

INDEPENDENCE THROUGH INTERDEPENDENCE

---

# IMPACT REPORT

2023-2025

---

**Building capacity for self-advocacy and disability-led research  
in support of neurodivergent wellbeing**

[weareiti.org](https://weareiti.org)

## Letter from the Board Chair

To Our Community,

Three years ago, Dr. Shannan Palma and Lorien Dana founded this organization with a conviction that autistic adults should lead the research, services, and advocacy that affect our lives. What began as Autistic Self-Reliance Support Network has grown into Independence Through Interdependence—an organization now operating four flagship programs, a for-profit subsidiary, and partnerships spanning from Central Ohio to Tokyo.

This report reflects a period of significant growth and strategic maturation. ITI secured over \$860,000 in committed funding for 2025–2027, including a \$124,977 PCORI Engagement Award to convene the first national stakeholder meeting on autism and suicide prevention research. We incorporated ITI Lab as a partially-owned subsidiary, creating a sustainable funding model that reduces reliance on grants while keeping resources circulating within the autistic community. We expanded our leadership team, promoting April Gao to Vice President of Research and Design and hiring Athina Peterson to lead ITI Circle.

These accomplishments aren't isolated wins, they reflect ITI's core approach: building infrastructure that positions autistic people as experts on our own condition rather than subjects of others' research. The Mobility Autonomy Program develops technology with autistic users, not for them. The Positive Outcomes Project brings autistic advocates to the table with suicide prevention researchers. #FlipThePowerDynamic aims to change how autism research is funded and conducted globally.

The board is proud to support an organization led by and accountable to the community it serves. We thank our funders, partners, advisory board members, and the hundreds of autistic adults who have contributed their time and expertise to ITI's research. Your participation makes this work possible.

We invite you to read this report, engage with it, share it with others, and consider how you might join us in building a world where autistic adults thrive through interdependence.

Tye Tavaras, JM  
Chair, Board of Directors



## Executive Summary

Independence Through Interdependence (ITI) is an Ohio-based 501(c)(3) organization led by autistic and ADHD adults. Founded in 2022 by Dr. Shannan Palma and Lorien Dana, MEd, ITI builds capacity for self-advocacy and disability-led research and service delivery.

From 2023 through 2025, ITI established a sustainable organizational model, launched four flagship programs, and secured over \$860,000 in grants and contracts to support neurodivergent wellbeing through 2027.

### Key Metrics at a Glance

<p><b>\$861,127</b></p> <p>Committed Funding 2025–2027</p>	<p><b>120+</b></p> <p>MAP Stakeholder Touchpoints</p>	<p><b>2</b></p> <p>Companies Launched</p>	<p><b>930+</b></p> <p>Research Touchpoints via ITI Lab</p>
--	---	---	--

