

centre FOR  
autism  
services  
ALBERTA

centre for autism services alberta's

# 2010-2011 annual report

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## message from the president

I have thoroughly enjoyed my first year as President of the Board of Directors. It has been a tremendous learning opportunity for me. I have been very fortunate to have the support of our talented Board members, who bring a wealth of experience and expertise to our organization, as well as from our Executive Director, Deborah Allard Usunier, who leads a dedicated and energetic team here at the Centre.

This past year has seen several accomplishments, including:

- The publication of the Infant and Toddler project report;
- The expansion of the Pivotal Response Treatment (PRT) model to more families;
- The introduction of more groups and partnerships, such as yoga and our new volunteer club at the University of Alberta; and
- The continued development of new and innovative service delivery models.

I expect our next year will be incredibly busy as the Centre seeks accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF), which will make the Centre the only accredited provider of autism services in Alberta. This will help to ensure that the programs and services the Centre provides to families continue to be of the highest quality. I'm very much looking forward to the coming year and the challenges and opportunities it will bring.

Sincerely,

Don Kwas

## message from the executive director

The fiscal year September 2010 to August 2011 was another busy year for the Centre. Our programs continue to expand to reach children and families impacted by autism. Over the past fiscal year the Centre delivered services to 211 families across all programming.

In an effort to respond to broader family needs the Centre focused on increasing its family support by delivering expanded programming and resources. In January we launched our Family Night support evening for the entire family; parents enjoyed their own child-free time to connect with each other, siblings had an opportunity to meet each other and discuss shared experiences and finally the kids got to meet and play with each other while engaging in opportunities for socialization. The cooking program was also offered in St. Albert and Leduc, and our very popular yoga programming ran in two different locations in the city. In May, the Centre hosted a Mother's Day Tea and our June Family Day BBQ saw a wonderful turnout on a beautiful summer evening.

The Centre's Volunteer program continued to grow to more than sixty volunteers who have donated more than 3900 hours in the past year. A student's group at the University of Alberta formally registered their

group with the university creating an executive committee that participates in programming opportunities and also takes on the lead of fundraising in support of the creation of adolescent services. We are inspired by their passion, commitment and leadership abilities.

The Infant and Toddler Report's public release highlighted the need for early intervention and provided evidence supporting the need for services to all children in this age category. A formal ask to the Government of Alberta took place where we requested a review of the criteria for services for this age group, in particular the severity rating. We will continue to ask for a review of services available to children that are diagnosed prior to eligibility for Program Unit Funding through Alberta Education.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the board, staff, volunteers and the families for their continued dedication and support. The innovation, creativity, and commitment to children and families are demonstrated daily in all of the activities that the Centre is engaged in. Together we can reach our vision – that children with autism spectrum disorders can achieve their full potential.

Deborah Allard Usunier  
Executive Director



# accomplishments

Over the past year the Centre has undertaken a number of projects in order to enhance program functioning and delivery. Accomplishments of note include the following:

## 1. health and safety committee:

With the growth of our organization it became apparent that we needed to formally commit to doing everything possible to prevent injuries and to maintain a healthy environment for all stakeholders. To this end, in January 2011, the Centre created a formal team committed to Health and Safety. Since the inception of the Health and Safety Committee, commitment letters have been distributed to stakeholders, external and internal safety checks have been implemented, and health and safety policies and procedures reviewed and revised. The Health and Safety Committee continues to meet regularly in order to meet ongoing objectives.

## 2. resource library:

In May 2011, the Centre welcomed client families to our newly renovated on-site resource library, which offers a variety of child, family, and autism-related resources. Families can choose from books, DVDs, journals, brochures and pamphlets. Families are invited to borrow materials of interest. With a television available for DVD review and a computer for family use, the library is an area intended to be welcoming as well as functional.

## 3. communications:

Recognizing the importance of ongoing effective communication with our client families and other stakeholders, the Centre has taken a number of measures to improve in this area. In December 2010 the Centre created and filled a position for a part-time communications advisor.

