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Good morning and thank you so much for being with us today at AUCD. My name is Verity Rodrigues and I am an educational consultant and psychologist with Vanderbilt's Treatment and Research Institute for Autism Spectrum Disorders (or TRIAD) in Nashville, TN. I am truly honored to share the podium with Dan Wells. I am going to share some work TRIAD has been doing to partner with community and civic organizations to

make Nashville a fully inclusive community for individuals of all abilities and their families.

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TRIAD's Community Engagement Initiative: A Brief History - 2007

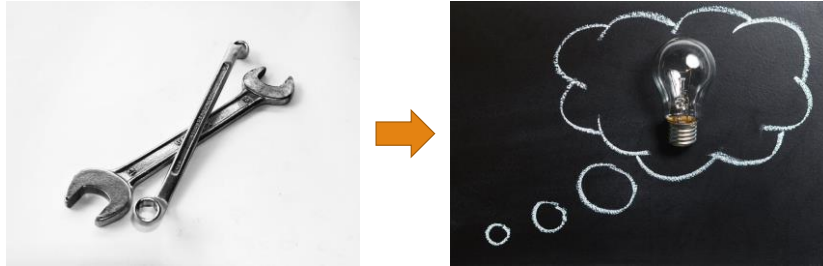


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In 2007, TRIAD began the Families First Program, offering free monthly workshops to families of young children on the autism spectrum. After several years of offering these workshops, parents began sharing some of the challenges they experienced when taking their children into the community.

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TRIAD's Community Engagement Initiative: A Brief History – 2010 to Present



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A problem had been identified and in 2013, resolved to fix this problem, TRIAD staff and faculty began reaching out to prominent arts, education, athletic, and community organizations around Nashville with the goal of promoting awareness, acceptance, and inclusivity.

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TRIAD's Community Engagement Initiative: A Brief History – 2010 to Present



The exciting part was that each time TRIAD knocked on an organization's door, the door flew open - organizations were eager to learn how to become stronger and more reliable for the Nashville community as a whole. Word spread quickly and organically, and before long, organizations were banging down our door asking how they could access TRIAD's trainings and resources.

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TRIAD's Community Engagement Initiative: A Brief History – 2010 to 2017

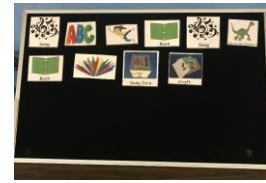


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Partnerships began with TRIAD consultants training staff members of each organization to increase overall awareness about autism and related developmental disabilities.

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TRIAD's Community Engagement Initiative: Supports and Materials



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Additionally, TRIAD worked with organizations to create research-based supports to increase accessibility for families.

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TRIAD's Community Engagement Initiative: Inclusive Events

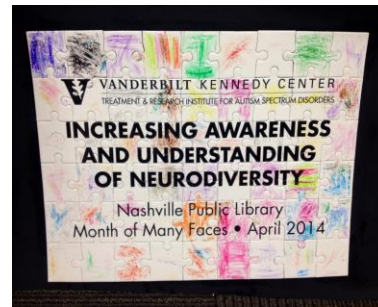
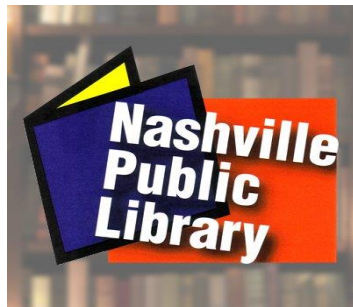


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TRIAD also supported organizations with hosting inclusive or modified events and performances to put their work into practice.

