



The Guild
FOR HUMAN SERVICES



2024–25

Annual Report



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Welcome

Dear Guild Community,

As we reflect on Fiscal Year 2025, we celebrate growth, innovation, and deepened commitment to our mission of empowering individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) to live with dignity, purpose, and connection.

This year brought both progress and challenging public conversations. Recent statements by U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. about autism—framing individuals with autism primarily in terms of limitations—underscore why our work is so essential. Such language fuels stigma and fails to reflect the diversity and potential of people with autism. The Guild affirms that individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities lead varied, meaningful lives as students, employees, artists, friends, family members, and valued members of society. Our responsibility is to ensure that they have support and opportunities to thrive.

The stories in this report demonstrate how The Guild has created more opportunities for community connections through events and lasting partnerships. The Guild is committed to the success of our workforce through professional development, continuing education supports as we invest in our employees for the long term. In FY2025, we made progress towards our ongoing goal of enhancing residential and clinical services with trauma-informed practices by opening state-of-the-art sensory spaces at The Guild School. On a local and national level, we continue to strengthen our advocacy for recognition, funding, and inclusion.

Looking ahead, The Guild will focus on building pathways to independence, broadening community partnerships, and continuing to challenge narratives that diminish the worth of The Guild's community. We remain steadfast in advancing inclusion and possibility for all.

With gratitude,



Michelle Peters
Chair, Board of Trustees



Amy C. Sousa
Chief Executive Officer



Michelle Peters
Chair, Board of Trustees



Amy C. Sousa
Chief Executive Officer

The Guild at a Glance

The Guild serves around 160 people with intellectual and developmental disabilities annually through educational, residential, and clinical programs.



85
students
enrolled

in The Guild School
in Concord



adults
living in
15 residences

Staff observed that
84% of students
felt calm or happy after using
the sensory room



Guild staff spent

612
hours

onboarding
new staff in
pre-service
orientation

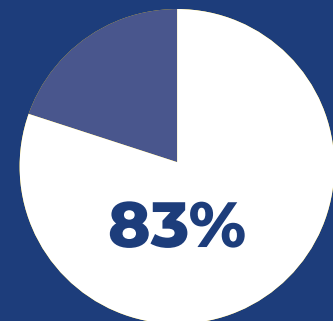


More
than
2,300

individual social
and leisure
activities offered
for residents



64 youth living
in **9 residences**



of parents/guardians are
very satisfied with supports
their child receives in the
adult program



Community Film Screening

Last October, The Guild hosted a screening of the documentary *In A Different Key*, at the Maynard Fine Arts Theater. Families, guardians, staff, and community partners from both The Guild School and the Adult Program came together to hear the story of the first child diagnosed with autism and consider how this history shapes our understanding of it today.



DJ Smiles Brings Holiday Joy

DJ's Holiday Smiles brings holiday magic to nonprofit organizations that support historically underserved populations. Named after her son DJ, The Guild's Board Chair Michelle Peters and her family began this event as a way to share smiles with everyone around the holidays, regardless of their abilities, challenges, or living situation. The joy has grown in the four years they have partnered with The Guild, delivering personalized gifts to over 60 individuals in 2024.



The Spring Dance is a Night to Remember

At the spring dance, students, residents, and staff danced and sang along with the hits of the 80s and 90s at The Westin Waltham-Boston. *The Boston Globe* shared the story of the evening through a photo essay and video story that illustrated how meaningful the event is to individuals at The Guild. The event showed our community shining brightly together, highlighted by moments of joy, independence, and empowerment.

Sudbury Event & State Street Sponsorship

At the third annual Sudbury area community fundraiser, more than 80 guests gathered at The Sandy Burr Country Club to connect and have meaningful conversations. The event raised more than \$21,000 towards creating brighter futures and more inclusive communities. State Street has been a generous supporter of The Guild's mission over the years. As the presenting sponsor, they helped to make this event possible.

