

2024 ANNUAL REPORT

Belonging | Integrity | Growth

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Message from the President

2024 marked a half-century since a group of parents created what would become sisi. Their kids were becoming adults, and they needed supports. But nothing was available in the outlying parts of our region — so instead of complaining, they took action. They started a small program in a garage in Springville, and it is incredible to see what grew from that one small seed.

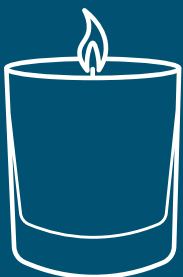
Did our founders imagine that sisi would be one of the 20 largest not-for-profit organizations in our region? Did they envision 50 sites in three counties, employing 700 people and supporting nearly 2,000 people each year? Did they anticipate that sisi would come to offer therapeutic horse riding, a dance program, and the SAGE janitorial and groundskeeping operation? Did they guess that sisi would one day own and operate the only metal kazoo factory in the United States? Could they have predicted a full array of residential supports, day services, preemployment and employment supports, clinical services, and in-home supports?

Probably not. And yet, everything that sisi is today was built on the foundation that was set down in 1974. For 50 years, sisi has kept evolving to meet the community's changing needs. We will continue to do that. With the legacy of our founders as a firm foundation, we will build an even brighter future. I'm confident that 50 years from now, people we've never met will celebrate progress that has not even entered our minds.

2024 was a time to celebrate our heritage, and to look ahead with a new three-year strategic plan to propel us forward. Please take a few minutes to reflect with us on this remarkable year — and thank you for helping to write sisi's story!



Jeff Paterson



In loving memory of those we lost in 2024

Robert Edwards Jr., Jacob Sheflin Jr., Anita Juda,
Roger Rueger, Fred Dunn, Mary Faiello, Irma Shea

MOW volunteers save woman's life

In January, Meals on Wheels volunteers from our Angola Day Hab saved the life of an elderly woman in danger.

The crew of Jon Soreno, John Fish, Julie Fleishman, Zack Allen, and Dan Ciesla, along with Habilitation Instructor Jim Carney, were out delivering on Jan. 3 when they discovered one of the meal recipients had fallen and couldn't get up. When the woman didn't answer her door, Jim and Jon walked back to the van to get her phone number. But when they did, they heard a voice call out.



"The woman's voice was too faint to really understand, so I turned off the van, to better hear what she was saying," Carney said. "She was yelling, 'Help' and saying she couldn't get to the door. She asked if we could call an ambulance, because the door was locked."

The two men returned to the van and quickly and calmly explained to the rest of the crew what was going on. They then called 911 and alerted emergency personnel to the situation. They then stayed until police arrived to explain what had happened.

First responders were able to break into the house and load the woman into an ambulance. She was transported to a local hospital.

Later, the crew returned to the day hab and relayed their story to the rest of the program participants and staff members.

"We used it as a teachable moment to reinforce with them how important our community volunteerism is in general and especially with the Meals on Wheels program," Carney said. "Because, sometimes, we are these peoples' only contact with the outside."

The crew received praise from the rest of those at the day hab and from representatives with Meals on Wheels. If they hadn't acted, the woman may not have received the medical attention she desperately needed.

"I have the utmost respect and appreciation for all those committed to dedicating their time to help serve people in our community," said Colleen Diebel, team leader at Angola Day Hab.



Lots of big changes at Moving Miracles Dance Studio in 2024

We celebrated our 26th year of operation with our first inclusionary recital with a “School of Rock” theme in May. The show was a huge success with our amazing dancers showcasing all of their hard work and talent.

Following the close of the 2023-2024 dance season, the studio hit the ground running with new opportunities and fun collaborations. Moving Miracles reinvigorated summer programming by offering a series of inclusionary workshops that were open to the community at the studio and also held our first off-site yoga class at Yoga6. We were invited to perform a special dance number and participate in the Make LemonAide Foundation for CP Laps for Love event last June. Moving Miracles also had the privilege to collaborate and perform with renowned violinist and composer, Tim Fain.

The fall of 2024 was met with new and exciting opportunities as Moving Miracles moved from rented studio space to a studio we own. In addition, we kicked off the season’s programming by increasing the number of solo classes available. We are excited to host a solo showcase in addition to our traditional end of year recitals in 2025.

In total, the 2023-2024 dance season provided 3,123 units of service to 104 students. In addition, dance programming through the summer provided an additional 85 units of service. The projected totals for the 2024-2025 dance season are 3,261 units of service to 124 students, with 1,395 units of service already having been provided in the 2024 portion of the dance season.