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TRIAD's Community Engagement Initiative: 2010 – Present



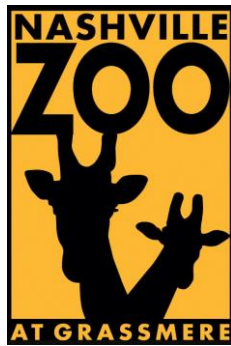
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What initially began as autism awareness quickly developed into something much greater – acceptance and inclusion for not only individuals on the autism spectrum, but individuals of all abilities. In 2014, just a year after starting a partnership with the Nashville Public Library, they introduced neurodiversity into their April programming, called A Community of Many Faces, where they celebrate and highlight the beauty of various aspects of human diversity, with the

**goal of strengthening our community and our connection to
one another.**

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TRIAD's Community Engagement Initiative: 2010 – Present



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The Nashville Zoo at Grassmere, one of the largest community attractions in Nashville, began with hosting Autism Awareness Day to help build community awareness of neurodiversity within the Nashville community. The Zoo also trained all of their staff and volunteers and developed research-based supports to increase the accessibility for zoo-goers throughout the year.

TRIAD's Community Engagement Initiative: 2010 – Present



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The collaborative partnership with the Nashville Children's Theater is representative of many other local community partnerships TRIAD has developed. For each of the Nashville Children's Theater productions, they offered a modified performance that included various visual supports such as a story-board (or visual schedule) of the expected sequence of events, performers were aware of not making any sudden loud noises, lighting was dimmed, and there was space for

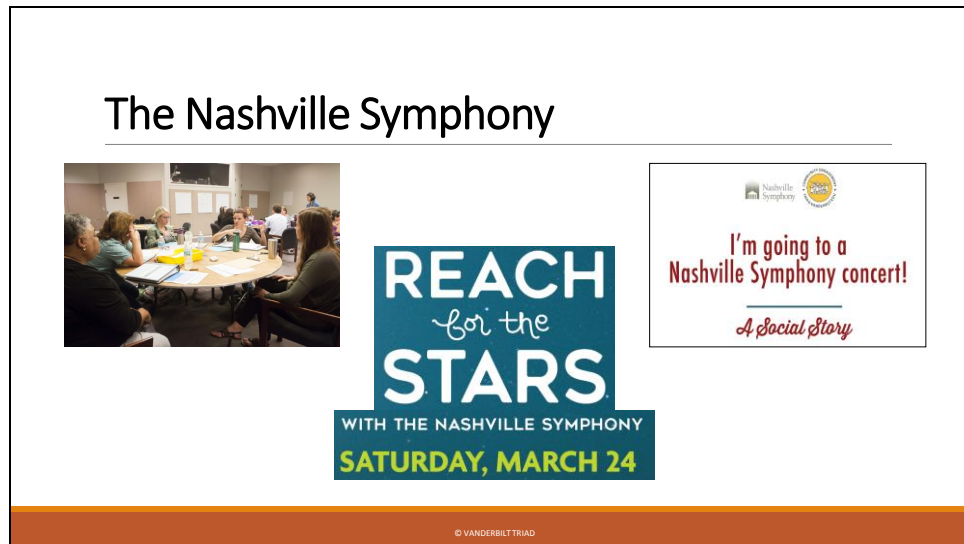
kids to move freely and experience the performance in their own way. Recognizing that these supports increased accessibility for all students, including students on the autism spectrum, Nashville Children’s Theater has now incorporated all of these features into each of their school performances.

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Before we jump to the present day and talk about where TRIAD's Community Engagement Initiative is now, I'd like to share a personal experience and story with you about TRIAD's partnership with the Nashville Symphony.

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Last year, TRIAD had the honor of partnering with the Nashville Symphony in their effort to increase their inclusivity for the Nashville community. Their initial goal was to train their staff and volunteers to increase overall awareness of autism and neurodiversity, to learn how to use evidence-based supports to increase accessibility for all patrons, and to host an inclusive or modified Symphony event.

TRIAD consultants provided trainings to staff and volunteers on person-first language and communicating effectively with individuals on the autism spectrum and their families. Staff and volunteers also learned about evidence-based supports to increase accessibility during concerts for all individuals including social stories or written or visual descriptions of what to expect when visiting the Symphony, other visual supports including visual task analyses for pre-concert activities, and environmental modifications such as flexible seating, the availability of quiet spaces, and booster seats.

