



AACORN

Expanding Choices. Building Community.
Enriching Lives.

OUR VISION, MISSION & VALUES

EXPANDING CHOICES BUILDING COMMUNITY

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AACORN: Adult Agricultural Community Option for Residential Needs

The mission of AACORN is to provide life enrichment opportunities and residential options for adults with intellectual and developmental differences in a supportive inclusive community.

AACORN envisions adults with intellectual and developmental differences embraced as valued members of a diversely-abled community while experiencing success through innovative approaches to learning and living.

- ✓ Finding purpose
- ✓ Mutual respect
- ✓ Lifelong learning
- ✓ Perseverance
- ✓ Positive relationships
- ✓ Community service
- ✓ Environmentalism
- ✓ Self-advocacy
- ✓ Healthy living



HELLO

FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Dear Friends of AACORN,

I am excited to connect with you as AACORN's Executive Director. At AACORN, we believe that lives are transformed by Expanding Choices and Building Community, and I feel incredibly honored to be part of an extraordinary group of people who live and breathe this mission each day.

Our work at AACORN is all about providing enriching opportunities for adults with intellectual and developmental differences (IDD). Here, transformation truly happens. Our participants are embraced as valued members of a diversely-abled community, experiencing success through innovative approaches to learning and growth. AACORN was founded in 2011 by a small group of parents whose initial goal was to secure a long-term residential option for their family member. However, they soon realized the greater need for adults who have aged out of school was an appropriate program they could attend, so the focus shifted. AACORN was awarded 501(c)3 status in 2013 and our skill-building program was held at various locations. Now, nestled on our beautiful 40-acre farm, our participants engage in meaningful, hands-on activities that help them build confidence and independence. Working side by side with their peers and our dedicated staff, they not only build skills but also lifelong relationships. This is more than a program—it's a community where everyone thrives and finds their place.

For adults with IDD and their families, AACORN is a place of supportive welcome and hope, especially for those facing limited post-graduation options. Knowing your loved one is in a place that meets their needs with care and quality programming means everything.

I invite you to join us in this journey of transformation. With your support, we can continue to provide the unique resources and opportunities that make a real difference in our participants' lives. Please consider joining other AACORN supporters in empowering our adult participants and enriching our inclusive community.

Thank you for being a part of the AACORN family.

