



centre FOR
autism
services
ALBERTA

centre for autism services alberta's

2011-2012

annual general report



Centre for Autism Services Alberta

4752 – 99 Street, Edmonton, Alberta T6E 5H5

phone: 780-488-6600

e-mail: info@centreforautism.ab.ca

website: www.centreforautism.ab.ca





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message from the president

It has been my honour to serve as the President of the Centre's Board of Directors for the past two years. In 2011-12, the Board of Directors engaged in a number of activities that addressed the need for a review of the Centre's long term strategic direction.

In an effort to gain greater awareness of membership needs, concerns and feedback, the board engaged in two full day strategic sessions with the leadership team. These meetings served as an opportunity to discuss extensively the need for the Centre to extend its services beyond children and their families to meet the growing demand for teen and adult services in northern Alberta. Over the 2012/13 fiscal year the Board will finalize a new five year strategic plan that will formalize the Centre's extended reach. A key partner in providing initial seed money to begin services to teens and adults will be the Sinneave Family Foundation.

The board also spent the last year supporting the executive management team in the Centre's application to become CARF accredited. All existing policies were reviewed and updated and many more policies were developed and approved by the board throughout the year. In March 2012, the Centre became the only autism services provider in Alberta to achieve accreditation in Supports for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder through CARF International (Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities). The Centre was awarded a three-year accreditation (the longest term available), further validating the Centre's ongoing commitment to families.

In closing, I must recognize the tremendous support I have received during my term as President from our talented Board members, who bring a wealth of experience and expertise to our organization. Also deserving recognition is our dedicated and energetic team here at the Centre, led by Executive Director Deborah Allard Usunier. Their continuing efforts on behalf of our families are inspiring.

Sincerely,

Don Kwas

message from the executive director

The Centre had another busy year. We provided services to 234 children and their families across all programs over the last fiscal year. We were happy to expand our services to accommodate teens and young adults over the past year. In the spring we offered a therapeutic teen socialization program, PEERS, for higher functioning adolescents with ASD. During the summer, with the support of The Ability Hub, we delivered *Get the Goods on Nutrition* for 16 to 29 year olds. As we move into the new fiscal year the Centre plans on expanding services to both teen and adults and to develop a long range plan of delivering a full complement of services across the lifespan.

The Centre is very appreciative of the support we received from the community over the past year. A new student group from the University of Alberta provided the Centre with a robust and active volunteer program. They created an autism awareness video for World Autism Awareness Day on April 2 and organized a number of fundraising and awareness activities in support of the Centre. Their fundraising activities assisted the Centre with the facilitation of the PEERS program and covered the registration fee for two teens, who would have otherwise been

unable to participate. We are grateful to all our community groups and individuals that provided financial support to the Centre so that programming could continue to expand to meet the needs of individuals and their families impacted by autism. The list includes: The Ability Hub, President's Choice Children's Charity, Gateway Rotary Club, Park Paving Ltd., Community Spirit Grant, Second Glance Clothes Ltd., AGLC and a private donor who has been supporting our cooking programs for the past five years. Without this community support the Centre would not be able to offer programming such as a full day summer camp or any of the community recreational programs that we currently run such as yoga, cooking, camp and family night.

The Centre is especially proud of receiving a three-year accreditation in Supports for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder through CARF International. This 18-month endeavour involved the support of every staff member, board member and participation of numerous families. I am very thankful for all who participated and very proud of the staff and the board for their dedication and commitment to achieving such an honour.

Deborah Allard Usunier
Executive Director



accomplishments

In the past year the Centre undertook several projects in order to enhance programming and service delivery. The Centre continues to demonstrate a commitment to excellence as evidenced by these key highlights:

carf accreditation

In March, the Centre became the only autism service provider in Alberta to achieve accreditation in Supports for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder through CARF International (Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities.) This formal recognition that the Centre meets the criteria for service excellence was awarded after a rigorous evaluation of all operations. It provides assurance to families that the Centre delivers the highest quality of services and programming and is accountable and transparent.

The Centre was awarded a three-year accreditation, the longest term available.

Achieving CARF approval was a significant undertaking. CARF Accreditation is an important assurance of the Centre's commitment to families. Continued earning of this accreditation is part of our long term goals.

expanded programming

The Centre rolled out the first part of its teen and adult programming with the pilot course *Get the Goods on Nutrition*. Open to individuals with autism between 16 to 29 years of age. *Get the Goods on Nutrition* helped 17 participants develop a better understanding of healthy lifestyle and nutrition, meal planning, grocery shopping, food preparation and hosting. All levels of ability were accommodated during the three-week long summer course that was launched thanks to the generosity of The Ability Hub. Course feedback indicated many of the participants were cooking more often at home.

