

Application #: 02

1823 - Weekly Respite at Autism Sanctuary

Application Details

Funding Opportunity: 1524-Get Outdoors Fund (GO)- FY23- Spring Round
Funding Opportunity Due Date: Mar 7, 2023 5:00 PM
Program Area: Get Outdoors Fund
Status: Submitted
Stage: Final Application

Initial Submit Date: Mar 7, 2023 4:34 PM
Initially Submitted By: Casey aarke
Last Submit Date:
Last Submitted By:

Contact Information

Primary Contact Information

Active User*: Yes
Type: External User
Name*: Ms. Casey Taylor Oarke
Salutation First Name Middle Name Last Name
Title: Director of Applied Practice
Email*: casey@autismsanctuary.org
Address*: 2185 Haden Martin Rd

Palmyra Virginia 22963
City State/Province Postal Code/Zip
Phone*: 434-989-0581 Ed.
Phone
#####1#1#
Fax: #####1#1#
Comments:

Organization Information

Status*: Appl!Oled
Organization Name*: Autism Sanctuary, Inc.
Organization Type*: Non-Profit Organization
Tax Id: 84-4794206
Organization Website: <https://www.autismsanctuary.org>
Address*: 2860 Pea Ridge Rd

Charlottesville Virginia 22901-
City State/Province Postal Code/Zip

Phone*: 404-593-8591 Ext.
###-###-####

Fax: ###-###-####

Benefactor:

Vendor ID:

Comments:

GO Fund Grant Pre-Application Questionnaire

Project Information

The project title will be used in public relations and grant documents should funding be awarded.

Is the project title the same as application title?* Yes

Are you affiliated with a federal governmental entity, a for-profit entity, or are you an individual?* No

Proposals for the same concept may be submitted twice, but resubmissions must reflect significant revision to be considered.

Has this proposal been submitted to the GO Fund previously?* No

Amount of Funding Requested (\$500 min, \$25,000 max) \$25,000.00
Partial funding is possible.

*:

Would you like to be considered for any other VOF grant program if eligible?* Yes

Please select which category best describes the project.

Category*: Programming

Project Location

(Latitude/longitude required*, other location info such as street address or tax parcel ID optional)

*See [Google Maps Guide](#) for directions on using Google Maps or contact grants@vof.org to ask for help getting latitude/longitude coordinates.

Project Location*: 38.111819462
Latitude (00.00000)

Longitude*: -78.65345791
Longitude (-00.00000)

Please provide any additional location information to help locate the project site.

Other Location Information (such as street address or tax parcel ID): 2860 Pea Ridge Rd., Charlottesville, VA 22901

Is the project located on a property owned by the grant applicant?

Located on Property Owned by Applicant*: No

Does the landowner agree to the proposed use of their land?

Landowner Agrees to Use: Yes

Project Description

Project Description*:

Autism Sanctuary is a nonprofit respite space in Central Virginia created to serve the local autistic population. Through our walking trails and farm, we provide an engaging outdoor environment for all individuals regardless of their needs. We are seeking support to implement a weekly outdoor

enrichment and education program for autistic individuals with high support needs who may receive fewer community services. Funding will allow our program to thrive and support many local families.

Community Needs

Community Need
Accessibility, inclusion, and belonging for an underserved population
Outdoor adventure, education, and enrichment
Vocational training for a disabled community
Inclusive social programming
Respite for participants and their families
Agriculture-based education
Internship opportunities for autistic individuals and local college students
Supporting the neurodiverse population in Central Virginia

Community Support

Community Support*:

Autism Sanctuary’s unique mission of supporting the high-need autistic population has allowed us to receive a significant amount of community support. We have a strong network of volunteers, partnerships with other non-profits and schools, and tables at local farmer’s markets, races, and conferences. In 2022, we raised over \$10,000 to fund a crucial component of our respite plan, and have already received community interest and multiple volunteer commitments to assist with our new program.

