

BESTBUDDIES®

Press Kit

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BEST BUDDIES®



2024 Fact Sheet

Mission

Best Buddies International is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to establishing a global volunteer movement that creates opportunities for one-to-one friendships, integrated employment, leadership development, inclusive living, and family support for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

Vision

To put **BESTBUDDIES**® out of business.

Who We Serve

Best Buddies serves individuals with IDD and their families. The IDD community includes, but is not limited to, people with Down syndrome, autism, Fragile X, Williams syndrome, and other undiagnosed disabilities.

History of Service

Best Buddies was founded 35 years ago, when Founder, Chairman and CEO Anthony K. Shriver recognized that people with IDD lacked opportunities to socialize with their peers without disabilities. Shriver incorporated Best Buddies as a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization in 1989. Today, Best Buddies offers 12 formal programs — Elementary Schools, Middle Schools, High Schools, Colleges, Citizens, e-Buddies, Jobs, Ambassadors, Promoters, Transitions, Inclusive Living, and Eunie's Buddies.

We are **BESTBUDDIES**®

Best Buddies is the largest organization dedicated to ending the social, physical, and economic isolation of the 200 million people worldwide with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Our programs empower people with IDD to form meaningful friendships with their peers, secure jobs, improve communication and advocacy skills, and live independently, while also offering support for their families.

Participants



3,000

Chapters around the world

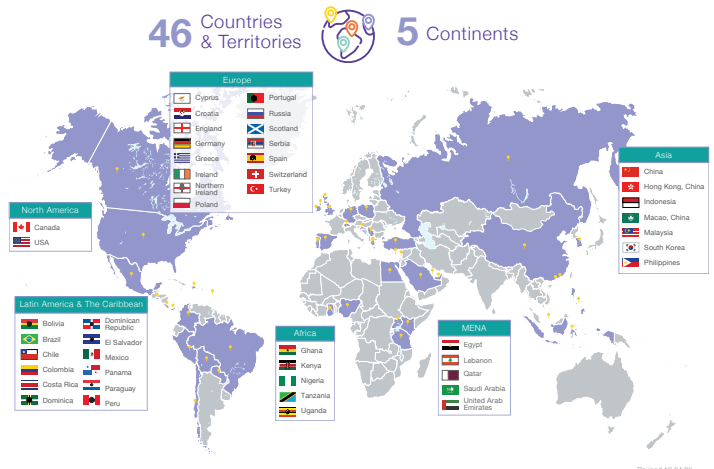


1.3M

Positively impacted people with and without IDD

Best Buddies Around the World

Best Buddies operates accredited programs in all 50 states and in 46 countries and territories spanning 5 continents.



Global Headquarters

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BESTBUDDIES.ORG



@BESTBUDDIES

BESTBUDDIES® Programs



One-To-One Friendships

Builds friendships between people with and without IDD, offering social mentoring while improving the quality of life and level of inclusion for a population that is often isolated and excluded.

BESTBUDDIES. Elementary Schools, Middle Schools, High Schools, Colleges, & Citizens Creates an inclusive community for students and adults with IDD, helping them become socially integrated with their peers at every age.

e-BUDDIES.

Provides opportunities for participants with and without IDD to form virtual one-to-one friendships, create connections in the e-Buddies social platform, and attend social events online.



Integrated Employment

Secures jobs for people with IDD, empowering them to earn an income, pay taxes, and independently support themselves through their professional accomplishments.

BESTBUDDIES. Jobs

Matches skilled, qualified individuals with IDD with businesses seeking enthusiastic and dedicated employees. Through the Jobs program, Best Buddies develops partnerships with employers, assists with the hiring process and provides ongoing support to the employee and employer.



Leadership Development

Educates and empowers people with and without IDD to become leaders, public speakers, and advocates.

BESTBUDDIES. Ambassadors

Offers people with and without IDD the opportunity to gain the public speaking skills, self-esteem, and confidence needed to successfully advocate for themselves, their peers, and Best Buddies in communities and workplaces.

BESTBUDDIES. Promoters

Empowers youth to become advocates for people with IDD and helps chapters organize special events that promote inclusion and bring awareness to the disability rights movement.



Inclusive Living

Provides an integrated experience in which people with and without IDD are active, contributing citizens – living independently in a dynamic environment where they can learn, grow, and thrive.

