



Centre for Autism Services Alberta 2015 - 16 Annual Report

Creative Expressions



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autism
services

President's Message

It has been a privilege for me to serve as President of the Centre for Autism Services Alberta Board of Directors these past two years. They have certainly been eventful years as the Centre has striven to build and maintain program and service delivery during uncertain economic times.

In the coming year, our relationships with funders and donors will remain a matter of ongoing work. As a Board, working with our senior management team, we take very seriously our role in evaluating our current programs and services in order to maximize efficiencies and ensure funds are spent effectively.

One such example is the exciting new Quest for Independence program and the associated renovations to provide for an apartment here at the Centre for young adults with autism to experience day-to-day living in a supportive environment. This program is the first of its kind to be offered in Edmonton.

Finally, I would like to thank my fellow Board members for their input and guidance and recognize the senior management team and all the Centre staff, led by our dedicated Executive Director - Deborah Allard Usunier - for their tremendous commitment to our Centre, its programming and our clients.

- Don Kwas

Executive Director's Message

Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder reach their full potential. It's our vision and purpose. It informs everything we do. And it reminds us every day why we exist - potential. The Centre was founded by families who saw the potential within their children but realized that that potential would be lost without support. So we created an evolving evidence-based practice that recognizes and nurtures each child's potential.

Then, as these children grew, we created programs - cooking and skills programs, summer camps, visual arts, and social programs - to reveal, encourage, and develop potential.

But, in a world where kids with autism are routinely bullied and adults with autism are routinely excluded, we realized that we must do more. So we partnered with community organizations, encouraging others to see and understand that potential and open doors to individuals with autism.

But, in a country where 83% of adults with autism report no income from employment, we understood that we couldn't wait for others to act. So we developed teen and adult programs to build pre-employment and independence skills.

During 2015-16 we supported more individuals with autism and their families than ever before. We informed, trained, and mentored more community members, including more educators than ever before. But, until every person with autism in our province is provided the opportunity to reach their full potential, we know that our work has only just begun.

- Deborah Allard Usunier

Enriching lives

421 children, teens, and young adults participated in Centre enrichment programs including summer camps, sports and recreation activities, and visual arts.

Without the routine of school, the summer months can be challenging for families. The Centre's summer camp programs were created to support development over the summer, offer opportunities for individual enrichment, and most importantly, be fun!

This year, the Centre greatly expanded our three summer camps - **Little Aces** (Ages 3-5); **Camp ACE** (Ages 5-12); and **Teen Camp** (Ages 13-17) - allowing for more campers and a greater variety of activities.

Interest-based camps were added to the Teen Camp roster including photography/videography, computer science, sports, drama, and video game design and activities were enhanced to ensure that every teen with autism, regardless of where they fit on the spectrum, could find a program to meet their needs.

The Centre also created new sports and recreation opportunities, expanding existing programs and launching new ones like **Teen Basketball**.

Our visual arts programs for children, teens, and young adults continue to be among our most popular offerings. This year we held our most successful art show and sale, garnering the attention of two Edmonton television stations.



Teen Camp at the Apple Store

Changing Outcomes

173 families received developmental and early childhood services, therapy, and social skills support provided by the Centre's team of autism professionals including registered psychologists, educators, behavioural and occupational therapists, and speech-language pathologists.

Early intensive behavioural intervention, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, and educational supports can substantially change outcomes for children with autism and their families. Addressing deficits and delays early give children the best chance for success.

The Centre's supports, including specialized services and developmental contracts for families in Edmonton and Calgary, and early childhood and mental health services in Edmonton are helping children develop and families thrive. Programs offered include:

- **Early Childhood Services (PUF)** - helping pre-school children with autism transition to school environments
- **Facing Your Fears** - help for children struggling with anxiety
- **Let's Ride** - transit skills for teens in partnership with Edmonton Transit
- **PEERS** - social skills for teens

A Path to Inclusion - Wendy Wen

Selena was diagnosed with autism shortly before her 3rd birthday. We got her into a pre-school intervention program as soon as we could, but she had so many challenges. She couldn't communicate, she would bite and act out, and she was afraid all the time. It was clear to us that we needed to do something else, so we contacted the Centre.

I wanted Selena in an inclusive learning environment, not just in a special class. I wanted her to have friends, to learn, and to develop. But as she clung desperately to me during our intake interview, afraid of anything or anyone new, it was hard to see the path ahead.

The Centre's home and community-focused intervention programs changed that. Now, as parents, we have more than just support, we have a team to guide and coach us. Working together, we have significantly alleviated Selena's anxiety and built her skills.

Now, Selena is in Grade 2. She's happy to go to school where she loves to greet her friends by their names. She really wants to communicate and connect to others now. Instead of putting her into a special program where she isn't challenged, the Centre focused on addressing her individual needs and insisted upon her inclusion.

