



DS  
act

Down Syndrome Association  
of Central Texas

# 2025 IMPACT REPORT

# Letter From Our Board President

Dear DSACT Community,

Welcome! 2025 was an exciting year filled with cherished programs, people, and events as well as a host of new offerings and faces. Thank you for making this possible!

It is a challenge to pick just a few favorite moments each year, but here is my best try...

First, Advocacy Day at the State Capitol – we joined members of DSACT and partner organizations from across the state to hear proclamations read on both the House and Senate floors. In addition, we met with representatives and were able to leave information (along with some crazy socks) for many officials. My favorite part of the day was watching my middle school son advocate for DSACT and reading the letter he wrote to include in our packet. His words in support of inclusion for his younger sister at school and in life were profound. I am already looking forward to next year when we will do this again and the kids can advocate as a team... get ready Texas politicians!



Next, the Education Conference – during one portion I was messaging my team at school about some of the strategies being shared because they fit into lessons we were doing at that time. The DSACT Education Conference was improving classroom experiences for learners with and without Down syndrome within thirty minutes of the information being presented. Wow! Even with a day full of incredible strategies, content, and applications, the highlight was the keynote address from a DSACT member and self-advocate. His description of his own educational experience, current accomplishments, and future goals raised expectations for every educator in the room.

Finally, Buddy Walk – it is incredible to see our huge community come together each year, finding new ways to celebrate each other. Being with the friends and family that return every year, as well as the new folks that joined us for the first time, is a gift. Every year I say it was the best one yet, and this year certainly delivered!

There is much to celebrate and exciting opportunities ahead. Thank you for helping DSACT educate, advocate, and build community! You are building an inclusive Central Texas for everyone.

With sincere gratitude,

Connolly Lees

DSACT Board of Directors President

## Board of Directors



(Left to Right)

**Juanpablo Wright**, **Sara Dodd**, **LaTasha Rodgers**,  
**Victoria Gonzales** *Vice President*, **Nick Carlin** *Treasurer*,  
**Suzanne Shepherd**, **Marshall Eudy** *Secretary*,  
**Ellen Sauer**, **Connolly Lees** *President*, **Mariel Cannady**

## Staff



(Left to Right)

**Brittany Garcia** *Administrative Assistant*  
**Julia Forslund** *Executive Director*  
**Megan Neeley** *Events and Programs Manager*  
**Jami Dean** *Education & Outreach Manager*  
**Ava Richards** *Programs & Communications Intern*  
**Theo Frankovich** *Director of Development & Partnerships*

# Recreation Programs

DSACT’s recreation programs are a cornerstone of our mission, creating joyful, inclusive spaces where individuals with Down syndrome of all ages can build healthy habits. In 2025, we expanded these opportunities into new communities and launched several new recreation programs, allowing us to reach more families than ever before. Across weekly and seasonal sessions, participants connected with peers, developed new skills, and experienced the power of belonging in supportive environments.

In 2025, DSACT hosted **46 Recreation Programs** across **279 sessions** for **484 registrants**



“I loved socializing with the families that I met. Their experiences helped me gain knowledge of more programs and other resources in the community. It gave my son the opportunity to meet new friends.” – DSACT Parent



## CHECK OUT SOME OF OUR NEW RECREATION PROGRAMS



**Basketball**



**Bowling**



**Rock Climbing**



**Learn To Swim**



**Pickleball**



**Cooking**



**Karate**

# Education Outreach

Education outreach is central to DSACT's mission to build meaningful support for individuals with Down syndrome. In 2025, DSACT delivered 7 training sessions on the Down Syndrome Learning Profile reaching 359 people. We also hosted Lunch & Learn workshops on key topics, such as Early Childhood Development and Getting Ready for College. Together, these efforts reflect our commitment to empowering families, educators, and communities.



## World Down Syndrome Day Kits



DSACT amplified our reach in 2025 by distributing 100 classroom kits for World Down Syndrome Day across 29 districts, 67 campuses, and 4 homeschooling groups across Central Texas, impacting over 2,633 students.

