

AUTISM NATURE TRAIL ENDORSEMENTS

We sometimes forget that children with autism become adults with autism — and they are adults a lot longer than they are children. The Autism Nature Trail will provide a welcoming environment for visitors of all ages to experience the excitement, joy and comfort found in the wonders of our natural world. This unique form of direct and accepting engagement with nature in a world-class park adds a new dimension of exposure, with the potential of providing a lifetime of meaningful and fulfilling experiences.

~ **Joe Mantegna, actor and autism activist**
Honorary Fundraising Chair for The ANT



I'm glad that my suggestions for the Autism Nature Trail have been integrated into the final design and overall plan. The Trailhead Pavilion as a pre-walk station is important since many autistic children need to know what they're getting into before they will engage. Cuddle swings and gliders are good choices for movement. I understand the cost involved in providing trained staff for the Trail, but its success depends on people who are passionate about nature who will get the children engaged.

~ **Dr. Temple Grandin, Colorado State University**
Advisor to The ANT

As the parent of one neurotypical daughter and two sons on the spectrum who are at different levels of functioning, it was always challenging to find activities we could do together as a family. When I was first consulted about the Autism Nature Trail at Letchworth State Park in New York State, I envisioned a place where one of my boys could be captivated by the water feature while the other studied the patterns of the Sunshine Slope while my daughter explored the adjoining Nature Center independently — all in a safe haven where a sudden outburst or meltdown did not mean that we would feel the need to pack up and leave. To have a park space intentionally designed for the enjoyment of individuals on the autism spectrum along with their families and friends is unprecedented — and long overdue.

~ **Ellen Bry, actress, mother, autism advocate**
Advisor to The ANT



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I feel so fortunate to have been asked to collaborate on this amazing project. As a professional who specializes in working with individuals diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders, this project was a dream come true — the opportunity to help design rich, safe, immersive nature experiences where meaningful exploration is encouraged.

The composition of **The ANT** design team, which ranged from landscape architects to therapists, was an incredibly unique collaboration that fostered the development of something truly inspired. This Trail will provide individuals with ASD, their friends, and their families an oasis in a sometimes overwhelming and chaotic world and a chance to connect to one another and to nature.

~ **Amy Laurent, Ph.D.,OTR/L (SCERTS Model collaborator)**
University of Rhode Island and Autism LevelUp!, Consultant to The ANT

As a parent run organization that supports over 2,000 Greater Rochester families living with autism spectrum disorder, it is an honor for AutismUp to provide an endorsement to The ANT. This project mirrors AutismUp's mission to promote and produce opportunities for individuals and families living with autism that enhance and improve quality of life. Clearly, the creation of such a trail will provide countless opportunities and experiences in a comforting, sensory friendly and nature enhanced environment that will be beneficial to the entire family.

~ **Sarah Milko, Executive Director**
AutismUp, Rochester

Nazareth College's Center for Civic Engagement is proud to partner with the Autism Nature Trail at Letchworth State Park. We are excited about the curricular and co-curricular connections our students will make through their involvement. Our students have the potential to make a difference in the lives of others while strengthening their learning by applying theories they're learning in their classrooms to the real world setting of **The ANT**. We look forward to further developing our partnership!

~ **Nuala S. Boyle, Director, Center for Civic Engagement**
Nazareth College, Rochester

Congratulations on an amazing accomplishment, and thank you for your love and dedication to this project! **The ANT** is going to serve individuals diagnosed on the autism spectrum and the entire community so well and will be the gold standard for similar endeavors going forward.

~ **Margaret Poggi, Head of School**
LearningSpring School, New York City

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“I believe the Autism Nature Trail will bring to life the miracles of nature flourishing in Letchworth State Park. For children and families, as they manage the effects of autism spectrum disorder, it is my hope their adventures on the trail will become enriching and life changing, bring greater connections to our lovely park and to other people.” ~ **Susan Firestine, Social Worker**

"With Letchworth State Park's reach across two counties and two state tourism regions, new offerings such as **The ANT** assist in keeping the Park relevant, increasing its visibility and -- in this case -- attracting an entirely new demographic of visitors. Continued investment in the development and promotion of projects like **The ANT** in our parks serves to enhance the quality of life in the region and contributes to its economic health and the ability to attract and retain supporting businesses." ~ **Elissa Russell, Director of Tourism & Marketing, Livingston County Area Chamber of Commerce**

“...children, youth and families affected by autism have limited opportunities for active outdoor leisure pursuit because of concerns regarding safety, sensory sensitivities and a need for accommodation for communication abilities. The Autism Nature Trail will provide a safe, accessible, outdoor destination that will be available to people affected with autism across the lifespan to enjoy. **The ANT is the ANTithesis of inactivity!**” ~ **Dr. Susan L. Hyman, Levine Autism Clinic, Golisano Children’s Hospital, Rochester**

“Friends, do yourself a big favor and make nature more of a priority in your life! When in touch with nature, it's remarkable how keen one's senses are if given the opportunity to use them. Often, interaction with nature allows one not only to discover something new, but also to discover the value of one's senses. Furthermore, if one sense is compromised, another sense can often more than compensate. Enjoying nature first-hand creates not only a ripple effect in our knowledge of nature, but more importantly, a ripple effect in establishing our own self-worth and our ability to truly connect with nature! This is why I wholeheartedly support The Autism Nature Trail.” ~ **Hans Kunze, Bird & Nature Enthusiast/Columnist, Wyoming County**

“We will actively promote **The ANT** to all the families and professionals we have served and will serve and have no doubt that they will become regular visitors.” ~ **Dr. Marcus L. Thomeer, Co-Director of The Institute for Autism Research, Buffalo**

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