A year of change, challenge, and triumph at High Hurdles

It seems like there is never a year of simplicity at High Hurdles, but in some ways that is a good thing! We saw a lot of growth this year and experienced some growing pains as well. The lesson season started off well with riders coming back in full swing for the spring session. We saw steady growth in numbers for each session and were happy to see the farm active!

We were able to participate in some unique outreach opportunities and events including an Easter Egg Hunt, a July party, attending vet clinics and other Continuing Education opportunities, and attended DD Day, Equifest and a local school district's outreach fair. We continue to provide program support to our partners at Lothlorien Therapeutic Riding Center in East Aurora.

We unfortunately lost Rosie in the spring to a rampant infection that despite our best efforts was not able to be controlled. We brought on two other horses this year, Indy and Canyon from Rosie's connection.

In the Fall, an instructor transitioned to a DayHab position, and we hired Jocelyn Wilkins to fill her role. We had a few fun facility/equipment upgrades as well including the purchase of a new round pen, installation of fencing within the existing structure and some new equipment for the arena.

In 2024 we served a total of 100 unduplicated riders, providing nearly 1,200 individual lesson hours throughout the season which when compared to last year (72 riders and 640 units) is quite the jump!

We are looking forward to continuing to expand the program and its outreach in 2025!





‘Kindness Grows’ with new mural

Jill Hemmingway, a DSP at the East Aurora Day Hab, noticed their courtyard was missing something. So she proposed the idea of painting a mural on the wall. The goal was to create a vibrant, colorful garden that could be enjoyed year-round, no matter the weather—a bright and welcoming sight for anyone entering from King Street. After gathering input from staff and program participants, Jill learned everyone’s favorite colors and flowers, with one person even suggesting a butterfly.

Jill passed along all the details to her daughter, Claire, who created a sketch of the design. The wall was then scraped, power-washed, primed, and painted firefly blue. Once Claire transferred the design onto the wall, staff and program participants got to work painting. The project began in August and was completed in October.

The finished mural is a colorful garden that features the phrase “Kindness Grows Here”—a reminder that at East Aurora, they strive to be kind to everyone, continually learning, growing, and ensuring that all who visit feel welcome and included. Special thanks to Jill Hemmingway, Claire Hemmingway, Rebecca Swatsworth, Kristina Kuhn, Colby Carmer, and Craig Sherwood for their help and involvement in this special project!



sasi's 2024 Founders Award

sasi was founded 50 years ago by a group of parents who had an idea about the types of services that they would like to see for their sons and daughters. At that time, there were limited opportunities for family members with disabilities. They decided to put their ideas into action. Through a lot of hard work, dedication, and persistence, what started out from humble beginnings, operating out of a garage has metamorphosed into the multifaceted agency that we know today as sasi.

The Founders Award is based on this concept of good things coming from the germination of an idea coupled with determination, persistence, and hard work. The winner of the Founders Award is a staff person who exemplifies the attributes of the founding board members and whose ideas have helped to improve the agency and provide opportunities, influenced the people sasi supports, and has had a positive effect on the agency.



Greg Norton brings the laughter to sasi

Greg Norton is no comedian, but he knows how to get a big laugh. It's a deep, infectious laughter that he has been sharing with people throughout Western New York.

Since 2015, Greg has been leading a group of sasi employees and people we support in Laughter Yoga. Sounds like a hoot, doesn't it? It is. The focus of Laughter Yoga is to release endorphins in the brain to lighten the spirit, lower stress, relieve pain, improve mood, and promote an overall sense of well-being. Greg and his group of instructors have shared their Laughter Yoga with many sasi programs and functions. Recently, the team did presentations at a membership meeting for the Developmental Disabilities Alliance of Western New York (DDAWNY), and several other agencies have come calling, looking to get in on the fun.

For this reason, and for his years of dedication to the sasi mission, Greg was an easy choice to receive the 2024 Founders Award.

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“Laughter promotes relaxation,” Greg said. “Laughter boosts your immune system. Laughter improves your mood. Laughter prevents heart disease. Laughter shifts your perspective. Laughter allows us to entertain the absurd and imagine alternate possibilities. Laughter has social benefits. Most importantly, it is enjoyed by all who are willing to have fun and not worry about how they look doing it.”

President and CEO Jeff Paterson presented the Founders Award to Greg at the Annual Awards Breakfast in October. He credited Greg as being someone who radiates with energy, good humor, and a can-do spirit.