Warmly,

Mary Pickett



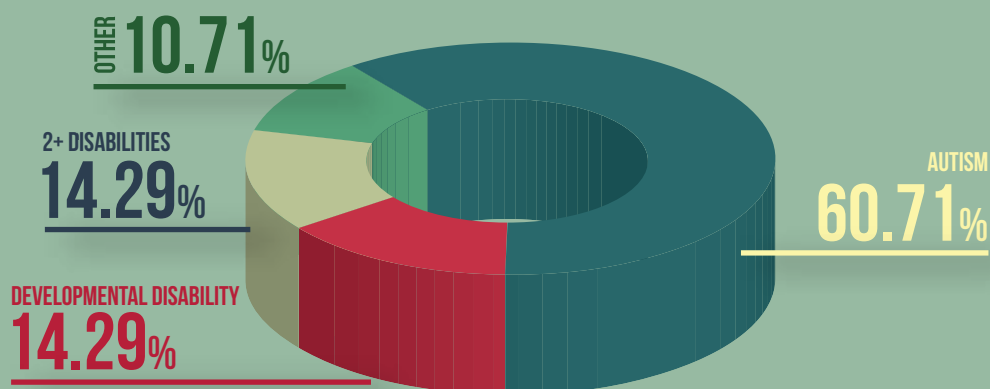
WHO WE SERVE

OUR COMMUNITY IN FOCUS

UNDERSTANDING

PARTICIPANT DIFFERENCES

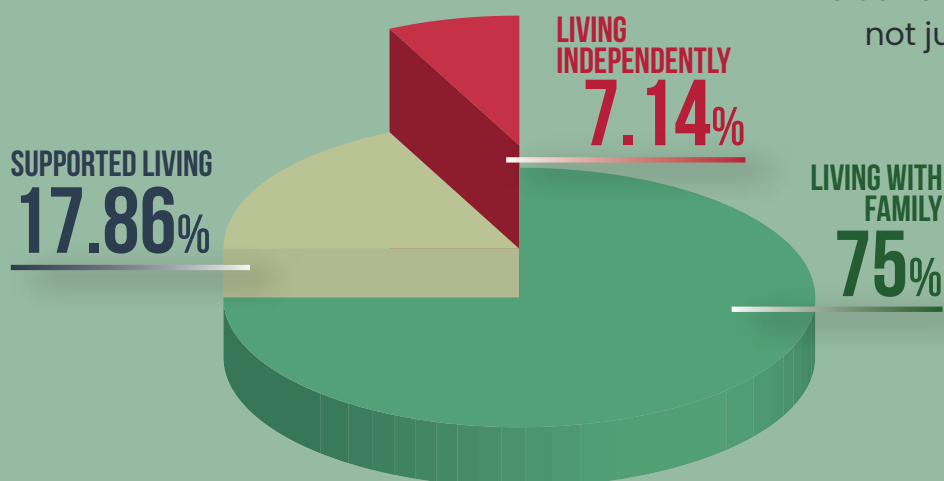
Understanding the challenges our participants face helps us create life enrichment opportunities that are truly person-centered. By tailoring programming to their specific abilities and needs, we foster a supportive, inclusive environment where each individual can experience success, build meaningful relationships, and thrive as valued members of a diversely-abled community.



PARTICIPANT

CURRENT LIVING SITUATIONS

Our participants live in a range of settings – from family homes to supported living – but many need more than housing; they need a true community. AACORN's vision for an inclusive residential option will provide not just a place to live, but a place to belong, grow and thrive alongside peers in a supportive community.