The Nashville Symphony



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The Reach for the Stars Sensory-Friendly Concert was specially designed for children on the autism spectrum and individuals with sensory sensitivities. The Symphony wanted to create a safe and welcoming environment where concertgoers of all ages could move freely, make noise and enjoy the concert in their own individual ways, and retreat to a quiet area when needed. Accessible seating was available, as were various other supports and accommodations making the concert truly

an accessible experience for all. I'm now going to play a video of highlights from the concert.



Now I'd like to introduce you to Sam and his family. His parents wrote TRIAD and the Symphony a letter after attending the Reach for the Stars concert sharing their personal experience at the event. Here is their story:

"Our son Sam, who is 4 years old, was diagnosed with autism in 2015. Since that time, he has been in an inclusive classroom and we are seeing so much progress and growth. One of the many things we love about Sam is his unique interests. In

January, he traded his passion about cars and trucks for orchestra music. It started with his interest in his dad playing the trumpet. We got Sam a toy trumpet and started showing him a few videos on YouTube of orchestras. He was immediately drawn to the music of John Williams. He began to set up his toy animals in orchestra formations and pretend to direct them. For the first time ever, he decided to independently name one of his toy animals - It's a giraffe and his name is "John Williams." In February, I went online and that's when I found information about the Reach for the Stars symphony event and excitedly learned that John Williams music was slated for the program. I immediately bought tickets and printed out the social story. Sam went through the social story multiple times per day and memorized all the details.

Even though I felt he was very prepared, my husband and I were still nervous about the event. Though, when we arrived at the Symphony Center, Sam knew right away what to do. He walked right in and directed us toward to the instrument petting zoo. He had the opportunity to play four instruments that he already knew about, but had never seen in person. He was absolutely thrilled.

When we entered the auditorium, Sam chose to sit four rows from the front. He waited expectantly for the concert master and conductor to arrive and applauded. Once the music started, he was so excited he didn't sit down for at least the first three selections. He clasped his hands under his chin and was just riveted. My husband and I looked at each other with big smiles and my husband whispered "Look, he LOVES it!" It was absolutely a dream come true for Sam.

As a parent of a child on the autism spectrum, let me just say that it felt so wonderful and inclusive to be there with so many other families, extraordinary children and adults of all ages. It was beautiful to see how all the people we interacted with before the concert at the stations and instrument petting zoo treated every individual with patience, kindness, and respect. I can't stress this enough either; it meant so much to us (and I'm sure to others) to have this event at the Symphony Center and not some other venue. It afforded our families dignity, which we don't always experience at special events. I loved looking around and seeing all the various ways people enjoyed the concert. It was a wonderful example of the benefit and joy a truly inclusive experience can bring to our community."

Broader Impact on The Nashville Symphony

- Walter Bitner
*Director of
Education &
Community
Engagement,
The Nashville
Symphony*



- Kelley Bell
*Education &
Community
Engagement Manager,
The Nashville
Symphony*

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Now that you've heard from a family about their experience, here are some quotes from the Symphony staff about their experience hosting the Reach for the Stars event.

From Walter Bitner, the Director of Education & Community

Engagement

“There has been a very strong interest in presenting a Sensory Friendly concert at the Nashville Symphony for some time, and our first event was eagerly anticipated by our staff and

musicians. With skilled guidance from local experts and thoughtful preparation, our team was able to put together a superlative experience for hundreds of families - including many who had never attended a concert at the symphony before. From the thorough and diverse array of pre-concert activities and resources to the engaging and heartwarming concert itself, our first Sensory Friendly concert was gratefully received by the community. We are thrilled to be making preparations for our next Sensory Friendly event later this season.”

From Kelley Bell, Education and Community Engagement

Manager

“Creating this sensory friendly concert was an amazing experience. Some of the feedback from patrons expressed that their children love classical music, but they had not been


able to attend a concert as a family until now. I'm also glad that many families attended who don't have a personal connection with autism -- we did not want this event to silo our audiences into different groups. It turned out to be a wonderful point of connection for the whole community."