I wanted Selena in a positive learning environment, but I've learned that parents need that too. Being a Centre family means that we have the support, feedback, and coaching that we need to help Selena realize her potential.

"I'm barely scared now."
- Ben, Age 11, Facing Your Fears graduate



Little Aces Camp

Empowering Families

962 family members participated in educational workshops, family nights, special events, and centre-based respite.

The Centre embraces person-centered and family-centered practices. We exist not just to serve individuals with autism, but to serve their families as well. Through family-centered activities, we work to empower families so they can support and advocate for their family member with autism and engage fully in their community.

Family programs include: educational workshops designed to provide caregivers with the tools they need to support their children, teen, and adults with autism; family nights where caregivers come together to socialize and support one another and where their children with autism and their siblings play and grow together; our new Grandparents' Group where caregivers learn together; special events that both create a sense of pride and identity and get families out in the community; and centre-based respite to support the entire family, siblings included.

Fostering Independence

97 teens and young adults participated in Centre skills development, independence, and social programs. For far too long, teens and young adults with autism have been left out - out of school and community activities, out of programs, out of options. But the families who formed what would become the Centre knew all along that their children would grow and their needs would grow along with them. So the Centre adopted a lifespan approach committed to providing comprehensive and innovative supports and services to individuals across the lifespan.

The Centre's independence programs include cooking programs like Shop, Cook, and Learn for teens and Independence in the Kitchen for young adults that go far beyond typical kitchen classes, focusing on the multitude of skills involved in eating healthy while living independently.

The Centre's social programs for teens and young adults are critical for healthy social development and contribute significantly to our young people's mental health and well-being.

And this year, the Centre added two new programs designed to fundamentally alter the future for young people with autism in Canada - *CommunityWorks Canada*®, a pre-employment program for high school students and *Quest for Independence*, the first post-secondary independence program for young adults in our city.



Independence in the Kitchen

A Mother's Hope - Kim Gleason

Mark was just over 2 when he was diagnosed. Back then, there was nothing for children with autism in Edmonton. But we were in the right place at the right time - the second to last family to get accepted into the Autism Linkages pilot study and what would become the Centre. Without that, I don't know where we'd be.

Now as a 21 year-old, what Mark needs most is for people to see his potential. They see his autism, but do they see that he's a classical guitar player - do they see his incredible math ability?

After high school, Mark's behavioural issues went from snowflake to blizzard. Suddenly, he was isolated from his peers. We knew about *Quest for Independence*, but I was hesitant. Did I want Mark in a program that was just for people with autism? That's not what inclusion means to us. But even with support and established routines, he was stagnating at home. So we took the plunge and applied for *Quest*. We couldn't have made a better decision.

Mark hasn't complained once about coming to *Quest*. He's happy to come in the morning and happy to go home in the afternoon. He gets that he's accepted here and it's really building his confidence and self worth.

A couple of weeks ago, Mark's dad was working in the yard and missed making lunch for Mark. When he came into the house, he saw Mark eating a healthy balanced lunch. He thanked Mark's brother who replied, "Mark did it!" Mark had made his own lunch just like he does every day in *Quest*.

Our hope is that Mark will be as independent as he can. I haven't given up on the idea that Mark will go to college some day. But right now, he's growing and gaining confidence in *Quest* - where people see his potential - and that's exactly what he needs.

NEW in 2015-16

Calgary

This year, the Centre expanded our service area to serve families and individuals with autism in Calgary.

Services and supports in Calgary include: Specialized Services in coordination with Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD); Developmental and Behavioural programs; Autism-related assessments including functional behaviour assessment and positive behaviour supports.

Grandparents' Group

When one of our grandparents wanted to reach out and support other grandparents, we provided space and support to create the Grandparents' Group.

Led by grandparents, the group meets regularly for educational and social sessions focused on family sharing and support.

Facing Your Fears

Many children with autism also suffer with anxiety. Now the Centre has a program to help. Facing Your Fears, a family-focused group intervention, uses cognitive behavioural principles to help children identify their fears and develop strategies to manage them.

A critical component of the program is empowering parents with techniques to support their children.

Transforming Communities

764 educators, students, and community leaders participated in Centre trainings or educational/awareness events including the Centre for Autism Services Alberta Students' Association's Discovering Autism interdisciplinary conference held at the U of A.

Ultimately, the Centre has two objectives - supporting individuals with autism so they can reach their potential and fully engage in their community and transforming communities so they are equipped to welcome individuals with autism and support their engagement. One without the other is simply not enough.

This year, the Centre did more than ever before to transform communities. 501 educators (principals, teachers, and EAs) participated in Centre professional development workshops during 2015-16 including 93 teachers who took PEERS training to better support social skills in teens with autism and hundreds more who discovered best practices in behavioural supports, modifying classroom environments, and facilitating transitions.

