

Project Title

Come as You Are:

Establishing a Faithful Welcome for Neurodivergent Families

This project equips parochial schools and churches to better welcome neurodivergent children and their families. With MomCo's support, I will:

- Launch neurodiversity trainings for parochial school educators, volunteers, and church staff
- Create sensory-friendly spaces in churches and parochial school buildings
- Develop resource kits to foster understanding and inclusion

This project is the fruit of our family's journey toward belonging and grace.

Parenting a neurodivergent child is a blessing beyond words—but it's also isolating, draining, and often misunderstood. I've sat in the back of church with tears in my eyes, silently praying my son wouldn't have a meltdown. I've felt judgmental stares when he flapped his hands or made noises others didn't understand. I've cried in my car and wondered if anyone truly saw how hard I was trying—not just to parent well, but to belong.

When my husband and I searched for a faith community and school, we were heartbroken to find that the spaces meant to welcome all God's children weren't built for ours.

I couldn't accept that.

So I began working with our church and a local school, offering training and tools. The transformation was immediate.

This project is born from that same hope: that no mom has to choose between her child and her faith. That no child feels like a disruption in the place meant to offer the most grace.

Hope for Moms, Homes for Every Child in Church

This project brings hope to moms like me. Moms who have sat in the back of a church holding their breath, praying their child can make it through one more minute without being judged. Moms who have wondered if there would ever be a place in their faith community where their child truly belonged.

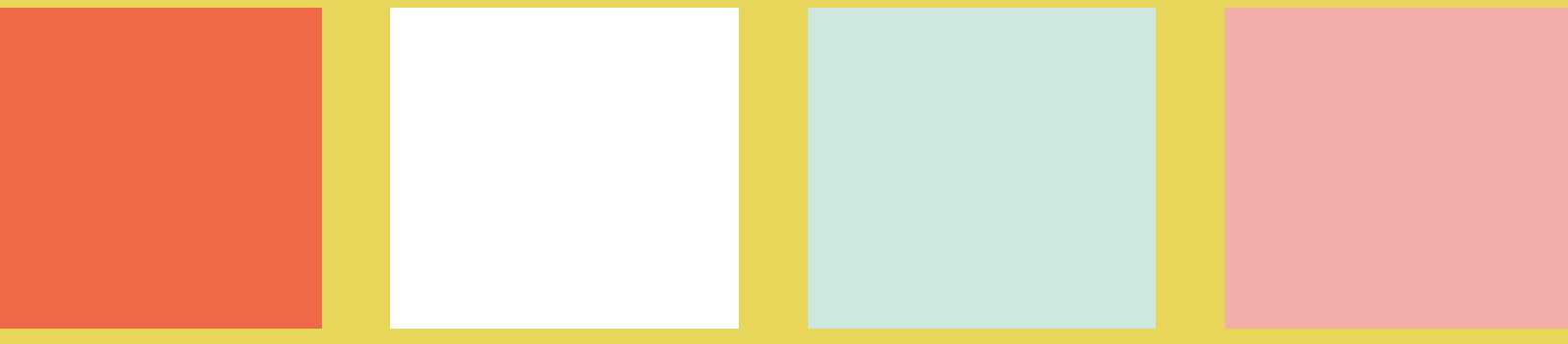
“Come as You Are” brings hope by making that place real.

Through educator and staff training, sensory friendly spaces, and faith-rooted resources, this project tells moms they are not alone, and their child is not a burden. It offers practical support and emotional relief. It replaces shame with understanding, and fear with belonging.

When a mom walks into a church or school and sees a quiet room built for her child, when she hears a teacher speak with compassion and knowledge about neurodivergence, when she finds a devotional written for the unique challenges she faces, she no longer feels invisible. She feels seen.

This is the kind of hope that changes everything.

It restores confidence, deepens faith, and creates a community where every mother and every child are embraced fully and lovingly. That is the promise of this work. And that is the hope I want to give.



Key Objectives

1. Create Inclusive Faith Spaces

Establish dedicated sensory-friendly quiet rooms in two local churches, offering neurodivergent children and their families a peaceful place to take breaks during services without shame or disruption. Create classroom sensory kits for two parochial schools to support regulation and inclusion throughout the school day.

2. Equip and Empower Educators

Deliver neurodivergence training to educators and church staff in two parochial schools and churches through Illinois grant funded programs, giving them tools to recognize, support, and celebrate students with diverse needs in a faith-based setting.