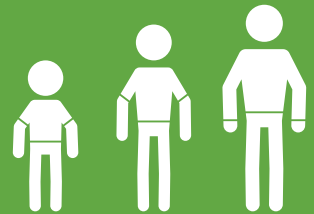
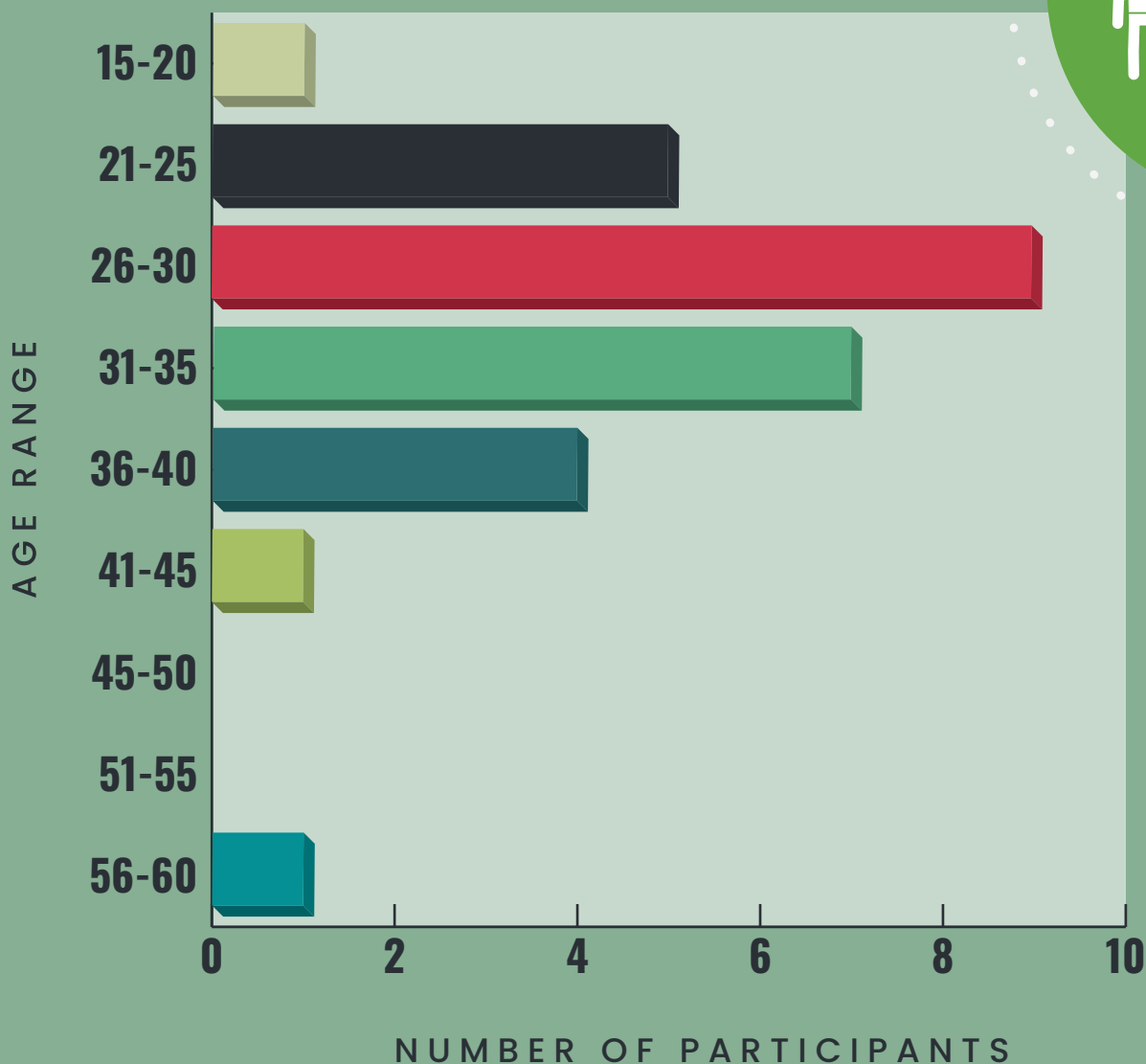
WHO WE SERVE

SUPPORT FOR ALL AGES

Since the fall of 2024 AACORN has provided tuition-free programming for all participants