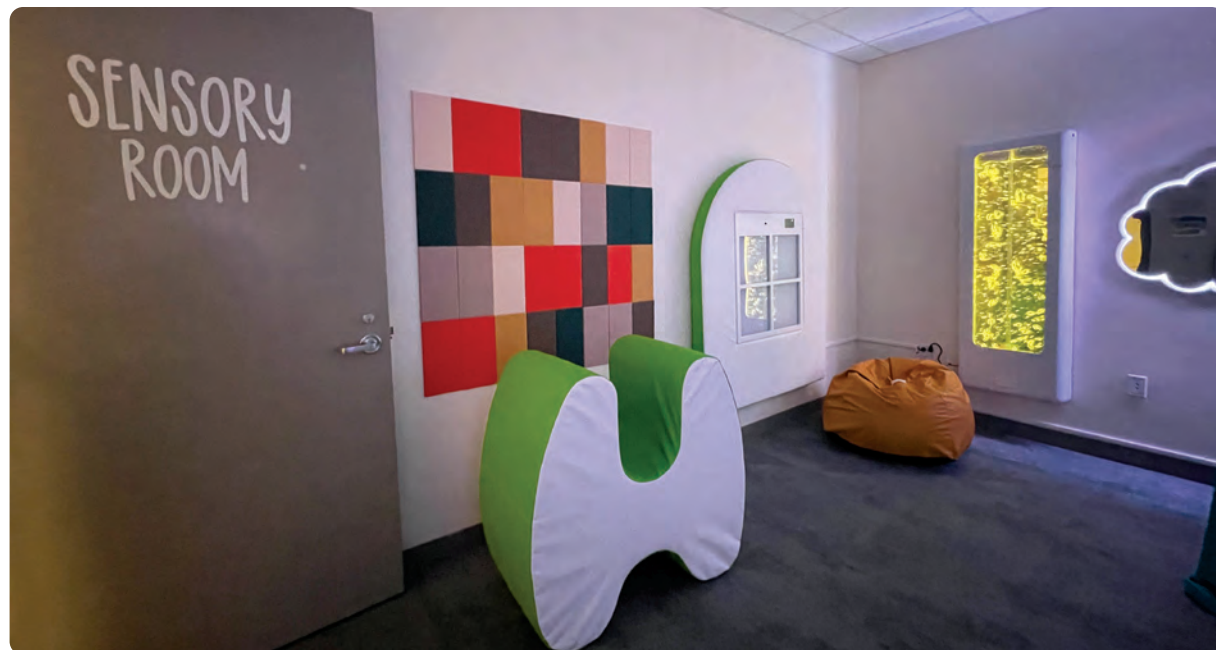


Improvements to the Sensory Rooms and Break Spaces

For students with IDD, access to supportive break spaces is an essential part of learning. These areas provide a quiet and structured environment to step away from overwhelming situations, calm their emotions, and practice self-regulation. Students can return to the classroom with a renewed sense of focus and readiness. The Guild understands the importance of designing these spaces to feel supportive and empowering instead of isolating or punitive.

Following updates to their statewide regulations, The Massachusetts Department of Early and Secondary Education (DESE) issued \$1.5 million in grants for schools to make voluntary improvements to break rooms in 2024. The Guild School received funding to expand the number of inclusive open spaces and enhance the overall learning environment from DESE and long-term private supporters, The Sudbury Foundation and DCU for Kids.

Annie Willis, Chief Education Officer, and a work group of clinicians reimagined the school's break spaces and some of the common areas as part of The Guild's focus on continuous improvement. The Guild engaged students, staff, families,



and vendors to guide the development of more supportive, student-centered environments. This approach blended professional expertise and personal experience, reinforcing The Guild's commitment to trauma-informed, person-centered care.

Since last fall, all six former break spaces have been renovated. In three spaces, doors were removed, square footage was expanded, and entrances were widened, transforming them into open, calming alcoves. The remaining three rooms were redesigned into dedicated sensory rooms with plush companions, interactive panels, compression chairs, weighted lap pads, and other calming tools.