BESTBUDDIES. Living

Offers individuals with and without IDD an opportunity to live together in a vibrant, educational community that supports all residents in advancing their employment, financial literacy, continued education, and life skills as they work to achieve their personal goals.



Family Support

Provides families access to individual connections and community resources that assist them on their journey of supporting a family member with IDD.

Eunie's BESTBUDDIES.

Connects families who are expecting or have a young child with IDD to experienced parents of a child with IDD, encouraging a genuine relationship rooted in mentorship, resource-sharing, and guidance.



About Best Buddies

Best Buddies International is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to establishing a global volunteer movement that creates opportunities for one-to-one friendships, integrated employment, leadership development, inclusive living, and family support for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

Founded in 1989 by Anthony K. Shriver, Best Buddies is a vibrant, international organization that has grown from one original chapter to nearly 3,000 elementary school, middle school, high school, and college Friendship and Promoter chapters worldwide. Today, Best Buddies' 12 formal programs — Elementary Schools, Middle Schools, High Schools, Colleges, Citizens, e-Buddies, Jobs, Ambassadors, Promoters, Transitions, Inclusive Living, and Eunie's Buddies — engage participants in each of the 50 states and in 46 countries, positively impacting the lives of nearly 1.3 million individuals with and without disabilities around the world.

In many cases, as a result of their involvement with Best Buddies, people with IDD build lifelong friendships, secure rewarding jobs, become inspirational leaders, live independently, and receive family support.



About Anthony K. Shriver

Anthony Kennedy Shriver is the Founder, Chairman and CEO of Best Buddies International, which he created in 1989 to foster one-to-one friendships between people with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Recognizing the tremendous volunteer potential of university students, Shriver first inspired his college peers to personally collaborate in expanding the realm of opportunities that people with IDD should experience.

Today, through Shriver's stewardship and entrepreneurial spirit, Best Buddies has grown into a leading nonprofit entity with increasing international reach across five continents, establishing a global volunteer movement that creates opportunities for one-to-one friendships, integrated employment, leadership development, inclusive living, and family support for people with IDD.

Best Buddies is comprised of 12 programs that positively impact nearly 1.3 million individuals with and without disabilities worldwide. The organization is active in each of the 50 states and operates accredited international programs in 46 countries and territories.

A graduate of Georgetown University, Shriver has been recognized for his work on behalf of Best Buddies with diverse international accolades and honorary degrees. He is the father of five beautiful children and resides in Miami Beach, Florida.

Disabilities Defined

Every person is unique, therefore each person's disability may manifest in a different way. The descriptions provided include common characteristics of each disability and may or may not be part of the person's behaviors or learning styles.

Intellectual Disability

An intellectual disability is characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning (reasoning, learning, problem-solving) and in adaptive behavior, which covers a range of everyday social and practical skills. This disability originates before the age of 18.

Characteristics may include difficulty with

- Problem solving independently
- Understanding non-verbal cues
- Reading/writing
- Math/numbers
- Telling time/concept of time
- Communication (expressive and receptive)
- Social Interactions

Developmental Disability

Developmental disability is an umbrella term that includes intellectual disabilities but also includes other disabilities that are diagnosed during childhood. Developmental disabilities are chronic disabilities that can be cognitive, physical or both. The disabilities appear before the age of 22 and are typically lifelong. Some individuals may have a condition that includes both a physical and intellectual disability.

Include but are not limited to

- Down Syndrome
- Fragile X Syndrome
- Autism
- Williams Syndrome
- Cerebral Palsy
- Traumatic Brain Injury

Down Syndrome

Down Syndrome occurs when an individual has a full or partial extra copy of chromosome 21. This additional genetic material alters the course of development and causes intellectual impairments and physical abnormalities.

Common characteristics

- Decreased muscle tone
- Short attention span
- Impulsive behavior
- Delayed speech and language development

Fragile X Syndrome

Fragile X syndrome is a genetic condition that causes a range of developmental problems including learning disabilities and cognitive impairment.