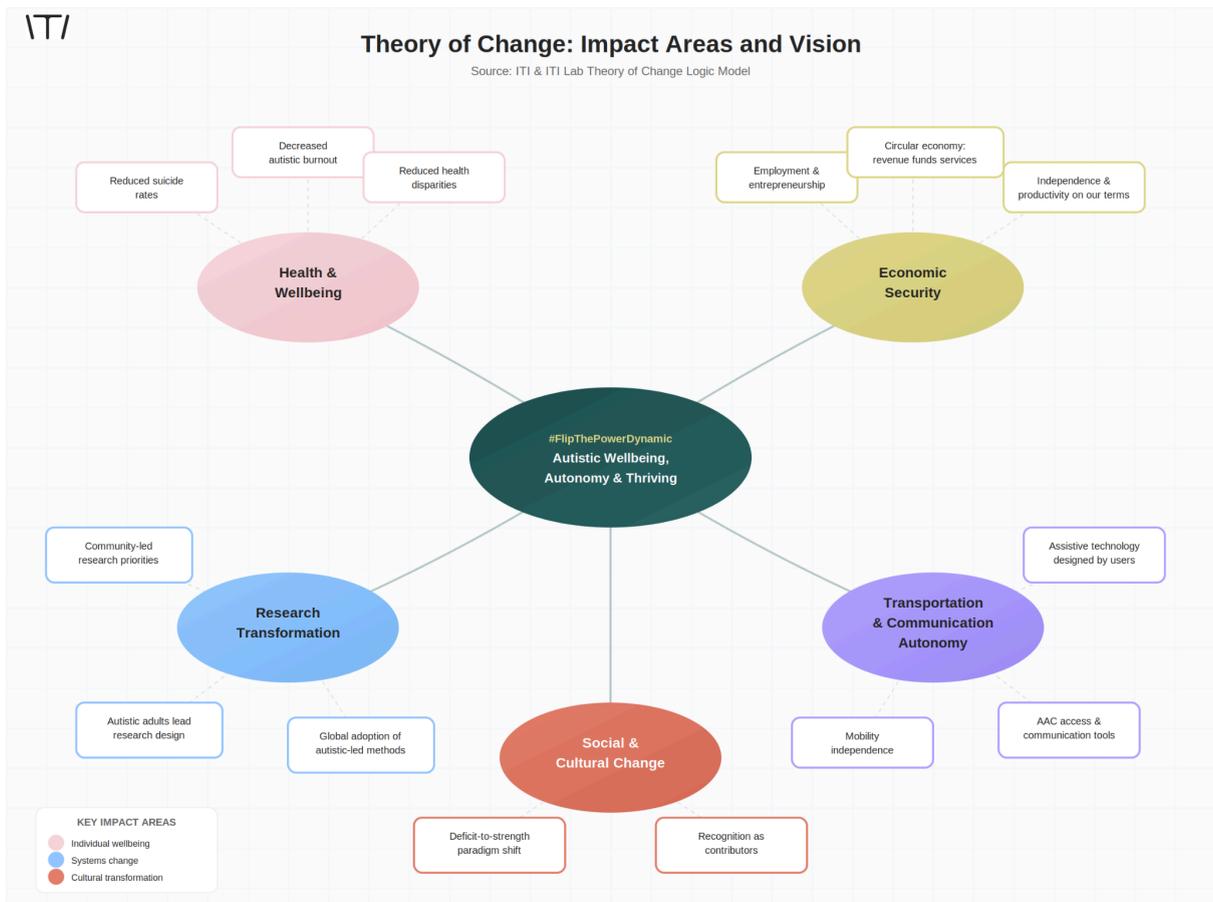
### Major Accomplishments

- Established ITI Lab as for-profit subsidiary, creating a sustainable funding ecosystem and launching first assistive mobile app
- Supported by Columbus Foundation funding (\$40,000) to launch Mobility Autonomy Program
- Awarded PCORI funding (\$124,977) to host national convening on autism and suicide prevention
- Secured DODD funding (\$734,550) for MAP and ITI Circle (I/DD entrepreneurship incubator) programs
- Completed comprehensive stakeholder engagement with 120+ touchpoints for MAP Phase 1



# Our Theory of Change

Autistic adults face systemic exclusion from research that impacts their lives, disproportionately high suicide rates, limited access to supportive services, and inadequate assistive technology. Only 4.3% of autism research funding addresses the lifespan. ITI addresses these gaps through disability-led research, accessible technology, and community-driven services targeting five impact areas..



### Logic Model by Initiative

Initiative	Inputs & Activities	Outputs	Systems Change
<p><b>MAP</b></p> <p>Mobility Autonomy</p>	<p>DODD Innovative Technology Solutions funding, MAP coalition partners, four-phase transportation training, VRN development</p>	<p>Virtual Resource Navigator app, training curriculum, replicable model</p>	<p>Replicable accessible transit model removes barriers so autistic adults can live independently.</p>
<p><b>POP</b></p> <p>Positive Outcomes</p>	<p>PCORI Engagement Award, Autism and Suicide Prevention Workgroup participation 2026 national convening, nonexistence ideation research</p>	<p>Research agenda for clinical effectiveness research, engagement toolkit, validated findings</p>	<p>Shifting research priorities toward adult wellbeing produces interventions that work.</p>
<p><b>CIRCLE</b></p> <p>Entrepreneurship</p>	<p>DODD Self-Employment funding, Neurodiversity at Work Hub, business incubation</p>	<p>Program resources, fee-for-service model, business launches</p>	<p>Entrepreneurship creates financial independence and positions autistic adults as contributors.</p>
<p><b>FLIP</b></p> <p>Research Advocacy</p>	<p>NSF grant support, Kumagaya Laboratory partnership, Tojisha-Kenkyu adaptation</p>	<p>Experiential Understandings module, Self-Advocates' Glossary, Timeline</p>	<p>Transforming deficit-based to strength-based paradigm means autistic adults lead research.</p>



