

# 2021 A Year of **MOMENTUM**

2021 has been a year of *forward momentum*, and we invite you to celebrate the future with us



## WELCOME

**NEXT for AUTISM** is a nonprofit organization that transforms the national landscape of services for people with autism by strategically designing and launching innovative initiatives. Our team is laser-focused on quality-of-life areas that truly promote meaningful impact on the lives of autistic adults and their families in four key areas:

Home



Work



Social



Health &  
Well-Being



### What's next for NEXT for AUTISM?

Doing whatever it takes to make the world a better place. We are ensuring every adult with autism is a valued, contributing member of society – living their very best life. This lookback report is meant to give you a snapshot of our work.

*This printed material is a downloadable version  
of NEXT for AUTISM's 2021 Year In Review.*

**Experience the interactive report at:**  
*[reports.nextforautism.org/2021](https://reports.nextforautism.org/2021)*

# Letter from the CEO-Gillian Leek

Momentum.

This one word best captures NEXT for AUTISM as we close 2021. Momentum describes our great organization, important mission and bold path forward to make sure every adult with autism thrives.

It's been a challenging time. We have all experienced incalculable loss -of life, of opportunity, and of our daily patterns of living.

For the community NEXT for AUTISM proudly serves, the stakes have changed. The isolation brought on by COVID-19 restrictions has only magnified the many disparities that autistic adults face at work, at home, and in their communities. We are keenly aware of how disconnected from their larger communities individuals with autism and their families often feel, even in the best of circumstances.

With renewed demands for social justice, calls for greater equity, and increased focus on diversity across our country, it is also time for autistic individuals to not only be seen, but to join in, to be included in this important movement toward acceptance, representation, and true belonging, no matter our perceived differences.

We are working hard to bring this vision to reality, sharply attune to projects that will have the greatest impact, particularly in the areas of home, work, social, and health & wellbeing.

This year, we embarked on several exciting efforts to quickly address some of the most pressing issues adults on the spectrum now face. This lookback report is meant to give you a snapshot of our work.



We are doing whatever it takes to make the world a better, more inclusive, and more equitable place. We work every day toward one goal: advancing our vision of a world where differences are embraced.

It is time to change the paradigm for how individuals with autism thrive throughout their adult lives -and NEXT for AUTISM is completely committed to being a leader in this movement.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gillian Leek". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Gillian" being larger and more prominent than the last name "Leek".

GILLIAN LEEK  
CEO  
NEXT for AUTISM

## A Message from our Board Chairs, Laura Slatkin & Michelle Smigel



“

"NEXT for AUTISM is an organization intent on growing our mission impact and core areas of work to best support autistic individuals. Because adults living with autism deserve equity in the workforce, homes that are safe and welcoming, a rich social life—life experiences and opportunities we all work toward."

—  
Laura Slatkin  
CO-FOUNDER & BOARD CHAIR

“

"We know this important work takes a village. Valuable partnerships are essential to NEXT for AUTISM, and we are working with like-minded groups and individuals at the community, non-profit and corporate levels committed to challenging the status quo. In teaming with others, our aim is to develop innovative content and meaningful offerings that build capacity, improve outcomes, and ultimately, enhance the lives and experiences of autistic individuals."

—  
Michelle Smigel  
BOARD CHAIR



# NEXT for AUTISM Welcomes **Tommy Hilfiger** to the Board of Directors



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"As a parent, I have firsthand experience raising children with autism, and I'm deeply committed to doing my part in raising awareness and supporting the development of resources and programs that will help individuals on the spectrum go beyond barriers and lead enriching lives. I am honored to join NEXT for AUTISM as a board member and to help advance their mission. In the spirit of this year's theme "Momentum", I am looking forward to working with our incredible board and team to continue opening up new horizons for people with autism through inclusion, education, and a strong sense of community.

Tommy Hilfiger  
BOARD MEMBER



## OUR WORK



# NEXT for DSPs

For too long, direct service providers (DSPs) have been without adequate training, professional development, benefits, and liveable wages. Amidst a national workforce crisis, NEXT for AUTISM is working every day to move the needle for DSPs and this critical profession that serves our community.

NEXT for AUTISM has partnered with The ARC Westchester to pilot a professional learning model focusing on components of choice, belonging, healthy living, and life-long learning.



“

"As a DSP, I am a witness to progress every day thanks to the NEXT for DSPs program. I see our residents' level of comfort increase as time passes, and they become more interactive with our staff and their surroundings. We continue to learn how to effectively support them in learning the skills they need to live a happy, fulfilling life."