The primary responsibility of the communications advisor is to address and optimize communication channels. The Centre has

also launched its own Facebook site with the intent of providing a communications tool for parents. It is intended to serve as an additional mechanism to update parents, or those interested in autism, about Centre news and general autism-related information. As well, parents can post messages on the site and potentially form a support network. Having a means through which families may be able to better connect with one another is important, and has been identified as an area of need by our client families. Another means of communicating with families, and having a venue in which families may choose to share their experiences, is through the Centre's newsletter. The newsletter was launched in August 2011, and will be made available quarterly. The newsletter will be available on our website as well in print for those who do not have access to the Internet.

## 4. staffing:

With changes to the service model, which sees families receive more intense services for a shorter period of time, the Centre has changed the way in which we recruit and employ staff, particularly our Aide staff. In 2009-2010 we began to employ more salaried aides as opposed to all hourly aides. This has led to greater staff retention of the aides and significantly less aide recruitment. We have provided significantly more training to our salaried aides and therefore are able to utilize them to a greater extent. The salaried aides have become much more integrated in to the multidisciplinary team and have become a significant resource pool for promotions within our organization. As our volunteer population has significantly grown over the past two years, we have started to pull from this pool for new Aide hires; finding that they come in with more experience as well as a stronger desire to stay employed with the Centre for a longer period of time.

# persons served

In the 2010-2011 year the Centre provided specialized services to 114 families. While children have contract dates ending at various times and there is continuous flow in and out of services, the Centre generally serves between 90-95 children at any given point in time.



We are committed to delivering family-centered care and that means we must get to know each and every family we serve. In June 2011 a Centre-wide interview was conducted by members of the clinical teams to update demographic information on persons served. Following this initial collection of information all demographics will continue to be updated at time of intake and discharge. The following is a summary of the 90 families who participated in the interview:

- 50% of families responded that another language, beside English, is spoken at home
- 57% of families identified their culture as something other than Canadian
- 50% of families perceived some type of barrier(s) in receiving services at the Centre
  - 41% identified transportation
  - 22% identified childcare
- 33% of families identify themselves as lower income requiring financial assistance for resources or groups
- 72% of families have a traditional two parent, nuclear family
- 18% are single parents
- 10% have extended family living with them

Results from the Persons Served survey indicate that over the next year the Centre will need to ensure that cultural sensitivity is a key component of its service delivery and family centered practices.

## effectiveness measurements and outcomes

As part of our contractual obligation with our funders at Family Supports for Children with Disabilities (FSCD), staff conduct an outcomes interview with client families at the 6-month mark of their contract year. The outcomes identified in this document, adapted for use by FSCD, were taken from work on family and child outcomes developed by the Early Childhood Outcomes Center. Within the semi-structured interview parents are asked to rate their experiences on a 7 point scale on 12 items. Lower scores are generally indicative of areas of need while higher scores are indicative of areas of strength.

The Centre has been conducting these interviews with families since November 2010. These interviews are usually

conducted by Program Coordinators. Limitations have been identified by Centre staff and shared with FSCD, including concerns regarding procedures in collecting the information (i.e. families may not be as forthcoming in answering some of the questions with Program Coordinators as they oversee service delivery) as well as the fact that the interview information is not confidential and is shared with FSCD, which may lead to over- or under-reporting by families. The Centre continues to work within its scope to address the limitations identified.

In examining the compiled data (interviews collected between December 2010 and September 2011) the following items averaged the highest ratings by families:

- How comfortable are you in contributing your thoughts and ideas at meetings with professionals in order to make decisions that matter to you? (average rating of 6.11 across all families interviewed)
- Is your family able to tell if the interventions are helping your child make progress? (average rating of 5.55 across all families interviewed)
- How much do you believe your family understands about your child’s special needs? (average rating of 5.45 across all families interviewed)

The following items averaged the lowest ratings by families:

- To what extent does your child take suitable action to meet his/her needs (average rating of 4.11 across all families interviewed)
- Does your family have someone you can rely on for help when your family needs it? (average rating of 3.95 across all families interviewed)
- To what extent does your child engage in positive social relationships? (average rating of 3.43 across all families interviewed)