"The sensory rooms offer fun and unique ways for our students to work with staff to

find their 'just-right' level of sensory input, that can ultimately help them improve their attention in learning environments," said Mary Barnes and Nicole Picone, Occupational Therapists at The Guild. "When students' sensory 'systems' are becoming overwhelmed, they now can access new, safe ways to calm and soothe themselves."

Early feedback is positive. Students are using in-classroom tools and new sensory spaces to self-regulate, which reduces behavioral incidents requiring intensive interventions. Staff report a calmer school climate and stronger student-educator partnerships. The Guild is eager to track outcomes as these new spaces and supports are fully implemented.

Something's Brewing at The Guild Coffee Shop

For over 7 years, The Guild School has operated a coffee shop where roughly 300 students have gained valuable work experience. Students are responsible for setting up the equipment, taking and preparing orders, operating the cash register, delivering to offices around the building, and cleaning up when the day is done.

Every student over 14 has an individualized vocational training plan and gets paid for

completing work shifts. For many students this includes working at the Coffee Shop in some capacity. Students working on their math or social skills may work at the register while students working on their mobility and dexterity skills may help with delivering orders around the building.

According to an analysis by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, only about 37% of working-age adults with disabilities were employed and roughly 59% were not in the labor force in 2024. For individuals with disabilities, work opportunities provide a sense of meaning and purpose, offer social interactions, contribute to a feeling of self-sufficiency, support self-esteem, and build an overall sense of independence and well-being.

The Coffee Shop helps foster the development of customer service skills in a familiar and supportive environment. Such hands-on experiences will help students increase their work duration, manage executive functioning tasks, and learn money sense through direct purchasing routines.

In addition to serving hot and iced coffee and hot chocolate, the Coffee Shop offers bagels with complimentary cream cheese or butter. Since opening in 2018, the team has worked to expand the offerings with new syrup flavors, an espresso machine, setting up a new payment system, and taking online orders while keeping costs down.

“Such hands-on experiences will help students increase their work duration, manage executive functioning tasks, and learn money sense through direct purchasing routines.”

The Guild Coffee Shop was highlighted by Meghan Smith of GBH News in April. She spent the morning seeing how it operates and produced a video about the program and its impact. Students and staff spoke with her about what they enjoy about their work.

“I like making customers happy. I like doing my job thoroughly,” student Josh says in the video. “I’ll be working at Dunkin’ because I have a good resume for it so that should help a lot. I’m looking forward to the success I’ll do after The Guild.”



Creating Community: Sudbury House and The Irish Cultural Centre

Community inclusion is integral to The Guild's mission of educating, empowering, and encouraging individuals with IDD. For adult residents at Sudbury House, a genuine friendship with the Irish Cultural Centre (ICC) has formed over the last four years. They began attending events in 2021 as a way to stay engaged during a difficult time of Covid regulations. It has continued and grown into a meaningful connection.

This spring, the adults attended the St. Patrick's Day Family Breakfast, where they were introduced to special guests Consul General Sighle FitzGerald and the Irish Minister for Employment, Enterprise & Tourism, Peter Burke. A few weeks later, they were back for the annual Easter Bunny Breakfast.

The residents at Sudbury House enjoy the variety of activities offered. Rachel says she particularly enjoys the arts and crafts, like themed coloring pages. House Manager Mercy Jolo says "They recognize our presence and thoughtfully arrange a special seating area for us each time. Their attentiveness is evident, as they regularly check in with us throughout the duration of the program."

Like anyone, individuals with IDD love participating fully in the life of their community. Unfortunately, not all organizations and events are accessible or



thoroughly inclusive. The ICC has been an outstanding example of how an organization can create a truly welcoming environment.

A few strategies organizations can use for their events include:

- 1 Welcome everyone and acknowledge their presence. It means a lot to have others recognize what each group has to offer.
- 2 Individuals with disabilities may need special arrangements ahead of time. Accommodations can be made to fit the needs of the guests, such as considering how close they are to loud music or heavy foot traffic.
- 3 Needs change! Regularly check in throughout the event, which is helpful to make sure everyone is still comfortable and can continue enjoying the main event.

