



# AACORN

## 2021 ANNUAL REPORT



**CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF EXPANDING  
CHOICES AND BUILDING COMMUNITY**



# EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT



Eric Birko was hired in November, 2020

When presented with a challenge – you can rise to meet it, try to wait it out and see if it passes, or run the other way. AACORN looked at the year that was 2021 and got to work. While things like COVID-19 still were present, AACORN was able to overcome various obstacles with a healthy dose of outside the box thinking. We persevered through generous support from our friends, families, and community partners. AACORN didn't just survive 2021 – we grew and are stronger today because of it. In 2021, there were a lot of improvements made to our farm. We partnered with Tilers International to install a tower providing consistent internet access. We achieved MAEAP certification, which means that we are considered a top performing farm program paying attention to environmental issues such as erosion and conservation while being good stewards of the land we utilize. AACORN had several volunteer groups come out and complete meaningful projects including painting our barn, re-roofing our soap and salad shed, and creating a beautiful fire pit and seating area. AACORN celebrated our 10-year anniversary in July of 2021. We hosted our annual event on site and celebrated all those who helped make AACORN what it is today. We unveiled an early plan sketch for our residential component that officially kicked off with the Residential Planning Committee forming in the fall of 2021. The sky's the limit for us here at AACORN and we are excited for what this new year will bring!

Eric Birko  
Executive Director

## CHECK OUT THE SKILL-BUILDING PROGRAM

AACORN is a program for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities whose participants are all over 18 years old. Although Michigan provides special educational programming to age 26, once students age out of school there are very few program options and they are frequently left with nothing of meaning or purpose to fill their days. AACORN exists to provide that meaning and purpose as well as valuable social connections. If you are interested, follow these steps:

- 1) Contact us by phone at 269-348-0985 or through our website at [aacorncommunity.org](http://aacorncommunity.org)
- 2) Set up a tour and interview at the farm to see if the program is going to be a fit
- 3) Following the farm visit, if there is still interest, the new potential participant (or family) completes the application and scholarship forms
- 4) Applications are reviewed and the Program Director contacts parents to complete the scholarship process and add the new participant to the schedule

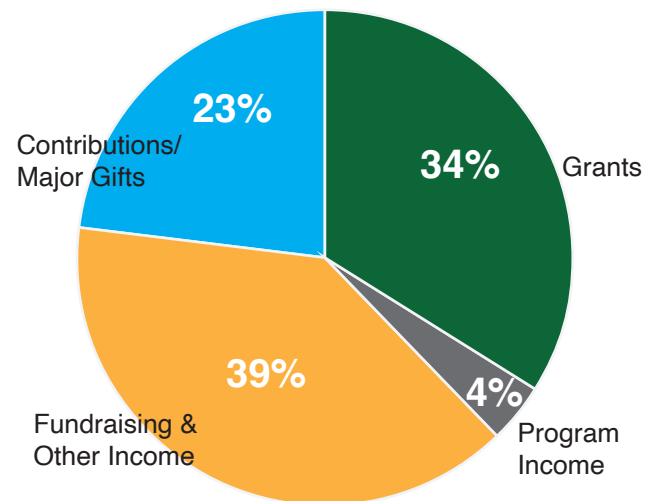
**FEES:** We charge a fee for each session, but most participants do not pay full fees. Lack of ability to pay should not be the reason to stay away; we work with families to arrive at fees that fit their budget.