## How We'll Measure Systems Change

### MAP

Mobility Autonomy Program

- Replication in other regions
  - Transit providers trained
- Transportation independence measures

### POP

Positive Outcomes Project

- Research proposals aligned with priorities
  - Engagement toolkit adoption
- RFPs referencing convening agenda

### CIRCLE

Entrepreneurship

- Business launches and income increases
  - Policy modifications across partners
- Economic impact on local communities

### FLIP

Research Advocacy

- English-language Tojisha-Kenkyu adoption
  - Module and Glossary citations
- Autistic adults in research design nationally

### Ultimate Goal: #FlipThePowerDynamic

Transform the autism research and services landscape from one focused on "fixing" autistic people to one that centers autistic wellbeing, autonomy, and community-defined priorities.



## Organizational Timeline

<p><b>2022</b></p>	<p>Autistic Self-Reliance Support Network founded by co-executive directors Dr. Shannan Palma and Lorien Dana, MEd</p>
<p><b>2023</b></p>	<p>Established fiscally-sponsored assistive technology project; Won \$7,500 first prize at Give Back Hack Columbus for tech concept; Launched Positive Outcomes Project</p>
<p><b>2024</b></p>	<p>Established ITI Assistive Technologies Inc. as 20% owned for-profit subsidiary; Secured \$390,140 DODD grant for subsidiary and established resource sharing agreement allowing us to hire 3 FTE at nonprofit and share staff; Launched MAP; Awarded funding from Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Ohio DDC, Columbus Foundation; Launched #FlipThePowerDynamic campaign</p>
<p><b>2025</b></p>	<p>Rebranded nonprofit as Independence Through Interdependence and subsidiary as ITI Lab; ITI Lab launched Decide app (Feb); ITI Awarded PCORI funding (\$124,977); DODD contracts: MAP (\$438,750) and ITI Circle (\$295,800); Promoted April Gao to VP; Hired Athina Peterson as Director of Innovation and Program Development</p>



## Our Programs

### Positive Outcomes Project (POP)

AUTISTIC WELLBEING



The Positive Outcomes Project emerged from community discussions about disproportionately high rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide among autistic adults. POP aims to increase positive wellbeing

through three strategies: understanding factors leading to high suicide rates, evaluating sensory-supporting spaces on wellbeing, and assessing nervous system regulation strategies.

#### Featured Partner: Lisa Morgan, LCSW-CC

Lisa Morgan is a Certified Autism Specialist, co-chair of the Autism and Suicide Prevention Workgroup of the American Association of Suicidology, and author of *Crisis Supports for the Autism Community* toolkit. She brings lived experience as an autistic adult and suicide loss survivor. ITI is partnering with Lisa Morgan Consulting, LLC to host the first Autism and Suicide Prevention Conference in February 2026 funded by a \$124,977 PCORI engagement award and to conduct research on nonexistence ideation and mental health safeguards for autistic users of AI.



# Mobility Autonomy Program (MAP)

## TRANSPORTATION ACCESS

MAP addresses transportation barriers through an integrated partnership ecosystem that combines technology with community-centered solutions. The program responds to Ohio DDC reports showing 39% of people with developmental disabilities could only sometimes find needed transportation and only 33% felt they could use transportation options on their schedule.