Get the Goods on Nutrition is the first module under The Engagement Program, which has been created by the Centre to help teens and adults with autism. Targeting an underserved population, this new area of programming will help individuals build independent living skills in a supportive environment. Once fully launched, The Engagement Program will offer services and courses to teens and adults with ASD that address a wide range of quality of life areas, such as employment or volunteer opportunities.

staff

Committing ourselves to work solely with individuals who have autism and their families allows staff to specialize in autism care, which is reflected by employee recruitment and ongoing staff development. The Centre has an impressive team of autism specialists, including two PhDs with a third individual in the process of achieving this impressive academic credential. The Centre is proud to have two staff members who successfully completed the acclaimed Autism Research Training (ART) program and a third individual who is in the process of attaining this training. Its goal is to recruit and train outstanding researchers in the field of autism, in disciplines such as genetics, brain imaging, epidemiology, neurology, psychiatry, psychology and others. Trainees are considered Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR) Strategic Training Fellows in Autism Research. This program consists of mentorship and networking with leading autism researchers across Canada. One of the specific goals of the ART program is to prepare trainees to become highly productive, ethically responsible independent investigators, with the technical and professional skills that are required to become effective leaders, communicators, and knowledge translators. Also noteworthy is our Board Certified Behaviour Analyst (BCBA), who is just one of three people in the province of Alberta to have this designation. All our team members have autism specific training and solid credentials. Having such incredible resources ensures that our families receive a high level of quality services.



workshops for educators

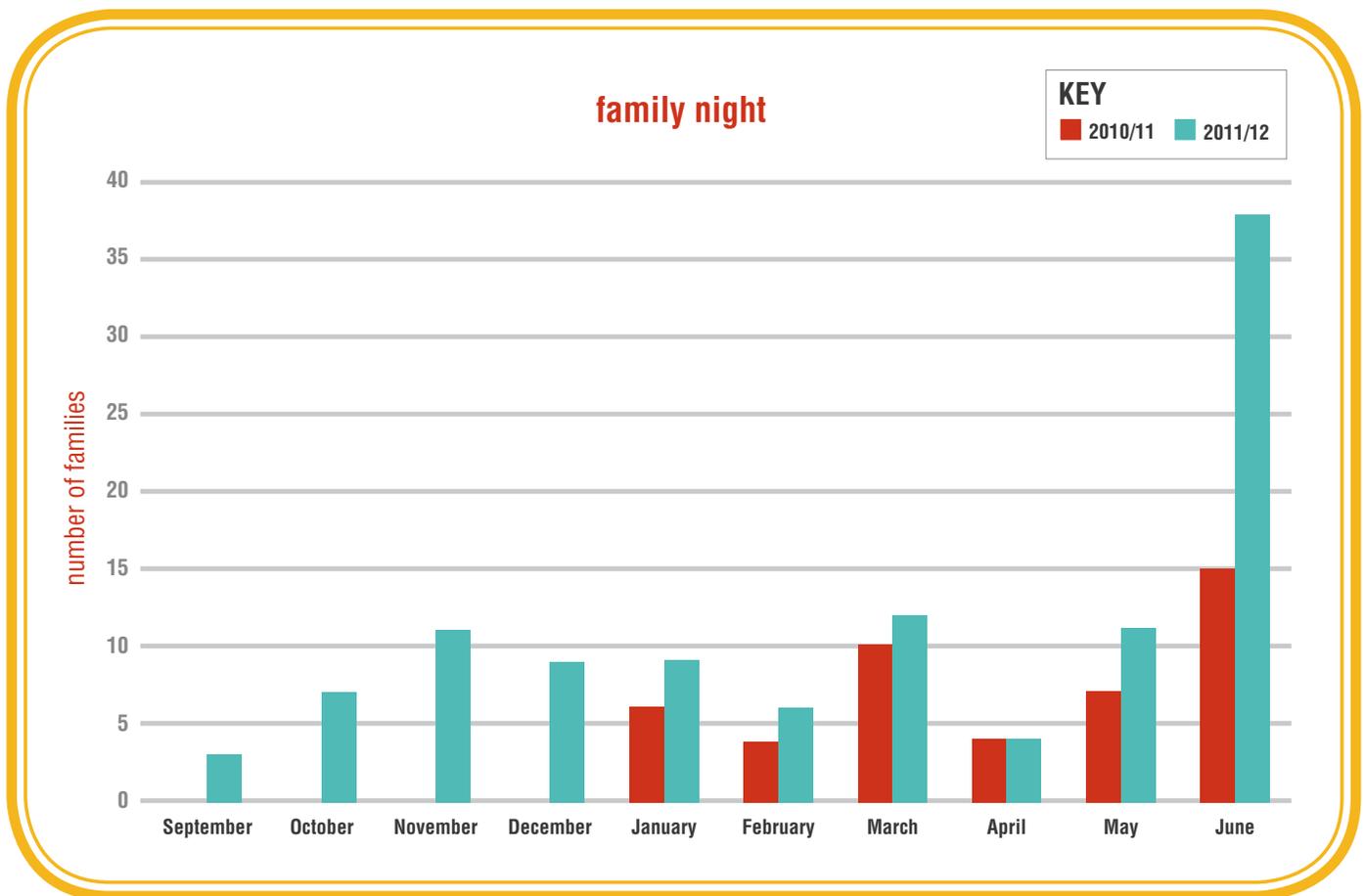
The Centre reached out to the educational community with its launch of workshops for school staff. *Autism in the Classroom* was held in October 2011, February 2012 and May 2012 at the Centre. The workshops drew 76 participants from three school districts. Participant feedback was very positive and indicated that participants felt a strong need for a continuation of this service. Participants expressed a desire for more workshops to be offered by the Centre. As a result, the Centre created a second-level workshop titled *Autism in the Classroom: Next Steps*, designed for those who have already participated in the first workshop. The Centre also expanded workshop opportunities to accommodate onsite full day workshops for school districts or shorter school in-service information sessions, such as a 90-minute workshop on one topic. These learning opportunities will continue.