“ They recognize our presence and thoughtfully arrange a special seating area for us each time. Their attentiveness is evident, as they regularly check in with us throughout the duration of the program.”

“We thoroughly enjoy having the residents join us at ICC for our celebrations. We look forward to seeing them at each event. I love their enthusiasm for the activities and entertainment that we provide. We recognize that arts, music and dance are universal and can be enjoyed by all ages and abilities,” says Tara Spellman, Administrative Director of the ICC.

Photo by Eamonn Grealish, courtesy of the Irish Cultural Centre.

Community Engagement in Action

Community Life Engagement (CLE) is all about supporting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to live meaningful, connected lives in their communities. This can include volunteer work, continuing education, recreation, and more. The CLE in Action Project highlights four key pillars:

- 1 **Individualized supports** designed for each person's unique needs
- 2 **True community involvement** that fosters real connections and contributions
- 3 **Skill-building opportunities** to promote independence
- 4 **A focus on personal goals** that reflect each individual's aspirations

Last winter, The Guild was proud to take part in the CLE in Action Project, a national effort that brought together providers and advisors to share ideas, success stories, and best practices. The project included interviews, case studies, and conversations with community leaders to better understand how organizations can expand opportunities for inclusion. Allison Traub, Clinical Director of Adult Services, helped lead The Guild's participation.

"We strive to engage individuals in the community daily and do so in a way that matches their interests and passions," says Allison. "The Guild continues to work on strengthening and building relationships in the community. Building community relationships and having more of a presence enhances a community wide understanding of who we support."

A big part of this work involves our Direct Support Professionals (DSPs). DSPs play a unique role in empowering individuals to explore new environments, gain independence, and practice important life skills. Since new experiences can sometimes feel overwhelming, staff use supportive strategies—and even conversation scripts—to help smooth interactions and provide context for community members who want to be inclusive.

The Guild is committed to giving staff the tools they need to succeed. Through CLE in Action, we've started developing a toolkit of best practices to help DSPs strengthen residents' community experiences and open more doors for engagement.





“The feedback from The Guild is that he’s a joy, he’s always trying to make people laugh, and he’s always being silly. We knew he needed more than we could give him to be his best.”

Parent Perspectives: It Takes a Village

Jeannette P. shares the story of her son Robbie’s transition to The Guild School, and then to The Guild’s adult program.

Trying to figure out what life was going to be when Robbie was 22 was almost unimaginable for someone who has a child with profound autism and is nonverbal. We always imagined Robbie living with us into his thirties, but then the pandemic happened. Life became smaller, and we lost a lot of our supports.

From what we could tell, Robbie wanted peer connections and to live on his own like his older siblings. After working with the school district, we were able to place Robbie at The Guild School and we’re very grateful for that. We saw after the initial transition that he was very happy living with other young men his age.

I attend some support groups and it’s amazing how many parents think they’re a failure because they had to go into a

residential program. And I’m there to tell them, “Your child just needed more than what you could give them. You gave them 100% but they needed 110%.”

I was in talks with our transition coordinator probably three years before he turned 22. It was so stressful. Matching personalities, skill levels, and intellectual abilities is a very big challenge.

They would find something that was available and give us a referral kit. Paper is great, a report is great, but going in person is the only way to make sure that it’s a good fit. Knowing your kid and being realistic about it is the best avenue.

Over the course of six months, there were four different programs the transition coordinator thought were a match for Robbie. As his mom, I didn’t always agree. It was just by chance that there was an opening where he is now, it wasn’t guaranteed. When The Guild offered us a

placement in an adult home, it only felt natural to go that route.

He’s becoming more independent and he’s self-advocating more, which is huge. The feedback from The Guild is that he’s a joy, he’s always trying to make people laugh, and he’s always being silly. That’s something we hadn’t seen since before the pandemic. We knew he needed more than we could give him to be his best.

When he wants to go back to his house, you can tell that he wants to be with his second family. It shows how much he craved being a part of something bigger.

He feels like he has a place where he belongs. I think we all want that. I feel confident that when my husband and I are no longer here, Robbie will be well cared for, and his life skills will continue to grow. We know that he will have his community.

