Canopy Adult Autism Program By Giant Steps

An *OPEN MINDS* Program Profile

Founded in 1996, Giant Steps Illinois (Giant Steps) is a non-profit provider organization serving individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD), and their families, with educational and therapeutic services. Giant Steps is licensed and certified as a non-public therapeutic day school by the Illinois State Board of Education. Giant Steps mission is "to [provide] innovative and excellent vocational, educational, and life skills training and support for adults with autism."

Headquartered in Lisle, Illinois, Giant Steps serves the Chicagoland area. The organization employs 220 staff members. Annually, Giant Steps serves approximately 168 consumers through the Giant Steps Day School, and 65 consumers through the Canopy Adult Program.

As of fiscal year 2026, Giant Steps reported annual revenue at $16.3 million, representing an 11.6% increase from the prior year, when reported revenue totaled $14.6 million. Over the previous five years, revenue has increase 14%, from $14.3 million in 2021.

Program Model—Giant Steps' Canopy Adult Autism Program (Canopy) is a comprehensive adult day program dedicated to serving adults with ASD. The program provides a full range of wraparound services and operates using evidence-based practices individualized to each participant's strengths, needs, and personal goals. Through regular physical activity for participants, Canopy programming emphasizes functional academics, communication development, social and emotional growth, positive behavioral supports, vocational training, independent living skills, leisure and recreational activities, community-based instruction, and health and wellness. The program puts emphasis on real-world learning. Participants engage in daily community outings, volunteer opportunities, vocational experiences, and recreational activities that foster independence, confidence, and community inclusion.

Population, Fees & Funders—The Canopy program based in Sugar Grove, Illinois serves adults ages 22 and older with a primary or secondary diagnosis of ASD. It also includes a blended option for transition-age young adults starting at age 18. Services extend to surrounding counties of the greater outer-western Chicagoland area. Canopy is currently licensed to serve up to 65 adults with autism with the program operating at full capacity. The cost per consumer is $122 for daily enrollment with no shuttle service and $135 daily with shuttle service to Sugar Grove from the Lisle campus. There is also a $150 annual registration fee.

Program Performance & Outcome Metrics—Participant performance is tracked and monitored using Global Performance Goals. Cost outcome metrics for the program: Metric: Cost per participant per day, $122; Strategy: Canopy's salaries and benefits represent 75% of program costs, requiring increases to stay within inflationary limits. Remaining costs, such as supplies and equipment, are also budgeted to stay within these limits. Variable costs that rise above inflation are offset through fundraising and/or cuts to controllable expenses.

Program History—Giant Steps began by serving children in its day school. As those original students progressed through each stage of their education, Giant Steps added new grade levels to continue serving these consumers. When the first cohort reached the transition age, the organization's Board of Directors recognized the need for continued autism-specific services and established the Canopy Adult Program. Startup funding was sourced and supported by the board.

Successes, Challenges & Advice to the Field—The need for autism services and support in and around Sugar Grove, Illinois, is significant. Within 30 miles of Canopy, few programs serve autism specifically, despite an estimated 9,000 to 11,000 autistic adults in the region. Giant Steps leadership reported that the greatest challenge in operating Canopy is meeting increased demand for autism-specific services while already operating at full capacity. Closing this gap requires expanding capacity, including the proposed 22,000-sq-ft Activity Center, alongside stronger staff recruitment and retention, better staff benefits, and sustainable funding.

General Information	Key Executives & Officers
Giant Steps Illinois 2500 Cabot Dr Lisle, IL 60532 630-864-3800 https://mygiantsteps.org/	Sylvia Smith, Chief Executive Officer Sam Cannata, Chief Financial Officer Gustavo Estrada, Technology Director Tracy Brody, Human Resources Director Ally Dogan, Canopy & Christine's Dream Program Administrator