Project Status

Project Status*:

The respite program will have a soft launch this March, hosting families already familiar with Autism Sanctuary. Our team has designed activities and social scripts for our initial respite day and is diligently working to develop new programming for additional weeks. To ensure that we have a variety of engaging activities for our visitors, we are in the early stages of creating new outdoor structures and facilities, including a pavilion that will serve as an outdoor classroom and social space.

Project Implementation

Implementation Step
Develop additional activities and write social scripts for participants
Complete a "soft launch" of the program with a handful of returning families
Build an additional restroom facility on the property
Design and build an outdoor pavilion and learning center
Market the respite program to the public and create an online registration form
Start the official, full-scale respite program

Funding

Funding is Essential*:

As a new non-profit, we have made significant strides over the past year to increase our presence in the local community. However, we need to reduce our programming deficit before we can fully serve our community’s needs and fund additional projects. With the generosity of the Get Outdoors Fund, we can create a fully developed respite program, which will not only meet a significant community need but will also be a catalyst to our growth and development in 2023 and beyond.

Total Estimated Project Cost

Please indicate the total estimated cost of the project. Include all expenses related to the implementation of the project, not just those submitted for the GO Fund grant.

Total Cost of Project*: \$75,000.00

Funding Sources

Please indicate the amount of funding secured for the project and the amount requested from non-VOF sources.

Secured Funds*: \$26,000.00

Requested Funds (non-VOF)*: \$23,000.00

Additional Information

Additional Information*:

Many people with autism, especially those with higher support needs, are excluded from recreational programs or have had negative experiences when using spaces designed for their neurotypical peers. As they age out of the public schools, they are forced to transition to a system that

provides limited support, and waitlists for new programs or funding can be lengthy. With our respite program, we are able to lessen the burden on these families, providing them with care and support that they need.

Get Outdoors Grant Application

Project Description

Provide a brief summary of this project in the space below. Please note this summary will be shared with the public and replicated for press releases and grant documents should funding be awarded.

Brief Summary*:

Autism Sanctuary is creating a new respite program for its autistic visitors with high support needs and their families. Through this program, visitors will be led on guided walking tours through our trails, participate in skill-building activities, engage with farm animals, and learn more about the natural world through exciting lessons taught in an outdoor learning center. Visitors and their families will be able to enjoy nature and form a community in an engaging and welcoming environment.

While an explanation of the project has already been provided, please share some additional information about the project.

State the purpose of the project*:

Autism Sanctuary will provide more community support and foster connections within the underserved autistic population in Central VA through a weekend respite program. The program would include guided trail walks, nature-based activities, picnics, engagement with our livestock and gardens, and events to be held in a wheelchair-accessible pavilion. Through these guided activities, visitors will be able to build new friendships, learn important skills, and develop an appreciation for the outdoors.

Planned Deliverables

Deliverable
Creating an enjoyable outdoor experience for 50 or more autistic individuals and families
Educating a disabled population about the benefits of the outdoors and agriculture
Generating 2-3 agriculture internships for interested program participants
Participation from five or more community organizations or schools
Building an ADA-compliant pavilion/learning center
Building an ADA-compliant restroom facility
Hosting at least three community-wide "open house" events by the end of 2024
Development of three or more permanent outdoor activity stations
Participation from 40 or more individual volunteers

Project Goals/Results/Outcomes

Goal/Result/Outcome
Increased access to the outdoors and programming for autistic people with high support needs
Stronger positive connections among community members
A greater sense of belonging and appreciation for the autistic community in Central VA
More community-wide education and empathy toward those with autism
Increased sense of joy from program participants
Increased interest in the outdoors and agriculture from program participants
Creation of a well-researched and supported respite program for autistic people in Central VA

Community Description

Expand upon how this project addresses specific needs in the community.

Community Needs*:

A respite program at Autism Sanctuary would address the demonstrated need for autism-focused programming. Currently, in Charlottesville and the surrounding areas, there is a program deficit. Those that are available have long waitlists, are costly, or don't have the support to care for someone's specific needs. Ultimately, many families are turned away from community programming. With our respite initiative, Autism Sanctuary will be a part of the solution and support those often left behind.

