



## Program Initiatives 2022-2023

The mission of **A Little Compassion Inc. (ALC)** is to build a safe, kind, and inclusive community for all. ALC positively impacts the lives of neurodiverse young adults with autism, intellectual/developmental disabilities, and related disorders by nurturing their unique skills, strengths, and preferences. ALC takes the lead in providing authentic and enriching employment and social opportunities for neurodiverse young adults, as well as offers support for their families. Through education and empowerment programming, ALC increases public awareness and acceptance to ensure that neurodiverse young adults are seen and valued.



### **N.E.S.T. (New Employment Skills Training):**

A Little Compassion's flagship program supports young adults while they learn the ins and outs of working in a coffee shop. The basic employment skills these individuals learn (such as customer service, teamwork, and operating a point of sale system) foster financial, social, and emotional independence. N.E.S.T. provides workforce development training to an average of 20 neurodiverse youths annually. Participants receive individualized job coaching, mentorship, and practical work experience, leaving the program with the skills and confidence towards gainful employment.

The **Nest Gatherings** program is ALC's largest program. Nest Gatherings offer young adults from around the state monthly social opportunities to meet like-minded and similarly abled peers. The Nest Gatherings MeetUp group includes over 600 members and serves over 500 households. Nest Gatherings are free and open to everyone. ALC places a special emphasis on reaching individuals with autism, intellectual and developmental disabilities, and other neurodiversities, where they can socialize in a safe, non-clinical, structured environment. Gatherings activities include game nights, anime nights, writing circles, crafts, and more.



The **Possibilities Boutique** is a shop located in The Nest Coffee House where local artists can sell and showcase their work. Possibilities came to be after the COVID pandemic limited the opportunities young adults had to engage with the community. By providing a space where exceptional artists could share their work with the community, the Boutique encourages independence as artists are responsible for managing their inventory, displays, and pricing. Consignors are paid with a 60/40 split. These artists grow to take pride in their abilities while learning about financial independence and entrepreneurship.



**Doggie Barks:** treats began production at the start of 2022. Doggie Barks are for pups of all abilities, made by individuals of all abilities. In partnership with three breweries from Essex, Chester, and Deep River, CT; ALC utilizes donated spent grains to bake fresh peanut butter dog treats in-house weekly. Doggie Barks is the newest project at ALC and is expanding significantly as local businesses begin to sell the treats. Currently, 17 businesses carry our Doggie Barks. The Doggie Barks project provides alternative and additional employment opportunities and skill development for neurodivergent staff who bake and package the treats. Our lead baker as well as our Sales person are young adults on the spectrum. Looking forward, leadership is planning for our Doggie Barks project to grow thus increasing the number of neurodivergent individuals ALC employs.

**The Acceptance, Inclusion, and Outreach (AIO) Program** is the awareness and change mechanism of the ALC mission. The AIO program focuses on teaching that individuals of all abilities are valuable and integral members of our shared community. Through the AIO program, ALC shares free resources, holds volunteer training and information sessions, and spreads kindness through its events and publications. The AIO program features a monthly *Nest News* newsletter that is sent to over 1,400 individuals. The *Nest News* newsletter not only includes current events at The Nest, but also showcases boutique artists, baristas, and interns with spotlights that praise their abilities and accomplishments.

Additionally, the AIO program includes a Neurodiversity Children's Library, which is located in the coffee shop. The Neurodiversity Children's Library provides free educational and fun resources about neurodiversity, inclusion, and kindness to families. Patrons can come into the shop and read children's books that emphasize the importance of learning kindness and acceptance from a young age. Further education and awareness initiatives include social media campaigns and community events. Examples of social media campaigns include Down Syndrome Awareness, Autism Acceptance Month, and neurodiversity mythbusters.

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