community & family support services

family night & respite services

In January 2011 the Centre started offering Family Night in an effort to provide an evening of support for an entire family. Siblings, parents and individuals with autism participate in a variety of activities in these monthly meetings. Attendance has been trending upwards as we continue to modify the program based on feedback from families. Our Night at the Zoo in June 2012 was our most popular session with 38 families attending.

The Centre also offered a monthly half-day respite program one Saturday a month with 76 respite spots filled from September to June. Due to an increase in the demand for respite the Centre has increased its respite services to every second Saturday for the current fiscal year.



pivotal response treatment

Education in Pivotal Response Treatment was delivered by staff from the Koegel Autism Center in January 2012. It was attended by 43 participants, which included Centre staff, parents and 7 individuals from external agencies. Participants came from as far away as Lethbridge to attend this session.

parent workshops

In January and May 2012, the Centre provided workshops to parents. A total of 16 families attended the following sessions:

- Autism Facts, Myths and Best Practices
- Positive Parenting and Behaviours that Challenge
- Making and Using Visual Supports and Social Stories
- Occupational Therapy for Your Child with Autism
- Working Language into Play and Daily Routines

Additionally, the Centre also delivered Triple P services (Positive Parenting Program) to seven families receiving specialized services.

recreational programming

In addition to the 128 children under designated specialized services supports contract provided to families under contract with FSCD, the Centre delivered community and individualized programming to 140 families throughout the past fiscal year. 107 unique families participated in recreational programs and another 33 families attended therapeutic programming such as Cool Kids, Friendship Builders, PEERS and the Engagement program. As part of our commitment to family centered care, some recreational opportunities included the entire family, which drew a total of 167 individuals.

This past summer saw a wait list for every week of our summer camp. We limited each child's participation in camp to a maximum of three weeks to ensure that every child who registered was able to attend camp at least once. We recognize the camp wait list needs to be addressed and we continue to examine ways to best meet this growth area.

The Centre also offered a diverse range of recreational programming opportunities. This programming included: art, camp, cooking, skating, yoga and Young Master's Club (taekwondo).

family support & community recreational programs survey

In 2012, the Centre sought family feedback for direction on our community programming. A survey was sent to 156 families. Our stakeholders affirmed that there is strong interest in this topic as we had 70 surveys completed and returned to the Centre. We have posted key highlights from the survey in this annual report. Families may contact the Centre to see full survey results.

- 70% (54 families) of those who responded indicated there were barriers to accessing recreational activities, many had multiple barriers.
 - 23% (16 families) indicated that cost was a barrier
 - 24% (17 families) reported that transportation was a barrier
 - 47% (33 families) indicated location was a barrier
 - 50% (35 families) reported time was a barrier
- 74% (51 families out of 69 respondents) strongly agreed that it is important that special needs/autism specific recreational programs are available. Additionally, 16% (11) somewhat agreed with this statement. Just 10% (7 families) disagreed with this statement.
- Families also told us quite clearly that they want the Centre to offer community recreation programming. 72% (50 families out of 69 respondents) strongly agreed there is a need for the Centre to offer this service. 17% (12 families) agreed somewhat while just 10% (7 families) disagreed with this statement.

