



centre FOR
autism
services
ALBERTA

Impact

REPORT

2023 - 2024





The Centre for Autism Services Alberta

Is dedicated to providing comprehensive, innovative support for individuals with autism across their lifespan.

Our purpose is to empower Autistic individuals and their families to **thrive**.

To achieve this, we focus on delivering impactful programs and services that inspire positive change and foster an inclusive future for participants, families, communities, and partners. We prioritize understanding each person's unique context, dreams, and goals to promote their achievement. Our commitment to autistic voice and choice ensures our services align with what matters to Autistic individuals. We also emphasize continuous improvement— if there's a better way, we do it.

This report outlines our journey throughout 2023-2024 fiscal year towards realizing this vision.



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A NOTE FROM OUR *Board Chair*

As the Board of Directors, we are deeply proud of the transformative impact our initiatives have had on the lives of Autistic individuals and their families. This year, driven by our strategic vision, we have successfully expanded our programs in Calgary and continue to broaden our services across the lifespan. Our dedication to building inclusive communities and advancing understanding has been further strengthened through the invaluable partnerships we've cultivated across Alberta.

Together, we are shaping a brighter future where every individual can achieve their fullest potential. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our donors, partners, volunteers, and families for their unwavering support and crucial contributions to this mission.



Dani Perl,
Board Chair





A NOTE FROM OUR *Executive Director*

As I write my final Executive message for the 2023/24 impact report, I want to thank the board members, staff, donors, partner agencies, and families who have supported me during my 17 years as Executive Director. It has been a joy working with such talented and dedicated individuals.

When I began, the Centre served just 80 families annually under one Family Supports for Children with Disabilities contract. Today, we impact over 3,000 lives yearly across Alberta. Our services have expanded from clinical programming for young children to a full range of supports across the lifespan and spectrum, focusing on changing outcomes, empowering families, fostering independence, enriching lives, and transforming communities.

These five pillars have led to valuable partnerships with the University of Alberta, MacEwan University, arts organizations, community groups, and the City of Edmonton. Our sports programs for Autistic children, teens, and young adults are now integrated into city facilities. We also teach independence and leadership through our seven apartments in the Quest for Independence program, and we launched a new supported independent living program for adults.

Additionally, we educate over 1,000 community leaders and educators annually, centring on improving services for Autistic individuals. Our EmploymentWorks program for Autistic adults, ages 15 to 64, reflects our ongoing commitment to enhancing employment opportunities for this community.

It has been my pleasure to serve as CFASA's Executive Director.

Soon to be happily retired,

Deborah

Deborah Allard Usunier,
Executive Director





*Doing more to make
an impact.*

In partnership with caring
supporters like you, the
Centre impacted **3,064** lives
across Alberta.



Highlights

2023 - 2024

Increased Services for Adults:

- New – Supported Independent Living Program (SIL).
- Secured funding to double capacity – Quest for Independence Program.

New Key Partnership:

- Embedded our sports programs in City of Edmonton facilities.

Served More Children and Families in Edmonton and Calgary:

- Increased capacity for clinical and early childhood education services.
- Launched onsite respite services in Calgary.

Neurodiversity Speakers Bureau:

- Delivered workshops throughout the province.
- Engaged with CFASA on neurodiversity affirming policy and practices.

Further Strides in Language Accessibility:

- Translated key documents into additional languages: Somali and Tigrinya.



Our Five Pillars of Service





Changing Outcomes:

Clinical and Educational Services

Changing outcomes means adopting a holistic approach that recognizes and nurtures each individual's **unique strengths, needs, and aspirations**, starting in childhood. Our goal is to remove barriers and enhance overall well-being.

In 2023/2024, we expanded our services, reaching more families and are continuously working towards a brighter future for every Autistic individual.

345 families supported across Edmonton and Calgary -
an increase of **16%** over last year.

In-home Services:

Specialized Services

(ages 2-17) | **168** families served

Behavioural Developmental Supports

(ages 2-17) | **77** families served

School Program:

Early Childhood Services

(ages 2-5) | **72** students

Therapeutic Groups:

Facing Your Fears (ages 8-14), **PEERS for Teens** (ages 13-17),
and **START Program** (ages 2-8) | **28** families served





Meet Atticus!

