

KiDS CAN CHRONiCLES

www.kidswithautismcan.org

So Far, So Great!

We had the pleasure of adding new events over the last several months and turning some of our events into yearly traditions. Kids with Autism Can is officially in our fifth year and growing by leaps and bounds! Welcome, to our new families who have just started attending events and those of you who are now on our mailing list and hoping to join us for some great family time in the future. It is important to remind you that if your family is signed up for an event and your plans change and you cannot attend, please let us know as soon as possible. Many events now fill up and it is important that we use all of the available spaces that we are paying for and not saying no to people when we have spaces available.

In January, Kids with Autism Can families attended a great game with the Phoenix Suns, we appreciate being selected as Community Partners for the Suns and sharing in the 50/50 raffle profits. February brought Rock Climbing, some of our kiddos just wanted to use the gear as a giant swing and they were accommodated with appropriate supervision. March was a thrill! La Casa de Cristo generously donated their gymnasium complete with a stage and PHX Theatre brought an amazing performance to us. Some kiddos sat on chairs while others enjoyed the comfort of their own beanbags, pillows and blankets they brought along to meet their needs for comfort in a new space. We were blown away at the kid's ability to settle in and enjoy the show. There was also plenty of space to walk around if anyone needed time for movement. The first part of this year also included CrackerJax, Bowling, a D'Backs game (with over 200 family members from our group joining us for a great afternoon), and Ice Skating! We also enjoyed supporting AZ Assist on their trip to Video Games Live.



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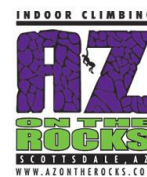
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Coming Events! Details to follow soon! It's all Fun and...

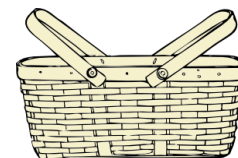
MacDonald Ranch



AZ on the Rocks



Family Picnic



As you can see, our events are happening more often and on a bigger scale. We want to be very careful about increasing the number of people attending each event because we know if we get too many people in one place, no matter how hard we work to meet kid's sensory needs, the crowds and noise can be overwhelming. We need to weigh attendance, cost and comfort at each event. We don't always get it perfect, but know that we are taking it into consideration and trying to create the best experience possible. We have more control at some locations than at others and we try to mix up the event types so even though every event doesn't work for every family, we provide a little something for all. Also please remember the reason we do it at no cost is to give families a chance to try new things and grow in the experiences they enjoy. We, as an organization and parents of a child with autism, encourage you to try the events that are not the perfect match, yep we said "not" the perfect match! We try to create safe, comfortable places for kids to grow and learn. Please give your family those opportunities. Yes, it can be challenging, but we think, over time, you will see the benefits. It is why we do what we do.

“FUN”d Raising and Grants

What an Evening! In May, we hosted an amazing fundraiser, A Night to Celebrate Our Stars. Kids with Autism Can brought in \$10,000 to help us fund our upcoming year. Thanks to all who donated items as well as their time and talents! We enjoyed a perfect desert sunset and a clear starry night along with delicious food, the great A capella music of the ASU Pitchforks and amazing people giving generously for our success.



Again, we wish to thank CVS Caremark, Arizona Diamondback Charities, and John C. Lincoln Gives for generous grants that will help us provide more events in 2014. They will provide more social opportunities for our families. We have recently applied for Coyotes and Cardinals Grants as well.



On A Personal Note – Life with Autism

A few weeks ago a woman who has a daughter with autism ask to meet so we could talk. Her daughter is 9 years old and the road is not getting easier. Her words to me were something like this. You have been through this, you seem to be getting to the other side and you seem pretty ok. Well one of the toughest parts of autism, is I guess, there really is no other side. It would seem the spectrum has no beginning and no end. I am not good in math but it makes me visualize that line with an arrow on each end, doesn't that mean it just goes on forever?