**PROGRAM SESSIONS:** 9-11:30 and 12:30-3. Some participants stay all day and bring a sack lunch.

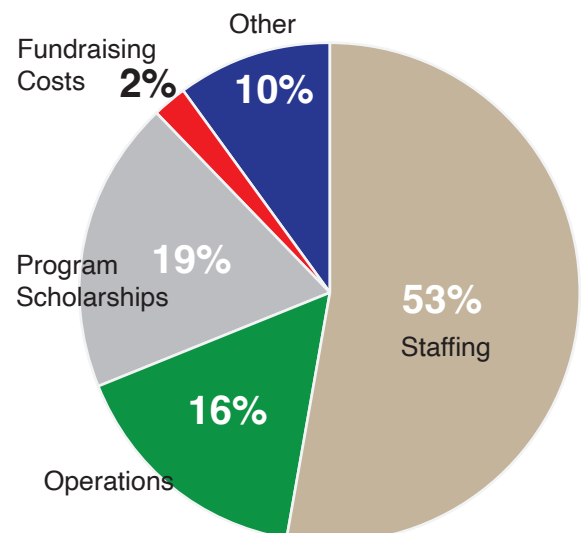
**TRANSPORTATION:** As AACORN is in Kalamazoo County, many of our participants use the Metro County Connect to attend. We have a scholarship in place to pay for transportation and might soon provide a pick up and drop off service ourselves. We currently have a short waiting list, but are always interested in new participants, including those from surrounding counties.

**NOTE:** At this point it is difficult to accommodate participants with significant physical disabilities, but we are moving towards greater accessibility.

## Revenues: \$419,907



## Expenses: 353,375



## VOLUNTEERS MAKING A DIFFERENCE



Kevin Kuss is new to us. He has already completed one project with our participants, a new bench, and they are currently working on building an outdoor rabbit hutch with other projects lined up. Kevin comes out to AACORN Monday and Wednesday morning each week. He has a gentle and friendly manner, making him so accessible to our participants and they are always excited to see him pull in.



Mary Galer started last summer with us after she visited the farm. We love having Mary out here! She is such a self starter— last summer/fall she spend a great deal of time working out in the garden area, helping us with some of the more overgrown sections that needed to be hand weeded so we didn't accidentally harm the plants we wanted to keep. As we transitioned into the colder months, Mary came indoors and helped teach us some valuable skills in quilt development and other craft organization and ideas.

## FEATURED PARTICIPANTS: CHARLES AND EMILY

### Charles Oisten / Participant since 2019

You know when Charles has arrived at AACORN. How you may ask? The room sees him pull up and a big cheer of "Charles is here!" erupts. And that's just how he likes it. Charles comes to the farm a couple of times a week with a smile on his face and eager to discover what activities we might be up to that session.

When asked what his favorite activity is when he comes to the farm – he slyly smiled and said cooking. Charles has shown some serious talent in the AACORN kitchen, making some healthy meals and snacks to share with the other participants and staff. He adores spending some snuggle time with our rabbit Marshmallow. But when pressed, he said that the best part of AACORN is getting to come out and see his friends a couple times a week. We couldn't agree more.



### Emily Sergeant / Participant since 2014

Emily is a long-time participant of AACORN. She knows the ins and outs of our day so well that at any given time, she might remind us that it's time for a walk or ask why we haven't yet fed the kitties. She is beloved by her friends, her favorite kitty "Dewey", and the staff alike. Emily shared that she likes going on our walks (when the weather is good of course) and has demonstrated a lot of

skill in our craft room. She has made some neat projects, including an apron that mimics Dorothy from "The Wizard of Oz" (another of her favorites). She wanted to make sure that everyone knew though... her favorite person here is our one and only Liz Farnar. "Liz makes me happy". Emily – you do that for us too!





# OUR 2021 DONORS

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Brian Powers  
Carol Pratt  
Laura Probyn

## IN MEMORIAM

In 2021, Billy Demink, long time participant and friend of AACORN passed away. His smile and his energy were contagious and we miss him every day.



Rein & Chris Pukk  
Karen Rangler  
Mark & Jill Reed  
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Rodney Rieth  
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Bonnie Whetstone  
Joan & Gordon Williams  
Susan Williams  
Mark & Margaret Williams  
Thorsten Willman - Leigh Ann Sayen  
David Wochaski

Douglas & Margaret Wood  
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Louise Wright- Curt Leibbrand  
Jane & Bob Ziemer  
Robert & Jane Ziemer  
Bryan Zocher

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Woods Cultivation LLC

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