Misa Martin

COMMUNITY LIVING SUPPORT  
PROFESSIONAL AT THE ARC WESTCHESTER





## NEXT for DEI

Adults with autism continue to face barriers to meaningful employment. With a heightened focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts, and thanks to a grant from the Bhatia Family Foundation awarded to NEXT for AUTISM in April of 2021, we are creating a DEI toolkit for companies that are committed to reporting their disability statistics. [NEXT for DEI](#) encourages every business to measure their success in employing professionals with disabilities and promoting this data publicly, as they do with gender and race/ethnicity in their diversity reports.



“

“As the mother of an autistic teenager, it is a privilege to partner with NEXT for AUTISM as they forge new ground for adults with autism. Their work is changing lives not only in the autism community, but in the community at large. It's time for autistic individuals to be seen as key components of our society and should be included in conversations around diversity, equity, and inclusion, especially in the workplace.”

—  
Anita Bhatia  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
BHATIA FOUNDATION



## NEXT for **GOING OUT**

A fulfilling and meaningful social life is key for any adult. Autistic adults often find themselves without the proper visual tools to navigate and manage life in the community.

This year, we launched NEXT for GOING OUT, an easy-to-use resource providing visual support tools for adults with autism and the professionals supporting them. Picture supports for common activities like shopping and going to the library will be easily accessible for every adult. Using visual supports improves the ability of adults with autism to be independent and have more control of their world. NEXT for GOING OUT was piloted in 2020 and will be published in December of 2021.

With help from the Embassy of the State of Qatar, NEXT for GOING OUT provides visual supports through choice boards, visual schedules and work systems, because we know that visuals increase independence.





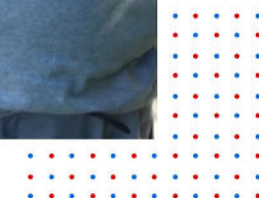
# NEXT for **GOING OUT** in action

To develop the workbook, NEXT for AUTISM hired autistic adults as models to showcase the activities featured.

**Meet our model Timothy**, who was eager to get to work and prides himself on being a hard worker, making sure to know everyone's name that he is working with. After booking this project, Timothy practiced taking the city bus to the meet up location in White Plains, New York several times. This was one of his goals as part of a community habilitation program, as travel training is an important skill for increased independence.



Since working with NEXT, Timothy has been hired at a local university and plans to learn which bus to take to travel to his new job. With his first successful experience taking the city bus alone, he now has the confidence he needs to learn his new route.





## NEXT GEN CONNECT

Mentorship is a well-established practice for supporting employment. NEXT GEN CONNECT is a peer mentorship program to improve acquisition and retention of employment for autistic adults. We are leveraging the passion and skills of professionals to act as mentors. Neurotypical people can fill the role as mentors, but ideally mentors will have autism too. After we pilot, evaluate and refine our program, we will disseminate it across the myriad of channels available for mentor relationships. These include alumni associations working with soon to be college graduates, young professionals committed to promoting diversity, equity and inclusion, autism networks interested in supporting the emerging workforce—we are open to all interested.

“

“I met with my co-mentor today. It was so nice getting to know him and learning more about him. The materials were excellent - I thought they structured the meeting well and promoted thoughtful discussion. We chose a theme for our next meeting that I think complements both the prepared materials and his goals. This is so much fun!”

Alexa West  
NEXT GEN BOARD MEMBER



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“Meeting with my mentor has been a very fulfilling experience. We learned so much about each other in the form of our goals and career interests. Interacting with my mentor has helped me understand how to make professional connections with people and how to tie my experiences to my career interests. Overall the NEXT GEN CONNECT program has helped me make new connections and opened me up to new career opportunities.”

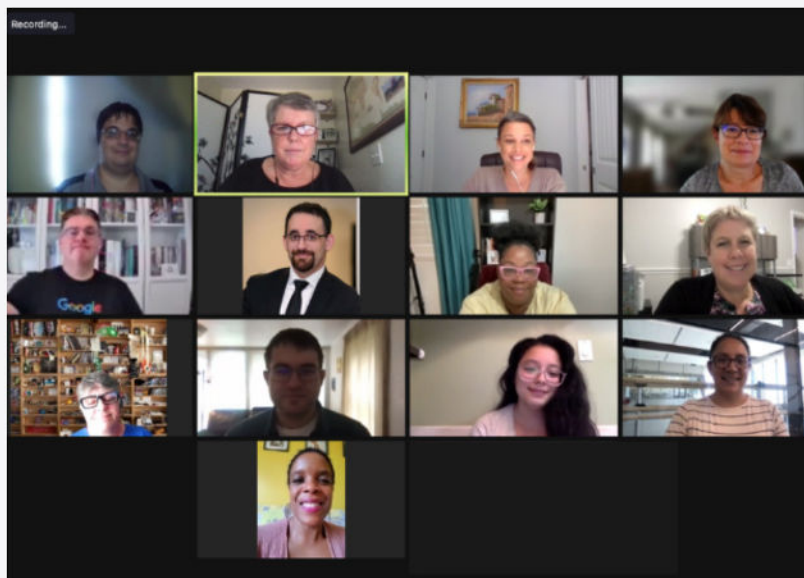
Eric Ogando  
NEXT GEN CONNECT MEMBER



# Introducing the Advisory Board

We know that the best way to support adults with autism is to fully include them in the fabric of the organization and elevate their voices in every corner of our work. To that end, NEXT for AUTISM established an advisory board in 2021 that is dedicated to providing critical feedback on our work.