Dental Care for Individuals with IDD

Dental hygiene is an important part of overall health for anyone. At The Guild School, faculty from Tufts Dental Facilities (TDF) visit 3–4 times per year to do cleanings and dental exams for students in an environment that's familiar and comfortable for them.

TDF provides comprehensive dental care for individuals with developmental disabilities through eight clinics across the state. They see about 350 patients a year through community outreach, traveling to organizations like The Guild. Gina Terenzi, DDS, and dentistry resident Sarah Islam visited the school and saw 23 students in April. Dr. Terenzi has been working with The Guild for over 20 years, getting to know the students and form a relationship as they grow up.

One Guild School student said she enjoys going to the dentist and she clearly knows Dr. Terenzi well. "I've gone to the dentist before but the only thing I don't like is sometimes they put floss in my teeth and it makes my gums bleed," Amani said after her appointment.

During the exam, the dentist will help the patient get comfortable with the medical staff and the tools. Sometimes it takes multiple appointments to establish a relationship and desensitize them to having the tools in their mouth. Dr. Islam says, "I always try to see what makes them feel comfortable and safe."

Taste, noise, and texture can all be part of an overwhelming sensory experience for individuals with IDD. Dr. Terenzi suggests paying attention to what doesn't work for an individual. If noise is a problem, don't use an electric toothbrush. If taste is a problem, find the right flavor or brush without toothpaste. Some individuals may only be able to regularly brush their teeth once a day. In this case, brushing at night is preferable.

Nutrition is also an important part of dental care. Dentists recommend limiting sugary or acidic drinks like soda, candy,

and snacks. Drinking enough water can help to flush out debris and combat side effects like acid reflux and dry mouth caused by medications commonly prescribed to individuals with IDD.

Dr. Terenzi emphasized that it's a specialty within dentistry and requires specific training to manage behavior and address unique dental problems. There is a shortage of programs and providers around the country. "It's a highly specialized group of people and the community needs to be supported," she said.



I always try to see what makes them feel comfortable and safe."





“These victories, no matter how small they may seem to others, are monumental in this field and reaffirm why the work matters.”

Leading Through Empathy: Nerline Desjardins’ Professional Journey at The Guild

Teaching Assistant Nerline Desjardins has been working with students with intellectual disabilities, autism, and significant behavioral challenges at The Guild for more than two decades. She worked as a residential assistant for 10 years before transitioning to a teaching assistant 11 years ago.

“I am passionate about creating an environment where every person is valued, respected, and given the opportunity to thrive, no matter their challenges,” says Nerline. What motivates her is the opportunity to empower individuals, strengthen families, and contribute to the community every day.

Colleagues say Nerline is intuitive, establishes positive rapport with her students, and is attuned to the needs of others. By consistently applying motivational strategies to her work with students and cheering them on, Nerline provides an increased level of reinforcement to students in both academic pursuits and daily-living skills.

Teacher Manager Jill LeBlanc described a recurring situation where a student in Nerline’s classroom would suddenly lie down on the floor and stop following staff instructions and requests.

“Nerline is able to swoop in, strategize based on observation of the student, and

motivate the student to complete targeted tasks, cheering her on all the while. She has demonstrated this skill across the school and residential programs. Even better, she works diligently to assist other staff members to do the same.”

Working in human services allows Nerline to combine her strongest skills: empathy, patience, and advocacy. While these traits help her excel at her job, they add what she describes as an “emotional weight” outside of the classroom.

“At times, there can be misunderstandings or lack of awareness from the broader community, requiring advocacy and education to ensure children with disabilities are seen, valued, and supported.” She emphasizes the importance of incorporating compassion and self-care practices to help prevent burn out and maintain her passion for the work.

In this field, Nerline believes it is important to build strong, trusting relationships with the students and be a consistent and reliable source of encouragement for them. She says some of the greatest milestones in her career have been seeing the growth of students she has supported. “These victories, no matter how small they may seem to others, are monumental in this field and reaffirm why the work matters.”