The Centre provided specialized services to my son Atticus for the past three years. It was a wonderful experience, and the team helped our family to navigate the world of autism. They imparted different strategies on how to teach our son. With their guidance, we realized that my son is a visual learner, and we utilized it along with his interests to teach him skills. With their support, we fully embraced our son's diagnosis and learned to enjoy the journey. Our family and friends can see tremendous improvement to Atticus too. We experienced camping with our friends, and we were able to travel to the Philippines to see our families. Atticus is thriving in a regular school and attending our Church Children Worship Services every week. He also experienced being part of mainstream summer camp and swimming lessons in two recreation centres last summer. Currently, he is attending Kidstrong (fitness program for kids) and Best Brains (tutorial for kids). There are still challenges but the team equipped us with the knowledge and information we needed to successfully address them. We are blessed and forever grateful for the services of this amazing organization.

-Judy, CFASA Parent.



Empowering Families:

Family Services

The Centre is dedicated to empowering families by offering a wide range of **tailored support, resources, and educational services** that meet the unique needs of Autistic individuals. We understand the importance of respite, which is why our services provide families with the much needed breaks they deserve. Our Family Nights create spaces for connection, bringing together families within our community to share experiences and support one another. In addition, we offer informative parent workshops and inclusive family events, all designed to foster a deeper connection. Through this holistic approach, we equip families with the tools and confidence they need to navigate challenges and perhaps make some friends along the way.

309 families supported -

totalling **1,042** individual family members engaged in family activities or programming.

Respite | 193 children from **24** families.

Family Nights | 196 families and **849** individuals attended **6** family night events.

- Corn Maze
- Family Zoo Night
- Halloween Practice Event
- Candy Cane Lane
- Holiday Photos
- Zoo Lights

Parent Workshops | 6 workshops attended by **89** family members. **2** of these workshops were delivered nationally through the Aide Canada Project.





Family Spotlight

This is the first time we have attended Family Night.

We had a fantastic time at the corn maze.

In our busy life, the family night reminds us to spend time with our own family and it also gives us a chance to connect with other Centre families.

-Christine, CFASA Parent



Enriching Lives:

Community Enrichment Programs

At the Centre, enrichment means we strive to enhance the overall well-being and quality of life of Autistic individuals. By providing leisure, sport and art opportunities for **positive experiences**, **skill development**, and **fostering a sense of belonging**, we empower Autistic individuals and their families to lead fulfilling lives.

389 total participants in all programs - an increase of **76%** over last year.

Art Programs | **84** participants, ages 7 to 29, from **44** unique families attended **3** different art programs.

- Fun with Art
- Exploring Art
- Creative Expressions

Sport and Recreation | **55** participants from **46** unique families attended our basketball, soccer and Active for Life programs.

Summer Camp | **250** campers ages 3 to 17 from **154** families attended **4** different summer camps.





Meet Harrison!

I'm very grateful for Basketballers because it's a place where I know my child can engage in sport while also being well supported without me having to worry about whether the staff will properly understand his needs and how to communicate with him. He really loves sport, so this is a great way to help keep him active. I really hope the program keeps developing so he can continue to play as he gets older and his skills progress. I also love that he has the opportunity to engage with other Autistic children. It's a place where he can feel like he belongs and not feel like he's standing out or is odd. Harrison looks forward to Basketballers each week.

-Gillian, CFASA Parent.



Annual Art Show

This year's annual art show and sale "Portrait Identity" presented by Booster Juice, in partnership with the Nina Haggerty Centre for the Arts, was a major highlight, as 41 participants sold over 50 paintings. The story of the art programs and show was shared on CBC Radio and an estimated 125 individuals came through the door.



Fostering Independence:

Teen & Adult Services

At the Centre, we work alongside Autistic adults, their families and the community to **collaboratively foster independence** and support the development of skills for life as they transition into adulthood and beyond.

138 teens and adults accessed programming -
an increase of **26%** over last year.

Quest for Independence | 22 adult participants

Shop, Cook & Learn | 16 teen participants

Teen Social Night | 38 participants

Just for Teens | 16 participants

Young Adult Social Night | 33 participants

Virtual Social Night | 13 participants





Meet Jordan!

Every Tuesday night, participants in the Centre's Active for Life program gather at Commonwealth Recreation Centre for an evening of exercise in a supportive environment. They're joined by volunteers, a certified trainer, and their peer mentor, Jordan.

"Jordan is a really amazing young man," says Jordan's mom, Lori. "He's just a real joy to be around and he's really positive."

Jordan warmly greets his peers as they enter the studio for the evening's activities. His inviting smile and friendly "hellos" set a positive tone, encouraging everyone as they arrive. As a Peer Mentor, Jordan's job is to encourage and support his peers with exercises, and to learn alongside and assist the volunteer team.