The Advisory Board is frequently consulted to help NEXT for AUTISM determine areas of support not currently in the programmatic portfolio, as well as evaluate the current work as it relates to opportunities for improvement and growth. The 15-member Advisory Board, comprised of autistic and neurotypical professionals, weigh in on relevant topics directly affecting autistic adults and providing insight into how NEXT for AUTISM can best address concerns and help identify paths to solutions.



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"I'm really happy with the range of autistic voices that are present on the Advisory Board. There's a real breadth of ages, identities and backgrounds and the board is really doing a great job of answering the questions that NEXT poses to us from intersectionality-based positions. I think we're doing a lot to expand NEXT's connection with autistic adults. I was diagnosed late in life, so the inclusion of older and late-diagnosed stories is as important to me as hearing other LGBTQIA voices was to me as a young person coming out. I also really appreciate connecting professionally with other autistics. This Advisory Board is a great capacity building opportunity for NEXT for AUTISM and, independently, for the Autistic Community.

Johanna Murphy  
ADVISORY BOARD MEMBER



**NEXT**  
FOR **AUTISM**  
ADVISORY BOARD





# Autistic Reflections

## Meet Dallas Dismuke

Life on the autism spectrum presents a unique set of experiences every day. Check out our first-person reflections from autistic individuals speaking to what it's like navigating employment, a social calendar, prioritizing health and happiness, and defining what "home" means to them.



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# Community & Partners



**NEXT for AUTISM** and **The Fragrance Foundation** hosted our 2nd annual BOOTCAMP fundraiser with **AARMY's Co-Founder and Chief Fitness Officer Akin Akman** in December 2020. We received support and donations from over 275 people to benefit community living for adults with autism.

Now, we're gearing up for this year's BOOTCAMP event! There's still time to [join us on December 7th, 2021](#). We welcome teams and individuals of all abilities and fitness levels across the country to join in for 45 minutes of supercharged fun in support of NEXT's mission!

## 275 + people

**donated to benefit community  
living for adults with autism.**



In honor of Autism Acceptance Month, **Edit NYC** and **Shawn Warren Jewelry** held a special virtual shopping event in support of **NEXT for AUTISM**. The event was held during the week of April 14th online (and in-person by appointment) where **20% of all sales were donated to NEXT**. A big thank you to our supporters of Retail Therapy near and far.

## 20%

**of all sales were  
donated to NEXT.**



# Activations

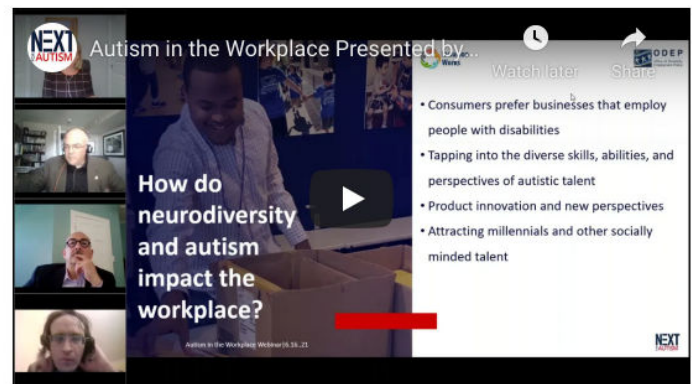
**NEXT for AUTISM** is proud to partner with organizations and corporations to generate a variety of meaningful employment opportunities for adults with autism, further engage with our community, and raise awareness and critical funds. It's our mission to ensure that leaders are well-equipped for thoughtful and consistent inclusion, and it all starts with a breadth of key partnerships like these.

In April of 2021, the **Strategic Workforce Initiatives** team partnered with the **Office of Disability Employment Policy and Inclusion Works** to present a webinar about Autism in the Workplace. It has been posted on our YouTube Channel and is our **most-watched video to date**.

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“The detailed thinking that I have and some of the other strengths and talents that I have, some of which are because of my autism, helps give me the gifts and strengths that can help empower my work and have really enhanced the work I do for ODEP”

—  
Scott Michael Robertson, PhD  
SENIOR POLICY ADVISOR,  
EMPLOYMENT-RELATED SUPPORTS POLICY TEAM  
OFFICE OF DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT POLICY  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR



NEXT for AUTISM is continuing our corporate consulting work with Freddie Mac on their Neurodiversity at Work program and Cintas with their disability recruiting efforts through the 2021 year.