Describe how this project provides a unique service or resource to the community.

Community Service or Resource*:

Though there are therapy farms in Central VA, there are few that combine outdoor experiences with agricultural education and work opportunities, and even fewer that specifically target those with high support needs. Also, in many cases, programs that serve autistic adults or people with high support needs are exclusive or very costly. From grants, donations, and our network of volunteers, Autism Sanctuary is able to provide support and a community to those with autism at no cost to the families.

Community Support

Describe how the community has been involved in the development of this proposal.

Development*:

The local community has played a large role in helping us create a novel respite program. Families have generated interest in the program and assisted with fundraising efforts. Respite-based organizations and schools have provided us with significant feedback on how to create a successful, engaging program. Additionally, students and volunteer groups have been extremely helpful in designing our trails and activities. Our respite project is one that is made for the community, by the community.

Describe how the community will be involved in the implementation of this project.

Implementation*:

Families who attend our events will be asked to submit feedback or complete a satisfaction survey, which will help us determine where we need to improve. Additionally, we would not be able to expand without the support of the community, so we will continue to involve local families and organizations in activity development, volunteering, and fundraising efforts. We will host community-wide events like open houses and appreciation dinners that will help us to further connect with those we serve.

Additional Information

If the location of the project or the focus of the project has special significance to the community, please describe it here.

Additional Information:

The outdoor and agricultural focus of our program serves a unique need among the autistic community. As mentioned in a 2021 New York Times article, nature is a ?salve for children with autism.? Outdoor programs are being proven to have therapeutic benefits for those with autism, especially when they incorporate agricultural education. Autism Sanctuary?s respite program would not only provide activity and a sense of community, but also a way to heal and grow through the benefits of nature.

Estimated Timeline/Plan of Work

Estimated Timeline/Plan of Work

Start Date	Completion Date	Activity	Status	Responsible Party
01/20/2023	01/20/2023	Visit from VA for short (2hr) respite day, feedback collected for additional development	Completed	Virginia Institute of Autism, Autism Sanctuary staff, interns, and volunteers
01/23/2023	03/02/2023	Development of activity plan and social scripts for participants	Completed	Autism Sanctuary staff and interns
02/20/2023	03/17/2023	Recruiting volunteers for "soft launch" events	Underway	Autism Sanctuary staff and community members
03/02/2023	03/10/2023	Inviting handful of returning families to a "soft launch" of the program	Underway	Autism Sanctuary Board of Directors and staff
03/18/2023	04/29/2023	"Soft launch" of respite event - to be held bi-monthly in March and April	Not yet started	Autism Sanctuary staff, interns, and volunteers
03/18/2023	05/01/2023	Analysis of feedback from "soft launch" events	Not yet started	Autism Sanctuary staff and interns
05/01/2023	07/31/2023	Work with developer (Lee Construction Group) to design ADA-compliant restroom and pavilion	Not yet started	Autism Sanctuary staff and interns, Lee Construction Group (anticipated)
06/01/2023	07/01/2023	Market respite program to public and launch an online registration form	Not yet started	Autism Sanctuary staff and interns
07/01/2023	09/30/2023	Begin construction of restroom and pavilion	Not yet started	Autism Sanctuary staff, interns, and volunteers
08/05/2023	12/16/2023	Contact interested families and launch full respite program	Not yet started	Autism Sanctuary staff, interns, and volunteers

Budget

Expenditures

Item	Expense Estimated or Actual Cost?
Materials for pavilion construction	\$15,000.00 Estimated
Materials for new permanent outdoor activities	\$5,000.00 Estimated
Additional tools - wheelbarrows, rakes, shovels - for trail maintenance	\$500.00 Estimated
Additional trail and activity signage, including non-verbal picture board	\$3,000.00 Estimated
Non-permanent outdoor activities - lawn games, craft materials, instruments	\$1,500.00 Estimated
	\$25,000.00

