



## Autism Now Through The Years: 2011–2014



The Arc's Autism Now Center<sup>1</sup> is a dynamic and interactive, central point for quality resources and information for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and other developmental disabilities, their families, and other targeted key stakeholders.

---

**Regional Summit:** a meeting held in a specific region or area with the function of bringing together individuals in a community to identify their needs in a certain area

---

The Arc's Autism Now Center was created to fulfill the need for a one-stop, online resource containing contemporary and trustworthy information carefully selected by individuals who have a diagnosis on the autism spectrum and others in the field, for individuals with ASD and their allies. The overall goal of The Arc's Autism Now Center is to provide the estimated 4.7 million Americans who have intellectual and developmental and other related disabilities (I/DD) access to information about the necessary supports and services to attain optimal growth and development.

Five regional summits, held in Washington, D.C., California, Indiana, Texas, and Florida during the summer of 2011 informed planning. The summits were designed to bring together a diverse group of stakeholders to discuss the major issues confronting the ASD and I/DD communities, and to identify targeted areas of need to direct The Arc's Autism Now Center efforts. In a later satisfaction survey, individuals with ASD and professionals/advocates indicated that topics were relevant and speakers knowledgeable. As a result of information gained from the summits, improvements were made, including content, information delivery, and call center operations.

<sup>1</sup>The Arc's Autism Now Center is a national initiative of The Arc of the United States and was funded by the Administration on Developmental Disabilities (grant number 90DN0283).

# The Impact of the Autism Now Center

Since 2011, the Autism Now Center has been providing information and resources in core areas across the lifespan including: early detection, intervention, and education; transition from high school into early adulthood; community-based employment; advocacy for families and self-advocates; community inclusion; aging issues; policy; implementation of the Affordable Care Act; long-term supports and services; family and sibling support; and local, state, and national networking opportunities. In an effort to find out more about the overall impact of the Autism Now Center on users, as well as overall user satisfaction, an evaluation was conducted. Highlights of the resulting evaluation report are outlined in this summary. [The full report is available here.](#)



## Website

The Center's website ([autismnow.org](http://autismnow.org)) is the primary way in which Autism Now provides resources and disseminates information to a national audience. Between launching in April 2011 and 2014, the website had over 126,000 unique visitors to 124 pages of content containing over 1,700 resources. Visitors were mainly from the U.S. (90%); however, international users from the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and India visited the site as well. The most frequently viewed sections of the website were pages related to information about funding and SSI, social stories, and classroom resources. Pages related to issues around sexuality and relationships for individuals with ASD were also popular and commanded the attention of many users. Satisfaction survey data reveal that respondents found resources useful and accurate; 77% of individuals with a diagnosis of ASD felt the website improved their lives; professionals and families agreed that the site was easy to navigate.



## National Information and Call Center

[The National Information and Call Center](#) consists of a toll-free phone number and an e-mail address to field individual questions/comments. At the time of the evaluation, the Center had received nearly 1,800 emails and phone calls from families, professionals, and self-advocates. Overall, the most frequently sought after information was related to finding services, self-advocacy, and locations at which diagnostic testing can be performed to confirm or rule out ASD.



## Webinars

During 2010 and 2014, The Autism Now Center hosted [116 webinars](#) yielding nearly 9,000 registrants on topics such as transition, early detection and intervention, recreation and self-advocacy, education, Social Security Insurance and benefits, disability services, employment, dating and sexuality, bullying, and housing. Evaluation data show that the vast majority of respondents indicated that resources and information provided were informative and applicable to their daily lives and they appreciated that presenters were experienced. Overall, participants agreed that information provided was useful and increased their understanding of the topic.



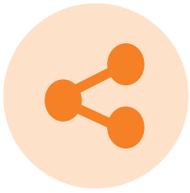
## Blog

[The blog](#) is a page of the website dedicated to essays written by self-advocates, professionals, parents, and others on topics related to autism or ASD. Topics covered include sensory integration for individuals with autism, learning styles for individuals with autism, poetry written by an individual on the autism spectrum, and a piece on autism acceptance and the lived experience of living with an ASD.