Common characteristics

- Delayed development of speech and language
- Anxiety
- Hyperactivity
- Impulsive actions
- Fidgeting
- Difficulty with communication
- Inappropriate social interactions

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Autism Spectrum Disorder is a condition related to brain development that impacts how a person perceives and socializes with others, as well as how they communicate. The term “spectrum” refers to the wide range of symptoms and severity. Autism spectrum disorder begins in early childhood and can cause problems functioning socially, in school, and at work. People with ASD can have severe limitations in one area with no limitations in others.

Characteristics may include difficulty with

- Making eye contact
- Verbal and non-verbal communications
- Fine motor or gross motor skills
- Understanding the feelings of others
- Staying on topic
- Reading social cues

Common behaviors

- Repetitive behaviors such as hand-flapping, fidgeting, rocking
- Sensitivity to touch, smell, taste
- Upset by change in routine
- Have obsessive interests
- Repeat words or phrases

Williams Syndrome

Williams Syndrome is a developmental disorder characterized by mild to moderate intellectual disability or learning problems, unique personality characteristics, distinctive facial features, and heart and blood vessel (cardiovascular) problems.

Common behavioral and learning characteristics

- Phobias
- Trouble with visual spatial tasks
- Difficulty with attention and concentration

Cerebral Palsy (CP)

Cerebral Palsy (CP) is a group of disorders that affect a person’s ability to move and maintain balance and posture. CP is caused by abnormal development of the brain or damage to the developing brain that affects the ability to control muscles. The brain damage that leads to CP can happen before birth, during birth, within a month after birth, or during the first years of a child’s life, while the brain is still developing. The symptoms of CP vary and some people will experience only the physical problems, where others may also have intellectual disability.

Common characteristics

- Difficulty with gross/fine motor movement
- Seizures
- Visual impairments
- Hearing impairments
- Speech and language impairments
- Changes in spine or joints

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

Traumatic brain injury is a form of acquired brain injury, which occurs when a sudden trauma causes damage to the brain. Symptoms of a TBI can range from mild to severe, depending on the extent of the damage to the brain.

Common characteristics

- Headaches (ranging from mild to severe)
- Confusion
- Memory loss
- Difficulty concentrating
- Mood changes
- Seizures

Person-First Language



Best Buddies promotes social inclusion and respect for all people. The basic tenant of people-first language is the power and importance of recognizing a fellow person as a human being above all else.

Person-first or people-first language is a way of describing disability that involves putting the word “person” or “people” before the word “disability” or the name of a disability, rather than placing the disability first and using it as an adjective. Person-first language literally puts the person first instead of his or her disability.

Respect individuals with disabilities as people, not projects or people to pity. By referring to an individual as a “person with a disability” instead of a “disabled person,” you are providing an objective description instead of a label. The purpose of people-first language is to promote the fact that someone’s disability label is just a disability label—not the defining characteristic of the entire individual. Many guides on disability language and etiquette emphasize using person-first language, except, perhaps, when discussing certain disability cultural groups that explicitly describe themselves with disability-first language.

Examples of Person First Language

Say this

- People with disabilities
- They have a disability
- They have autism (or an autism diagnosis)
- They have a diagnosis of Down syndrome
- They have a learning disability (diagnosis)
- They have a physical disability (diagnosis)
- They are of short stature/a little person
- They have a mental health diagnosis
- They use a wheelchair/mobility chair
- They receive special ed services
- Communicate with their eyes/devices/etc
- Congenital disability
- Brain injury
- Accessible parking, hotel room, etc...
- They need__or they use__

Not this

- The disabled
- They are mentally retarded
- They are autistic
- They are Downs
- They are learning disabled
- They are quadriplegic/crippled
- They are a dwarf/midget
- They are disturbed/mentally ill
- They are confined/wheelchair bound
- They are special ed
- Is non-verbal
- Birth defect
- Brain damaged
- Handicapped parking/hotel room, etc...
- They have problems/special needs

Milestones 1987-2024

1987 - 1996

- In 1987, Anthony Kennedy Shriver launches BESTBUDDIES® Colleges by founding the first Best Buddies chapter at Georgetown University.
- In 1988, the iconic Best Buddies logo was donated to Best Buddies by legendary pop-artist, Keith Haring.
- On January 19, 1989, Best Buddies is incorporated as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, becoming America's first national, unified, social and recreational program for people with IDD.
- In 1992, Best Buddies Global Headquarters office moves to Miami, FL.
- In 1993, Best Buddies launches BESTBUDDIES® Citizens to pair adults with IDD in one-to-one friendships with their working peers who do not have disabilities.
- In 1994, Best Buddies launches BESTBUDDIES® Jobs, a supported employment program targeting high-paying, corporate jobs for people with IDD.
- In 1995, Best Buddies launches BESTBUDDIES® High Schools to pair special education students in one-to-one friendships with high school volunteers.
- In 1996, Best Buddies launches BESTBUDDIES® Middle Schools to pair students with IDD in one-to-one friendships with middle school volunteers.