### The MAP Coalition

ITI partners with key organizations: ITI Lab develops AI-powered assistive technology; Unmuted Grace provides speech generating device training; Sidewalk Sidekick crowdsources real-time accessibility data; BeEnabled brings disability-led experiential learning; Punch Card ensures technical development aligns with UX research.

### Program Phases

- **Phase 1 (Completed):** Stakeholder engagement with 120+ touchpoints
- **Phase 2 (Current):** VRN MVP development with 15-20 pilot users
- **Phases 3-4 (Planned):** Scale solutions, provider training, replication models

### In Development: Virtual Resource Navigator

The VRN serves as both a real-time trip companion and planning resource, providing emotional regulation support, step-by-step guidance, and personalized navigation assistance based on accessibility needs and preferences. Features include Digital Accessibility Profile Tool, Integrated Trip Experience Support, AI-powered recommendation engine, and End-to-End Journey Navigation.



# ITI Circle

## ENTREPRENEURSHIP & ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

ITI Circle addresses critical gaps in Ohio's entrepreneurship support systems for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Despite 105% growth in I/DD self-employment between 2022 and 2023, existing resources remain underutilized due to lack of disability community awareness.

### Program Components

- Eight-session training program with disability-specific supports
- Microgrant program: \$1,500 grants to minimum 20 businesses
- Cross-training for mainstream business organizations
- Disability-led advisory council

ITI received \$295,800 from DODD for 2025-2027 to pilot ITI CIRCLE in Ohio.

### Introducing Athina Peterson

Athina Peterson leads ITI CIRCLE, ITI's entrepreneurship program for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. She previously served as Central Ohio market manager for SEACHange, a social enterprise accelerator, where she advised more than 30 startups and guided ITI through establishing ITI Lab. Peterson also completed a Miller Fellowship with Yellow Springs Community Foundation.



# #FlipThePowerDynamic

## RESEARCH ADVOCACY



#Flip advocates for changing autism research funding priorities to focus on autistic wellbeing. To catalyze this change, in 2024 ITI launched ITI Lab to research and develop assistive technology, provide sustainable

funding for autistic-led resources, and partner with users to create the largest pool of data on the autistic lifespan ever.

ITI is developing a partnership with University of Tokyo's Kumagaya Laboratory to adapt Tojisha-Kenkyu methodology—a disability-created approach where people with lived experience reflect, share experiences, and identify commonalities to inform research design.