**"I am a librarian at an elementary school. Our school has 2 students with Down syndrome and I would love to use the book and resources to raise awareness and empathy for our friends." – WSDS Kit Recipient**

## Lori Tullos Barta Educator of the Year

We are honored to recognize the recipients of the 2025 Lori Tullos Barta Outstanding Educator Award: an incredible team of educators from **Rouse High School in Leander ISD**. This exceptional group has demonstrated unwavering commitment to fostering inclusion and supporting the success of all students. **A big thank you to Tommy Thompson, Sharon Schwab, Jordyn LaFevers, Daniel Lapaglia, Jessica Paxtor, Julie Ray, Nadia Shanaa, Josie Giarratano, Cherryll Price, Kristen Clifford, and Susan Rudick for their outstanding efforts to create an environment where every student is seen, supported, and empowered to thrive.**



## Literacy Lab



**In September 2025, DSACT proudly launched Literacy Lab**, a hands-on program designed to empower families with research-based literacy strategies grounded in the Science of Reading. Through close collaboration with parents, the program equips families with practical tools to support their child's reading development at home. In its inaugural cohort, 8 families enrolled, participating in a blend of in-person and virtual sessions each month, ensuring accessibility, consistency, and meaningful progress toward lifelong literacy.

# Social Groups

**Our social calendar was busier than ever in 2025, with more than 75 events across six social groups.** Adults built independence and community through Supper Club outings and Service & Social Club volunteer projects with partners like Hope Austin and Keep Austin Beautiful. Teens and adults also enjoyed dances, bowling socials, and recurring events with games and crafts. Younger members explored favorite spots like Dart'em Up, The Sensory Club, Little Land, local parks, and splash pads, building friendships and lasting memories along the way.



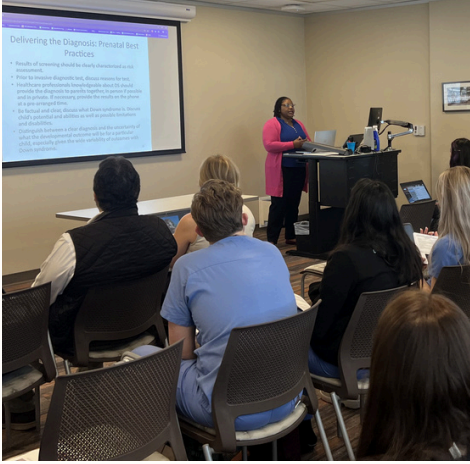
## Welcoming New Staff!

**In 2025, we hired Megan Neeley as our Events and Programs Manager to facilitate and organize recreation programs and social events. We also welcomed two facilitators to increase our social events across the social groups, Haley and Doris.** When asked about the teen group, Haley said, "I have seen the most confidence improvements and increases in new social interactions in our teen group! We have had a few teens bring their favorite games from home and ask others to join in so they can teach them how to play. It has been so fun and heart-warming to see the growth in social engagement and formation of new friendships since we started these events last summer."



**Regarding the adult social group, Haley told us,** "One thing that always strikes a chord with me in this group is the way they support each other and listen to how other people are feeling. **The empathy these adults share with one another is so beautiful.** For our activity we shared something we love most about ourselves, a goal we have for the new year, something we are grateful for, and how we are going to spread kindness. The answers were incredible. So many of the goals surrounded the concept of helping other people, being a better listener, and spreading more joy and happiness. Everyone was grateful for most of the things others take for granted: life, family, friendship."

# Medical Outreach



DSACT's medical collaboration project has been a pivotal initiative in enhancing healthcare education for medical providers caring for our community. **We worked with 23 Pediatric Residents, 14 OB/GYN residents, and 5 final-year medical students**, providing them with specialized training and resources to better understand and address the unique medical needs of individuals with Down syndrome.