Other Fund Sources

Match Source	If other, please list	If Grant Program, please list Grant Funding Source Name	Funding Status	If requested, please list the anticipated award date	Match Type	If other, please list	Planned Use	Match Amount
Grant Program		Bama Works Grant	Secured		Cash		Further development of indoor space and activities	\$5,000.00
Locality Support			Secured		Cash		Purchase of a Utility Terrain Vehicle to transport those with mobility concerns around property	\$13,711.00
Grant Program		The Jake Cassell Fund	Requested	03/31/2023	Cash		Fund materials for ADA-compliant restroom facility and develop an on-site campground	\$20,000.00
Grant Program		USDA EQIP Funding	Secured		Cash		Installation of a 60x30 ft high-tunnel gardening system	\$10,000.00
Grant Program		Whole Kids Garden Grant	Requested	08/01/2023	Cash		Improve existing garden and create wheelchair-accessible educational garden	\$3,000.00
Grant Program		Whole Kids Foundation Bee Grant	Secured		Cash		Develop pollinator garden and create educational bee program	\$1,500.00
Locality Support			Secured		Volunteer hours		Volunteer help with maintaining trails and building new outdoor structures (at avg rate of \$29.95)	\$14,975.00
								\$68,186.00

Budget Summary

Total Requested Amount:	\$25,000.00
Total Match Amount:	\$68,186.00
Total Project Cost:	\$93,186.00
Match Percentage:	73.17%

Supplemental Material

Supplemental Material (If Applicable)

Applicants are strongly encouraged to include supplemental material.

Selecting yes and saving the form will pull up a section where materials may be uploaded for submission.

Will you be providing supplemental material?*: Yes

Supplemental Material

Description	File Name	Type	Size	Upload Date
An expansion of question 2 with examples from a respite day with the Virginia Institute of Autism (VIA), as well as pictures from the VIA respite day and other Autism Sanctuary events.	GOF Supplemental Materials.pdf	pdf	5 MB	03/07/2023 04:32 PM
Article written about the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club's (PATC) work at Autism Sanctuary in the summer of 2022. PATC's work was crucial in the development of our walking trails.	PATC.pdf	pdf	606 KB	03/07/2023 04:34 PM

Expansion of Question 2

To go into greater detail about what types of activities would be offered through an Autism Sanctuary respite program, we wanted to share information about a visit from the Virginia Institute of Autism (VIA) this past January, which we intend to use as a model for future respite events. During this day, we had two groups of students visit the Sanctuary for two hours each - members of VIA's adult day-program came in the morning and younger (around ages 15-21) students joined us in the early afternoon.

The adult group was able to enjoy many of Autism Sanctuary's outdoor amenities. They completed a scavenger hunt while walking along the nature trail, played with colorful chimes in our "Music Meadow," fed cattle, and made a craft indoors using materials found during the scavenger hunt. After light snacks and a brief discussion about what they enjoyed during the day, we ended their trip with a ride around the property on our newly acquired UTV.



Pictured:

Top-left: VIA staff member feeding cattle on walking trail

Bottom-left: Visitor playing with chimes in our "Music Meadow"

Top-right: Visitors and staff making a bird feeder out of pinecones found on the trail

The weather changed drastically between the morning and afternoon, so students in the later group spent the majority of the time inside playing games and making indoor s'mores. However, they also were able to ride the UTV and feed chickens before they left, as seen in the pictures below:



Pictured:

Left: UTV ride with a student and staff member from VIA, assisted by Autism Sanctuary staff and interns
Right: Students from VIA feeding chickens, assisted by an Autism Sanctuary volunteer



Overall, though the experiences of both groups were completely different, all visitors left Autism Sanctuary with huge smiles and a desire to come back soon. According to the groups' coordinator from VIA, Lauren Haskins, "I heard so many positive stories from each of the groups once they got back and both groups emphasized how happy a number of the students and adults were while there." The positive feedback from this initial trip solidified our plans to develop a respite program at Autism Sanctuary in 2023. This March and April, we will host a handful of respite days for families and community partners who are already familiar with our organization to gather more feedback. Then, after additional development, we plan to launch a full respite program this summer, to continue throughout the remainder of 2023 and beginning again in spring of 2024.