Jordan, an Autistic adult, has been a participant at the Centre since he was a child, initially joining social groups before receiving his formal autism diagnosis later in life and joining the Quest for Independence program during COVID. In January 2024, Jordan began his role at the Centre as a Peer Mentor in the Active for Life program with support from his job coach, Nate, hired through the Ready Willing and Able program.

Although this is Jordan's first paid job, he has extensive volunteer experience, including eight years with the University of Alberta's Golden Bears football team assisting as equipment manager, as well as participation in Special Olympics.

"He is eager to try to develop himself more athletically and has come alive knowing that in a world in which he failed at during school which was athletics, he excels in now," Lori says. "We always kept saying one day we are going to find the gate that will be where we funnel everything through for his independence and athletics was it."

Jordan says his favourite part of the job is leading the cooldowns, and he applies the skills he learns at work to other areas of his life.

"I take what I do at the job and take it to track (Special Olympics). I do leadership by modelling appropriate behaviour and good form in the exercises, and I help new people to the group feel welcomed and comfortable the same way I did at Active for Life," Jordan says.



Jordan acknowledges that the job has significantly boosted his confidence as well.

“At the start, I couldn’t help the peers for my job, but now I can,” Jordan says. “Before I was a little nervous, I didn’t know the people, but now I do. And now I know the spot well and I know the stuff very well. I have built up confidence and comfortability with both the people I was working with and with the facility.”

Jordan’s mom has also noticed growth in Jordan since he started his job as Peer Mentor.

“Jordan getting a job in something he loves with the supports that he needs that don’t look like an aide; that piece is what’s flipping everything for Jordan. He sees himself as a team member, not that he’s part of the team that needs the help,” Lori says. “Every light in every room of Jordan’s brain has flipped on due to this part time job. I had no idea this would do so much for him. He really sees a possibility of a career. He sees hope, he sees independency.

“Had you asked me what my dreams for Jordan were when he was graduating out of high school, what I thought would happen, was really scary. Now I think the complete opposite. It’s phenomenal.”

“I still want to help people both at my job and with the social group,” Jordan says. “It feels great to do good at my job. It makes me feel important. It’s exciting that I can help people in the community. I love my job.”





QUEST

for Independence

Quest is the Centre's innovative version of a post-secondary program designed to empower individuals by enhancing essential life skills that promote **well-being, independence, and active social participation**. Participants develop valuable vocational and leadership abilities through hands-on work or volunteer opportunities, while also engaging in enriching social, leisure, and recreational activities within their communities.



Leadership at Quest

Some participants have jobs outside of Quest, but for those who don't, the Quest staff work hard on finding and supporting opportunities for everyone to gain work experience and develop leadership skills! This experience is gained through volunteering or through the Shamrock Building Caretaker position.

Participants who have been in the Shamrock roles for a while step into leadership positions, helping new coworkers learn the tasks and ensuring they have the necessary supplies.

What is a Shamrock Building Caretaker?

The Shamrock Building Caretaker position is a year-round and **weekly paid** employment opportunity that anyone in Quest can participate in that consists of various tasks to maintain the entire Shamrock apartment building.

Tasks may include:

- Outdoor lawn care
- Indoor building maintenance
- Suite cleaning
- Checking supplies inventory and managing supplies budget
- Snow removal and winter maintenance



Meet Sebastian!



Sebastian is a lead Caretaker and has been a Shamrock Building Caretaker for two years. He says that his favourite part of the job is the hard work.

"I like to be helpful and get paid. I have learned how to help others and be a good leader."

Meet Max!



Max is new to the Shamrock Building Caretaker position and says that he has a lot of fun while working.



EmploymentWorks



EmploymentWorks is a program funded through the Government of Canada and the Sinneave Family Foundation that supports individuals with autism and other neurodevelopmental disabilities in preparing for, getting, and keeping **meaningful employment** or **pursuing further education**.

Participants | 39 participants completed programming focused on employment readiness, active labour market participation, and employment retention.

Employment Partnerships | 5 new partnerships were formed bringing the total to 13.

39% of participants -
secured employment or returned to post secondary within 12 months of program end.