Recognizing parents as the longest lasting supports in their child’s life, the Centre works closely with families with the intention of ensuring that they have the skills to effectively interact with their child with ASD. To this end, the Centre is specifically looking at the scores from the FSCD Outcomes Interview, which relate to parent capacity. These are:

- How much does your family know about how to help your child develop and learn?
  - average rating of 4.99 across all families interviewed
  - 66/77 families (approx. 86%) reported a score of 4 or higher

- Do you feel like your family has the skills to help your child participate in family routines and activities?
  - average rating of 4.73 across all families interviewed
  - 59/77 families (approx. 77%) reported a score of 4 or higher

Many parents at the Centre identify increasing community involvement as being a family priority. One of the items on the FSCD Outcomes Interview asks about parents' ability to participate and feel connected with their community. The scores for this item are:

- Do you feel that you have the knowledge and skills to connect with programs and services in your community that benefit your family?
  - average rating of 4.55 across all families interviewed
  - 50/77 families (approx. 65%) reported a score of 4 or higher

Due to the volume of evidence supporting Pivotal Response Training (PRT) as a key behavioural intervention, the Centre has developed a partnership with the Koegel Institute, University of California. Through this partnership, services at the Centre have incrementally been changing to incorporate PRT strategies into our services. A key aspect of PRT is the training of children's primary caregivers. Since January 2010 the Centre has been working, in conjunction with the Koegel Institute, to train 37 parents of children receiving specialized services through the Centre. As part of the training process, parents are expected to video interactions with their children. These videos are scored by staff at the Koegel Institute and parents receive feedback on their skill use with their children. Of the parents who have been receiving training for at least 6 months, 79% passed at least one video (23/29), 59% (17/29) passed at least two videos, and 48% (14/28) passed 3 or more videos.

## access measurements and outcomes

In speaking with our families and hearing their stories it is evident that many are eager

to commence services as quickly as possible after having received approval for services. While it is outside of the Centre's control with regards to how quickly families receive a diagnosis for their child or how quickly they receive approval from funders, we are more readily able to control how quickly families are able to meet with their teams after they have chosen us as a service provider.

From January 1, 2011 to September 19, 2011 the Centre had 26 new intake families. The average number of days between families submitting an application for services (including approval from funders) and the beginning of services was 31 days. Of these 26 families it is important to note that there were 3 outliers, where factors beyond the Centre's control impacted the number of days to intake (e.g. family out of the country for a period of time). The average, excluding these outliers, was 27 days. Excluding these outliers (out of 23 families), 19 had met with their intake team within 35 days (83%).

## stakeholder input/ satisfaction measurements and outcomes

### family-centered care:

Since 2007 the Centre has been using the Measure of Processes of Care (MPOC) with staff and families as part of our program evaluation. The MPOC is a standardized questionnaire designed to evaluate family-centered care from the perspectives of families and staff.