The Centre's Student Association at the University of Alberta presented their 3rd annual Discovering Autism interdisciplinary conference to a record crowd of students, parents, professionals, and community leaders in March - one of several special activities and awareness events sponsored by the group on campus.

And, new this year, the Centre formed a partnership with MacEwan University to help train the next generation of autism professionals while students on campus formed their own Centre-affiliated student organization.



Finding My Confidence - Aaron Esposito, Age 18

Last year at this time, I was just in high school. Now my life is filled with things I enjoy like *CommunityWorks* and hanging out with my friends from the Centre.

I wasn't sure about *CommunityWorks* at first, but I decided to give it a shot. I found out that I really like giving back to others. *CommunityWorks* opened my mind - made me feel like I'm part of the community. I did so well in *CommunityWorks* that Brady asked me to volunteer at Teen Camp this summer. At computer science camp I found out that I'm pretty good at video game design. Now I'm going to work on becoming a better coder using the coding websites from camp.

Maybe I could work in a video game store in the meantime, while I'm learning. I still get anxious thinking about asking for a job application, but doing community work is helping me find my confidence. I'm not alone. There are a lot of others just like me and we're finding ways to get past our struggles.

"I strongly believe in programs that teach functional skills and help foster independence, like this cooking class, and enjoy playing a personal role in helping that happen." - Arthur, Volunteer

Quest for Independence

When young adults with autism leave high school, they may suddenly find themselves isolated without support. No autism-specific program has existed to address these individuals' needs in Edmonton, until now. This year, the Centre launched *Quest for Independence* - the first post-secondary program specifically for young adults with autism in Edmonton. We built a unique learning space to house the program - the *Quest* model apartment - and conducted a successful crowdfunding campaign to furnish and equip the space. Now young adults have the opportunity to develop the skills of independence they need to thrive in our community.

CommunityWorks Canada®

Most young people develop workforce skills naturally, starting with odds jobs or babysitting and working their way up to after-school and weekend employment. But young people with autism rarely get these opportunities. Left out as teens, they are unable to catch up as adults. The result - a mere 17% of adults with autism have jobs - the lowest employment rate of all disability groups in Canada.

This year, the Centre initiated a major program to change that. *CommunityWorks* gives high school students with autism the opportunity to develop pre-employment skills while serving their communities as volunteers. The program is giving a lot of young people something new - hope for the future.

- Changing Outcomes -

173 individuals with autism and their families - specialized services, early childhood services, mental health and socialization programs



-Enriching Lives-

421 children, teens, and young adults - summer camp, sports and recreation, visual arts
307 summer campers ages 3 - 17



Supported by

3 research fellows, **2** registered psychologists, and **17** Master level clinicians

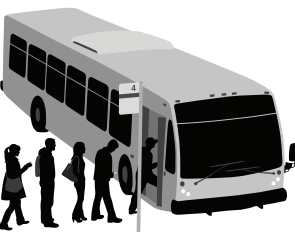


2,417 People Served in 2015-16



- Fostering Independence -

97 teens and young adults -skills, independence, and social programs



Enhanced by Volunteers

80 volunteers contributed
6,073 hours in support of Centre programs



Facilitated by Community Partners

22 community partners supporting **27** programs

- Empowering Families -

962 family members - respite, educational workshops, family nights, and special events

Reaching Future Leaders

2 student associations (University of Alberta/MacEwan University) and Discovering Autism student-run conference at U of A



35 educational workshops

- Transforming Communities -

764 educators, students, and community leaders - education and awareness
501 educators (principals, teachers, EAs) participated

The Centre is Everywhere

Twenty years ago, in Edmonton, there was no way to help children with autism and their families. They were isolated, confused, and exhausted, with no connection to one another, to experts, to the community. Then a small group of parents changed everything.

In 1997, a few parents of children with autism launched a new organization in Edmonton. The science then, as now, showed that early intervention could make a huge difference in a child's life. They reached out to help other families and, as the organization grew, they ensured that its services and programs would grow too, evolving with the science of autism and with the children themselves. But they wanted something else too – to build a community that understands, includes, and creates opportunities for people with autism.

Today, the Centre for Autism Services Alberta, a Canadian Registered Charity, embodies the goals of our founding families, setting the standard for best practice in Autism Spectrum Disorders through individualized care that evolves with children as they develop, services and programs that engage families in the community, and partnerships that create opportunities for people with autism in Edmonton and beyond.

The Centre has an address. But we like to think of it as everywhere.

Our Vision

Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder reach their full potential.

Our Mission

Our mission is to provide comprehensive and innovative supports and services to those affected by Autism Spectrum Disorders across the lifespan.

Our Values

We value access to supports, services, and resources across the full autism spectrum lifespan.