“Greg came to sisi with experience, and he was willing to tackle just about any task,” Paterson said. “He has consistently gone beyond his job description – assisting with curriculum ideas, creative problem solving, behavioral challenges, and so much more. He is always there during tough times, even leaving the building to respond to an incident, miles from the site.

“In addition to all of this, Greg is an aide for a sisi program participant. He arrives early in the morning to provide personal care and assistance, and then again after his shift in the evenings. Greg picks up many hours at some of sisi’s residential sites, where people have significant medical challenges. And in case you were wondering what he does in his spare time ... Greg is also a volunteer with the Moving Miracles dance program.”

Greg, in typical fashion, accepted the award humbly and placed the focus on the group, rather than just himself.

“I was asked what getting the Founders Award means to me,” Greg said. “I appreciate being recognized for the work that we do here for the people that we support and the effort that is put behind it. I enjoy the work that is done with the people we support, as everyone can learn and grow, and I have grown since I started working here 17 years ago. I look forward to learning and improving in my skills.”

From Adversity to Authorship: The story of Courtney Helmich

Courtney Helmich, who receives supports from sasi, has defied the odds at every turn. She wasn't expected to live to adulthood, graduate high school, or earn a college degree. But Courtney doesn't let expectations define her. Instead, she follows her determination wherever it leads—writing more than 20 books and sharing her remarkable journey.

Born in 1993 with cerebral palsy and quadriplegia, Courtney faced immense challenges from the start, with slim chances of survival. Yet by 2013, she had earned her Regents diploma from Pioneer High School. That same summer, she enrolled at Genesee Community College to pursue an associate's degree, inspired by her dream of becoming a special education teacher.

In 2018, Courtney proudly graduated. Determined to find a meaningful job, she sought assistance from ACCES-VR, a state-funded program that helps people with disabilities achieve their goals.

However, living in a seven-person home posed significant challenges. The demands of her environment, combined with her physical limitations, made her dream of employment seem increasingly out of reach. Courtney reflected, "I knew I wanted to make a difference. I wanted my story to be told, but it felt like there was nothing for me."

A heartfelt conversation with a close friend changed everything. "You should become an author and write about your story," her friend suggested.

Those simple words ignited a spark in Courtney. Writing under the pen name "Annie Lynne"—a tribute to a beloved horse from her childhood—she authored her first book, "This Is Me, Courtney Lynn," a memoir chronicling her life journey.

Her first book was published less than two years ago, and since then, she has written more than 20 books covering a wide range of topics. From heartfelt tributes to beloved caretakers and reflections on adaptive and assistive technology to navigating the process of acquiring a new wheelchair, Courtney's work shines a light on her life and experiences.

In her book "A Temporary Home," she emphasizes the importance of following your dreams despite life's brevity. "We are only on this earth for a short amount of time, so we have to make the most of it," says Courtney.





Community Living & Individual Support Services

APARTMENTS

The Ennio Cerquetti and Elliott Woods apartment buildings each have 12 single apartments available for rent to people with a disability. These units provide affordable, accessible housing in a community where public transportation is available. Elliott Woods experienced no tenant turnover in 2024 while Ennio Cerquetti welcomed two new tenants. The end of year occupancy rate at both buildings was 100%.

Through the support of grant and foundation funding, Sasi was able to tackle some projects at this site which significantly increase the comfort and safety of the location for the tenants. Some of these projects include additional automatic door openers on all shared spaces within the buildings and additional security cameras on site. Moving forward, long-term plans to sustain the units and systematically replace and maintain property have been established. We were able to make progress on some of these projects as well including replacing flooring in some of the units and upgrading the vent system to ensure reliable heating during snow events.

SUPPORT BROKERAGE

The self-direction program continues to evolve and provide unique opportunities for people to coordinate their supports and make more independent service planning decisions, specifically through the involvement of their Support Broker. The Support Broker department at Sasi developed further throughout 2024 and by the end of the year added a full-time broker. By the end of 2024, the Support Broker program was providing service to 123 people, which reflects an increase of 21 new enrollments. It is anticipated that this program will continue to grow and develop throughout 2025.

THE HOUSING SUBSIDY PROGRAM

Housing subsidies are offered through OPWDD in the form of Individual Support Subsidies (ISS) to assist people with establishing and maintaining independent housing. Enrollment remained steady in 2024 and is expected to continue to grow throughout 2025.