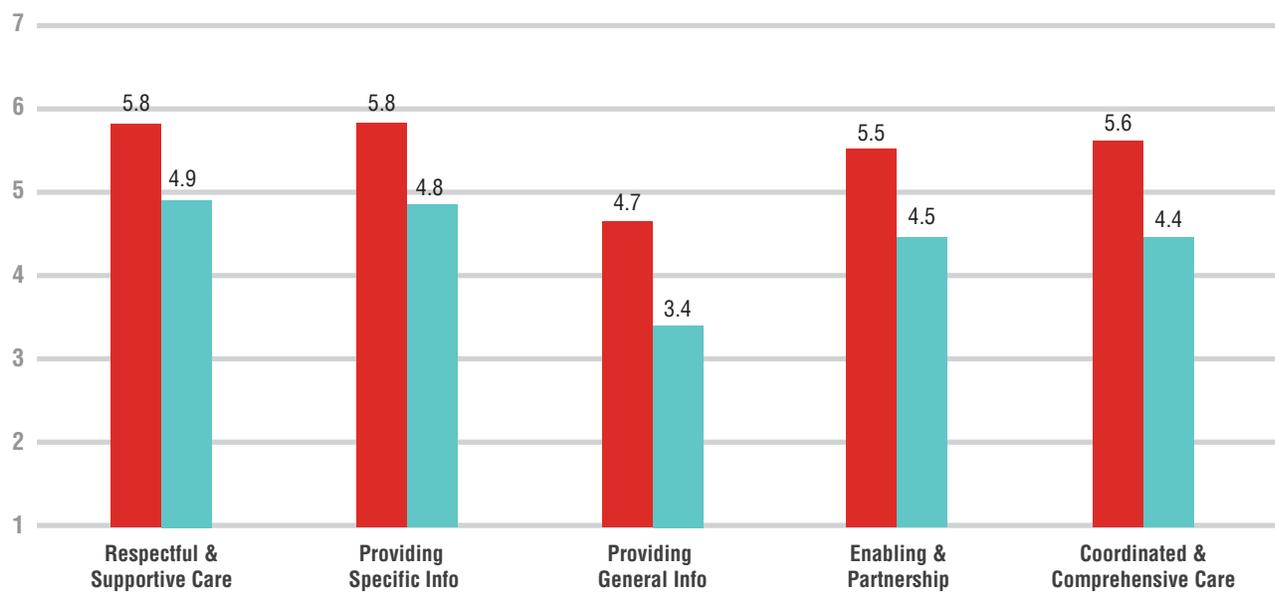
In March 2011 the MPOC was distributed to families and staff who have been with the Centre for 6 months or longer. 23 families, representing approximately 30% of all eligible families at the time of distribution, responded. 21 clinical staff, representing approximately 85% of all eligible clinical staff at the time of distribution, responded. 33 front line aide staff, representing approximately 40% of all eligible front line aide staff at the time of distribution responded. Below is a comparison of family and staff responding and the differences reported between the results from this current distribution and the results from the last distribution in 2009.



### parent responses: overall domains

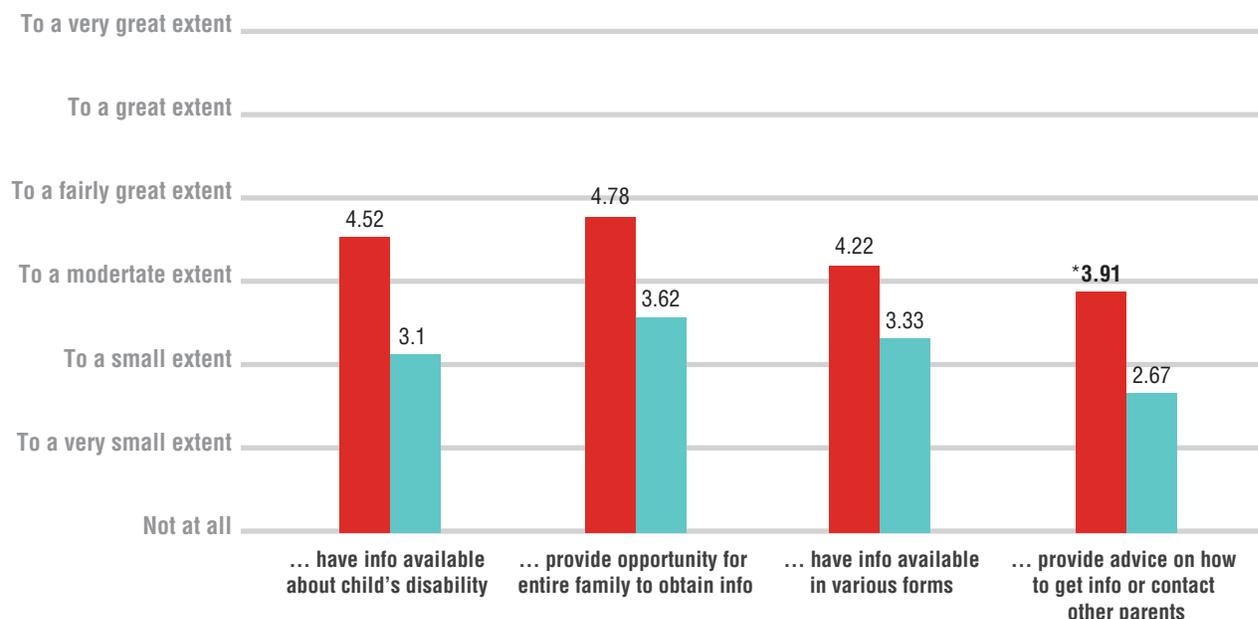
scores based on a 7 point scale with 1 = not at all and 7 = to a very great extent