- We embrace person-centered and family-centered practices.
- We value meaningful participation of all individuals in every aspect of society.
- We believe in the right to individual choice and self-determination.
- We value collaboration with all stakeholders.
- We are dedicated to continuous quality improvement.
- We value accountability and transparency.
- We engage in open and honest communication.



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Community Support

Individuals with autism have the opportunity to reach their full potential when they are an integral part of their communities. Thank you to all those in our community who helped change outcomes, enrich lives, empower families, and foster independence in individuals with autism this year: Volunteers, the heart of our community and enrichment programs; Donors who make everything possible; and Community Partners without whom inclusion is an empty notion. Together, we are transforming our community.

Volunteers

80 volunteers contributed 6,073 hours to ensure the success of children, teens, and young adults with autism and their families in Centre programs.

Financial Support

Government of Canada - Worktopia
Province of Alberta
Shannon & Geoff Aalders
Walter Albarracin
Alberta Association of
Services for Children and Families
Marion Albright
Maxine Albright
Align Association of
Community Services
ATCO Epic Campaign
Anna Au
James Au
Darlene Barr
Spinnler Benade
Andre Blanchette
Karen Bolstler
Nathan Bowman
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Gary Deane

Michelle de Beer
Bill Dory
Meghan Edgson
Els for Autism Canada
Jami Engel
Suzanne Euinton
Darryl Fontaine
Charles Gachnang
Gateway Rotary Club
GoodLife Kids Foundation
Paul Goguen
Donna Gowin
Grey Nuns Imaging Department
Susan Gynane
Cliff & Amanda Hansen
Douglas Hellam
Semina Hepburn
Edith Hunter
Nha Huynh
Jasper Auto Parts
Justice Services Division Staff
Elizabeth Kazulin
Keg n Cork Liquor Co

Brian Knapper
Knifewear
Kevin Scott & Lisa Korte
Ng Michelle Hung Kwan
Don Kwas
Claudia Landero
Kitti Luckkid
Jackie Mah
Maryon McClary
Jacquie McCubbin
Jennifer Mcmillan
Lois & Ted Mulligan
Heather Murk
Heather Nickolchuk
Darren Pack
Mark Panganiban
Karyn Papadatos
David Pham
Linda Pham
Tracy Pham
President's Choice Children's Charity
Rexall Foundation
Kathleen Richey

Andrew & Jackie Ryan
Martha & John Schiel
Karen Schmitke
Wai Lun Shing
Jeremy Simpson
Rick, & Brune Sinneave
Sinneave Family Foundation
Brett Small
Renai Sveinson
Katelyn Swan
Tipaskan Elementary
Grade 4 Entrepreneurs
Pat & Morris Tofteland
Tina Towns
Deborah Allard Usunier
Anna M Warawa
Mai Watson
Wendy Wen
Roger & Lynda Wild
Lynn Wilson
Charlene Wong
Valerie Yandreski
Alex & Beverly Yeung

"We tried Little Aces for the first time this year. On Thursday night, our son cried when I asked him about camp. Assuming he had had a bad experience, I asked why he didn't like it. He answered "I want to go to camp forever!" He was sad because Friday was the last day. We're definitely signing up for camp next year!" - Tina, Centre mom

In-Kind Support

Todd Babiak
Century Hospitality Group
Citadel Theatre
CTV Edmonton
Earl's
Edmonton Eskimos
Joanne Fodchuk
Glazer's Distributors
HeartStrings Jewelry
Leduc Animal Clinic
Jasper Place Lodge
KCMP Property Solutions

Ben and Grant Kurtz
McBain Camera
Sheryl & Conner Modin
Muzyka Family
Porsche Centre Edmonton
Techsoup Canada
The Brick
TimberTown
Titan Flooring
Tomnuk Designs
Turner Guitar Studio
Winspear Centre

Community Partners

The Apple Store – Southgate Centre
Citadel Theatre
City of Edmonton –
Muttart Conservatory
City of Edmonton – The ReUse Centre
Dynamyx Gymnastics
Edmonton Humane Society
Edmonton Transit System
Edmonton Valley Zoo
Extreme Edge Skating Club
Free2BME
Goodwill Alberta
Homeward Trust Edmonton

Hope Mission
Latitude 53
McBain Camera
Nina Haggerty Centre for the Arts
Nuit Blanche Edmonton
Our Lady Queen of Peace Ranch
Qi Creative
Ronald McDonald House of
Northern Alberta
University of Alberta Faculty
of Engineering
University of Alberta Faculty of
Physical Education & Recreation

The Centre for Autism Services Alberta is proud to be accredited in *Behavioural Consultation Services - Autism Spectrum Disorder - Children and Adolescents*, a standard of excellence awarded by CARF International.

Centre for Autism Services Alberta is a registered Canadian charity no. 872973995RR0001