1999 - 2008

- In 1998, Best Buddies hosts the first *Best Buddies Miami Gala*.
- In 1999, Best Buddies launches e-BUDDIES®, a cutting-edge online friendship program.
- In 2000, Best Buddies holds the inaugural *Best Buddies Challenge: Hyannis Port*, a 100-mile bike ride from Boston to Hyannis Port.
- In 2003, Best Buddies has participants in all 50 states on the US.
- In 2004, Best Buddies launches the nationally televised inaugural *Volvo Best Buddies Challenge: Hearst Castle*, a 100-mile bike ride along the Pacific Coast Highway.

2009 - 2019

- In 2009, Best Buddies launches *Best Buddies Friendship Walk*.
- In 2010, Best Buddies has programs in 50 countries around the world.
- In 2011, Best Buddies launches BESTBUDDIES® Ambassadors to teach participants with IDD communication and self-advocacy skills.
- In 2012, Best Buddies launches BESTBUDDIES® Promoters, the first Best Buddies program open to elementary schools; the inaugural of the *Best Buddies Challenge: Miami* takes place and the first *Best Buddies Champion of The Year Gala* is hosted.
- In 2014, Best Buddies celebrates its 25th anniversary and also celebrates 25 years of the *Best Buddies Leadership Conference*.
- In 2017, Best Buddies holds the first *Best Buddies Breakaway Camp: Malibu* and hosts the inaugural *Best Buddies' Celebrating Mothers* in Malibu, CA, with Global Ambassador Cindy Crawford and her daughter, Kaia Gerber.
- In 2019, Best Buddies launches its fourth mission pillar, BESTBUDDIES® Inclusive Living, to provide individuals with and without IDD an opportunity to live independently in a dynamic environment where they can learn, grow and thrive.

2020 - Current

- In 2020, Best Buddies introduces BESTBUDDIES® Ventures, with the first launch being BESTBUDDIES® X Rosetta Bakery in Miami, FL, creates jobs for individuals with IDD and operates as a profit center via a bakery and coffee shop partnership.
- In 2022, Best Buddies launches BESTBUDDIES® Transitions to help prepare young adults with IDD for independence and inclusion in their communities as they move from school into adulthood.
- In 2022, Best Buddies launches BESTBUDDIES® Elementary Schools to teach inclusion to a younger age group to create a lasting effect on societal norms for the next generation.
- In 2024, Best Buddies launches its fifth mission pillar BESTBUDDIES® Family Support, to offer families access to individual connections and community resources that assist them on their journey of supporting a family member with IDD.

2024-2025 Special Events

Best Buddies Celebrating Mothers
May 4, 2024 / Nashville, TN



Best Buddies Challenge: Hyannis Port
June 1, 2024 / Boston to Hyannis Port, MA

Best Buddies Leadership Conference
July 19 - 22, 2024 / Bloomington, IN

Best Buddies Champion of The Year
Fall 2024 / Nationwide



Best Buddies Challenge: California
October 19, 2024 / Marin, CA

Best Buddies Challenge: Miami & Best Buddies Miami Gala
November 16, 2024 / Miami, FL

BB Breakaway Camp: Malibu
December 4-8, 2024 / Malibu, CA

Best Buddies Friendship Walk
Spring 2025 / Nationwide



Best Buddies Month
March 2025 / Worldwide

Spread the Word to End the Word
March 1, 2025 / Nationwide

BB Breakaway Camp: Malibu
April 2025 / Malibu, CA



Join us to learn more about Best Buddies programs and to experience our mission in action. For more information, please visit **BESTBUDDIES.ORG/TAKE-ACTION**

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Creator of the Best Buddies Logo

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Press Inquiries?

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