



centre FOR  
autism  
services  
ALBERTA

2020-2021  
annual report

## message from the president

I am happy to report on the progress the Board has made this year, and to celebrate the work of the Centre in some decidedly challenging times.

Over the course of several Zoom meetings, the Board and the Centre's Executive team came together and buckled down to closely examine what the Centre currently embodies and where we want to go. The end result was a wholly updated set of values and purpose statement that will serve as our guide and inspiration in the vision for the future of the Centre.

Reflecting on the work the Centre has done over the last year and the ability of the staff and management to respond to challenges and pivot in trying times never ceases to amaze me. This year has been no exception. The bulk of services ordinarily offered have been running with few exceptions, and that can be credited to the devoted and determined staff, as well as the feedback and partnerships with persons served and other stakeholders.

We are excited to see everyone (virtually or otherwise) here at the AGM.

*Samantha Labahn, President*

## board members

Samantha Labahn, *President*

Kiri Wysynski, *Past President*

Dani Perl, *Vice President*

Dr. Sandy Thompson-Hodgetts, *Secretary*

Miori Mathews, *Treasurer*

Weber Lin, *Member at Large*

Sagara Sureash Wijesooriya,  
*Member at Large*

Scott Morrow, *Member at Large*

Jenny Reddy, *Member at Large*

## executive director's message

What a year it has been. A year of starting, stopping, redesigning and further modifying programming to meet the needs of the individuals and families the Centre serves, all while maneuvering the ongoing pandemic. The Centre operates 27 distinct programs; continually adjusting each program to adapt to each new wave of COVID-19 has been one of the most difficult challenges we have ever taken on as an agency. In some instances it was just not possible to adapt a program to fit online delivery, forcing us to make the difficult decision to cancel it all together. Our services are essential to all those we serve and we recognize the hardship that this caused for families. We remain dedicated in our commitment to meeting the needs of our members as we continue to pivot during this pandemic. I am grateful to our persons served and their families for their patience and understanding over the past year; and grateful to our staff, who, despite their anxiety, continued to deliver services face-to-face whenever and wherever possible.

Thank you to our donors and funders for continuing to support the work that we do. We remain concerned about the impact a worldwide pandemic has had on the population we serve (social isolation has been especially hard for individuals and families affected by autism), and your support has helped make it possible for us to focus on addressing these issues. We are grateful to both the Federal and Provincial governments for providing the PPE equipment that enabled us to continue delivering services, as well as for the financial support they've provided. In particular, this year's summer camp was able to happen because of the support we received from Canada Summer Jobs.

Although it was a challenging year, we made it through and had many great successes. Thank you to everybody who played a part in it!

*Deborah Allard Usunier*



# philosophical framework

## Neurodiversity Paradigm

We define autism as a developmental disability that affects how people think, understand the world, move, communicate and socialize. The autistic brain is a natural variation.

### Person Centered

Understanding each person's specific context, dreams, and goals to support their achievement.

### Family Focused

Recognizing that at different stages of life, family/guardians are key decision makers for and with their dependent.

### Person, Family & Interprofessional Collaboration

We work as a team that includes the autistic person, their family, multi-disciplinary personnel, and other people from the autistic person's community.

### Meaningful Participation

The environment and people within it adapt to meet each individual's needs, creating a sense of belonging and participation in all activities and settings.

### Naturalistic, Developmental & Behavioural Intervention

We integrate developmental and behavioural sciences using strategies in natural activities and routines to teach skills and promote success.

### Evidence Based

Maximizing effectiveness by using empirical findings; professional experience; and values and preferences of persons served.

## Honouring Diversity

Services are inclusive of and responsive to overlapping identities, culture, and unique experiences.



## purpose

To empower autistic people and their families to thrive.

## mission

To provide comprehensive and innovative supports and services to those affected by autism spectrum disorder.

## vision

Individuals with autism spectrum disorder lead meaningful, engaged lives.

## values

### Collaboration

We build authentic partnerships.

### People-Focused

We seek to understand each person's specific context, dreams, and goals to promote their achievement.

### Autistic Voice & Choice

Our services reflect what is important to autistic people.

### Continuous Improvement

If better is possible, we do it.

## pillars of service

- Changing Outcomes
- Empowering Families
- Enriching Lives
- Fostering Independence
- Transforming Community

# what's new

## Funding for Phase II of AWWNE

Exciting times ahead for the Autistic Women and Non-Binary Network of Edmonton (AWNNE) group as they received funding to proceed with Phase II of the project. In the 2020-21 year, this group met monthly to discuss the unique challenges of being female or non-binary, employed and autistic, laying the groundwork for the creation of helpful employment resources for autistics. They developed a video that showcased their points of view, what it's like to be female/non-binary and on the spectrum, what it's like in the workplace, and what they wish employers knew about autism. This video was presented at the virtual CASDA National Autism Leadership Summit and was very well received by attendees.

Phase II of this project will provide an opportunity for AWWNE members to continue to develop employment tools and resources, and will also focus on the development of the AWWNE website. The goal is to house employment resources on the site, ensuring they're accessible to all who need them.