[READ THE BLOG POST](#)

“

“Working with NEXT FOR AUTISM has been a very rewarding experience. Providing accessibility reviews, group training and research, Freddie Mac has become better equipped to provide support to our neurodivergent talent.”

Sarah Crump  
MANAGER, OFFICE OF  
INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT

FB Live Event with **Autism Society of America** on September 16, 2021:  
***Housing Crisis and Solutions*** where **NEXT for AUTISM'S VP of Strategic Initiatives, Brad Walker**, discussed the housing crisis in the autism community and ways to combat the issue.

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“Even if a person is able to find housing in congregate settings or group living, right now our industry is facing a serious DSP shortage, how are they going to access the resources that are necessary to ensure that they can navigate all the other aspects of semi-independent and independent living?”

Brad Walker  
VICE PRESIDENT, STRATEGIC ADULT  
INITIATIVES, NEXT FOR AUTISM





# Color the Spectrum Community Grants

The Color the Spectrum Community Grants are funded by proceeds raised during the **2021 NEXT for AUTISM's COLOR THE SPECTRUM** livestream event, in partnership with YouTube. We received over 300 applications, and will soon award several \$25,000 community grants to support the transition from school to adulthood. This year, **NEXT for AUTISM** is championing autistic-led and centered organizations and initiatives.



Funds raised from #ColorTheSpectrum will be used by NEXT for AUTISM to support the transition from school to adulthood in the following 3 areas:



## HOME

Thousands of autistic adults are in need of homes that are safe and welcoming.



## WORK

Autistic individuals face high rates of under and unemployment. NEXT for AUTISM supports equal access to employment and career choices.



## SOCIAL

Disconnection and isolation are more common for autistic people than many other disabilities. Recreation, arts, athletic and other social activities help connect autistic people to their communities.



## FINANCIALS

# 2020 Financials

NEXT for AUTISM has once again received a 4-star rating from Charity Navigator for demonstrating strong financial health and commitment to accountability and transparency. Click below to view our full Charity Navigator page.



[VIEW FINANCIALS](#)

## TEAM

# NEXT for AUTISM Team

## Board of Directors

Laura Slatkin,  
Co-Founder and Board Chair

Suzanne Aisenberg

Dr. Orrin Devinsky

Rick Goldsmith

Yie-Hsin Hung

David Remnick

Jon Stewart

Harry Slatkin,  
Co-Founder

Michael Auerbach

Karen Siff Exkorn

Doug Herzog

Steven J. Kantor

Bellanca Smigel Rutter

Tracey Stewart

Michelle Smigel,  
Board Chair

Sharon Cunningham

Esther Fein

Tommy Hilfiger

Arlene Maidman

Robert Smigel

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## Emeritus Board

Deeda Blair

Patricia Cayne, PhD

Ilene Lainer,  
**Co-Founder**

Ophelia Rudin

William Rudin

## Team

Gillian Leek,  
**Chief Executive Officer**

Amy Wallace,  
**Senior Vice President, Finance  
and Administration**

Patricia Wright,  
**Senior Vice President, Strategic  
Initiatives**

Kate Brunner Quinn, CFRE  
**Vice President, Development**

Alison Bush,  
**Senior Manager, Strategic  
Initiatives**

Lauren Cudgma,  
**Senior Marketing Manager**

Anjula Duggal,  
**Vice President, Marketing**

Kelly Fleming,  
**Director, Development and  
Events**

Coleif Holte,  
**Associate, Finance and  
Administration**

Leah Spindell,  
**Manager, Office and  
Administration**

Lauren Todd Steinbacher,  
**Director, Strategic Workforce  
Initiatives**

Brad Walker,  
**Vice President, Strategic Adult  
Initiatives**

## Advisory Board

John Barrowman

Dawn Buffington Townsend,  
Ph.D., BCBA-D

Mari Cerdá

Nasiah Cirincione-Ulezi,  
Ed.D., BCBA

Carly Ott Fulgham

Dr. Peter Gerhardt

Casey Grothus

Jim Hogan

Andrew Komarow, MSFS,  
CFP, CNP

Johanna Murphy

Maria Davis-Pierre, LMHC

Anne Roux, MPH, MA

Denise Rozell, JD

Maurice Snell

## Next Gen Board

Tania Ryalls,  
**Board Co-Chair**

Erik Rutter,  
**Board Co-Chair**

Marni Hirschfield Gomez

Ali Goldsmith

Jenna Grippo

Jennifer Hilibrand

Andrew Klestadt

Kayla Lebovits

Harry Maidman

Matthew Tinkelman

Alexa West