THE SUMMIT CENTER

Foundations

FAQs: Understanding the Need

WHO DOES THE SUMMIT CENTER SUPPORT?

Founded in 1973 as the Learning Development Program, The Summit Center supports more than 1,200 children and adults with autism and other developmental disabilities throughout Western New York.

While autism spans a wide range of strengths and needs, Summit primarily supports individuals with Level 2 and Level 3 autism, who require substantial support in daily life. Many experience significant communication challenges that make everyday conversation and social interaction difficult. Changes in routine or overwhelming sensory environments can cause real distress. And too often, the everyday spaces around them, from schools to workplaces, simply aren't designed with their needs in mind.

WHY ARE MORE CHILDREN BEING DIAGNOSED WITH AUTISM?

Nationally, 1 in 31 children is now diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, and demand for specialized services continues to grow alongside that number.

Better identification and screening: Pediatricians screen earlier and more consistently, accurately diagnosing children who might have been overlooked in the past.

Better diagnostic criteria: The clinical definition of autism spectrum disorder has expanded to capture a wider range of needs and presentations.

Greater awareness: Families, teachers, and doctors recognize signs earlier and seek evaluations sooner.

As more children are identified earlier, more are in need of an individualized education, making the expansion of Summit Academy a critical priority.

HOW MANY CHILDREN ARE ON YOUR WAITLIST?

Summit Academy's waitlist has increased by 200% from just ten years ago. More than 500 students from school districts across Western New York are waiting for placement. One-third of these students are under the age of five.

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FAQs: The Project

WHAT EXACTLY IS THE FOUNDATIONS CAPITAL CAMPAIGN?

The Foundations Capital Campaign is an $12.75 million project to establish the Summit Academy Early Education Center at 2040 Sweet Home Road in Amherst and expand The Summit Center's capacity to support children with autism during the critical early years of development.

Campaign funds will support the purchase of the 55,000-square-foot building, renovations, furniture and equipment, startup costs, and a $600,000 investment in the Stephen R. Anderson Endowment. The new Early Education Center will include 24 classrooms, integrated therapeutic support, sensory-enriched indoor and outdoor spaces, and evidence-based instruction designed around the unique needs of young children with autism.

WHY IS THIS EXPANSION NEEDED NOW?

The Summit Center has continuously evolved and expanded to meet our community's changing needs. In 2012, we opened a behavioral health clinic for individuals with mental and behavioral health concerns. Then, in 2014, we launched our first adult community day habilitation location, STEPS. We now operate seven STEPS sites across Buffalo and the northtowns.

More recent expansion includes the launch of Summit Academy Enhanced in November 2022, the first outpatient program of its kind in New York State offering behavioral assessment and treatment for students with severe harmful behaviors. And when Autism Services, Inc. closed in 2024, we stepped up to absorb both of their schools, now Summit Academy Hazelwood and Summit Academy Elmwood.

For children with autism, learning can be exponential if support aligns with how they think and process information. In the earliest years of life, the brain continually forms new neural pathways. This expansion is about meeting that window of development with the specialized education our students deserve, right when it can have the greatest impact.

The need is urgent. Summit Academy's waitlist has reached its pinnacle, with more than 500 children seeking placement. The cost of waiting is not measured in months but in missed milestones and unfulfilled potential.

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FAQs: The Project

HOW WILL THIS AFFECT SUMMIT ACADEMY STAHL?

Summit Academy Stahl is currently home to 10 preschool and 25 school-age classrooms. The 10 existing preschool classrooms will be relocated to 2420 Sweet Home, freeing up classrooms to accommodate more elementary students. Discovery Kids Learning Center and our administrative staff will also move to the new building to create additional classroom space at Summit Academy Stahl.

In total, 13 new school-age classrooms will open at Summit Academy Stahl, bringing the total number to 38. These classrooms will support children as they move from preschool into the next stage of learning, along with those referred from area school districts.

HOW MANY ADDITIONAL STUDENTS WILL THE EXPANSION SUPPORT?

The expansion will increase our census from 480 to 662 students.