**KEY**  
■ Parents 2011  
■ Parents 2009



scores <5.0

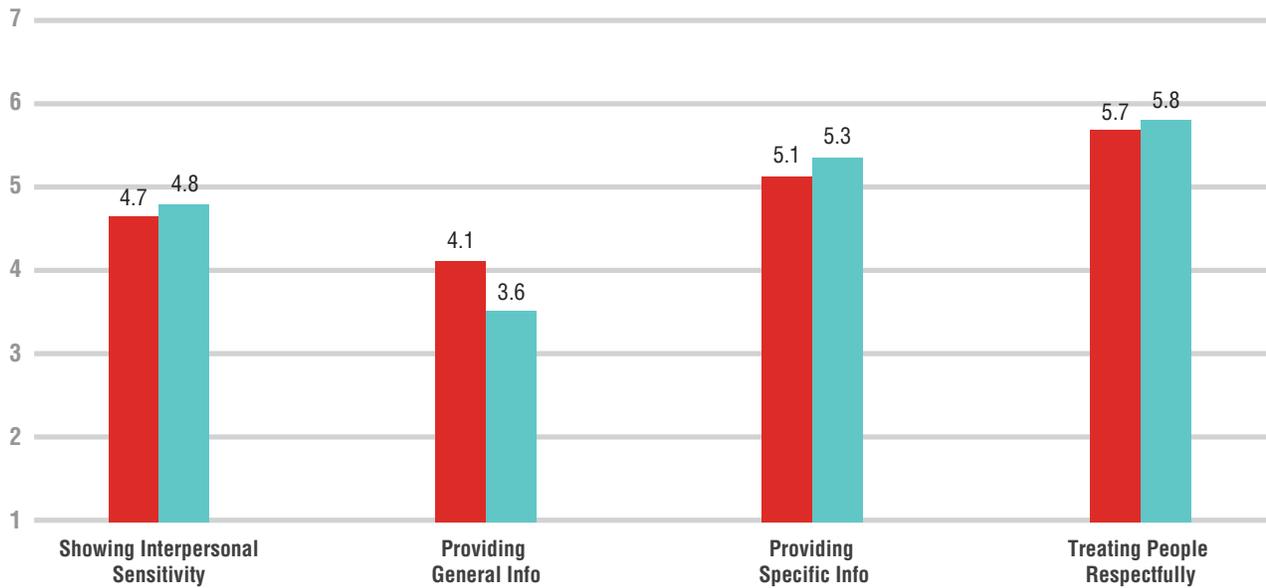
**KEY**  
■ Parents 2011 ■ Parents 2009



\* only score remaining under 4.0

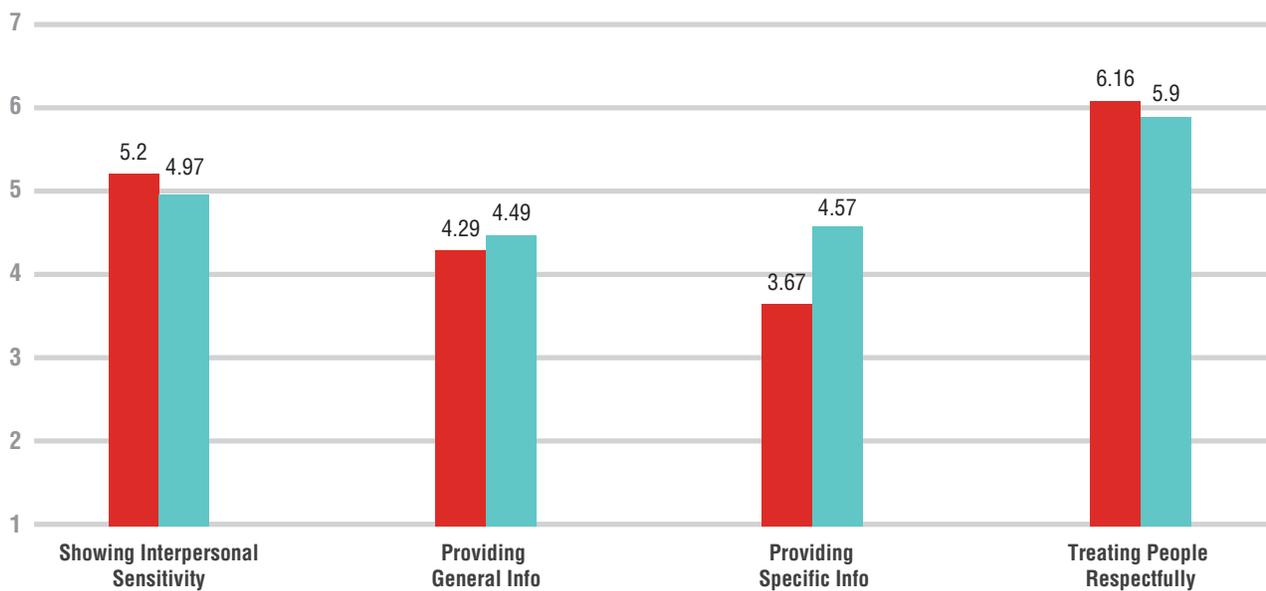
### clinical staff: overall domains

scores based on a 7 point scale with 1 = not at all and 7 = to a very great extent



### front-line aide staff: overall domains

scores based on a 7 point scale with 1 = not at all and 7 = to a very great extent





When it comes to providing family-centered care, it appears as though clinical staff are “harder” on themselves than parents or aides. Overall, there have been increases in reporting of family centered practice since the last reporting period in 2009, particularly on behalf of the families. The authors of the MPOC suggest that scores below 4.0 are areas that the service provider should actively work to improve. For parent respondents there was only one item that averaged a score below 4.0. This was the item “...providing advice on how to get information or contact other parents.” Since the results of this last MPOC have been reported the Centre has taken steps, such as the development of a Centre Facebook site and Centre newsletter, to better connect families. The Centre also continues to promote its Family Support program and to set up events such as annual Family barbeques to create venues for families to meet and interact. With regards to those items averaging a score below 4.0 for staff respondents, it is recommended that Centre management continue to explore ways, through professional development and internal support mechanisms, to address these needs. With staff turnover, a means of supporting newer staff in these areas remains an important task.