### Upcoming Resources

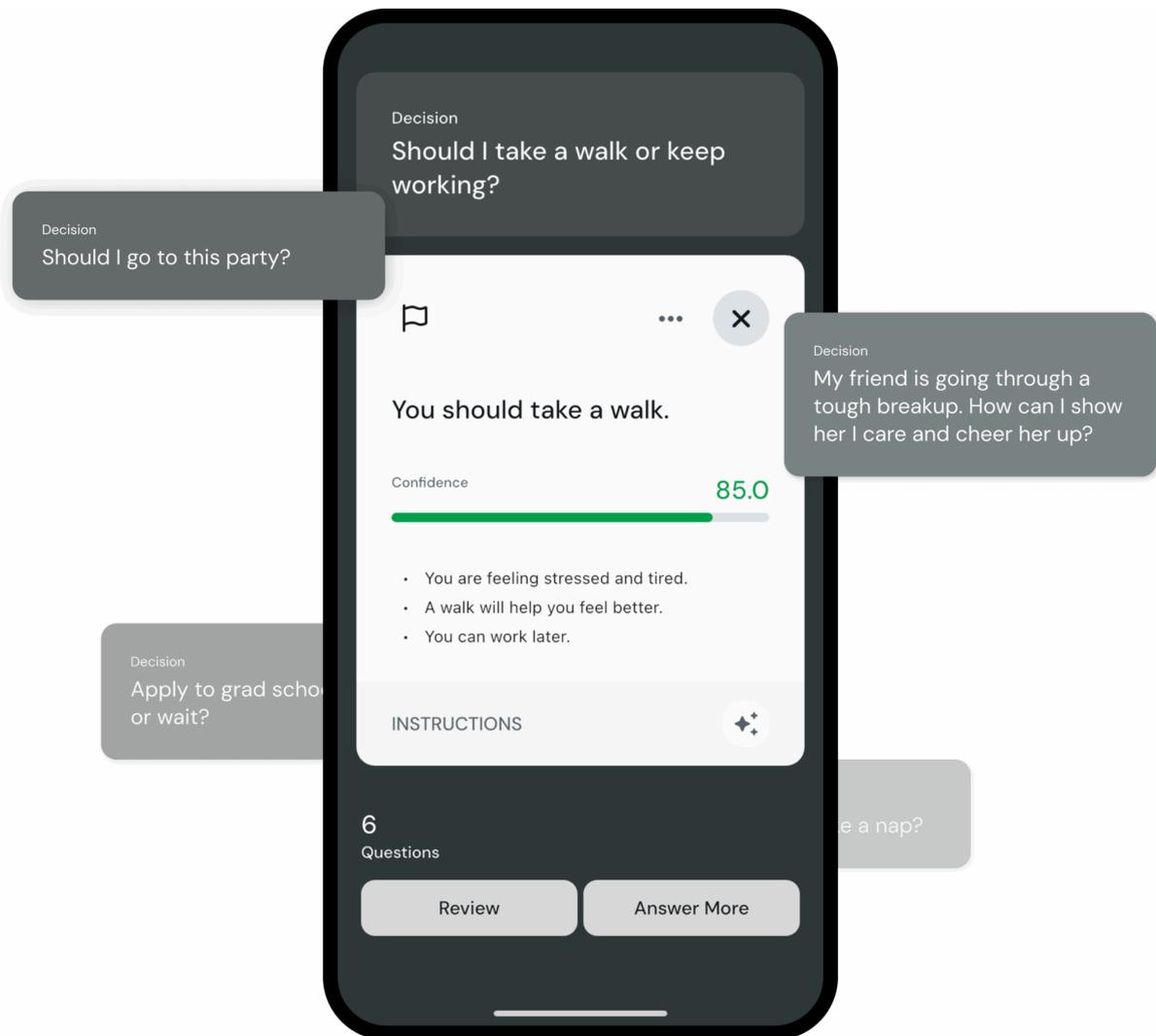
- **Experiential Understandings of Autism:** College-level module (Winter 2026)
- **Autism in Context Timeline:** Interactive digital timeline (Mid-2026)
- **Self Advocates' Glossary:** Plain language research overview (Mid-2026)



# ITI Lab

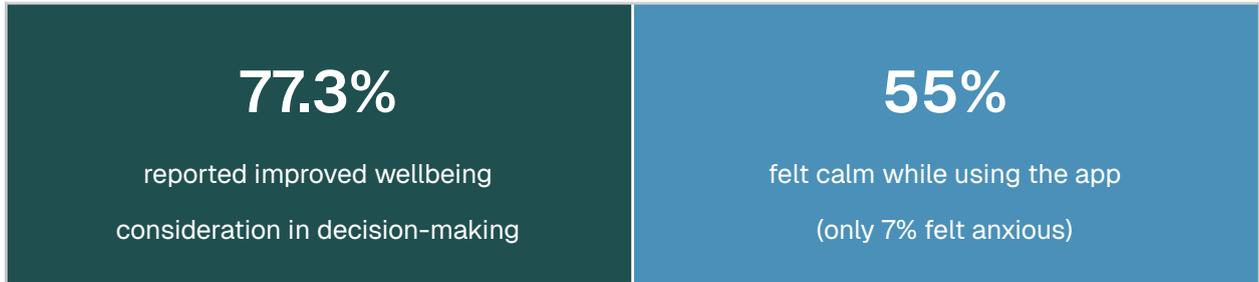
## Our Innovation Engine

ITI established ITI Lab as a fiscally-sponsored project in 2023 and incorporated it as a partially-owned for-profit subsidiary in 2024. ITI Lab develops AI-powered assistive technology for neurodivergent adults. The business model directs profits to support disability-led organizations, creating a sustainable funding ecosystem.