### Prism: E-Newsletter

During the time between 2011 and 2014, The Arc's Autism Now Center produced a thematic monthly e-newsletter called [Prism](#) covering topics or stories related to autism or ASD. Contributors included the Director and Co-Director of The Arc's Autism Now Center, as well as a monthly guest blogger. Over four years, Prism steadily grew its subscribers to over 454. Topics included education, advocacy, bullying and victimization, emergency preparedness, technology, diet and health, financial planning, daily accommodations, and independent living. Survey respondents indicated that information presented in the newsletter was useful, current, and improved their ability to work in the field.



### Social Media

 Since the [Facebook page](#) was launched in April 2011, it has received over 63,000 likes and has more than 21,300 followers. Topics for the posts range from The Arc's Autism Now Center content, articles and research, to daily posts of a positive story about an individual with autism. Survey respondents agreed that Facebook is an effective communication platform for this type of information; 73% agreed that the Facebook page helped them feel engaged and connected with other individuals who have ASD.

 Since launching in April 2011, The Arc's Autism Now Center [Twitter account](#) (@AutismNowCenter) has steadily gained new followers and has nearly 2,000 followers to date. Topics for the posts range from The Arc's Autism Now Center content, articles and research, to a daily post of a positive story about an individual with autism.

 The Arc's Autism Now Center created a series of videos housed on its [YouTube channel](#) as part of an Answer Series in which the staff collected questions from website visitors. The questions were answered by Amy Goodman, Director of The Arc's Autism Now Center, and cover a wide variety of topics: early signs of autism, assistive technology, neurodiversity, housing options, advocacy organizations, disability rights laws, how to talk to your doctor, bullying, social security, marriage, and many more. There are also some videos from The Arc's Autism Now Center's partner, Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE), covering topics such as sexuality, dating, and how to self-advocate and influence public policy. Currently there are over 50 videos posted which have been viewed by over 5,200 people. Satisfaction survey respondents agreed that videos are relevant, of good quality, and feature knowledgeable presenters.

Overall, survey results indicate that the majority of respondents were extremely or very satisfied with The Arc's Autism Now Center and its services.

Respondents agreed that information and resources from The Arc's Autism Now Center reflected their needs, included diverse perspectives, and showed respect for the ASD/I/DD communities. Half of professionals/advocates agreed that the information and resources helped increase their confidence/capacity to perform duties and 66% agreed that it helped increase their knowledge of supports and services for the future. The majority of family members agreed (55%) that The Arc's Autism Now Center helped them to be a better advocate for their child. A majority of respondents indicated that without The Arc's Autism Now Center, they would be negatively impacted and would have to find alternate sources of current and unbiased resources.

# The Arc's Autism Now Center Today

As a culminating project for the grant, Autism Now created an employment handbook called *TalentScout™: Unlocking the Talents of Employees with Autism Spectrum Disorders* for employers who are looking to hire, train, and retain employees on the autism spectrum. Written by self-advocates, it is a guide to assist employers in meeting the diverse employment needs of individuals on the autism spectrum. Content includes topics such as confidentiality, co-worker relationships, job announcements, accommodations, and much more. It can be found on The Arc's website: [thearc.org/thearcwork](http://thearc.org/thearcwork).



[Amy's Consultation Service](#) was recently created for The Arc's Autism Now Center. Amy Goodman, Director of The Arc's Autism Now Center, is available for speaking engagements, presentations, and trainings covering a wide range of topics including Autism 101, bullying, employment, Sensory Processing Disorder, special education laws, marriage and ASD, and much more. For more information and a menu of services, please email Amy at [agoodman@autismnow.org](mailto:agoodman@autismnow.org) or [info@autismnow.org](mailto:info@autismnow.org), or call 1.202.600.3489.



*"I thought about what kind of bus [my son] would ride to school, what kind of classroom he would be in and I wondered if he'd ever go to prom or get married or live on his own or go to college. I wondered if he'd ever tell me he loved me...yesterday he went on his 5th grade field trip with all of his typically developing peers and played in a water park with all of his many friends and told me later that he thinks he has a really awesome life. I think he does too."*

•Bonnie



*"Autism Now has been invaluable to us in our efforts to get our son what he requires. We have been advised of the regulations that schools must follow...Autism Now has also directed us to resources that we have used to build our son's case for inclusion."*

*"Autism Now has not just provided us with the findings of experts, but it has provided us with the explanations from people on the spectrum."*

•Steve