## CARF Accreditation

The Centre received another three year accreditation through CARF International. CARF is an independent, non-profit accreditor for health and human services, enhancing the lives of persons served worldwide. The Centre continues to be the only accredited autism organization in the province.

## We're Moving!

After 16 years in our current location, the Centre is moving! In September 2021, the Centre confirmed its plans to relocate the Edmonton office. Our new building located in Edmonton at 9353 – 50 street will allow us to expand our offerings and enhance our services. Stay tuned for more updates in the new year.

## Launched the *Onsite* Early Childhood Services (PUF) Program

With 20 students enrolled in our inaugural year, the new onsite PUF program at the Centre was a huge success!

# 1,392

## Lives Impacted

Despite a worldwide pandemic, the Centre was still able to provide support to 1,392 individuals, their families and community leaders across our five pillars of service: Changing Outcomes, Enriching Lives, Fostering Independence, Empowering Families and Transforming Communities.

# changing outcomes

- Early Childhood Services (PUF)
- Specialized Services Behavioral
- Developmental Supports
- Start Program
- PEERS

# 226

## Families Supported

This year, a total of 226 families were supported by the Centre's therapeutic services throughout Edmonton, Calgary, Medicine Hat and Nunavut. Services to Fort McMurray were put on hold due to the pandemic.

### Early Childhood Services (PUF)

In response to provincial cutbacks in the midst of a global pandemic, in September 2020 the Centre launched its first ever **onsite** preschool and kindergarten! Prior to the Alberta Education funding cuts announced in early 2020, The Centre supported families by delivering PUF programming in their local neighbourhood preschool or kindergarten program. Children were supported with an advisory teacher, speech language pathologist and occupational therapist, as well as a uniquely trained educational assistant. This team supported the child in an inclusive local classroom. While our preference will always be to offer support to children in their neighbourhood preschool or kindergarten class in an inclusive environment, our time will now be spent preparing the children to master a grade one inclusive program.

With the introduction of the new onsite classroom, not only did we manage to remain COVID-free, we saw tremendous gains in our students. In collaboration with our clinical team, the support of our wonderful staff and, of course, with dedicated parents, the Centre's PUF children thrived. The kindergarten class went from being able to sit at circle for five minutes at the start of the year to sitting and participating in circle for a full 30 minutes at the end of the year. In both classes kids began to play with each other and by the end of the year strong friendships formed between the students.

*"The Centre has support in place that will enable individuals to thrive by surrounding them with experts such as teachers, and different specialists. We find that all of the staff members are very compassionate and thoughtful in everything they do, and they truly care about the individuals. As a family, we are very grateful to have had our son attend their program and know that because of that kind of specialized support, he was and is able to continue to thrive."*

*- Parent Quote, PUF classroom 2021*



*"My son has shown a big improvement in all areas. And by this September he will be starting full time school. I know there will be challenges, but I know my team will support and help my son to overcome those. I could never have imagined sending him to school— but with the support and help my son will be going to school!"*

*- Parent Quote*

### Specialized Services

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, clinical services has made numerous changes to safely serve families and meet their needs as fully as possible. These changes included staff working from home, procurement and training on PPE, introduction of health screeners, sanitization and physical distancing procedures, isolation and testing requirements, training checklists, vaccination support, and the introduction of virtual services. Over the course of the 2020-21 year, we have had to adjust services multiple times as provincial guidelines changed. This involved working with families to find the appropriate blend of in-person and online services to ensure everyone felt safe, as well as modifying program goals and activities.

The move to virtual models of support allowed the Centre to expand its clinical services to underserved areas of the province. Our team also modified many of our groups so that parents were able to participate in an online format. We expect many of these technological options to continue to be available for families as we move into the upcoming year.

# enriching lives

- Exploring Art
- Creative Expression
- Minecraft Club
- Basketballers
- Art Club
- Virtual Teen & Adult Social Groups
- Summer Camp



Despite COVID-19 protocols closing many recreation programs in the 2020-21 year, by pivoting to online programming the Centre still managed to serve 189 children, teens and young adults. We even managed to launch a new Minecraft Club with equipment provided through a Microsoft Store donation from last year! Even though increased COVID restrictions forced the Minecraft Club to be cancelled halfway through its session, we were able to use the equipment again during summer camp to enhance our computer camps. The Centre welcomed personnel from Microsoft and a neuroscientist who each taught a week of coding during summer camp.

The Centre also continued to support some of our partner agencies like the Citadel this year, supporting the organization in the delivering the I Can Pretend program virtually for children with autism aged five to eight. Centre volunteers supported this virtual program.

Our teen and adult art programs in partnership with the Nina Haggerty Centre for the Arts also ran in fall 2020.

**189 children, teens and young adults**

with autism participated in art programs, sports and recreation programs and camp.

## What are some of the things you liked about the camp?

*"Looking up pictures of Disney Cars, the virtual tour of the ETS Bus and creating my own portfolio!"*

*"I'm glad my son was able to participate as I am not sure these resources are available in other cities."*

*"Let my son be an 'assistant counselor' which helped encourage him to participate in activities."*

*"The creativity, bringing in Citadel!"*

*"Everything."*

# fostering independence

- Quest for Independence
- EmploymentWorks
- Teens & Young Adult Social Groups

**101**  
teens and adults

accessed programming related to increasing independence, learning employment skills and enhancing practical living and social skills.



