



Zaniez Restores Dignity and Belonging to Autism Spectrum Families Through Inclusive Events, Sensory-Friendly Celebrations, and Welcoming Church Services

Research shows that **40% of parents isolate themselves from friends and family due to their child's autistic behaviors, while 32% report being excluded from social events**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wittmann, AZ – May 13, 2026

For too many families raising children and adults on the autism spectrum, everyday joys like attending church, celebrating holidays, or enjoying community events come with overwhelming anxiety and heartbreak. Zaniez, the pioneering Autism Spectrum Farm Trade School in Wittmann, Arizona, is changing that reality by creating a welcoming space where families can participate fully — without fear, judgment, or exclusion.

Spectrum families often live with profound isolation. Research shows that **40% of parents isolate themselves from friends and family** due to their child's autistic behaviors, while **32% report being excluded from social events**. Many attend church online or skip services entirely — with studies indicating that **only about 5% of Christian families with autistic children regularly attend church, and one in three never attend at all** — fearing they will disturb the congregation. Holiday outings frequently end in disappointment and financial loss when sensory overload from lights, noise, crowds, and lines forces early exits. Birthday parties and peer celebrations are often avoided because children feel they don't "fit in."

Zaniez is built to end this cycle of exclusion and restore dignity, joy, and community connection. The school will host **spectrum-friendly family events** designed with autistic individuals in mind, including sensory-controlled "sit-in" movie screenings with adjustable sound levels, peaceful bonfire hayrides, and gentle animal adventure meetups featuring chickens, dogs, horses, baby goats and more.

Animal interactions offer proven therapeutic benefits for individuals on the spectrum, including reduced anxiety and stress, improved social communication, enhanced emotional regulation, and greater opportunities for nonverbal connection and empathy-building in a non-judgmental environment.

In addition, Zaniez will hold **weekly family-friendly church services** — thoughtfully designed and broadcast so the entire family can participate together without worry of being a disturbance. Weekly Family Fun Nights, holiday celebrations, support groups, and advocacy initiatives will further strengthen bonds and combat loneliness for parents, siblings, and autistic loved ones alike.



“Zaniez exists to give spectrum families what they’ve been missing: a place where they belong, where their loved ones are celebrated, and where they can create joyful memories without sacrifice or shame,” said Dana Leigh Shafman, Founder of Zaniez. “We’re not just building a school — we’re rebuilding community and dignity for thousands of families.”

To launch these life-changing programs, Zaniez is actively raising **\$500,000**. Funds will support the purchase and equipping of the Wittmann farm property, curriculum development, and inclusive programming. Open enrollment began December 1, 2025, with a soft launch planned for Summer/Fall 2026 and full operations shortly after.

Families, donors, and community partners are invited to join this movement at **ZaniezKids.com** or by donating directly at **GiveSendGo.com/Zaniez**. Every contribution helps create a world where autism spectrum families are no longer sidelined — but fully seen, supported, and celebrated.

About Zaniez

Zaniez is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit Autism Spectrum Farm Trade School dedicated to empowering individuals ages 3 and up through hands-on vocational training in areas like gardening, woodworking, animal husbandry, cooking, science, art, music, and more. By combining practical skills education with family support, sensory-friendly events, and advocacy, Zaniez fosters independence, prosperity, and belonging. For media inquiries, contact ZaniezKids@gmail.com or call (602) 432-7230. Visit ZaniezKids.com for enrollment, donation, and program details.

MEDIA CONTACT

Dana Leigh Shafman
ZaniezKids@gmail.com
Phone (602) 432-7230

###