## staff engagement

In addition to the MPOC a staff engagement questionnaire was distributed by the HR department through Fluid Surveys. This was distributed to all salaried and hourly staff. 69 out of 126 people responded, representing 55% of staff.

The top scores obtained were in the following areas:

- The work I do makes a difference in the lives of the people I serve: 100%
- I would recommend our services to someone close to me whose child has been diagnosed with Autism: 100%
- I am aware of the organizations confidentiality policy: 99%
- I feel that my direct supervisor treats me respectfully: 98%
- I feel that my co-workers treat me respectfully: 98%

The lowest scores obtained were in the following areas:

- I am aware of the organization’s grievance procedure and how to make a complaint: 43%
- I keep up to date with any changes to the policy and procedure manual: 54%



- I know where to access the organization's policy and procedure manual: 64%
- I feel my pay is adequate for the role I have: 64%
- I am aware of the organization's anti-harassment and discrimination policy: 70%

Based on the results from the staff engagement survey Centre management has taken steps intended to increase overall engagement. These steps have included:

- Creating a yearly schedule of training
- Improving policies
- Formalizing Staff Orientation
- Providing Aides additional support through online forms/policies

## school satisfaction surveys

In June 2011 surveys were distributed to educators identified as working with children receiving specialized services from the Centre. The purpose of the survey was to gather input regarding: level of contact between educators and the Centre, educator's perceptions of the helpfulness of this contact and suggestions regarding ongoing/future collaboration. 51 individuals responded to the survey.