## Quest for Independence

The Quest for Independence program is designed to support young adults 18- to 29-years-old in building skills of independence for living and integrating into the community. The program currently operates within two community apartments and one onsite apartment at the Centre's Edmonton office. The priority for programming this year was a focus on maintaining mental health and connections. Throughout the ups and downs of the pandemic and responding to a variety of restrictions, Quest adjusted from online learning to small, in-person groups and, once restrictions tightened, back online. Our participants let us know every day that staying connected to their Quest peers and the program continued to be important to them.

*"Seeing our participants persevere through the uncertainty this last year was inspiring and very much highlighted the importance of the connections made in Quest!"*

*- Ewa Bochinski, Occupational Therapist*

## Questers' Favorite Zoom Activities

**Zumba class** - the group got their dance on!

**Explorers Club** - the group explored a multitude of virtual tours from around the world, including the Smithsonian Museum and Monterey Aquarium.





### EmploymentWorks National Project

The EmploymentWorks National Project (EW) is designed for individuals with autism (ages 15 to 64) who are seeking opportunities to develop the skills necessary to obtain meaningful and sustainable paid employment. This pre-employment program focuses on the development of workplace, social and communication skills applied in the classroom and in real-work settings.

**20 participants enrolled** in the program this year and **50% found jobs** even during a pandemic! By using flexible learning options through Zoom sessions, job simulations through Easy Simulations and incorporating LinkedIn Learning modules, participants were able to learn valuable worksite skills. A huge thank you to our local business partners who continued to open their doors for participants to have real worksite experiences.

### CommunityWorks and Funding Cuts

Unfortunately, Family Supports for Children with Disabilities (FSCD) cut funding to the CommunityWorks program this year. CommunityWorks taught employment readiness to teens on the spectrum through volunteering, using a peer mentor model. FSCD determined that this program did not fall under their mandate. We continue to advocate for this funding to be restored and are in the process of seeking other funding opportunities.



# empowering families

Due to COVID, many activities that are pivotal in supporting the well-being of Centre families had to be cancelled, including monthly Family Night and Centre-based respite programming throughout the year. Special events that families look forward to all year such as Candy Cane Lane, Family Christmas Portraits, and Valley Zoo Night were also cancelled. We were, however, able to continue to support families with educational opportunities throughout the year through our Aide Canada partnership. Nine workshops for families were delivered virtually and available throughout Canada: the Sleep Workshop, Leisure, Disclosure, Managing Stress During the Holidays, Self-Determination, Multi-Language Exposure, Community Safety, Menstruation, and School Transitions.

# 338

families served  
across Alberta

# transforming communities

**31 workshops** delivered across Alberta to

**538 Educators, Community Leaders and University Students**

**5 communities served**

(Calgary and Edmonton and surrounding areas, Medicine Hat, Fort McMurray, Nunavut)

## University Partnerships

The **Centre for Autism Students' Association** at the University of Alberta re-invented their activities, adapting to a virtual format, and stayed strong in their desire to spread autism awareness on campus throughout the year. A big highlight from the 2020-21 year was that they successfully redesigned the annual Discovering Autism conference into a virtual event: Discovering Autism in a COVID World. **Over 140 people attended** the conference and feedback from attendees indicated that they particularly enjoyed the diversity of the self-advocate panel.

Over the last nine years this incredible group has contributed **\$14,243.68** in donations to the Centre in support of teen and young adult programming.

## MacEwan University

Despite COVID, the executives of the **Autism Awareness Club** at MacEwan University kept their social media accounts active throughout the year, posting facts and useful information about ASD, their club activities and the Centre.

## volunteers

A huge **thank you** to our 35 volunteers who, even during a pandemic, still delivered **1,925 hours** of service on behalf of the Centre.

## our supporters

Throughout the year, **\$128,030.00** was generously donated to the Centre. These funds allowed us to expand programming and provide subsidies for families who could not otherwise afford to participate in programming.

## grants

Government of Alberta – Community Initiatives Program: **\$12,384** towards AWWNE

Civic Union 52: **\$3,000** to Summer Camp

Canadian Tire Jumpstart Program: **\$4,270.85** for teen and young adult fitness programs

## donors

### \$500 - \$999

Donna Gowin  
Jody McNeill

### \$1,000-\$4,999

Ray Zadry  
Abdelmagid Al-Shibani  
Don Kwas  
Jennifer Mcmillan  
Anonymous  
Laurie Bronson  
Debra Cerny  
Brian Knapper  
Monita Wong

### \$10,000+

Anonymous  
Sinneave Family

## corporate donors

### \$500-\$900

Centre for Autism Students' Association  
PayPal Giving

### \$1,000 - \$4,999

Wawanesa Insurance  
Kinette Club of Edmonton  
Detheridge Family Fund  
ATCO EPIC  
Ross McBain Charitable Gift Fund

### \$10,000+

Anonymous



**BOX**

**rafflebox**





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