3. Support and Encourage Mothers

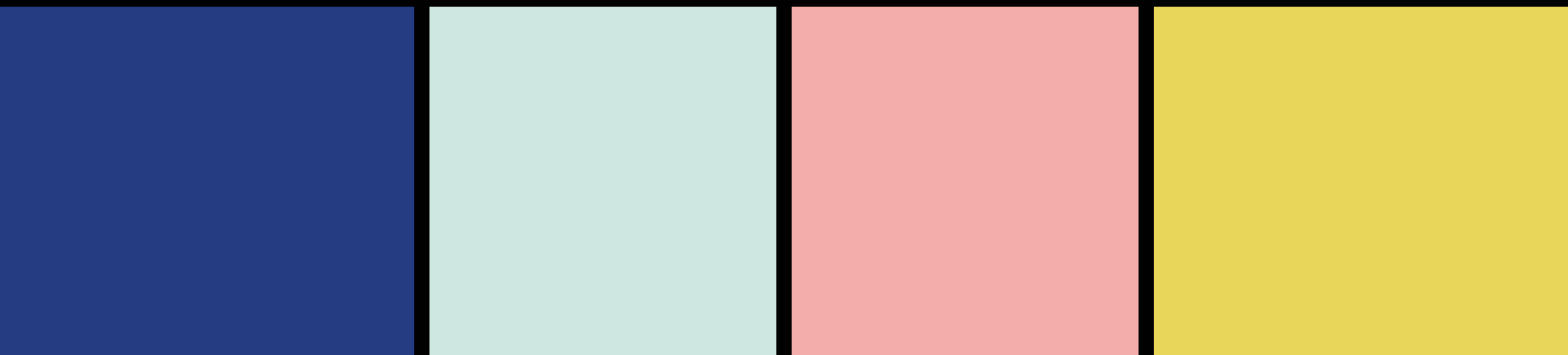
Provide faith-rooted materials and devotionals specifically designed for moms of neurodivergent children to remind them they are seen, supported, and not alone on this journey.

4. Reduce Stigma and Foster Belonging

Create church and school environments where neurodivergent children are not only welcomed but valued, and where families can fully engage in their faith without fear of judgment.

5. Build a Sustainable Model

Develop a replicable framework that can be shared with other churches and parochial schools across the region, extending the impact beyond the pilot locations.



Impact and Outreach

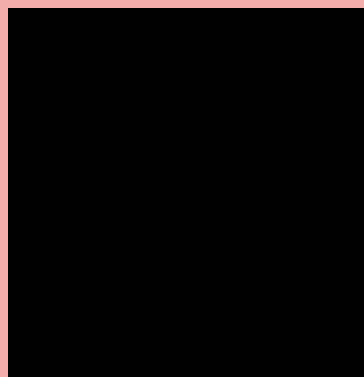
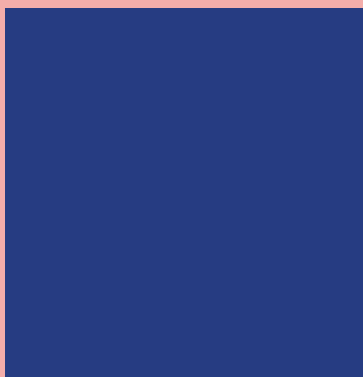
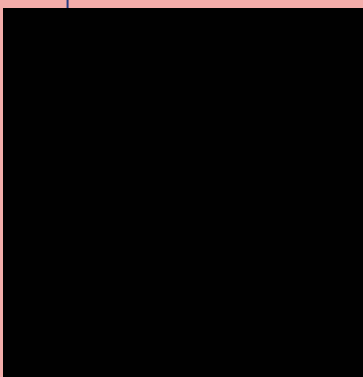
Approximately 20% of children in the United States are considered neurodivergent, encompassing conditions such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and other learning and developmental differences. This means that in every classroom, church pew, and community gathering, there are children whose unique needs often go unrecognized and unsupported.

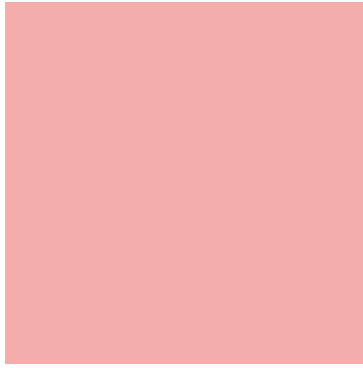
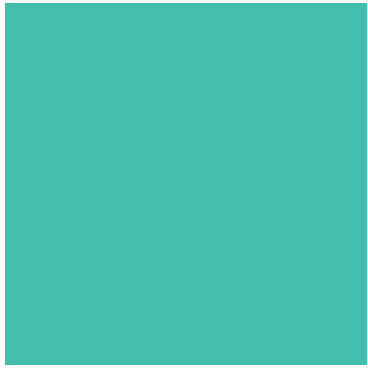
In its first year, this project aims to directly serve at least 50 families across two parochial schools and two churches in our community.