"One of the biggest take home points was about how many conversations are framed negatively around Down syndrome and focusing on positivity and strengths is very important. I will frame my interactions around how we can get this individual to achieve their maximum potential"

**-Medical Resident**

# New Parent Program

We believe every family deserves to be met with compassion and connection. Our New Parent Program welcomes expectant and new parents with a heartfelt congratulations, trusted resources, and a supportive community ready to walk alongside them. Through our New Parent Guides, Welcome Packages, and New Parent Support Group, families are reminded that they are not alone and that their journey will be filled with belonging and joy.

**67**

New families joined the DSACT community

**28**

New parents received a New Parent Package

**14**

Families joined our Parent Support Series



# Speech Therapy



**In 2025, DSACT completed its 18-month PEAK Speech Therapy Program**, supporting children in building stronger communication skills and confidence. Participants increased expressive language by an average of three additional words per sentence, with some children progressing from two-word phrases to seven-word sentences. Families also reported an average 20% improvement in speech clarity, with high satisfaction and meaningful progress across the program.

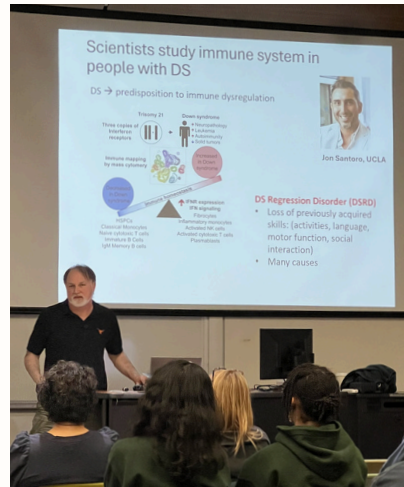
**DSACT also launched Let's Talk**, a three-session workshop led by speech-language pathologists designed to strengthen real-world conversational skills for adults.

# A Year In Review: Events

2/5/25

## Research Conference

DSACT's Research Conference featured topics in Down syndrome research, including new insights into diagnosing and treating Down Syndrome Regression Disorder. Led by a DSACT parent and Associate Professor of Neuroscience at the University of Texas, the event equipped families and professionals to better support individuals with Down syndrome.



2/16/25

## Austin Marathon

As part of the Austin Marathon, DSACT hosted a water and aid station that doubled as a high-energy fundraiser. Our amazing volunteers created a lively, welcoming environment that encouraged runners and brought visibility to our mission, all while helping raise essential funds to support our programs.



3/19/25

## Advocacy Day

DSACT hosted an Advocacy Day at the Texas Capitol, where proclamations honoring World Down Syndrome Day were presented in both the House and Senate. **Eight Down syndrome organizations joined us, bringing together over 150 participants from across the state.** The day empowered families and self-advocates to make their voices heard and helped drive meaningful conversations around policies that directly impact our community, such as expanded access to Home and Community-Based Services and increased wages for Direct Service Providers.



# A Year In Review: Events

3/29/25

## World Down Syndrome Day Recital

DSACT's World Down Syndrome Day Recital brought families and friends together for an unforgettable celebration of inclusion, music, and community. With performances in choir, line dancing, creative movement, hip hop, and contemporary dance, plus a family singalong, the event highlighted the joy, creativity, and confidence of our performers.



4/30/25

## Cocktail Bash

Our annual Cocktail Bash was a tremendous success, making this our most impactful year to date. The event celebrated the strength of our community while raising vital funds to support individuals with Down syndrome and their families. **We were also honored to recognize Tess Smichenko as our Volunteer of the Year**, celebrating her unwavering dedication and meaningful contributions to DSACT.



8/1/25

## Family Day

DSACT hosted a Family Day at Main Event featuring bowling, laser tag, and mini golf, bringing families together for an afternoon of fun and connection. Families left with smiles, strengthened connections, and lasting memories.



9/24/25

## Golf Tournament

The Golf Tournament brought our community together for a day of fun, connection, and fundraising in support of DSACT. Special thanks to our incredible organizers and volunteers whose commitment and planning made this event a success.