In addition to the activities mentioned above, we plan to create more opportunities for agricultural education, which we will turn into internships for program participants who show enthusiasm for nature and agriculture. The internship would teach them the basics of tending to crops, maintaining land, caring for livestock, and selling their produce at local farmer’s markets. According to The Autism Community in Action (TACA), only 14% of those with autism have paid jobs in a community-based setting. Though we would begin with an internship program for autistic visitors, our hope is to see it expand into employment opportunities, whether they are at Autism Sanctaury or other agriculture-based settings across the Commonwealth.

Additional Photos for Your Consideration



Pictured:

- Top-left: Autism Sanctaury and VIA sharing a table at the Market Central Farmer’s Market at IX Park*
- Middle-left: Cattle at Autism Sanctaury*
- Bottom-left: Visitors walking on Autism Sanctaury’s “Enchanted Forest” trail*
- Top-right: Volunteers from VDOT during United Way’s Day of Caring in 2022*
- Bottom-right: Autism Sanctaury summer interns on a tour of Polyface Farm*

A Trail for The Autism Sanctuary

By Steve Bair and Casey Clarke

More than a decade ago, Frances Lee-Vandell claimed and moved a 1780 home from Chesterfield, Va. to create a beautiful property identified as “Edgefield” near Charlottesville, Va. The historic home was dismantled board by board and rebuilt onsite among a landscape of rolling open grassy fields, wooded areas, and streams.

Today, the property features a range of animals, from chickens to cattle to bees, and a large vegetable garden. Fruit trees have been planted recently and a large stand of planted Loblolly Pine is maturing.

In this environment and under Edgefield’s stewardship by Lee-Vandell, Autism Sanctuary has been created and recreational, agricultural, and employment programs intended for autistic young adults and their families are being developed and established. The mission of Autism Sanctuary is *“to promote the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive benefits of connecting with nature for those with autism, and by extension, provide agricultural work, internship opportunities, and respite for disabled individuals.”*

With grant funding and volunteer support, Autism Sanctuary is realizing its vision of an engaging, therapeutically-beneficial nature walk with special stations and animal engagement. The nature walk trail(s) in the “Enchanted Forest” is a critical piece to helping to meet the Sanctuary’s mission; a need for assistance to design and contribute to construction of a well-designed, sustainable trail was requested of the PATC through PATC’s **Tim Alley**. Tim and PATC’s **Steve Bair** visited the Sanctuary in late June to learn the needs and plans of the proposed

trail. Much of the general site and layout planning of the approximately half-mile long trail had already been accomplished by Autism Sanctuary Founder Jason Brewster, volunteer Bryan Vig, and other Sanctuary volunteers and associates.



Matt Murray and Steve Bair put finishing touches on a waterbar
Photo by Robert Kreps

Making contact with Casey Clarke, Autism Sanctuary’s Director of Applied Practice, Tim and Steve made a second visit to the Sanctuary to meet with volunteers and associates Bob Kreps, Lee-Vandell, Jason, Bryan, and Casey to determine the final trail route, learn any additional special requirements of the trail layout and tread conditions to meet the needs of Sanctuary clientele, and to determine trailwork personnel and tool needs required to complete the project. The trail route circuit was flagged out

through a variety of habitats along a cow field fence, through a deciduous wooded area along a small stream, through the stand of Loblolly Pine, and back to the trailhead near the 1780 home and base of operations.

Later in July, a small PATC crew consisting of Tim, Steve, **Matt Murray**, and **John Hedrick** joined Sanctuary volunteers to construct the trail. The half-day of trailwork consisted primarily of a few tree and sapling removals, limb-pruning, and some treadwork in the form of waterbars to manage erosion control at a handful of sites. Advice and suggestions were provided by the PATC group on potential primitive bridge construction and trail signing. The group also visited a second proposed trail area which the Sanctuary personnel are considering for future trail system expansion. 🌲