Government of Canada
Opportunities Fund
for Persons with Disabilities

Canada



Sinneave
FAMILY FOUNDATION



EmploymentWorks

Employment Partners



electronic.recycling.association



Transforming Communities:

Community Impact

The Centre is dedicated to fostering a community that **understands, includes, and creates opportunities** for Autistic individuals – but we can't achieve this alone! We are fortunate to have the support of hundreds of volunteers, funders, donors, partners, and self-advocates who join us in our mission. Together, we transform our communities by advocating, educating, and amplifying the voices of Autistic people.

Professional Development Workshops | The Centre engaged **1148** educators, community leaders, and employers in **48** workshops throughout the year across western Canada, a **15%** increase over last year.

Workshop topics:

- Introduction to Autism and Neurodiversity
- Introduction to Behaviour Supports
- Promoting Participation
- Building Relationships
- Modifications and Accommodations
- Adapting the Classroom Environment

Neurodiversity Speakers Bureau Workshops | The Bureau delivered **11** workshops to staff, students, educators, and professionals across Edmonton and Calgary.





Our Volunteers

A huge thank you to our **115** amazing volunteers who gave their time, talents and care to our programs, services and summer camps. Our volunteers delivered an incredible **3493.5 hours of service** on behalf of the Centre.

We continue our proud and longstanding partnerships with two post-secondary student associations from the University of Alberta and MacEwan University. These groups actively work to educate, raise acceptance, and build authentic connections for Autistic individuals on and off campus.

University of Alberta

The Centre for Autism Students Association



- The CFASA Podcast is at just under **4,000** all time downloads!
- Other events included tote bag painting, a bake sale and a bottle drive raising valuable funding for the Centre's teen and adult programming.

MacEwan University

MacEwan Autism Acceptance Club



- The group held another “Stimformation” information session and created an informative presentation to educate people about stimming.
- Five fundraiser events were held to raise money for the Centre including a bake sale and some social nights.



Meet Huthaifah!

Huthaifah’s educational background is in counselling and therapy, with a focus on Psychology, but his connection to the autism community is deeply personal. His cousin, living in the Middle East, was diagnosed with autism but unfortunately received no formal support. Watching his cousin struggle without the resources he needed left Huthaifah feeling compelled to make a difference. So, when a close friend, already a volunteer at the Centre, introduced him to the work the Centre does, he knew this was the opportunity he had been looking for. More than just wanting to help, the Centre’s mission and values resonated with him, and as he learned more about their work, he felt a strong pull to get involved.

In 2023, Huthaifah began volunteering at the Centre as an interpreter for a Syrian family and their child with autism who recently resettled in Canada.

The family struggled to communicate with clinicians, which made it hard to receive the proper care for their child. Huthaifah, having grown up in the Middle East and come to Canada as a refugee himself in 2012, understood their struggles. He remembered the early days of his own family’s journey—how difficult it had been to adjust to life in a new country, not knowing English, and feeling lost in a world of unfamiliar systems and processes. Now, as an interpreter, he was in a unique position to help a family going through the very challenges he had once faced.

Huthaifah believes that his presence has made a real difference for the family. Finally, they had someone who could fully understand them, who could bridge the gap between them and the clinicians. His role goes beyond just interpreting words; it built a sense of trust and connection. While the family never explicitly told him how much he meant to them, their gratitude after every meeting was enough for him to know he had impacted their lives.

Volunteering at the Centre also transformed Huthaifah. The skills he gained as an interpreter have enhanced his work as a child and youth care worker, deepening his passion for working with young people. His knowledge of autism also grew, giving him greater insight into the challenges that families face. One of his most treasured memories is from an art night when the young client he was supporting learned his name and kept repeating it with a cute accent. That small moment, full of joy and innocence, is one that Huthaifah will never forget, and he hopes to keep making a difference in his community.



Our Supporters

Thank you!

Community Partners





Our Supporters

Thank you!

Sponsors and Funders





With Deepest Gratitude

Thank You to Our Donors

We extend our heartfelt thanks to each donor. Your belief in our mission empowers us to continue building inclusive, transformative programs and services that benefit those living with autism and their families.

Together, you make our work possible.

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With Deepest Gratitude

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***We also extend our gratitude to the many generous donors who choose to remain anonymous. Your contributions make a profound impact, and we are deeply thankful for your support.**





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Volunteer. Donate. Advocate. Educate.

Thank you for reading our 2023/2024 Impact Report. This report showcases our achievements over the past year and reaffirms our commitment to considering the impact of every decision on our participants, their families, our staff, and the community. We are dedicated to continuous improvement, and we aim to achieve even more in the coming year, as our next impact report will demonstrate.