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Community

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HOURLY WAIVER RESPITE

Hourly waiver respite is provided in a variety of settings to meet the needs of families and provide caregiver relief. Some of the programming options under hourly waiver respite include agency supported self-directed respite, in-home respite, site-based respite, and recreation respite. The program's enrollment and provided units of service increased from 2023 in all program areas. Enrollment and participation in these programs is anticipated to continue growing throughout 2025!

COMMUNITY HABILITATION

Community Habilitation is an HCBS Waiver service that provides support to people with developing and maintaining the skills to live as independently as possible. People work with Community Support Professionals to develop and maintain skills in a variety of areas associated with household chores, financial management, social skills, community safety, etc. In addition to traditional Community Habilitation programming, we offer other ways to receive Community Habilitation supports through either Agency Supported Self-Direct Community Habilitation, or Community Habilitation-R.

SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT AND ACCES-VR SERVICES

OPWDD Supported Employment Hours Billed 2023 = 7804 Hours

ACCES-VR Hours of Service Provided 2023 = 1,341.59 Hours

OPWDD Supported Employment Hours Billed 2024 = 8606.25 Hours

ACCES-VR Hours of Service Provided 2024 = 798.77 Hours

After an initial pause to some ACCES-VR supports at the beginning of 2024, the program got back on track toward mid-year and finished the year strong! The Supported Employment Department underwent some significant changes in last quarter of the year as they moved under Community Support Services Programming at sasi. The services provided through the Supported Employment Department continue to provide job training support from Job Developers/Trainers to assist people with developing the employment skills needed to obtain and maintain meaningful, community integrated employment. In addition, this department also provides various vocational skill assessments and training to assist students in preparing for competitive employment after high school. We are excited for the future of employment programming at sasi and have a variety of new opportunities to further develop these supports and services in 2025!



1974 50 YEARS celebrating 2024 sasi

2024 Revenue and Expenses

Revenue:

Government Revenue	\$	46,690,777	85.35%
HUD	\$	33,589	0.06%
Subcontract Sales	\$	3,300,823	6.03%
Program Participant Fees	\$	3,096,546	5.66%
Clinic 3rd Party Reimbursement	\$	135,260	0.25%
Investments	\$	1,021,951	1.87%
Contributions	\$	266,858	0.49%
Gain on Disposal of Assets	\$	43,270	0.08%
Miscellaneous	\$	118,460	0.22%
Total Revenues	\$	54,707,534	100.00%

Expenses:

Personal Services	\$	33,078,905	64.92%
Fringe Benefits	\$	8,175,518	16.05%
Professional Fees	\$	469,768	0.92%
Supplies	\$	1,679,093	3.30%
Utilities	\$	844,587	1.66%
Building Maintenance	\$	1,210,266	2.38%
Leased Facilities	\$	445,671	0.87%
Insurance	\$	531,670	1.04%
Equipment Expense	\$	1,387,534	2.72%
Individual & Staff Transportation	\$	1,679,010	3.30%
Workshop Expense	\$	497,219	0.98%
Interest Expense	\$	73,094	0.14%
Depreciation Expense	\$	558,333	1.10%
Miscellaneous Expense	\$	320,815	0.63%
Total Expenses	\$	50,951,483	100.00%

(Net Deficit)/Surplus \$ 3,756,051

2024 sasi Foundation grants

Darien Road IRA - backyard fence - \$12,950
 George Street IRA - backyard fence - \$4,680
 Symphony IRA - shed - \$6,500
 Tramore IRA - ceiling lift - \$2,350
 Wexford IRA - awning - \$6,450
 Elliott Woods Apartments - security system - \$11,296.34
 High Hurdles - fencing - \$6,400
 Donegal IRA - storage shed - \$6,200
 Waterford IRA - second floor laundry - \$12,400

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Mary Moglia-Cannon

Matthew & Kelly Mattison

Anthony Serafini

Brian English

Kathleen Noone

R. Rupp

In honor of Jeffrey Pietraszewski

Arthur & Rosemary Pietraszewski

In honor of Vivienne Przylucki

Gretchen Sherman

In memory of Roger Rueger

Eugene & Ingrid Timmel

Tammy Yekich

In memory of David Sears

Dale Porter

In memory of Scott Stoberl

Julie Mooney

In memory of Bruce Allen Wallace

Lillian & Howard Wallace

In honor of Tricia Yekich

Michael Kait

Mission:

Connecting people with creative opportunities
that honor their choices and fit their lives.

Vision:

The people we support are fulfilled in their lives,
respected in their community, and secure in their future.