PARTICIPANT

AGE RANGE



WHY SUPPORT US

YOUR SUPPORT MEANS GROWTH

AACORN

GROWTH CHART



Part Time Staff



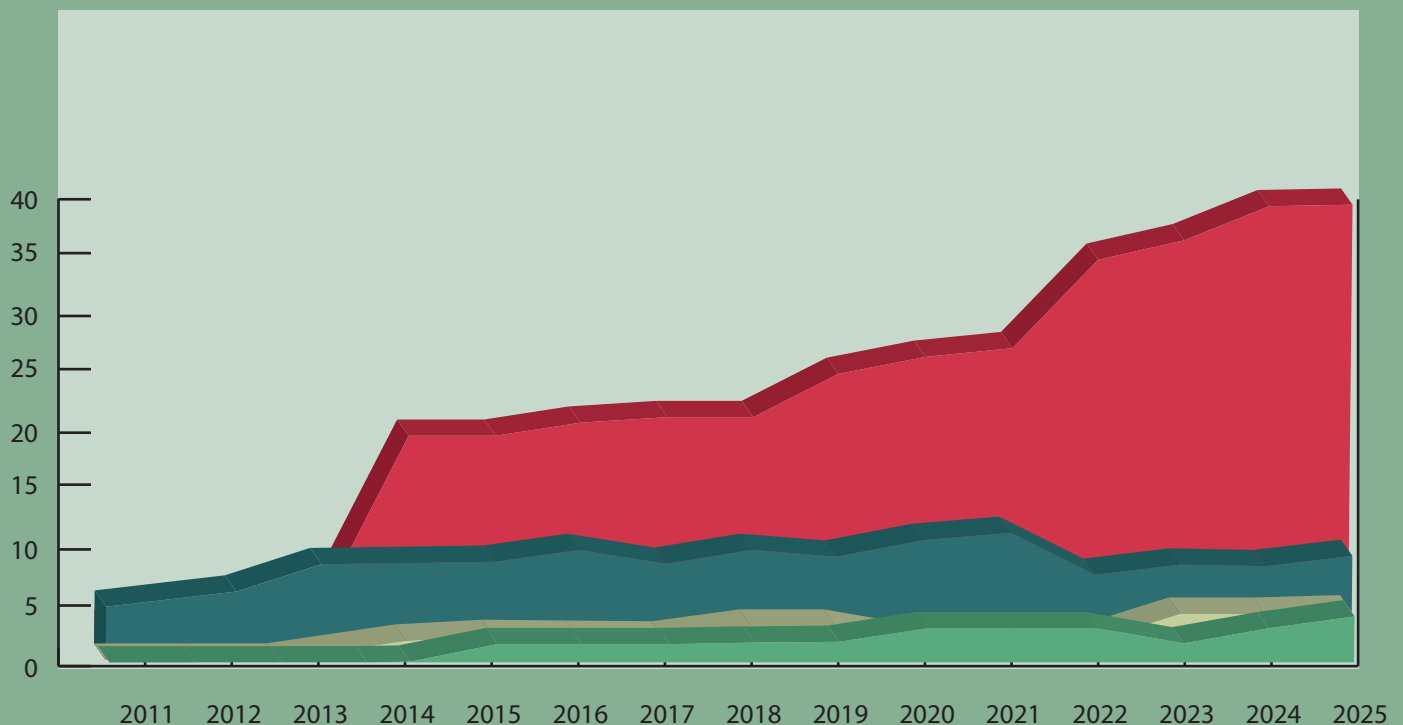
Full Time Staff



Board Members



Participants



Operational Note:

2011 - 2019: Program was available 4 days a week

2020 - Present: Program is available 5 days a week

Fall 2024 - Present: Programming is tuition free

IMPACT

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Each year, AACORN contributes to our community in ways like those shown here.



Food Pantry / Shelter Donations

80+ pounds of produce
100+ dozen eggs
15+ pounds of soap provided to benefit our community



Volunteerism

400+ hours of AACORN providing hands-on service to strengthen and support other nonprofits in our community



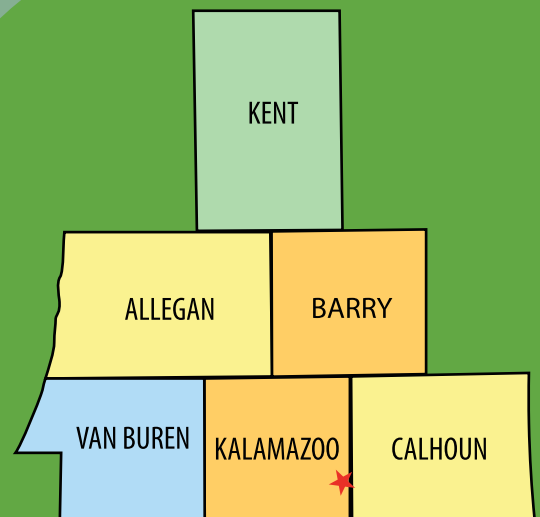
Community Engagement

Participants engaged in the community at 25+ local establishments



Employment Opportunities

20% of AACORN participants maintain paid part-time employment in our community



Welcoming participants from these counties to our farm.

TESTIMONIALS

HEAR FROM FOUNDERS

There is a significant lack of meaningful engagement for people with different abilities once they age out of the school system. Too often, they are left without purpose, connection, or support. At AACORN, we've seen firsthand how transformative it can be when these individuals are given a place to belong—a place where they are valued, supported, and celebrated for who they are.