We thank all our families for taking the time to complete this survey. The Centre strongly values input from our families and these results will be a factor in determining future programming.



specialized services contract

persons served

In the 2011-2012 fiscal year, the Centre served 128 children on Specialized Services contract. We discharged 52 families over the year. Government contract start and end dates result in a steady flow of intake and discharge of families.

As part of our ongoing commitment to family centered care, the Centre gathers information about as many of our families as possible. This enables us to better know those that we serve. In 2012, the Centre conducted a Persons Served Survey to gather demographic information. All Specialized Services families complete this survey as part of their intake process. The following is a summary of their responses:

- 53% of families responded that another language besides English is spoken at home. In 2011, 50% of our families indicated that another language besides English was spoken at home.
- 58% of families identified their culture as something other than Canadian. In 2011, that figure was very similar at 57%.
- 53% of families indicate some type of barrier/s in receiving services at the Centre.
 - 32% identified transportation as a barrier (In 2011, 41% identified transportation)
 - 36% identified childcare as a barrier (In 2011, 22% indicated childcare)
- 38% of families identified themselves as lower income. In 2011, 33% of our families identified themselves as lower income requiring financial assistance for resources or groups.
- 89% of families have traditional two-parent, nuclear families. In 2011, that figure was 72%.
- 11% of families are single parent. In 2011, that figure was 18%.
- 10% of families have extended family living with them. That figure was the same in 2011.



effectiveness measurements and outcomes

As part of our contractual obligations with our funder, Family Supports for Children with Disabilities, (FSCD) Centre staff conduct outcomes interviews with our specialized services families at the six-month mark of their contract year. The outcomes identified in the outcomes, 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 our families since November 2010. The 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 that have been identified.

In examining the compiled data that was collected between September 2011 and September 2012, the following outcomes averaged the highest rating by families:

On a scale of 1-7 with 7 being the highest rating

- How comfortable are you in contributing your thoughts and ideas at meetings with professionals in order to make decisions that matter to you?
Average all families' responses – **6.31**

- Is your family able to tell if the interventions are helping your child make progress?
Average of all families' responses – **5.51**
- How much do you believe your family understands about your child's special needs?
Average of all families' responses – **5.28**

The following items averaged the lowest rating by families:

- To what extent does your child engage in positive social relationships?
Average of all families' responses – **3.33**
- To what extent does your child take suitable action to meet his/her needs?
Average of all families' responses – **4.02**
- How often is your family able to do the things your family enjoys?
Average of all families' responses – **4.15**

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/ren with ASD. To this end, the Centre is specifically looking at the scores from the FSCD Outcomes Interview, which relates to parent capacity:

- How much does your family know about how to help your child develop and learn?
Average of all families' responses – **4.76**
85% 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 of all families' responses – **4.83**
78% 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. Here are the scores:

- Do you feel that you have the knowledge and skills to connect with programs and services in your community that benefit your family?
Average of all families' responses – **4.33**
70% reported a score of 4 or higher



school survey results

The Centre recognizes the vital role of school educators who work with children and families impacted by autism. In May and June 2012, surveys were distributed to schools in an effort to gather information about contact between educators and Centre staff. Families were asked to give the surveys to their child/ren's educational staff to ensure transparency and informed consent. The Centre mailed out 142 survey packages and received 38 completed surveys.

Of those findings, 97% of respondents (37/38) confirmed they had heard of the Centre prior to the survey and 84% (32/38) indicated they had a general understanding of the Centre's services prior to the survey. These results suggest that there is a high level of awareness about the Centre and its services. Significantly, 84% (32/38) of respondents indicated that, if they were given the opportunity, they would like to let other potentially interested families know about the Centre and its services. Comments in this area included that it is important for families and children to have this support, Centre staff are knowledgeable and professional and that Centre programs are comprehensive.

A number of respondents indicated they had no contact with Centre staff during the 2011-2012 school year while others reported as many as 15 contacts during that time frame. When contact had occurred, the vast majority of respondents indicated they were satisfied 68% (15/22) and 18% (4/22) were extremely satisfied. One individual expressed extreme dissatisfaction while 9% (2/22) were not satisfied with the collaboration. 89% (34/38) reported it is/would be beneficial to collaborate with the Centre while just one individual disagreed. 8% (3/38) did not answer this question. The Centre has developed a plan to ensure that there is increased collaboration between educators and Centre staff, but this can only take place with families' consent.