This includes:

- Over 30 mothers who will receive faith-rooted resources, support materials, and access to inclusive church spaces
- 20 to 25 educators and church staff who will be trained to better understand and support neurodivergent children
- An estimated 40 to 50 neurodivergent children who will benefit from sensory-friendly classrooms, break spaces, and compassionate, informed environments

As awareness grows and the model is shared, I anticipate this number increasing significantly through continued partnerships, outreach, and replication in other communities.





Specific Needs

This project addresses the unique and often overlooked needs of neurodivergent children and their mothers within faith-based communities.

Specifically, it will:

1. Create Safe, Sensory-Friendly Spaces

Many neurodivergent children become overwhelmed by the sounds, lights, and crowds of church and school environments. This project will create quiet, calming spaces where they can regulate without fear of judgment or exclusion.

2. Increase Understanding Among Educators and Church Staff

Through targeted training, this initiative equips teachers and ministry leaders to recognize neurodivergent behaviors, respond with compassion, and adapt environments to support every child's learning and worship experience.

3. Support Moms Who Often Feel Alone

Mothers of neurodivergent children frequently carry invisible burdens—guilt, fear, and isolation. This project offers them faith-rooted resources, encouragement, and the knowledge that they are not walking this road alone.

4. Reduce Stigma Within Faith Communities

By fostering empathy, education, and inclusion, the project challenges harmful assumptions and replaces them with a culture of grace and welcome.

5. Build Long-Term Belonging

Instead of temporary accommodations, this project creates lasting change. It lays the foundation for churches and schools to truly embrace neurodivergent families—not as exceptions, but as essential parts of the body of Christ.

Aligning with the MomCo Mission



This project lives and breathes the heart of MomCo's mission: spreading the love of Jesus and building a Christ-centered community where moms feel supported, seen, and never alone.

As a mom of a neurodivergent child, I have felt the ache of walking into church and immediately scanning for the nearest exit, just in case. I have endured the stares, the early exits, and the silent heartbreak of wondering if we truly belonged in the house of God.

And yet, in my lowest moments, I heard Jesus whisper what He said so clearly in Scripture: "Let the children come."

He did not say let the quiet ones come, or let the ones who sit still come.

He said all.

Every child.

Especially the ones the world too often misunderstands.

This project is called "Come as you Are" because that is exactly what it's about: removing the barriers between neurodivergent children and the spaces that should welcome them most.

By building sensory-friendly church spaces, training educators, and providing moms with faith-rooted resources, we are not just creating accommodations. We are opening doors.

We are reminding moms that the message of Jesus is still for them and their children. That they are not burdens, they are blessings. That the church can be a refuge, not a place of fear. That they do not have to choose between their faith and their child's needs.

"Come as You Are" is not simply a project. It is a calling. One that aligns with everything MomCo stands for: community, compassion, and the unshakable truth that God made no mistakes in our motherhood or in our children.

Project Implementation Timeline:

Fall 2025 – Summer 2026

Fall 2025 (September – November)

- Finalize partnerships with 2 parochial schools and 2 local churches
- Conduct initial needs assessments at each location (space, staffing, current resources)
- Continue partnership with The Autism Program of Illinois to coordinate training schedules and customize content for church staff and parochial school educators
- Coordinate with church leaders and school administrators to plan training logistics and site access
- Begin development of training curriculum and sensory resource kits
- Order materials and equipment for sensory spaces

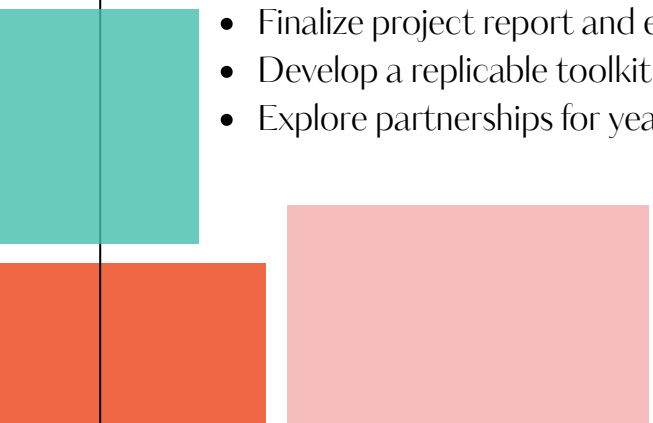
Winter 2025–26 (December – February)