## The Decide App

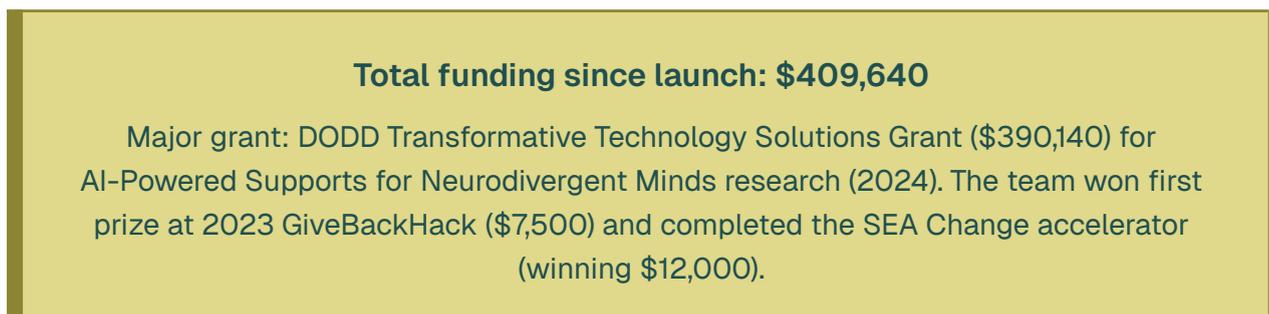
Decide is an AI-powered decision support app that reduces decision fatigue and paralysis for neurodivergent minds. It breaks down complex decisions, assesses risk levels, weighs user criteria, and visually presents options. Launched publicly in February 2025 with a freemium model.



## The Armory

Decide is the first entry in the Armory, a planned suite of support tools for autistic and ADHD adults. In development: personalization tool for goal-setting and journaling, and AI-powered open-source case management platform for healthcare self-advocacy.

## ITI Lab Funding



## Financial Overview

### Budget Summary

2024	\$435,416
2025	\$149,326
2026 (Projected)	\$676,532
2027 (Projected)	\$470,753

### Committed Funding 2025-2027

Funding Source	Amount
PCORI Engagement Award	\$124,977
DODD MAP Grant	\$438,750
DODD ITI Circle Grant	\$295,800
Other Sources	\$1,600
<b>TOTAL COMMITTED</b>	<b>\$861,127</b>



## The Funding Gap

Budget Needed <b>\$1,107,084</b>	Total Committed <b>\$861,127</b>	TO RAISE <b>\$245,957</b>
-------------------------------------	-------------------------------------	------------------------------

### How We're Closing the Gap

ITI pursues diversified funding including:

- Pending grant applications totaling \$409,935
- One-time and recurring [donations](#)
- Fee-for-service training delivery through ITI Circle
- *Longterm: App revenue from ITI Lab*

### What Your Donation Could Do

<b>\$50</b>	Supports one research participant stipend or funds one advisory council member
<b>\$500</b>	Helps fund mobility and communication tools to empower autistic autonomy
<b>\$1,500</b>	Sponsors one ITI Circle entrepreneur microgrant
<b>\$5,000</b>	Supports conference attendee travel and accommodations



## What's Possible with Additional Funding

Our current budget supports the initiatives already outlined. With additional funding, ITI and ITI Lab can accelerate work that directly impacts neurodivergent lives by moving forward other projects already in the pipeline.

R&D with nonspeakers for a phonetic speech generating device designed for dyspraxia and creative expression	Deepen collaboration with Kumagaya Laboratory at University of Tokyo
Research nonexistence ideation to better understand autistic suicide risk factors	Expand MAP model to include communication device training and distribution and realtime pedestrian data collection through partnerships
Scale ITI Circle model to other states seeking to support I/DD entrepreneurs	Research mental health risks and opportunities related to AI use by autistic people

**Your support enables disability-led solutions  
grounded in community priorities.**

To learn more or donate:

**[weareiti.org](https://weareiti.org)**

Independence Through Interdependence  
3737 Easton Market #1448, Columbus, OH 43219