# A Year In Review: Events

10/19/25

## DSACT Buddy Walk®

**Our signature fundraiser brought nearly 1,600 community members together for a joyful day of celebration, with the theme *These Boots Are Made for Buddy Walkin'*.**

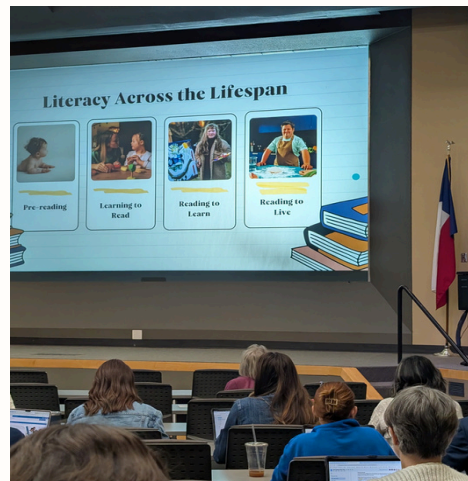
Participants enjoyed new attractions, like hair tinsel, henna tattoos, caricature drawings, and a DSACT line dance performance. Thanks to the incredible generosity of our community, the event raised more than \$170,000 to support our programs. Special thanks to Team Jean Pablo for raising over \$15,000, Adalyn's Alliance for registering 60 team members and Super Siah for winning the Team Spirit Award! We were especially proud to celebrate our first team captained by a DSACT adult, Speedy Supper Club, which invited all DSACT adults to join and fundraise, raising over \$2,500.



11/4/25

## Education Conference

DSACT hosted an Education Conference for parents, educators, and school leaders focused on practical strategies and best practices to support students with Down syndrome. Sessions covered topics such as literacy across the lifespan, inclusive academics, transition planning, and writing effective, compliant goals. Together, participants gained tools and insights to better support students at every stage of their educational journey.



12/13/25

## Holiday Party

Our Holiday Party was a joyful celebration filled with festive fun, music, and holiday magic. Families enjoyed lunch, arts and crafts, a DJ dance party, and special visits from Santa, the Grinch, and Princess Elsa, along with a beautiful holiday choir performance from the DSACT choir.



# Donors & Supporters



We are deeply grateful to every donor, volunteer, and in-kind supporter who made 2025 such a meaningful and impactful year for DSACT. Your generosity and belief in our mission fuel everything we do, from vital programs and family support to advocacy, education, and community-building. Thank you for being an essential part of the DSACT community and helping individuals with Down syndrome and their families thrive!



## LEGACY BUILDERS (\$10,000+)

Ellen Sauer  
The Shepherd Family  
Aero Capital Solutions

Frank and Jane Bradley  
McGuire Family Charitable Fund  
Montandon Charitable Trust

The Moody Foundation  
The Spuhler Family

## CHANGEMAKERS (\$5,000-\$9,999)

Daniel Family Fund  
Judy Sauer  
Charity Golf International

Marilyn & Terry Cole  
Tritium Partners  
BeatBox Beverages

H-E-B  
The Henry Family

## IMPACT LEADERS (\$2,500-\$4,999)

Carlin Wealth Management  
Group  
Dike Family Charity Trust  
Matt and Sam Conkey  
Marshall Eudy and Ryan  
Korsgard  
IronMountain Solutions Inc.

Beverley McCabe & Charles  
Pennington  
Sue Lowry  
Copper Top Tavern  
Nola Metcalf  
Diane Maskey  
Legacy Roofing Pros  
The Anderson Family

Half Community Initiative  
Guillermo Carrillo  
Dennis Cahill  
Lesly Johnson  
Austin Regional Clinic  
Champion Site Prep  
Henna Chevrolet

## CHAMPION'S CIRCLE (\$1,000-\$2,499)

The Cannady Family  
Elizabeth and Mike Bradley  
Vilma Luna  
Keystone Concrete  
The Feiner Family  
Nick and Catalina Carlin  
The Lees Family  
The Dodd Family  
Mary Coyle