AACORN is one of the few places in our community where adults with developmental differences can build real friendships, discover new interests, and experience the joy of meaningful activity in a supportive environment. It is a place of hope, connection, and possibility.

But the need is greater than ever. As we look toward the future, we envision expanded enrichment opportunities—on the farm and in the community. We see a need for transportation support, job coaching, therapies like OT, PT, or speech, and more accessible spaces so those with physical challenges can fully participate. These dreams are within reach—but only with the continued support of our community.

AACORN's survival and growth depend on people like you. Beyond funding, we rely on the generosity of volunteers, the donation of goods and services, and the simple act of sharing our mission with others.

We hope AACORN will always be known as a place of joy, friendship, and belonging—a safe haven that changes lives. We hope others will help us continue this vital work. Every gift—of time, resources, or funding—helps AACORN grow and ensures more lives are touched in meaningful, lasting ways.

Dr. Liz Farner, Founder

Before AACORN existed, I had to pull my son out of his day program because he was becoming aggressive and intolerant of its large group numbers and noisy atmosphere. I knew he needed a slower pace and quieter surroundings and I didn't want him to become isolated and bored with nothing to do. I reached out to other parents like myself to explore a farm-based program, and we created AACORN.

At first we envisioned building residences for adults with intellectual and developmental differences, but we realized that the greater need was for activities they could do during the day, and began working on that first. We began a skill building program on rented farm property until we were able to purchase our own forty-acre farm.

Our 10th anniversary celebration held at the farm made me proud to look back and see all we had accomplished, with years of success and growth to reflect on. We were no longer a fledgling, startup organization. While I take pride in the fact that the creation of AACORN started with me, it takes a village to accomplish great things. It is only through the commitment and hard work of many dedicated individuals that AACORN has grown and succeeded.

It gives me lasting satisfaction to know that AACORN has transformed many lives, not just the life of my son. It shaped me in a way I did not anticipate when my son died. I found peace in knowing that the struggles he faced were in fact the seeds that planted the AACORN tree. This is not just my legacy, but his.

Cindy Semark, Founder and Parent



Pictured: Mary Pickett, Executive Director;
Dr. Liz Farner, Founder;
Cindy Semark, Founder – Author
Photo Credit:
Encore Magazine/Brian Powers

TESTIMONIALS

HEAR FROM FAMILIES

Tom has grown in so many meaningful ways since becoming part of the AACORN community. One of the most significant changes has been his ability to complete tasks independently—something that remained out of reach despite over 20 years in special education. Today, Tom takes great pride in doing a job well, and that sense of accomplishment means the world to us.

AACORN has also helped Tom's communication. Using a combination of his limited verbal language and writing, he now connects with staff and peers in ways he couldn't before. His motivation comes from wanting to be part of something—and at AACORN, he's found true friendship and a strong sense of belonging.

He especially loves caring for animals, helping with chores, and being part of the daily rhythm. These are not just tasks to him—they are purposeful, fulfilling contributions. It was because of Tom's love of animals and my desire to create new opportunities for adults with disabilities in the Kalamazoo community that I became a founding board member of AACORN.

I'm deeply grateful for AACORN. It's a place that honors every individual, offering encouragement and opportunity in an environment that is both nurturing and empowering. I've seen how lives change here—how confidence, pride, and connection begin to bloom.

My dream is that AACORN will one day include residential housing. I imagine Tom waking up in his own apartment on AACORN's property, walking across the field to care for the animals he loves. That would be more than a dream fulfilled—it would be a life of meaning, dignity, and joy.

Cathy Pinto, Parent and Founding Board Member



At first, I couldn't convince Nick to try AACORN. But after a visit on a quiet day—guided by a former teacher and Liz Farner—something shifted. Seeing the space and familiar faces helped him feel comfortable. At that point in his life, Nick had been narrowing his interests and social interactions, so simply choosing to attend AACORN was a big step forward.