Building a Stronger Guild: A Farewell to Two Board Members

The Guild has seen significant growth and change since Sue Connors and Mike McDonnell both joined the Board of Trustees in 2016. The organization was going through a period of transition, having recently started the adult residential program in 2014 and bringing on Amy Sousa as Chief Executive Officer in 2017. Sue says, “We started to grow into an exceptional organization, caring for a population with IDD/ASD under first-class leadership and with creative, caring staff.”

Every member on the Board of Trustees has three vital roles: duty of care to their Board responsibilities, the mission, and the finances; duty of loyalty to put the interests of The Guild ahead of their own; and duty of obedience to the laws and regulations of the state.

When The Guild first received accreditation for residential programming from CARF, Sue played a large role in documenting The Guild’s policies for review. She has also served as the Clerk, taking on duties to document Board meetings, policies, and bylaws. Both Sue and Mike have hosted fundraisers over the years, directly funding programming and raising awareness for the mission. Mike has worked quietly behind the scenes for The Guild, supporting the move from Waltham to Concord as Treasurer of the Board. When he steps forward, he does so from the heart.

Reflecting on her time, Sue says, “serving on The Guild’s Board has been a pleasure, and I have learned a great deal from the leadership, staff and my fellow Trustees. I feel honored to have been part of it, and part of The Guild’s growth.”

“ We started to grow into an exceptional organization, caring for a population with IDD/ASD under first-class leadership and with creative, caring staff.”

Leadership

Senior Leadership

Amy C. Sousa, PhD, MSc, MHCDS
Chief Executive Officer

Michael J. Clontz, MSW, LICSW
Chief Operating Officer

Maureen Costello-Shea, MEd
Chief Program Officer

Ivette Rodriguez, MS
Chief Financial Officer

Annie Willis, MS, BCBA
Chief Education Officer

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Trustee Emeritus

Valerie Frissora, MS

Will Kinlaw, CFA

Michael D. McDonnell, MS

David Nathan

Claudia de Piante Vicin

Welcome, Peg Doherty!



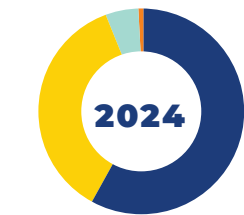
Peg Doherty is the proud parent of an adult son with multiple disabilities who has been in The Guild's adult residential program since 2015. She has served on The Guild Human Rights Committee for seven years. The Guild welcomed Peg to the Board of Trustees in 2025 and her term begins in FY26.

Financials

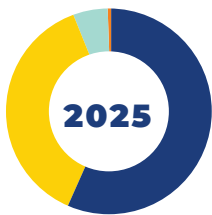
Financial Activities

REVENUE	2024	2025
Tuition	\$33,127,167	\$35,498,259
Service Fees	\$15,331,142	\$18,234,545
Contributions	\$465,527	\$292,075
Interest & Dividends	\$261,291	\$330,239
Net Realized & Unrealized Gains	\$2,082,534	\$1,457,629
Other	\$23,276	\$16,040
Total Revenue	\$51,290,937	\$55,828,787

EXPENSES



Total Expenses: \$47,791,127



Total Expenses: \$53,073,006

Statement of Financial Position

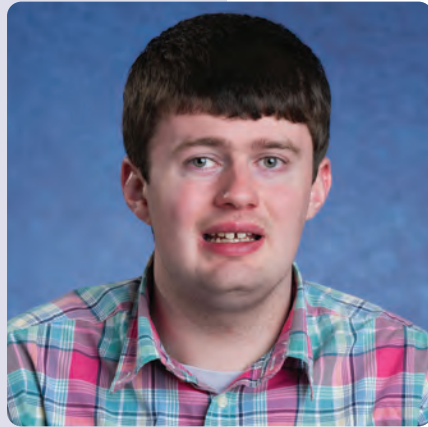
ASSETS	2024	2025
Cash	\$3,457,602	\$3,297,578
Accounts Receivables	\$3,655,337	\$4,657,443
Investments	\$17,049,748	\$18,770,886
Prepaid Expenses	\$275,803	\$251,959
Property & Equipment	\$28,284,326	\$28,216,765
Other Assets	\$3,414,785	\$3,645,432
Total Assets	\$56,137,601	\$58,840,063

State reimbursement covers almost all direct costs associated with The Guild School and residences but does not cover expenditures for capital renovations, program innovation, vacations and travel, and quality-of-life enhancements. The Guild relies on annual contributions from individuals, businesses, and grant-making institutions to support important program and capital expenses each year.