Respondents also reported a range of activities involving the Centre over the 2011-2012 school year. Respondents were permitted to check all that applied. These included:

- 29% (11/38) attendance of Centre staff at IPP meetings
- 16% (6/38) Educators/EAs attend Centre run team meetings
- 8% (3/38) in-services given by Centre staff for school staff



- 34% (13/38) phone calls or emails between Centre staff and educators
- 16% (6/38) for other, which included class visits and student observation.

Respondents indicated they would like future interaction activities with the Centre to include (permitted to check all that applied):

- 37% (14/38) would like attendance of staff from the Centre at IPP meetings
- 55% (21/38) would like Educators/EAs to attend Centre run team meetings
- 61% (23/38) would like in-services for school staff to be given by Centre staff
- 63% (24/38) would like educators/EAs to attend workshops held at the Centre
- 50% (19/38) want phone calls/email contact between educators and Centre staff
- 3% (1/38) other – one individual suggested IPPs be shared

workshop requests

Respondents reported they would like to see the following workshops offered in the 2012- 2013 school year:

- 50% (19/38) Autism: facts, myths and best practices
- 71% (27/38) Behaviours that Challenge
- 58% (22/38) Making and Using Visual Supports and Social Stories
- 63% (24/38) Pivotal Response Treatment (PRT) Overview
- 8% (3/38) Other: Autism and Puberty, Increasing food experiences, Info specific to teens

The Centre has several workshops planned for the 2012-2013 fiscal year.

volunteers

The Centre recognizes the significant contribution made by its dedicated volunteers throughout the year. Those who donate their time enhance the services that are offered by the Centre. All volunteers, who are screened and trained, make a difference as they participate in a variety of areas, including working with families and assisting with administration.

Over the fiscal year from September to August we had between 65 to 70 active volunteers that provided just under 4000 volunteer hours.

The past year saw further growth in volunteer resources with an increase in our volunteer database. Volunteer feedback indicates that they feel supported by the Centre through several areas, including training, opportunities and staff support.

university of alberta student volunteer group

In September 2011, an impressive group of University of Alberta students launched a formal group dedicated to raising funds and to raise awareness about autism. In its first year of operation, the Centre for Autism Services Alberta Students' Association had a 10-member executive led by President Ty Kim, who is also a member of the Centre's board of directors. In addition to the executive, numerous students assisted with fundraising during the fall and winter semesters. Fundraising events included a barbecue, bottle drive and samosa sale that resulted in a total of \$2,808.15 in donations to the Centre. These fundraising efforts aided the Centre's PEERS program.

The group also hosted awareness booths and conducted several events to mark World Autism Awareness Day in April. One highlight from this effort was the production of an information video, titled *Speak Up for Autism*. The seven-minute video includes information about autism and features a child with autism and his mother and sister. The video also features several volunteers and Centre staff. The video has been posted on YouTube for ongoing awareness (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bGc3Wu9aoeU>)



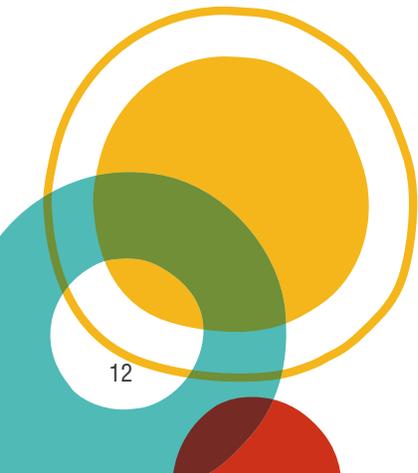
community support

In addition to the gift of time, the Centre has been fortunate to receive financial support or the donation of goods from various organizations and individuals in the past year. The Centre appreciates all contributions. This support allows us to enhance our programming and services to families.

In the 2011-2012 fiscal year our supporters list included:

- The Ability Hub
- Centre for Autism Services Alberta Students' Association
- City of Edmonton
- Edmonton Islamic Academy – student group
- Gateway Rotary Club
- AGLC – Government of Alberta (Community Spirit Program and Alberta Liquor and Gaming Commission)
- Microsoft
- Park Paving Ltd.
- President's Choice Children's Charity Fund
- Private donor who has supported cooking classes for the past five years
- Second Glance Clothes Ltd. in Leduc
- TechSoup Canada





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