AACORN offered what other programs couldn't: a peaceful, welcoming environment where he wasn't overwhelmed by noise or crowds. It gave him the chance to connect—with staff, participants, and volunteers—in a way that felt safe and meaningful.

- Nick enjoys being active and chooses to take part in daily walks and farm chores. He especially loves seeing the animals and talking about them with others. These simple joys have brought back a sense of purpose.

- Before AACORN, Nick had been living in a supported apartment but spent most of his time alone, following a comfortable, repetitive routine. Knowing he now spends two afternoons a week in a place where he is engaged, valued, and surrounded by a caring community means the world to his father and me.

- AACORN is the one program that truly understands his unique needs—providing structure, community, and meaningful activity in a way no traditional day program ever has.

I encourage any parent of an adult with Autism or similar challenges to consider AACORN. For those who need calm, connection, and a sense of belonging, AACORN is a rare and beautiful gift.

Jill Reid, Parent



DONATIONS

HOW DONATIONS CHANGE LIVES



There are different ways to donate to AACORN, here are just a few.



Individual Donations



Give a recurring or one-time gift. Recurring gifts provide budget stability.



Acorn Donation

\$1 – \$99

\$50 provides 6 round trip Metro Connect Passes fostering independence of our participants.



Seedling Donation

\$100 – \$249

\$150 feeds goats or chickens for a month—supporting growth through daily farm routines.



Sapling Donation

\$250 – \$499

\$420 provides a month of supplies for enriching activities and meaningful engagement for all AACORN participants.



Young Tree Donation

\$500 – \$999

\$850 feeds and cares for all our animals for a month—bringing comfort and connection to participants.



Mighty Oak Donation

\$1000 – Up

\$12,000 changes a life with a full year* of tuition-free programming.
*full day once a week, 12 months

DONATIONS

ADDITIONAL DONATION OPPORTUNITIES



Planned Giving and Endowments

Options for legacy gifts or multi-year donations.

- AACORN Community Endowment Fund at Kalamazoo Community Foundation ensures long-term support for our mission.
- Bequest or Estate Gift – A gift in your will or estate plan creates a lasting legacy beyond your lifetime.
- Donor Advised Funds (DAFs) provide a flexible way to give now and into the future.
- IRA Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCDs) can be made tax-free and count toward your RMD.
- Employee Giving & Company Match Programs can multiply your impact through your employer's matching gift program.

Corporate Donations

Supporting AACORN's mission while aligning your brand with inclusion, community, and impact. Corporate gifts can be tailored to your values and help us grow in meaningful ways.

- Event Sponsorships – Gain visibility and support our life-enriching programming.
- Building Project Support – Contribute to building and property improvements or future expansion.
- In-Kind Donations or Services – Donate materials, expertise, or labor to benefit our farm based skill-building program.

Volunteering and In-Kind Donations

Get involved with the organization or see what's needed at aacorncommunity.org.

- Sign up to volunteer in your area of interest. Groups and individuals welcome.
- View a wish list of needed items for in-kind donations.

Would you like to discuss how you can help transform lives at AACORN?
Contact Mary Pickett, Executive Director at aacorn.ed@gmail.com or
call 269-348-0985 to discuss available opportunities.



Programming for adults with intellectual and developmental differences in Kalamazoo County is limited and options in rural environments are scarce.

Every donation of any size or frequency directly supports the transformation of the lives of AACORN participants. With the support of donors like you, AACORN will continue to grow and thrive, benefiting the lives of our participants, their families and our community. Please donate today!

LEARN MORE



AACORN Farm, Inc.



45-2576096



269-348-0985



aacorn.ed@gmail.com



www.aacorncommunity.org



www.facebook.com/aacorncommunity



www.instagram.com/aacorn_farm/