The good news is the fact that we can try to view ASD from a different perspective. We can see what is amazing about it. The brilliance, the gentleness, the honesty and the reality that perhaps if we all lived with a little less “social grace” and with a little more honesty the world might be better. Nicholas says, “In all honesty and no offense”. It made me realize it isn't the honesty we struggle with, it is judgment we feel behind it. Please know, I am not a Pollyanna, I know when we write information we always use words like “challenge” to keep things positive but I know as well as anyone that word sometimes means problem. When you get calls from school, have to literally carry your child kicking and screaming from a store, when you get stared at in places that other people find fun because of your child's high pitched voice or the fact that his arms are flapping or the fact that his sensory processing is so out of whack he vomits at any smell or feeling that is new and some that aren't. So how do we blend the exhaustion of living this life of a family with autism and the joy and love we feel toward our children on the spectrum as well as our “typicals”?

In reality, typical is something I might find even more confusing. Our oldest daughter had Apraxia, no speech until she was 4 years old. She is now nearly 20 and we are just solving a reading issue she has had her whole life. I can't count the number of doctors we have gone to. My younger son is “gifted”. He is quite smart but it means his brain never seems to stop, his energy is either non-existent or over the top. It is also likely he has Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome. A loose joint disorder that we have never had fully diagnosed since as far as we know there isn't much to be done for it. The reason I share this is to say I believe all families face challenges but most are not as “in your face” as the minute to minute struggles of autism. Autism also has the advantage/disadvantage of usually not impacting physical appearances. Hopefully, by sharing our story, you can know when you come to events we are all a group that “gets it”. I think we have people who feel unprepared to attend events. One of our families offered up they don't attend game night because their son is very good with games. I want to express that is exactly why we have game night. With lots of game choices and therapy dogs and a big comfortable space, and other families who have kids learning the same skills, you are safe. That is the idea behind what we do. No judgment (at least that is our goal) just fun, adaptive experiences. We had so many years of working to expose Nicholas in a not protected environment and it was hard so we hope to make it easier. Please stop assuming it won't go well and try! If you have to leave after 10 minutes what have you lost? We pay for you to come and as parents I can't count the number of times we could only stay somewhere a few minutes when Nicholas was young. It's baby steps folks! Please keep trying.

I was sharing with Nicholas' speech therapist how we used to have to deal with sensory issues. How "rainbow order" had to be switched up. Pull out the orange peg said the therapist, "are you kidding" I replied. I had a kiddo who cried constantly and when he finally learned to play and not cry they told me to "pull out the orange peg" on the peg board. That right, let's make the kid cry now that he has finally stopped! But I get it now, baby steps! Different colored pegs, lead to different toys, different toys lead to new experiences, new experiences for a short time, will lead to new experiences for a longer time, which leads to more confidence for kids and parents. More confidence means more patience, which allows us to try new paths. For us this has been ongoing, still some baby steps now mixed in with some leaps of faith.

So here is how we made it from 0-18 years, although we are not on "the other side", the walk is kinder now. Not quite so physically exhausting but still mentally challenging. I think if we could squish up what we have learned, these would be the hints I would share. We do not have certificates or degrees in parenting, but we are on kiddo #3 so I feel like we can say we are professional parents. I don't think these are just for parents of differently abled kids.

1. Treat parenting as a job. Do it with professionalism. Take classes on parenting and learning good discipline skills. Know the difference between discipline and punishment. Remember your kids are stretching and learning and growing and they are doing their job too. We are always looking for the perfect place for our kiddos, perfect school and extra-curricular activities. Here is some news, nothing in life is perfect. Striving to have a great life is different than a perfect life.
2. Be consistent, I did not want to pull out the orange pegs but we followed through on what the therapists asked and Nicholas grew from their skills and his experiences.
3. Try not to worry about what they will be in 5 years and 10 years. I don't mean don't have a plan but don't focus on that fact that "he will never go to college". I have had parents with 2 year olds worried about their kids attending college. Live in the NOW when you can. In the Murwin house, when we have a daunting task we say, "How do you eat an elephant?", "One bite at a time!" Do you get the theme of this? Baby steps folks!
4. Compare your child to your child, not everyone else's. Are they growing and learning? Our kids mature too, it just looks a little different. One day I was driving into our sub division and I saw a bunch of kids running around throwing and catching a football, just being 12 year old boys, and my only thought was "Well that will never be Nicholas" it is burned in my brain. I was so sad I felt like my heart might break, but it didn't and all I could think was wow, I can't do that to myself or our family any more. Love your children for who they are and share your pride. You can apologize for an action of your child but not for your child.
5. Embrace the life you have been given and get the joy when you can.

