

Annual Gala

October 2024



Nothing About Us
Without Us Award
CommunicationFIRST

Ally of the Year
Shannon Des Roches Rosa

Mel Baggs
Down In The Valley Award
L. "Dax" Daxer

Loud Hands Award
for Autistic Storytellers
Ashley Storrie

Creating Community
Together Award
**Long COVID Justice
Pauline Bosma**

Harriet McBryde Johnson
Award for Nonfiction
Katherine Gilyard

Proceeds will support our advocacy work and programs for the coming year, and will allow us to continue working to empower disabled people across the country.



Nothing about us without us!

Our Mission

The Autistic Self Advocacy Network seeks to advance the principles of the disability rights movement with regard to autism. ASAN believes that the goal of autism advocacy should be a world in which autistic people enjoy equal access, rights, and opportunities. We work to empower autistic people across the world to take control of our own lives and the future of our common community, and seek to organize the autistic community to ensure our voices are heard in the national conversation about us. Nothing About Us, Without Us!

Program

Wednesday, Oct. 30th

3:00 to 4:45 pm ET – Sowing Safety: Cultivating Protections and Weeding Out Harmful Policies During the Ongoing Pandemic

As mask bans have continued popping up and pandemic protections are lifted, many disabled people are disproportionately impacted, facing heightened risks in a society increasingly eager to move on from the pandemic. We know that COVID-19 is still an issue. We'll be joined by experts discussing how to navigate the continual erosion of pandemic protections, the harm caused by mask bans, and what we can do to support and keep each other safer. [Register here.](#)

Panelists: **Ngozi Alston, Emi Kane, Eiryn Griest Schwartzman, CHES**
Moderator: **Alex Grandstaff**, Programs Manager

5:15 - 7:00 pm ET – Digging Deeper: Autism and Mental Health

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) often have mental health disabilities too, but it's harder to get the right care. This is because mental health services and IDD services are kept separate, creating gaps in support. Most of the time, people with IDD can only get either mental health care or IDD supports—not both. “Behavior support services” tend to focus on controlling or changing behavior and don't meet people's needs. This can contribute to trauma and mental health burden for many people with IDD. In this panel, we will talk about how the current systems are failing people with both IDD and mental health disabilities, and what changes we want to see. [Register here.](#)

Panelists: **Karyn Harvey, Perri Spencer, Nancy Thaler, Héctor Manuel Ramírez, Jenny Mai Phan, James Baptiste**
Moderator: **Donnie Denome**, Inclusive Publications and Research Coordinator

7:30 pm ET – Award Ceremony

At this year's Awards Ceremony, we will be honoring several awardees for their tireless work in advocacy, community building, and so much more. We'll also hear remarks from ASAN's incoming Executive Director Colin Killick! [Watch the livestream.](#)

Nothing About Us Without Us Award:

CommunicationFIRST

Creating Community Together Award:

Long COVID Justice, Pauline Bosma

Mel Baggs Down In The Valley Award:

L. "Dax" Daxer

Loud Hands Award for Autistic Storytellers:

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Harriet McBryde Johnson Award for Nonfiction:

Katherine Gilyard

Ally to the Autistic Community Award:

Shannon Des Roches Rosa

Giveaways

We'll also be raffling off two year-long ASAN [memberships](#) at the Trivia Teammates tier, which includes a membership welcome pack, a member-exclusive newsletter, digital phone and computer wallpapers, an ASAN logo sticker, an ASAN mug, a \$5 gift card to the ASAN shop, a physical copy of one of ASAN's books [Knowing Why, Navigating College, Empowering Leadership, Welcome to the Autistic Community, or Loud Hands], an ASAN pen, an ASAN lapel pin, an ASAN tangle, and a T-shirt!

Awardees

Nothing About Us Without Us Award: CommunicationFIRST

Launched five years ago this month, CommunicationFIRST is the only disability-led nonprofit dedicated to protecting the rights and advancing the interests of the estimated 5 million children



and adults in the United States who cannot rely on speech alone to be heard and understood due to disability or other condition and regardless of cause or age of onset. CommunicationFIRST is a cross-disability, cross-generational, multi-racial, and multicultural disability-led civil rights organization. They promote societal and systemic change through public engagement, policy and practice reform, and legal advocacy.

Members of our community are regularly denied access to effective communication; wrongfully assessed and stigmatized for life; deprived of an inclusive, appropriate education; segregated and institutionalized; isolated and excluded from everyday life, including the ever-more-important digital world; subjected to inferior health care; abused and victimized; and far worse. Research and lived experience suggest that Black, brown, multilingual, and other multiply-marginalized individuals are both more likely to need augmentative and alternative communication [AAC] at some point in life and to experience harsh and compounding forms of societal oppression and discrimination as a result. The unwarranted assumptions, stereotypes, and discrimination we still experience often stem from the outdated and hard-wired policies and practices of federal, state, and local governmental entities. It is still the norm for countless numbers of our constituents to be ostracized and perceived and treated as less than: As having less intellect, less to say, and no need or right to do so – all, ironically, because others cannot understand them.

CommunicationFIRST is transforming the national conversation about the rights and lived experiences of people who need and use expressive communication tools and supports. They are ensuring conversations at the federal and state levels around policy issues that impact people who cannot rely on speech alone (e.g., communication access in public and private entities (including education, health care, and the court system), guardianship, restraint and seclusion, institutionalization, and more) include their voices and address their interests. They are ambitious and unrelenting disabled advocates who believe in radical inclusion and acceptance. They are fighting to change hearts and minds, and to build a world that centers justice, community, dignity, and humanity.