The Raffiani Family  
Foundation  
Texas Lassos  
Ellen Boucher  
Lisa Rhodes  
The Victory Tap  
Ruby's Rainbow  
Jenna and Joey Bouchard  
Kim and Ron Eudy

Michele Roberts  
Amanda Gates  
Chisholm Trail Elementary  
School  
Ashley Sanchez  
The Schnizlein Family  
Jeanette Castelan  
Kimberly Wilde  
Bonnie Whiteis

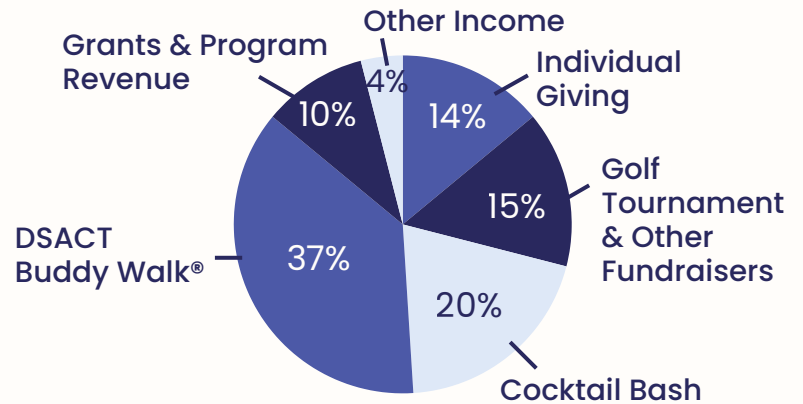
Lonnie Vantyle  
Mitch Permy  
Rolf and Pia Habersang  
Swift Fit Events  
The Clark Family  
The Pollard Family  
The Singleton Family  
Walmart

# Our Community Makes It Possible

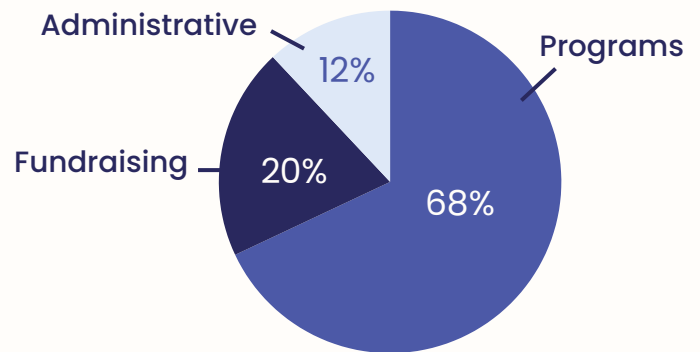
DSACT's mission is made possible through the generosity of individual donors, event participants, sponsors, and grant partners, along with program revenue. Through strong community support and careful financial stewardship, the organization has built healthy operating reserves. In 2025, the Board approved a planned net loss to strategically reinvest reserve funds into staff capacity and program infrastructure, supporting long-term sustainability and expanded impact.

**Total Revenue: \$467,487**  
**Total Expenses: \$553,195**

## Where Our Funding Comes From



## Where Your Support Goes



## Farewell from DSACT Executive Director

As I reflect on the years of Buddy Walks, social events, recreation programs, advocacy efforts, and countless meaningful moments in between, I am incredibly proud of the growth we have experienced together. From launching Supper Club and building our World Down Syndrome Day recitals, to organizing advocacy days at the Capitol, welcoming new families, and expanding programming across all ages, it has been an honor to walk alongside this community.

At the heart of it all are the families, self-advocates, volunteers, and supporters who make DSACT what it is. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to have been part of this journey. DSACT will always hold a very special place in my heart, and this is certainly not goodbye. I look forward to staying connected and popping in at events from time to time.

**With my sincerest gratitude,**  
 Julia Forslund





DS  
act

Down Syndrome Association  
of Central Texas

# CONNECT WITH US!

[www.dsact.org](http://www.dsact.org)

512-323-0808

[admin@dsact.org](mailto:admin@dsact.org)

Tax ID number: 74-2577312.



@dsact