6. We saw a speaker in my MOMS group this last year and she had my favorite saying ever. She said we need to stop comparing our insides to everyone else's outside. We know every crazy, yucky, happy, awful thing that goes on inside of us and we compare it to everyone else well put together exterior. The more I think about that, as the months pass, the more I realize how often we do that. If we can get happy in our own life maybe we can stop trying to make it something it isn't supposed to be.

Hopefully this provides some combination of practical advice and wisdom. Life is a journey!

It takes but one positive thought when given a chance to survive and thrive to overpower an entire army of negative thoughts.

-Robert H. Schuller

We Need You

We need you! As many of you know we are the parents of three great kids, this Fall our son, Nicholas (most of you know he has high functioning autism) will be attending college, we expect it will be a time he might need to rely on us as he works on his independence. As much as we do everything we can for the organization, our children are always our first priority, this being said, in order to keep things running smoothly as our family makes this transition we could use a few volunteers to allow us some free time to meet the needs of our family. If you are interested in joining us, please let us know your strengths and in what ways you might like to provide support. We have three or four strong, wonderful moms currently helping out regularly and one great dad translating our waiver into Spanish so we can welcome more families. So now it is time to start a bit more delegation. Tough for control freaks but we are going to give it our best shot! We will look forward to sharing our passion with some other families so Kids with Autism Can continue to grow.

Join us on:   

Family Play Directory

One of our very clever moms has a fun idea! It would give families and kiddos opportunities to meet up one on one or in small groups. She will be directly in charge of this project so all emails should go to her at KatieMobley71@yahoo.com. We want to support her in getting this set up and we think many of our families would find it a great tool. Katie is planning a directory of families who want to set up individual playtimes.

The directory will include: Parents First Name and Last Initial, Kids First Name/s and Age/s: (with ASD) and their Interests, Siblings Name/s and Age/s and their Interests, Zip Code and Email and/or Phone #.

You will only be on this list if you choose to! By contacting Katie Mobley, with your information, you accept any and all liability for these times. Since these won't be Kids with Autism Can events and we will not be on the premises, we are not asking for a liability waiver.

A Few Summer Food Tips

Do not refrigerate tomatoes! I usually buy Campari tomatoes, they taste like real tomatoes.

If fruit is hard, give it a day or two at room temperature to ripen up. Things like cantaloupe, pineapple, stone fruits, avocados, are at the store under ripe so they will last. Rarely should you buy these and eat them the same day unless you know you have picked out ripe fruit.

An ear of corn wrapped tightly in plastic wrap will cook in the microwave in 2 ½ minutes.

Grill a couple days of meat at once, hot meals then can become cold meats for salads and wraps. Make extras. Repurpose pastas, grilled veggies and beans and grains by cooking more at once. I will grant you some planning is involved so you don't waste things, but it is worth your time.

No one likes to cook in the heat, so one of our tricks is to use restaurant short cuts. For example, we live near several Chinese restaurants so when I am grilling meat and veggies but don't have time to spend 45 minutes cooking brown rice we will just get the rice for takeout. Very inexpensive and saves a lot of time. Trader Joe's also carries brown and Jasmine rice in the frozen section it cooks in pouches in 3 minutes.

You can buy some good pre-made products just read the labels. One of my favorites is salad dressing made by Cindy's Kitchen they carry it at Whole Foods and occasionally at Costco. It does have some cane juice and xanthan gum, so it isn't quite the same as made from scratch but the quality is good, as is the flavor. We use their Balsamic Vinaigrette on pasta/veggie salad, cold roasted or grilled potatoes and chives. Green beans, tomatoes, basil and fresh mozzarella. So no heavy mayo for those cold summer salads. If you do choose mayo, try to mix half and half with plain low fat yogurt and see if you might like it as a lighter alternative. We also use Balsamic on the salad below.

Spinach and Berry Salad

1 bag baby spinach

1 pint of berries, mixed or single kind, I like raspberries but strawberries, blackberries and blueberries work just as well.