Creating Community Together Award: Long COVID Justice



[Long COVID Justice](#) leads collective efforts to confront the Long COVID crisis, centering racial, social, economic and disability justice. Their work is done by and for chronically ill and disabled people, our families and communities.

They are network-builders, communicators and mobilizers. Our areas of focus include: strategic communications and narrative change, local and federal advocacy around Long COVID and associated conditions (LCAC), resourcing BIPOC leaders through fellowships, and creating accessible resources for health education and movement building.

Long COVID Justice is a project of [Strategies for High Impact \(S4HI\)](#), and we are fiscally sponsored by [Allied Media Projects](#).

Creating Community Together Award: Pauline Bosma



MASS is an agency that helps to empower self-advocates through education so people with intellectual and developmental disabilities can make choices that improve and enrich their lives.

Pauline is building a living legacy by working with her passion to create a better world for others.

Pauline is the founder and coordinator of the Rainbow Groups of Massachusetts Advocates Standing Strong (MASS), a network of support groups that started in October of 2004 for LGBTQ+ adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. She continually finds new ways to grow the network by supporting people across the state as well as nationally and on occasion, internationally. Pauline also delivers sexuality training and teaches staff and agencies about supporting people with I/DD who identify as LGBTQ+. Pauline loves helping her peers and others to learn about and celebrate gender and sexual diversity. When she assists in starting new local Rainbow Groups, she emphasizes human rights: the need for people to learn their rights, especially their rights to liberty and freedom of choice. Pauline gets the “big picture” and she patiently works to see her many ideas come to fruition. She is not afraid to take risks and is confident in achieving her desired outcomes.

Pauline is a passionate and dedicated leader on the Central Region Awareness and Action (A&A) training team where she assisted in creating a nationally recognized training, which teaches people with I/DD how to recognize, report and respond to abuse. Pauline’s training abilities are extraordinary! She also mentors her teammates on training techniques. She has a “can do” attitude, and she continually comes up with new ideas and ways to make things happen. She is also working on the MASS Rights for Change project, through

the Office of Violence Against Women, to help end sexual violence for people with I/DD, by increasing support for survivors of sexual violence. Pauline has experienced the pain of being excluded, and she makes it her life's work to bring everyone together in an atmosphere of acceptance.

Whether through her work with the LGBTQ+ community, abuse prevention, or in her everyday life, Pauline's life is about creating an environment where all our voices can be heard and supported in a safe place. She can instantly put people at ease, with her intuitive understanding of others and her down-to-earth style of communication and sense of humor. Pauline is committed to equity, opportunity, and inclusion for all. She is well-known and highly respected by her peers and other professionals, and she has changed the lives of many people who have reached out to her to share their stories. You could not find a more worthy candidate for this award.



Mel Baggs Down In The Valley Award: L. “Dax” Daxer

Dax lives in southwest Ohio, USA. They graduated from Wright State University and work as a volunteer for their local library. When they’re not wrangling large stacks of books back onto shelves, they

enjoy raising foster kittens, playing tabletop RPGs, and reading about science. They have been doing research and writing for the Disability Day of Mourning website since 2014.

Loud Hands Award for Autistic Storytellers: Ashley Storrie

Ashley Storrie is a multi BAFTA award nominee, comedian, writer and actress from Glasgow. Ashley most recently co-created and co-wrote *Dinosaur*, which she also stars in, produced by Fleabag producers Two Brothers Pictures, released on Hulu in the US and BBC1/iPlayer in the UK in 2024. The show was nominated for 4 Scottish BAFTAs including two nominations for Ashley in the categories of Actress [Television] and Writer [Film/Television].





Harriet McBryde Johnson Award for Nonfiction: Katherine Gilyard

When Katherine Gilyard first arrived at Howard University, her plan and dream were simple: pursue her love for science, major in biology, go to medical school, work in medicine like the

three generations of women before her, and become a resource for her community. However, after experiencing sexual assault in her freshman year, navigating the criminal justice, mental health, and medical systems as she awaited her offender's trial, and receiving an autism diagnosis, her dream evolved. Her community now included survivors of assault, people with disabilities, and those who had been left out of important conversations. Her plan shifted to reflect this change.

For over 10 years, Katherine's work has focused on deeply exploring the intersections of equity, power, systems, and culture, centering the stories of disabled and marginalized communities, and making health and wellness information accessible to all. She currently does this work as a multimedia health equity reporter, victims' counselor, and disability and accessibility advocate, always looking for new ways to learn and progress in her mission.

Ally to the Autistic Community Award: Shannon Des Roches Rosa



Shannon Rosa is senior editor of Thinking Person's Guide to Autism, an autism information and advocacy nexus. Her writing can be found in The Washington Post and the anthology Autistic Community and the Neurodiversity Movement, among other places. She lives near San Francisco, California, with her husband and adult autistic son.

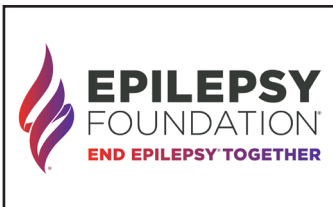
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AT&T proudly supports ASAN for its ongoing commitment to equal access, rights, and opportunities for the autistic community.



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Self-advocacy makes stronger communities



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the power of the autistic community in
achieving change and ensuring that there
is “nothing about us without us.”



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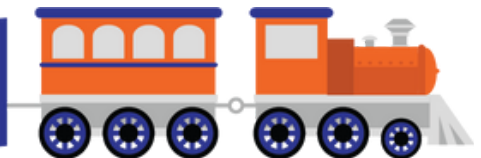




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www.autisticadvocacy.org

**Thank you for
celebrating with us!**