The number of contacts (either by phone, email, letter, or in person) between Centre staff and educators ranged from a reported 0-40 contacts per respondent. Most respondents reported 1 contact made over the course of the 2010-2011 school year. The median number of contacts was 1.5 per respondent. The average/mean number of contacts per respondent was 2.9.

Of those respondents who have had contact with the Centre, most reported that this was done in person (92% or 33/36 respondents).

Of particular note is that 29% of respondents (15/51) did not indicate any contact between educators and Centre staff.

Of those respondents indicating they have had contact with the Centre:

- 17% (6/36) reported that they were Extremely Satisfied with the sharing of information/resources
- 58% (21/36) reported that they were Satisfied with the sharing of information/resources
- 11% (4/36) indicated they were Not Satisfied with the sharing of information/resources
- 14% (5/36) respondents either did not respond to this survey item or indicated they were unable to respond to this survey item (example: one respondent noted that the Centre had just recently commenced services with the child attending their school)

When questioned whether there are barriers to liaising with the Centre:

- 86% of the respondents reported no barriers
- 10% responded that there are barriers
- 4% did not respond to this survey item
- Of those respondents reporting barriers the most cited ones were lack of time to coordinate and no one person taking a lead in coordinating contacts

With regards to how educators would like to connect with the Centre in the future, respondents reported that they would like to see the following activities:

- Educators/EAs invited to regular workshops held at the Centre – 75% (38/51 respondents)
- Educators/EAs invited to team meetings – 69% (35/51 respondents)
- In-services by the Centre presented to school staff – 69% (35/69 respondents)
- Classroom visits by Centre staff – 69% (35/51 respondents)
- Attendance of Centre staff at IPP meetings – 49% (25/51 respondents)
- Home visits by educators in coordination with Centre staff – 39% (20/51 respondents)
- Teleconferencing between educators and Centre staff – 25% (13/51 respondents)
- Other (case conferences, resource sharing, sharing of program goals/objectives – 4% (2/51 respondents)

Based on the results from the School Survey the Centre has taken steps towards meeting identified needs. In particular, the Centre has developed a series of workshops



designed for educators. These workshops cover the topics: Autism: Facts, Myths, and Best Practices, Behaviors that Challenge, and Using Visual Supports. These are scheduled to run in October, 2011, February and April 2012. Procedures for more effective collaboration with schools continue to be explored.

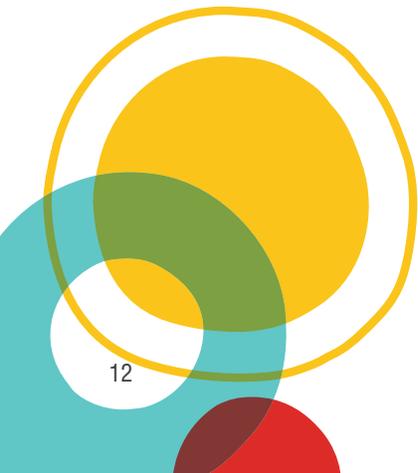
## community/family support services

In addition to the designated specialized services supports provided to families under contract with FSCD the Centre delivered programming to families prior to, during, or post specialized services. Over the last fiscal year the Centre delivered community-based recreational programming to 97 children with autism and their families and another 50 children were registered in the Centre's individual therapeutic programming. The recreational programs delivered were yoga, cooking, skating, tae kwon do, gymnastics, musical expressions, and summer camp.

Therapeutic programming included: Neighbourhood Table (addresses eating complexities that are clinically significant), Cool Cats (anxiety group), and speech and socialization groups.

Family support services included Centre-based relief and family night activities, such as the parent support group, sibling support group, and socialization groups for children with autism. The Centre also delivered Triple P services (Positive, Parenting Program) to 6 families receiving specialized services under a separate research grant. A total of 195 participants (parents, aides and community members) attended a total of 33 workshops that were delivered throughout the year.





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