



**For Immediate Release**

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## **Islands of Brilliance Shares Plans to Deliver Mobile Programming Throughout Wisconsin**

*Those on Autism Spectrum and Their Families Encouraged to Attend Workshops*

**Milwaukee** (February 11, 2022) — Thanks to a series of grants, [Islands of Brilliance](#) (IOB), a Milwaukee-based nonprofit that teaches children and young adults on the autism spectrum creative skills, is taking its programming on the road to reach families throughout Wisconsin.

From February – October, the nonprofit will bring its “Sandbox@” to 10 Wisconsin cities, including Milwaukee, Waukesha, West Bend, Racine, Kenosha, Wisconsin Dells, Madison, Green Bay, Sheboygan and Superior.

In each city, IOB staff will partner with a local “creative entity” to host 90-minute sessions for neurodiverse individuals and their families. Siblings and parents are encouraged to participate so the entire family can experience learning together and see first-hand the talents of their neurodiverse family member.

Sandbox@ introduces autistic students and their families to in-person versions of IOB's three virtual Sandbox programs: Smactivities, Natterdays and Doodle Lounge. Participants will have the opportunity to learn, create and connect with their peers in a safe and supportive environment through free-form drawing, group storytelling and instructor-led art projects.

IOB uses art and design as an intervention tool to teach students valuable technical skills while also helping them learn and practice social, emotional and communication skills that are essential for navigating everyday life and successful employment.

“We’re excited to reach families throughout the state in person with our creative programming for autistic individuals,” says Mark Fairbanks, cofounder and executive director of Islands of Brilliance. “We’ve been working with children and young adults since 2012 and have been able to unlock the potential of so many. We regularly hear from parents who say we’ve had a profound impact on their child’s life.”

**Sandbox@ Schedule**

- Sat., Feb. 26, 1 p.m. – Sandbox@ the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, Lubar Entrepreneurship Center
- Sat., March 19, 2 p.m. – Sandbox@ EPIC Creative, West Bend
- Sat., April 9, 10 a.m. & 1 p.m. – Sandbox@ Racine Creative Center
- Sat., April 30, 10:25 a.m. – Sandbox@ the Autism Society of Wisconsin State Conference, Kalahari Resort, Wisconsin Dells

The cost per participant is \$12.50 and interested families can sign up [here](#). Additional dates and locations will be announced in the coming months.

IOB received grant funding for its Sandbox@ from six Wisconsin-based foundations – Wispack Foundation, Green Bay Packers Foundation, La Crosse Community Foundation, Schneider National Foundation, Bader Philanthropies and We Energies Foundation.

### **IOB and UW-Milwaukee Receive NEA Grant**

In January, IOB and the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee received a nearly \$150,000 research grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) to study the efficacy of using art and design to prepare those on the autism spectrum for future employment. Nationally, unemployment estimates for neurodiverse young adults range from 50% to as high as 85%.

The NEA grant is renewable for five years and allows Islands of Brilliance to partner with professors and researchers from UWM to create the Autism Brilliance Lab for Entrepreneurship (ABLE). Through ABLE, researchers will study whether teaching children and young adults creative design skills can help prepare them for the workforce. The research team will also investigate how employers can better prepare neurotypical work environments for autistic individuals.

"The grant is significant because academic research that examines the impact of Islands of Brilliance's use of creativity as an intervention for autistic individuals has been a long-term goal for our organization," says Fairbanks. "Working with Dr. Nathaniel Stern and Dr. Celeste Campos-Castillo at UWM is an incredible opportunity, one that will benefit the community we serve and forever alter the trajectory of our organization."

To learn more or donate to Islands of Brilliance, visit [islandsofbrilliance.org](http://islandsofbrilliance.org).

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### **About Islands of Brilliance**

Islands of Brilliance (IOB) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that provides unique learning and social engagement opportunities for neurodiverse students through a person-centered approach that allows individual interests and capabilities to flourish. Our programming, rooted in art, design and STEM-based curriculum, helps children and young adults on the autism spectrum learn valuable technical skills, while practicing critical social and emotional learning competencies in a supported environment. Our education team partners with parents, educators and support agencies to identify the appropriate programming mix to meet each student's needs and goals. From foundational workshops featuring 1:1 mentorship for students beginning at age eight to our more rigorous Digital Academy program, we offer a robust menu of programs that help build the technical and social skills needed to thrive, whether it be in the workplace or actively engaged in the community. For more information, visit [islandsofbrilliance.org](http://islandsofbrilliance.org).