- The Early Education Center will support 160 preschool students as well as 24 early elementary students.
- Summit Academy Stahl's capacity will increase from 152 to 230 school-age students.
- Summit Academy Creekside's census will shift to support 46 school-age students plus 30 children in our Summit Academy Enhanced program for students with harmful behaviors.
- Summit Academy Elmwood and Summit Academy Hazelwood will remain unchanged, supporting a combined 134 students.
- Summit Academy Enhanced will grow from 30 to 60 students.

WHEN WILL THE NEW EARLY EDUCATION CENTER OPEN?

The Early Education Center will open by the end of 2027. Renovations at 2420 Sweet Home will begin in the spring of 2027, and the ten existing preschool classrooms will be relocated by December.

Leases from existing tenants at 2420 Sweet Home will expire in 2029 and in 2031. As this occurs, we will continue to open new preschool classrooms and school-age classrooms. To maximize our footprint and ensure adequate staffing and training, the full expansion project will not be completed until the fall of 2032.

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FAQs: The Campaign

WHY IS PRIVATE PHILANTHROPY NEEDED FOR THIS PROJECT?

While funding from the New York State Education Department will be used to operate the new classrooms when they open, private schools like Summit Academy - unlike public school districts - do not have access to dedicated funding for capital projects. Donations are essential to making this expansion possible, supporting the building purchase, renovations, furniture and equipment, and startup costs required to bring the Early Education Center to life.

In addition, donors are encouraged to invest in the Stephen R. Anderson Endowment to provide perpetual annual revenue for The Summit Center. A larger endowment will decrease reliance on government funding and enable the agency to agilely respond to new opportunities.

HOW MUCH HAS ALREADY BEEN RAISED?

Thanks to the generosity of two lead funders, The Summit Center has already secured $6 million, including $5 million from B. Thomas Golisano and $1 million from Foundation 214.

WHAT PORTION OF MY GIFT SUPPORTS THE ENDOWMENT?

Donors are encouraged to designate 10% of their total campaign commitment to the Stephen R. Anderson Endowment, helping ensure that The Summit Center's life-changing programs are available for future generations.

Donors may choose to direct their entire gift to either the capital project or the endowment, or set their own distribution percentage. The goal is to raise at least $600,000 for the endowment fund.

WHAT HAPPENS IF THE CAMPAIGN EXCEEDS ITS GOAL?

Any funds raised beyond the campaign goal will be invested in the Stephen R. Anderson Endowment to support The Summit Center's long-term financial viability. The endowment will provide a stable and dependable revenue stream to maintain and enhance our programs regardless of decreased government funding, economic fluctuations, inadequate reimbursement rates, and changes in the philanthropic landscape.

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FAQs: Making a Gift

WHAT WILL MY GIFT MAKE POSSIBLE?

Ultimately, your investment will help more children build the foundational skills they need for greater independence and well-being throughout their lives.

Together, campaign donors will help:

- Open the Summit Academy Early Education Center, an evidence-based program with 20 preschool classrooms and 4 classrooms for early elementary students.
- Create 13 new school-age classrooms at Summit Academy Stahl.
- Give more children access to individualized instruction, communication, support, therapy, and strategies for social, emotional, motor, and academic development.
- Strengthen The Summit Center's long-term sustainability through the Stephen R. Anderson Endowment.

CAN PLEDGES BE PAID OVER MULTIPLE YEARS?

Yes. Donors may fulfill their campaign commitments through one-time or multi-year pledges, generally payable up to three years. Flexible payment schedules can be arranged to meet each donor's philanthropic goals. Pledge reminders will be sent to help keep your payments on track.

HOW CAN I MAKE MY GIFT?

Campaign gifts may be made by check, credit card, ACH transfer, appreciated securities, donor-advised fund distributions, or IRA Qualified Charitable Distributions (for eligible donors). Our mission advancement team is happy to assist donors in selecting the giving option that best meets their needs.

ARE NAMING OPPORTUNITITES AVAILABLE?

Yes. Leadership gifts may qualify for naming opportunities throughout the Early Education Center and Summit Academy Stahl, including classrooms, therapy spaces, corridors, and other prominent locations. A complete list of naming opportunities is available through mission advancement office.

WHO CAN I CONTACT WITH ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS?

Please reach out to Ashley Coder, director of development at (716) 629-3428 or acoder@thesummitcenter.org. She'd be happy to help answer any questions.