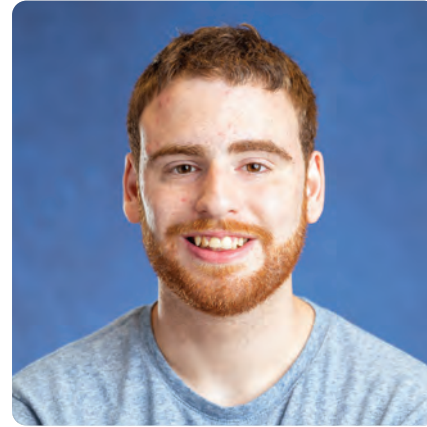
Guild School Graduates



Alex



Andrew



Austin



Brendan



Katherine



Myles



Robbie



Sir Henry



Corey



Isabel



Jared



Josh B.



Tatiana



Tiny

Not pictured:
Josh L., Patrick, Phoenix

Thank You to Our Donors

JULY 1, 2024 – JUNE 30, 2025

Lawrence Abrams	Bill Brown	Kathleen and Nicholas DeMattie	Kathryn Harris	Jayne and Tom Knapp
Lisa Abreu	Gail Brown	Keri DiLeo	Janet Hart	Carolyn Knight
Eliza Adams	Sara Brown	Katie Dinneen	Mark and Andrea Hauser	Beth Knobel
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 Dale and Lorna Peterson
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 Debra Price
 Mary Ann Price
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 Anthony Rizzo
 Jennifer Robertson
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 Fatma Sahinkaya
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 Christine Schrader
 Daniel Shea
 Susan Shea
 Kelley Sheils
 Robert Shumsky
 Laura and Jamie Silva
 Audrey Silverstein
 Nancy and John Simison
 Amy Simon
 Chris Sinclair
 Cynthia Skier
 Rosemarie Slade
 Henry Smallenberger
 Asha Smith
 Janice Smith
 Nicole Smith
 Timothy and Ilia Smith
 Una Smith
 Vicki Smith

Amy Sousa and Eric Horton
 Robert Sousa
 Michelle St. John
 Diana Starke
 Bobbie Stevens
 Rebecca Stevens
 William Sullivan
 Jenifer Swirnoff
 Carol Thibault
 Susan Veilleux
 Lorri Ventura
 George Verghese
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 Gregory Young
 Jennifer Young

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In honor of Shirin Azizoglu

Jaleh and Murat Azizoglu

In honor of Daniel Clark

Christine LoConte

In honor of Patrick Connors

Timothy Connors

In honor of Tom Corcoran

Van and Debbie Buchanan

In honor of Devon Joncas

Marina and Todd Joncas

In honor of DJ Peters

Donald Peters

In honor of Paula Plotkin

Cheryl Star

In honor of Jacob Quitzau

Karen Quitzau

In honor of Jason Rideman

Todd and Alaide Rideman

In honor of David Nathan

David Lee
 Charles Blumer

In honor of Aaron Watt

Dean and Catherine Borg
 Adi Liberman
 Vanessa Poster
 Rebecca and Chris Winters

In honor of Paula & Greg Fang-Weisz

Steven Sklare

In memory of Norma Lilly

Gilberte Chakar
 Sharon Glatt
 Jayne Reinstein
 Jessalyn Schwartz
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In memory of Robert and Linda Pelletier

Bob and Elizabeth Pelletier
 Jason Pelletier
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American Association on
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ANCOR

Association of Developmental
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MetroWest Nonprofit Network
National Association of Private Special
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North American Drama
Therapy Association
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