Not only was it well attended and well received, but our volunteers, ushers, staff, and musicians were enthusiastic about learning and engaging in this way. Many people approached me to express their excitement as well as their personal connection to autism. We hope to continue holding this event every year, and we are exploring ways to incorporate a lot of what we've learned into our regular programming. Our question is always: how does the Nashville Symphony, as a performance center, an orchestra, and a

nonprofit organization, reflect and support the diversity of our community?”

And, I’m thrilled to report that the Symphony is hosting their second annual sensory-friendly concert in February titled “Music and Magic: An Afternoon with the Nashville Symphony.”

What Does the Data Show? TRIAD's
Community Engagement Reach and Impact



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The slide features two side-by-side images. The left image shows a dynamic splash of water against a warm orange background. The right image shows a hand holding a blue pen, pointing to a data chart on a wooden surface. The chart includes a bar graph with multi-colored bars and a line graph with red and blue lines. A small copyright notice '© VANDERBILT TRIAD' is visible at the bottom center of the slide.

So, as part of our Community Engagement Initiative, we do collect some data to try and capture the reach and impact of the efforts of local community organizations. But, we know that these numbers only tell part of the story. Since its inception, across 10 different organizations (Country Music Hall of Fame, NPL, NCT, TPAC, Cheekwood, Opera, Symphony, Frist, Zoo, Predators), 176 supports have been created to

**increase accessibility, 54 inclusive events have taken place,
and 46,690 people have attended these events.**

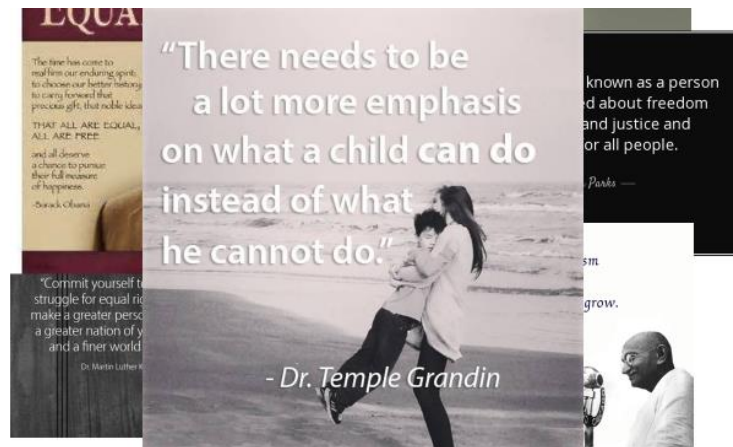
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Today, a group of forward-thinking community organizations have come together with the common goal of increasing accessibility and promoting inclusivity for all individuals across Nashville and Middle TN. They have formed a collaborative consortium called The Inclusive Network of Nashville, where they meet twice a year in person to share ideas and virtually throughout the year. These organizations include The Nashville Symphony, Opera, Ballet, the Country Music Hall of

Fame, the Nashville Predators, the Metro Nashville Police Department, Nashville Children's Theater and The Nashville Zoo, just to name a few. TRIAD is honored to partner with these organizations to make Nashville a truly inclusive and accessible city for all individuals.

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Let's take a look at some quotes from several amazing and inspiring people. These individuals are all different, yet they share a common vision - to make society truly inclusive and people-first for all individuals in all parts of the world.

Discussion: Actionable Steps for Societal Change

1. How can we build an inclusive people-first society?

2. What are some characteristics of an inclusive, people-first community?

3. What can your organization do to put people first and support an inclusive community for all?

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We would like to leave you with some questions to ponder regarding steps you, as an individual, can take to support inclusivity in your community. We can all lift our voices together to make a difference in how all individuals are treated in our communities. We hope you will feel empowered to lift your voice and take a stand for equality and inclusivity in your community.

Thank you!

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