

2025 ANNUAL REPORT



Volunteering for Community Organizations



CHAMPIONING OUR COMMUNITY

Enjoying our Community Parks and Attractions



Expanding Options. Building Community.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



As I reflect on 2025, I am most proud of how AACORN strengthened its connection to the greater community. AACORN remains a supportive, inclusive, farm-based program where adults with intellectual and developmental differences experience meaningful work, belonging, and growth. While we have built a strong and vibrant community on our farm, this year we intentionally focused on giving back to the community that makes our work possible, as featured in photos on the front cover.

In 2025, AACORN participants and staff contributed more than 1,000 service hours to charitable organizations throughout Kalamazoo County. We also spent more time in the community exploring recreational opportunities and strengthening relationships beyond our gates. This year affirmed something important: community is not just where we gather — it is something we actively create and contribute to. That is the heart of our work at AACORN.

With gratitude, Mary Pickett

COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS AT AACORN

The staff at AACORN are busy during the day with providing active, side-by-side support to our participants. They all work hard, but there needs to be a good balance between tasks like animal care and gardening and less taxing indoor activities, as well as travels in the community for shopping or fun. This means that there are limits to what staff and participants can accomplish during Program hours. Therefore, we are so grateful for the teams of volunteers who came out to the farm in 2025. They accomplished so much!

Stryker May

They worked both indoors and out. Indoors, volunteers cut paper for goat milk soap packaging, wrapped soap bars, and cut fabric to decorate the tops of jar mixes. Outdoors, other volunteers dug a pig wallow for our potbelly pigs, who immediately wallowed in to enjoy it.



About the Cover Photos

Volunteering for Community Organizations:

Clockwise from bottom left photo:

- Helping out at Loaves & Fishes, Kalamazoo
- Putting packs together at Generous Hands, Vicksburg
- Filling food bags at Salvation Army, Kalamazoo
- Assembling hygiene and period packs at Care Collective of SWMI, Kalamazoo

Enjoying our Community, from left:

- Trip to Binder Park Zoo, Battle Creek
- Visiting Kalamazoo Valley Museum, Kalamazoo
- Trip to Lakeview Park, Portage
- Trip to Scotts Mill Park, Scotts

These photos show just a sample of the many places we have traveled to, learned about, and enjoyed throughout the community this past year.

Parker Hannifin June

Several teams of employees worked over four days and accomplished a great deal. They removed the garden fence and put up a new one, expanded the pasture, and spread mulch on the garden pathways. They also weeded along the pasture fence line and the activities building, organized and cleaned out the basement, and cleaned out the produce barn. What a lot of work they did! They were rewarded with hanging out with the goats afterward.



AACORN Board:

- Liz Farner
- John Best
- Francis Cirvencic
- Hilary Dolbee
- Athens Love
- Andy Robins
- Jeanne Trompeter
- Cindy Semark
- Larry Schimmel

AACORN Staff:

- Mary Pickett, Executive Director
- Sam Meyers, Program Manager
- Autumn Cieslak, Property Manager
- Elise Ripmaster, Administrative Asst
- Sanny Miller, Program Staff
- Leana Best, Program Staff
- Beth Taylor, Program Staff
- Josh Cotter, Farm Assistant

COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS, Cont.

KVCC Girls Volleyball August



Members of the team came out and built a new goat play fixture, and the goats definitely approve!



WMU students and faculty making friends with a doe in the doe barn

Plante Moran Oct/November, seven different days

Plante Moran volunteers worked hard on a large fencing project. They built a new pasture fence around the full pasture with a sturdy type of fencing called cattle panel.

Other volunteer groups who came out and worked were from **Bells Brewery**, **Lake Effect**, and **WMU students** exploring occupational therapy and other health career opportunities through a summer program at the university.



AACORN Community Project



The acronym 'AACORN' is a clue to our commitment from the start to provide residential options for the adults we support. With the 'ORN' in AACORN standing for "option for residential needs," we have always had a goal of building residences once the skill-building program was well established.

The Residential Task Force has been meeting for two years, navigating the complexities that include design, funding, and regulatory approval. During this process, the program and its activities have outgrown the capacity of the Activities Building that was completed in 2020. Simply put, AACORN needs more space to function efficiently. Out of this need grew the concept of including a large multi-use building with the residential building plan, and the AACORN Community Project was created.

AACORN is excited to embark upon this ambitious capital project to 1) construct the first of four planned duplexes, each housing six adults, and 2) building a 10,000- square-foot community center. Both the duplexes and the community center are projected to be financially self-sustaining after the initial construction costs. The rentals from the duplexes will cover their operating costs, and the community center will be promoted as a rental venue for a variety of recreational and meeting uses in addition to expanding the programming options for our participants.

The AACORN Community Project expects to make significant progress in 2026, bringing us closer to breaking ground on these two buildings.



Hosting our first-ever Breakfast of Champions fundraiser was another highlight of the year, and the response was overwhelming. It was a powerful reminder that when people understand our mission, they want to be part of it.

Although it took place early in the morning, attendees appreciated that it took only an hour of their time, from the continental breakfast to the final wrap up. The program was packed with meaningful testimonials from participants and parents.



AACORN participant speakers with parents and supporters

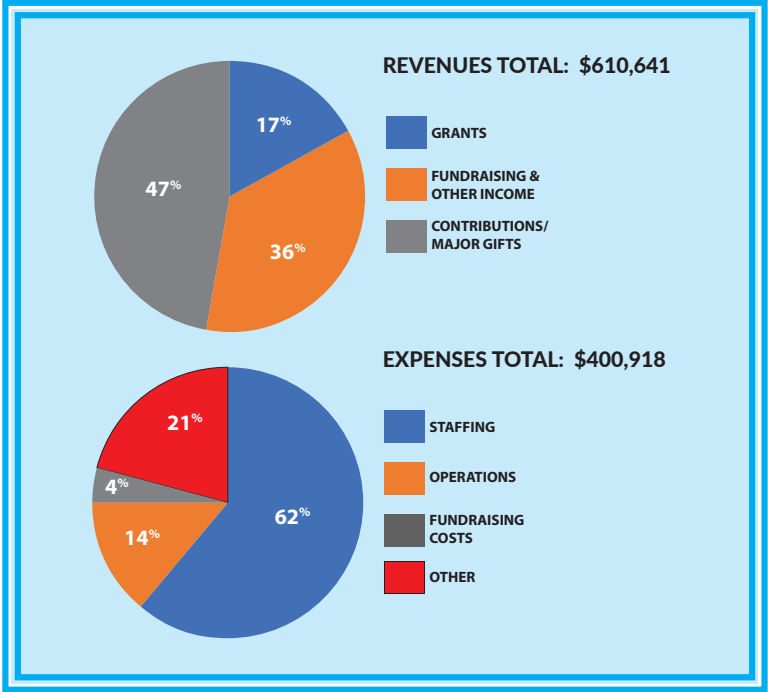
Farewell To A Friend...The AACORN family was very saddened to learn of the sudden death of Andy Robins early in December, 2025. While well known in the area for his work on radio station WMUK, he was known to us as a dedicated parent to participant Noah and an AACORN Board member for two years. He could always be counted on to deliver the exact Robert's Rule we needed to keep the meeting on track. We miss you, Andy.

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