It all began in a neurologist’s office ...

The story of Islands of Brilliance began in a doctor’s office in the Spring of 2001, when program founders Mark and Margaret Fairbanks were given a three word prognosis for their son Harry: “Lower Your Expectations.” Harry had recently been diagnosed with autism, but rather than encouraging his parents, neurologists told the couple that their 3 year old son “didn’t understand the difference between the beginning and end of a book, would not be ready for 1st grade, and don’t plan on him going to college.”

Like many parents of children identified with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), Mark and Margaret refused to give up on Harry, and discovered that by reaching into his world and engaging with his interests, they were able to build a bridge between his world and their own. By focusing on Harry’s area of perseveration (a key characteristic of autism, referring to an individual's devotion to a particular subject matter) along with encouraging Harry’s growing interest in and skilled use of technology, an idea was born.

Islands of Brilliance was developed as a pilot program in Fall 2012 with a simple yet groundbreaking premise: pair children with autism one-on-one with design professionals who would teach the students valuable software skills. The students would create projects based on their “subject matter expertise” and walk away from the class with new design capabilities, a sense of accomplishment and confidence in presenting their ideas in a group setting, plus a connection to their mentor as well as their fellow students.

Islands of Brilliance has grown considerably over the past eight years. The Islands of Brilliance team is continually amazed and inspired by the pure unadulterated creativity of their students, as well as the empathy and generosity of the creative community that makes it all possible.

Oh, and Harry Fairbanks? He is in his senior year at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Peck School of the Arts.
Major Milestones

**OCTOBER 2012**
IOB holds the first workshop as “Minimum Viable Experience” with seven students at Discovery World in Milwaukee, Wis.

**2015**
Workshops are held in Minneapolis, Minn. and Portland, Ore.

**NOVEMBER 2015**
IOB hosts its first Colors & Chords, a unique fundraising event that combines music and art to celebrate the accomplishments of our neurodiverse community.

**2016**
Workshops are held in Duluth, Minn. and Chicago, Ill. Enrollment in Milwaukee surpasses 100 registrations in a calendar year.

**JUNE 2016**
Brilliant Guest Artist Series begins with workshops led by professional designers, illustrators and educators from area businesses and universities.

**JUNE 2017**
Coding workshops are offered for the first time, using Google CS Learning Modules.

**OCTOBER 2018**
Digital Academy program launches using product-based learning in virtual reality and video game development.

**FEBRUARY 2019**
Brilliant Breakfast Club is established to foster pathways toward independence for young adults 18+ by focusing on daily living skills and providing opportunities for socialization.

**MAY 2019**
Brilliant Studios, an integrated employment model, hires its first three neurodiverse employees.

**SEPTEMBER 2019**
IOB introduces Brilliant Sandbox, a unique partnership with local school districts that pairs neurodiverse students with grade level peers outside of the typical school environment to help create new, positive relationships.

**DECEMBER 2019**
Enrollment in Milwaukee surpasses 500 registrations in a calendar year.

**MARCH 2020**
Islands of Brilliance launches online programming in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak.