



centre FOR  
autism  
services  
ALBERTA

# 2014-2015 annual report



## message from the president

I have truly enjoyed serving as the President of the Centre's Board of Directors for the past year. In 2014-15, the Board of Directors engaged in a number of activities that have supported the Centre's long term strategic direction.

The board also spent the last year supporting the executive management team in the Centre's application to become re-accredited through the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF International). Following a rigorous review process, the Centre remains the only autism services provider in Alberta to achieve accreditation in Behavioural Consultation Services – Autism Spectrum Disorder – Children and Adolescents through CARF International.

The past year has also seen a number of changes in the Centre's relationship with a primary partner, the provincial government. The election of a new provincial government in the spring of 2015 and ongoing changes in the Ministry of Human Services' Disability Services Division are providing opportunities to work better together to achieve our shared goal of improving the lives of individuals and families affected by autism spectrum disorder.

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.

*Don Kwas*

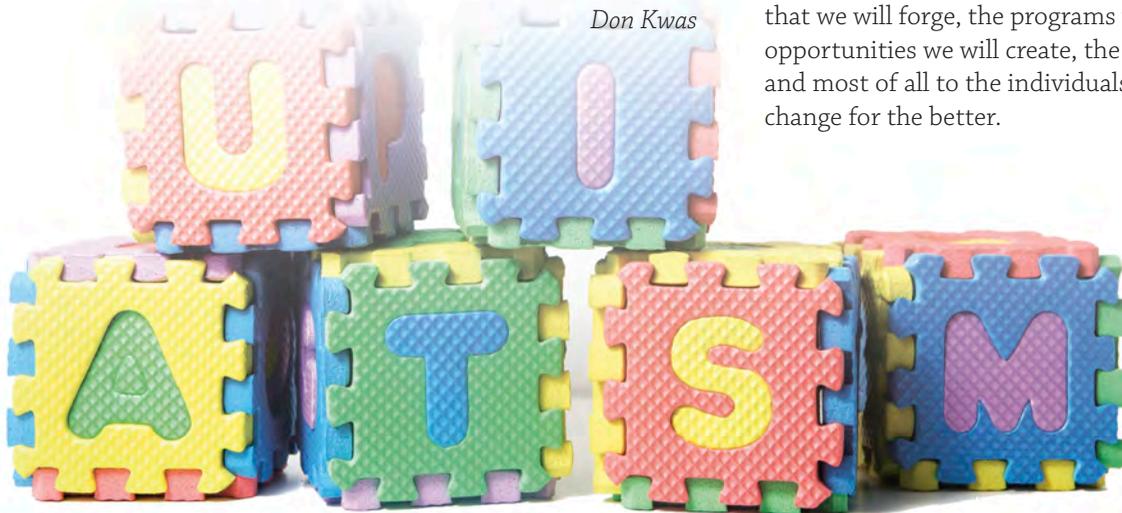
## executive director's message

Once again the Centre had another busy year. We continued to expand vital programming for teens and young adults providing services to 215 individuals in this age group that is too often ignored. We spent the later part of the year developing two new innovative teen and young adult programs. *Quest for Independence* is designed to foster skills of independence, explore work and/or volunteer opportunities, and ultimately, prepare the young adult and his/her family for the day he or she will leave home. Also new, *Community Works Canada* is a pre-employment program for 15 to 21 year olds with ASD. Funded in part by the Government of Canada, the Sinneave Family Foundation, and Autism Speaks, this program is helping to fill a critical gap and providing a dose of much-needed hope for young people and their families.

We also increased access to enrichment and recreational programming for children ages 12 and under. 287 children participated in our diverse programs, 77 more than the previous year (an increase of nearly 40%). We expanded Camp ACE, increasing programming from 6 to 8 weeks and meeting the needs of an additional 38 children – children who otherwise would not have been able to attend a summer camp. Despite our expansion, we continued to have a waitlist for camp – something that weighs heavily upon us.

We are especially thankful to our partner agencies in the community. We love it when other organizations and institutions join with us to positively change our community. I look forward to 2016 to the new partnerships that we will forge, the programs we will expand, the opportunities we will create, the barriers we will break, and most of all to the individuals whose lives we will help change for the better.

*Deborah Allard Usunier*



## changing outcomes

**1,745 individuals served** – children, teens, young adults, parents, grandparents, educators, students, community members and leaders.

During 2014/15, Centre for Autism Services Alberta served 1,745 individuals, providing: evidence-based clinical services, respite care and other family support, life skills and independence programs for teens and young adults, recreational programs for kids, workshops for educators, and a ground-breaking conference for future leaders.

**145 families** received therapy (funded through Family Support for Children with Disabilities and/or Alberta Education) provided by our extensive team of autism professionals. These critical services allow children to develop, families to thrive, and healthy communities to grow.

## fostering independence

**215 teens and young adults** participated in: Shop, Cook & Learn, Active for Life, Art, Let's Ride New Riders, Geocaching, Teen Social Night, Independence in the Kitchen, and Teen Camp.

Self-determination is key to personal fulfillment. Teens and adults with ASD generally experience less self-determination than their peers, both neuro-typical and with other developmental disabilities. The Centre strives to increase independence among teens and adults with ASD by teaching core components of self-determined behaviour. Every new skill learned, from how to access public transportation to how to bake a cake, creates a new opportunity.





## empowering families

**537 family members** attended 20 educational workshops, 10 monthly Family Night sessions, Annual Valley Zoo and Candy Cane Lane events, and received biweekly respite opportunities.

While family engagement is critical to clinical outcomes, it is also vital that families receive the support they need and have opportunities to connect with others who are traveling similar paths.

**“Here is a safe place to share, cry, or scream as we need. We all get it. We are a community.”**

**– Sheryl M., Centre mom**

### Ty’s Story

Ty and I have been involved with the Centre for Autism since 2011 – the year that Ty was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Since that time we have been part of everything from Parent Workshops to a pilot project at Fort Edmonton this summer with the Centre as our guide.

The Centre has been a great source of strength and compassion for us. When all else seemed to fail and I was at a loss, the Centre has always come to our rescue. They see Ty has a boy with strengths, weaknesses, and values but most importantly, they see his potential. Ty thrives at the summer camps that he attends and now, at what I thought was something that would not go well, he is participating in the Kitchen Kids on Thursdays and making me dinner! (Which are very yummy by the way!) Every time we are with or at the Centre, we are happy, relaxed and enjoy every minute of that time. There are days when Ty refuses to leave!

There are so many more things I could tell you about the Centre but I think what I love the most about it, is the sense of security that Ty and I feel in being there. There are never any doubts about how they are helping Ty or that he is safe and happy. I go on with my day, as does Ty, filled with hope and certainty that he is reaching his full potential every time that he is there.

Without the Centre, I believe that Ty and I would have been lost through the very confusing labyrinth of Autism. I am incredibly grateful for their help, their encouragement, and their ability to bring me to a place of calm, when I think there is no place like that.

**– Ty and Sandra L.**





## enriching lives

**287 children** 12 and under participated in: Fun with Art, Basketballers, Learn to Skate, Tae Kwon Do, Little Aces Camp, Camp Ace, and Community Pilot.

Like all of us, children with ASD need recreational opportunities to grow as whole individuals, to create social bonds, and to become integrated into their community. The Centre's child-centred recreational programs provide a safe and caring space, allowing kids to be kids.

**“At other camps, I don't think I would have made friends because... well, I'm different.”**

**– Sean MacDonald**

Sean MacDonald shares the same worries as other teenagers – getting picked for his school's sports team, learning to drive, making friends, dating, and keeping up with his schoolwork. But Sean's life is complicated by Autism Spectrum Disorder, ADHD, Anxiety Disorder, and Tourette's, making finding his place in the world an even greater challenge. Thanks to the Centre's summer camp programs, Sean has discovered a place he can thrive.

“Prior to this year, Sean's camp experiences were not too positive for him,” his mother, Leslie, explains. “Disastrous – in a word” leaving her feeling guilty for sending him. But the Centre's summer camp program is different. Leslie, like so many parents of ASD children, took comfort in knowing that the Centre's camps are staffed by highly-trained individuals who understand the complexity of autism.

“The Centre's camps are important because our kids would not be able to cope in a ‘regular’ camp and a ‘regular’ camp, with untrained leaders, would not be able to cope with our kids” she continues.

Sean attended three of the Centre's camps this past summer: Amazing Race, Summer Olympics, and MACH. His mom was impressed with the camp itineraries. Sean was more focused on the relationships he made. “I got to make some good friends. Plus, I now know two kids who will be in my school.”

Leslie is happy that Sean had such a positive camp experience and is looking forward to seeing his new friends at the Centre's fall programs. Having a camp geared toward individuals with ASD means the world to this mom.

“It means that my child can make friends. It means that my child can learn new things and be introduced to new skills and interests. It means that because I can rest assured that my son is well cared for, I am able to enjoy the time that we are apart.”

**– Sean and Leslie MacDonald**



## transforming communities

**357 educators** and community leaders learned how to be better teachers and advocates for people with autism spectrum disorders at 36 educational workshops in 2014/15, helping to open doors and creating more welcoming communities.

**204 university students**, researchers, parents, volunteers, and community leaders attended *Discovering Autism: An Interdisciplinary Conference* at the University of Alberta organized and sponsored by the Centre's Students' Association. ASD experts discussed cutting edge research and best clinical practices; families shared challenges and lessons learned; and students and community leaders explored pathways to inclusion.

The Centre for Autism Services Alberta Students' Association (CFASA) works to raise awareness of the myths and facts surrounding autism spectrum disorder and to fundraise to support Centre programs for families with children/teens with ASD. Now, in our fifth year, we have expanded our volunteer base and have introduced several new events to achieve our goals.

Our members are motivated by a desire to "help individuals with ASD reach their full potential, giving them a means to a great future" in the words of Arathi U, executive member. VP of Marketing and Design Deenal P. tells us that being involved gives her a "sense of purpose in the school community."

This year, we will host *Discovering Autism: An Interdisciplinary Conference* for the third year in a row and premiere *Autism Spectrum Disorder: Piecing Together the Puzzle Symposium* to raise awareness of ASD specifically among students. VP Rhea K. will be organizing the large-scale conference, motivated by her observation that "many people still do not fully understand autism" and her desire to "have a part in changing that." While the conference requires months of dedicated work, the entire group looks forward to hosting now that we understand the incredible impact it has, along with Autism Awareness Week, in elevating individuals' understanding and changing people's minds about ASD. In addition to enlightening presentations from renowned professionals, conference attendees are moved by personal narratives like that of Jessica P., a group member who is, herself, on the spectrum.

Over the year, our executives put in time and effort weekly in both formal and informal settings to help the group achieve our important goals while balancing full course loads and extra curricular activities, proving their dedication to the vision of the group and the mission of the Centre. It's a great growth opportunity, developing leadership and interpersonal skills while supporting a great cause and something we are all grateful for and proud to be a part of.

**– Ramita Verma, President  
Centre for Autism Services Alberta Students' Association, University of Alberta**

## community support

Over the last year we have had many community members supporting the Centre through financial donation, gifts in kind, and through the gift of time – volunteerism. We are grateful to each of you. Together, we are making a difference in the lives of individuals with autism and their families.

The following individuals or groups made significant contributions to the Centre over the last year:

- The Stollery Family Foundation provided funding for the development of our teen room.
- Our cooking program sponsor provided yet more funding this year, sustaining the program and enabling us to add Independence in the Kitchen for young adults. Over the past seven years, they have donated nearly \$77,000, launching and growing our cooking programs.
- Over the past three years, Knifewear's commitment, nearly \$68,000 over that time, has allowed us to continuously expand our recreation and camp programming.
- The Gateway Rotary Club stepped up to support summer camp programming as well and we have now entered into a three-year partnership with Robust Reds, their premier wine-tasting event.
- The Centre for Autism Services Alberta Student Association has proven time and again their dedication and commitment towards our mission and vision, raising awareness of autism throughout the University of Alberta campus and fundraising to support Centre programming.
- Close to 80 volunteers combined to perform nearly 4500 hours of service – proving yet again, we are the Centre and the Centre is everywhere.

## financial support

A. Ryan  
AGLC  
Autism Speaks  
B. Knapper  
Cameron Quilliam  
Car Heaven (Automotive Recyclers of Canada)  
Centre for Autism Services Alberta Students' Association,  
University of Alberta  
Charlene Wong  
Chengyon Yang  
D. Kwas  
E. Holder  
Gateway Rotary Club  
Government of Canada  
Jacquie McCubbin  
Jasper Auto Parts  
Knifewear Inc.  
Maryon McClary  
Nancy Wendt  
Private donor who has supported the cooking programs  
for the past 7 years  
Rick and Brune Sinneave  
Sinneave Family Foundation  
Stollery Family Foundation

## in-kind support

Ben and Grant Kurtz  
Century Hospitality Group  
City of Edmonton  
Country Croc  
Earls  
Edible Arrangements  
Edna McHarg  
Gail Stanford  
Jasper Place Lodge  
Keg N Cork Liquor Company  
Leduc Animal Clinic  
McBain Cameras  
Microsoft  
Murphys Law  
Rumor Skate and Snow  
Serena Mah  
Shoppers Drug Mart  
Techsoup Canada  
TimberTown  
Tomnuk Designs  
Wild Holdings



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.



**4752 – 99 Street, Edmonton, Alberta T6E 5H5**  
**phone: 780-488-6600**  
**e-mail: [info@centreforautism.ab.ca](mailto:info@centreforautism.ab.ca)**  
**website: [www.centreforautism.ab.ca](http://www.centreforautism.ab.ca)**

centre FOR  
**autism  
services**  
ALBERTA

Centre for Autism Services Alberta is a registered Canadian charity registration number: 872973995RR0001