- Launch first round of educator and church staff training sessions
- Begin setup of sensory break spaces in both churches
- Begin setup of classroom sensory resources
- Distribute devotional and resource materials to participating families

Spring 2026 (March – May)

- Complete setup of sensory-friendly classroom supports in both schools
- Complete setup of sensory break spaces in both churches
- Conduct follow-up sessions with educators and church staff to provide support and gather feedback
- Begin evaluation of initial impact (family feedback, church engagement, educator and staff input)
- Share mid-project update/testimonials through local faith networks

Summer 2026 (June – August)

- Host a “Come as You Are Sunday” or similar church event in each participating church to showcase the sensory spaces and celebrate inclusion
 - Finalize project report and evaluation summary
 - Develop a replicable toolkit for expanding to additional churches and schools
 - Explore partnerships for year two and potential scaling opportunities
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Anticipated Expenses Breakdown

Total Budget: \$8,000

1. Sensory Space Setup (2 Churches + 2 Schools) – \$4,600

- Sensory tools (fidgets, weighted items, visual aids, calming enhancements) – \$2,500
- Furniture (beanbags, soft seating, rugs, storage) – \$1,300
- Signage, visual schedules, calming decor – \$400
- Wireless headphones for church service access for parents (2 per %church) – \$400

2. Training and Curriculum Development – \$1,600

- Partner facilitation fees (e.g., Autism Program of Illinois) – \$800
- Printed training guides and materials – \$400
- Workshop supplies (handouts, presentation tools) – \$400

3. Parent and Community Resources – \$500

- Devotional-style booklets and printed faith-based resources – \$500

4. Closing Event & Outreach – \$800

- End-of-project celebration (venue, food, signage) – \$600
- Marketing materials (flyers, posters, printing) – \$200

5. Project Evaluation and Toolkit – \$500

- Surveys and feedback collection – \$250
- Printed final toolkit for future churches and schools – \$250

*There are no additional funding sources at this time.

Sustainability

“Come as You Are” is not a one-time initiative. It lays the foundation for lasting change in how faith communities support neurodivergent children and their families. The sensory spaces, training materials, and parent resources established through this grant will remain in use well beyond the first year, continuing to benefit students, families, educators, and church members.

To support long-term growth, plans are underway to establish a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. This structure will allow for the pursuit of additional grant opportunities, ongoing donor support, and expansion into new churches and schools.

The partnerships already formed demonstrate the strength and potential of this work. The relationship with Trinity Lutheran Church and School, in particular, has been instrumental. Their leadership, compassion, and willingness to embrace inclusive ministry show what is possible when a faith community leans into love and understanding. Continued collaboration with The Autism Program of Illinois will ensure access to high-quality training and professional guidance for future efforts.

A volunteer network made up of moms, educators, and church members will help maintain the sensory spaces and offer peer support to new families. These advocates will help ensure the heart of the project lives on well beyond its launch.

The long-term vision includes developing a replicable model and toolkit that can be shared with other churches and schools across the state and beyond. As the project grows, so does the reach of a simple but powerful message:

Every child deserves to be welcomed, and every mother deserves to be supported in her walk of faith and parenting.

This is only the beginning.



A Lasting Program

The goal is for “Come as You Are” to evolve into a recurring, sustainable program within faith communities. The initial pilot is just the first step in a broader vision to make inclusion a permanent part of how churches and parochial schools serve neurodivergent children and their families.

Sensory spaces will remain in place and in active use, supported by volunteers who can help maintain the environment and assist families as needed. Annual or semi-annual training sessions will be offered in partnership with organizations like The Autism Program of Illinois to refresh skills, onboard new educators and church leaders, and continue the conversation around inclusion and grace.

Additionally, the closing celebration will serve as a model for future community events—creating moments where families feel seen and celebrated, not just accommodated. As the program grows, additional churches and schools will be invited to participate using the toolkit and structure developed through the pilot.

“Come as You Are” is a seed for a recurring and expanding effort that will continue to grow wherever there are children who need to be welcomed and moms who need to know they are not alone.

In faithful service,

Kate Morthland

-A mom whose son teaches her to shine brightly, serve humbly, and dream as wide as the moonlight that God placed in the sky

