. As a result, special education positions often remain unfilled.

With the help of community partners, grants from AWS Foundation are making specialized training available to more teachers than ever before.

We offer scholarships to those working in or planning to work in special education in Northeast Indiana. Our fund at Community Foundation of Greater Fort Wayne supports licensed special educators seeking additional licensing in graduate school.

With the help of our loan forgiveness program at Questa Education Foundation, undergraduate students working on their degree in special education can focus on school without worrying about how they will pay for their education. We also provide funding opportunities to help area school districts implement evidence-based curriculums.

Additionally, we encouraged professional development for all teachers by sponsoring more than 120 Indiana educators representing 21 schools to attend the Focus on Inclusion 2020 Conference on inclusive education. Attendees selected training opportunities specially designed for their needs and level of teaching experience.

We believe that teachers are the building blocks to an inclusive and successful experience for all students. We will continue to partner with school systems and support programs that help equip teachers with the skills they need to match their passion for helping every student succeed.

# TRAINING



# COMMITMENT =

# BRIGHT FUTURES





We are all differently-abled to some extent. When we come together to recognize and respect our unique human differences, everyday life is improved — especially in the workplace. A neurodiverse workforce offers employers new perspectives and a greater range of talent. Higher-than-average abilities in special skill sets like pattern recognition, memory or mathematics are commonly found in some neurodiverse learners. Yet those affected often struggle to fit the profiles sought by prospective employers who seek those very skills.

That is where the partnership between The MindCAP Center and Blue Jacket can make the difference. With the support of AWS Foundation, they have collaborated to create a two-phase program designed to improve an individual's ability to gain and maintain employment.

Participants begin with The MindCAP program, maximizing learning potential as they acquire job and life skills that can be applied in a broad variety of situations.

Graduates of The MindCAP Center transition into Blue Jacket's Adapted Career Academy. This employment training program is designed to help individuals with developmental or intellectual disabilities discover the jobs that best fit their personality, interests and skills. When participants have completed both phases, the program introduces them to potential employers that can benefit from their unique talents.

**“THANKS TO THE BLUE JACKET PROGRAM,  
MY SON GOT THE HELP AND SUPPORT HE  
NEEDED — IT GAVE HIM CONFIDENCE TO  
SEE HIMSELF IN A NEW WAY.”**

— PROGRAM PARTICIPANT'S MOTHER



**ABILITY**



**NEURODIVERSITY = GOOD BUSINESS**





**“A MINI GRANT WITH A BIG IMPACT” IS THE IDEA BEHIND AWS FOUNDATION’S MIGHTY MONEY GRANTS. EACH YEAR, MANY MIGHTY MONEY GRANTEES TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE OPPORTUNITY TO TURN THEIR IDEA INTO A REALITY.**

Camp Red Cedar, Turnstone, the YMCA of Greater Fort Wayne and Easterseals Arc of Northeast Indiana recognized a need for individuals of all ages, and with varied abilities, to socialize. They combined their ideas to form the Fort Wayne Abilities Collaborative, an inclusive program built to bring teens and adults together through joint social activities. They started with a Mighty Money grant as “seed money” to develop and test their ideas as a pilot program. That small grant grew into a thriving program with greater support and community impact.

The Fort Wayne Abilities Collaborative created an inclusive environment where individuals with varied abilities meet new people and make new friends in relaxing natural settings. These activities have grown into regular events that participants truly enjoy. The program provides opportunities for increased self-esteem and confidence, positive social relationships, improved fine and gross motor skills, and energizing physical activity.

In addition to informal interactions with friends, individuals enjoy new experiences and develop their social skills and potential for personal growth through fun group activities.

Response has been overwhelmingly positive. Planned social events provide a safe, inclusive, non-judgmental, supportive environment for those with diverse abilities. Siblings and friends are welcomed at no cost to participants.

The Fort Wayne Abilities Collaborative is committed to finding ways to protect the health and safety of high-risk individuals even with the challenges of COVID-19, and continues to explore ways to expand and create new inclusive social opportunities for everyone.



**“WE LOVE INCLUSIVE EVENTS BECAUSE PEOPLE CAN MOVE AROUND FREELY, TALK AND BE THEMSELVES IN A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT.”**

**IDEAS**



**OPPORTUNITY = LASTING FRIENDSHIPS**





## 2019-2020 GRANT DISTRIBUTION

**EDUCATION & EMPLOYMENT** \$809,975

**SOCIAL ENRICHMENT** \$779,218

**TRANSPORTATION** \$225,000

**EARLY DIAGNOSIS &  
SYSTEM NAVIGATION** \$158,362

**+ FINDER** \$869,775

**HOUSING** \$141,000

**+ OTHER** \$1,838,243

**= \$4,821,573**

**AWS FOUNDATION IS PROUD TO  
WORK WITH ORGANIZATIONS  
THAT SHARE OUR PASSION FOR  
CREATING A MORE INCLUSIVE  
COMMUNITY. THANK YOU TO OUR  
2019-2020 GRANTEES FOR YOUR  
HARD WORK AND DEDICATION.**

**141  
GRANTS AWARDED**

55 EMERGENCY GRANTS  
**\$236,484**

22 MIGHTY MONEY GRANTS  
**\$38,268**

64 GENERAL GRANTS  
**\$3,677,046**

FINDER PROGRAM  
**\$869,775**

## 2019-2020 GRANTEES

Achieva Resources Corporation

all for One productions

Auburn Cord Duesenberg  
Automobile Museum

Audiences Unlimited

Autism Society of Indiana

Blue Jacket

Bowen Center

Byron Health Center

Camp PossAbility

Camp Red Cedar

Canine Companion

Cardinal Services

Carey Services

CASS Housing

CHAMP Camp

Children's Autism Center

Conner Prairie

Community Transportation  
Network

DeKalb County School District

Down Syndrome Association of  
Northeast Indiana

East Allen County School  
Corporation

Family Voices Indiana

Fort Wayne Ballet

Fort Wayne Citilink

Fort Wayne Civic Theatre

Fort Wayne Curling Club

Fort Wayne Dance Collective

Fort Wayne Park Foundation

Fort Wayne Philharmonic

GiGi's Playhouse

Healthier Moms and Babies

HearCare Connection

Heartland Sings

Huntington University

Indiana Legal Services

Joe's Kids

Little River Wetlands Project

Lutheran Social Services of  
Indiana

McMillen Health

Mental Health America of  
Northeast Indiana

One Heart Disability Ministries

Parkview Huntington Family YMCA

Parkview Warsaw YMCA

Passages

Pathfinder Services

RSVP of Allen County

Science Central

Special Olympics Indiana

The Arc of Indiana

The Arc of Wabash County

The Community Learning Center

The League for the Blind and  
Disabled

The MindCAP Center

Trine University

Visiting Nurse & Hospice Home

Visually Impaired Preschool  
Services

Volunteer Lawyer Program of  
Northeast Indiana

We Carry Kevan

Wellspring Interfaith Social  
Services

Whitley County Consolidated  
Schools

YMCA of Greater Fort Wayne

THINK DIFFERENTLY ABOUT DISABILITIES.



FOUNDATION

5323 W. Jefferson Blvd.  
Fort Wayne, IN 46804

[awsfoundation.org](http://awsfoundation.org)