1 ripe pear or apple, cut into long thin strips

1-2 Tbsp. crumbled feta cheese

¼ cup chopped nuts +/- to taste, toasted almonds, cinnamon toasted almond, or sweet and spicy pecans (homemade or from Trader Joe's) are my favorites, but any nut will work.

Toss spinach with about 1 Tbsp of Balsamic Vinaigrette, then add other ingredients and toss lightly. If needed, add more dressing to taste. Enjoy!



Kid Friendly (No Veggie Chunks) Lasagna

Makes 2 Pans

This is fun to cook together lots of good sensory sticky finger stuff to do.

2 boxes DeCecco lasagna noodles
1 lg. bag shredded mozzarella
1 fresh mozzarella ball
1/4 to 1/2 cup ricotta cheese
Fresh parmesan cheese

Sauce

1 66 oz. Jar Ragu Traditional Pasta Sauce
1 lg box or can of tomato puree
1 lb. ground beef
1 lb. Italian seasoned ground turkey
1 tsp. dried basil
1 tsp. dried oregano
½ tsp. garlic powder
½ tsp. onion powder
Ground black pepper to taste



Brown turkey and ground beef together in a large sauce pot and add remaining sauce ingredients, you can adjust spices to your liking start with less, taste and add. Bring to a simmer and turn off heat. Drain liquid. Sometimes I add pesto if I have it.

Cook noodles until pliable but not quite al dente. Remember they are going to bake too. Rinse with hot water and lay out over strainer to prevent sticking but also to drain. When you use them they should be a little sticky to the touch and not dripping.

Begin layering ingredients in deep baking dish. I use ceramic. Do not use excessive amounts of ingredients between layers. A light covering of sauce and cheese between each layer of noodles. Start first with a layer of meat sauce, just to cover the bottom. Then a single layer of pasta, light layer of sauce, then cheese. To do the cheese between layers, lightly sprinkle with shredded mozzarella, then small cubes of fresh mozzarella, then pea size dollops of ricotta. Then repeat, starting again with pasta, if you love parmesan you can add a bit between layers. I tend to just use it on top. When you are on the last layer of pasta, use more sauce to completely cover the pasta, then sprinkle with mozzarella and parmesan to cover. You will probably have some leftover sauce and cheese. You can freeze it for another time to use over any cooked pasta.

If your kiddos are better veggie eaters than mine, sautéed zucchini, onions, peppers and spinach are all delicious as an addition but do the veggies as a small dice and just sprinkle between layers. Spinach can just be layered raw in middle layers.

I make 2 pans at a time because it makes a lot of dishes and it can be frozen. One pan should feed 6 teenage boys or about 10–12 other people.

If you put this directly into the oven at 325 degrees it should take about 45 min because the ingredients are still sort of warm. If you put it in the fridge for later. Pull from fridge about ½ hour before you start baking it and then it might still take a bit more than 45 minutes. Be sure it is warmed thoroughly. Yum!

What's Next?

These are not promises, but some of the ideas we are working on. We are checking in with places like Butterfly Wonderland and the AZ Science Center and a few other locations. We are trying to find larger venues so we can have more people attend events but still have plenty of space per person so our families can feel comfortable, but as you can imagine bigger places cost more so we are working on creative funding. If anyone might be able to help us with that we would be grateful. We are excited to be working out the details with AZ on the Rock and MacDonald Ranch for our ongoing events at these locations. Kids with Autism Can is so happy these businesses have become a part of our traditions! We will be trying again for Polar Express Tickets and someone suggested the North Pole Experience so we will look into that as well. We are considering more cooking and yoga possibilities, although finding those opportunities are a bit challenging, but we plan to keep trying. We would also ask our families to keep their eyes and ears opened for events and opportunities.

Supporting Others – SEEDs and Surfing

Join Us For:

A SEEDs Trunk Show

July 25th

4-7 pm

At The Murwin Home

7492 E Buteo Dr

Scottsdale Arizona 85255

We will be supporting this event with a vendor booth. There may still be space available. Contact information is listed on the flyer.



Kids with Autism Can regularly updates their website. Please check back frequently for events and new information. Take time to dive into the stories and perhaps share some of yours.

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