



Year of Development, Transition and Opportunities!

2015-2016 was definitely a year of transition, development and, of course, new opportunities for Autism Edmonton. It is a pleasure to share with you some of our highlights from the past 12 months.

Governance and Strategic Priorities

Last year, our Board was busy completing a number of priorities including the hiring of a new Executive Director, revising Bylaws for presentation at the September 2016 Annual General meeting, grappling with complicated decisions regarding our office facilities, and updating strategic priorities given significant external and internal changes.

Major Events, Celebrations and Memories

Autism Edmonton works closely with the community to ensure that we have enough financial support to keep our doors open. We have no government contracts and rely solely on the generosity of the community, amazing volunteers, sponsors (financial and in-kind), corporate supporters and grants. Last year, we benefited from traditional and new fund-raising events that were dedicated in one form or another to the sustainability of Autism Edmonton services.

Opening Doors Gala

This is a bi-annual event that was held last year in October 2015; all 600 seats were sold. An extraordinary amount of effort by the community and staff is invested in this event, and it was an amazing success once again.

Casino

The Casino is also a bi-annual event that was held at the end of last summer. The Casino is Autism Edmonton's second largest fundraising event within a 24-month financial cycle.

Cycle for Autism

Our Cycle for Autism event in June was a time for fun and celebration with well-over three hundred community members coming out to participate in the activities and raise funds for our organization. This year, Spider-Man, an inflatable castle, the firetruck and Choo Choo the Clown were big hits. Forty volunteers helped facilitate the event for 31 teams consisting of 306 registered participants. They cycled, walked, or jogged to make this such a successful event. Truly a Sunday morning we will all remember fondly.

Els Golf Tournament

Last year Edmonton held its first Els Golf Tournament, and Autism Edmonton was a chosen charity of this event. We are grateful for the partnership and look forward to a successful 2nd event this coming September.

Pancake Breakfast

In June, amidst a blustery, rainy morning, members of Mike Lake's constituency joined him for a pancake breakfast. Autism Edmonton was invited to be on site and, once again, we benefited from generous community donors who were present or who provided their support before and after the event.)

Programs and Services

Family Support Services:

Autism Edmonton does not deliver therapy or client-specific services; rather, our most fundamental service is assisting families, individuals and professionals to “navigate” all of the resources available to them within the Edmonton area. This year, our Family Support Services Navigation Program lived a year of huge growth and development.

In 2015-2016, this program served 696 clients and responded to 2021 other persons via phone calls and emails for a total of 2,717 total contacts – a 60% increase over prior year (1569).

Housing - Edmonton Aspires Group

A group of parents and individuals met regularly to discuss various housing models and options for adults with autism. The group was very busy hearing about other communities' work and firmed up two preferences to pursue in the coming year.

Support Groups:

Autism Edmonton ran 7 support groups for community members and families during the past year. In general, group attendance over the previous year increased month to month and by June 2016, there were 116 participants in the month's group meetings, representing an increase of 118% at the same time in the prior year.

Support groups offered this past year included: Adult 25+, League of Extraordinary Individuals, Family Support, Newly Diagnosed, Partners of Adults with Autism, Parents of Adults and Drama. Autism Edmonton also held monthly Family Events through the year.

Pantry

Autism Edmonton partners with the Edmonton Food Bank to provide a program for families and individuals on the spectrum requiring this support in a more sensory sensitive environment. The Pantry Program was launched late in the 2014-2015 fiscal year and over the past months, the demand for this service continued to grow. There were 125 visits to this new program this past year, with 84 unique users (families or individuals).

Occasio

Our socio-recreational program for youth and adults celebrated its first year in April 2016, and that same month we decided to expand the program through a pilot funded by generous donations received at the Gala and specifically targeted for this program. In the past year, Occasio grew from 37 members (after the first 3 months of the program) to 77 at the end of this year. A total of 124 activities were offered this past year, resulting in 1389 hours of respite for parents. (In July of 2016 alone we offered 420 respite hours, reflecting ongoing growth for this budding program.)

During May and June of this year, Autism Edmonton was pleased to offer free Occasio services to youth and adults from Fort McMurray thanks to a generous donation from a caring community member.

Community Gardens Family Event

In June 2016, we began holding a weekly family event at the Our Lady Flower Garden. Every week, 30-35 community members (families, adults, children) join efforts to plant and then reap the harvest from a community garden held outside of town. Response to this event has been overwhelming and participation is consistently at a maximum

Volunteers and Community

Membership and Donors

This year our focus has been on corrective work, updating and collating all of our many membership lists, including the website list, donor list, past members' list and bounce back list. We worked to eliminate duplication and ensure the maintenance of a single, current and managed file. Through this process, Autism Edmonton polled members on their willingness to receive information electronically, facilitating easier communication and resulting in significant mail out savings.

At the end of the year, there were 944 confirmed members and during the past fiscal year, Autism Edmonton recorded an additional 805 new donors within the community. Since August of 2013, our organization has benefited from the generosity of a total of 5,671 unique donors (which includes donations and gifts in kind).

Volunteers

We had 134 inquiries regarding volunteer opportunities this past year and 106 applications. Of these, 103 volunteers were placed. In total, last year Autism Edmonton screened and trained 140 active volunteers who provided nearly 2,500 hours of program facilitation, program assistance, events and program supports and leadership (through governance).

Communications and Online Connections

We continue to count over 500 visits to our website on a monthly basis and our electronic distribution list has proven highly useful to send out reminders and our monthly newsletter in a timely and efficient manner. Our social media communication proved incredibly busy and an important source of information for Fort McMurray evacuees.

Awards

The Autism Edmonton 2016 Awards was a tremendous hit again this year. We continued the tradition of presenting the Autism Edmonton Awards out in the community, in front of the recipient's peers and celebrating with cake and a framed gift. There were a total of 11 award recipients:

- Workplace Champion – Gidget Maida – Vermilion and Simonne Lougheed – Edmonton
- Business Champion – Sheila Chisholm – St. Albert
- Educational Champion – Assistant Principal - Shane Grundy – Edmonton
- Educational Champion – Teaching Assistant - Anna Klippert-Touchette – Edmonton
- Autism Service Champion – Carrie Laturus – Edmonton
- Community Champion – Dianne Hinves – Edmonton, Hi-Tek Urethane – Nisku, and Team Doodlebug – Edmonton
- Self-Advocate Champion – Simon Wray – St. Albert
- Volunteer Champion – Joanne Boothby – Edmonton

CASDA Consultation

In May, Autism Edmonton was proud to work closely with CASDA to help facilitate a community conversation in our city. Nearly 50 participants joined the national team in a very hot and busy

room; the number present (on very short notice) as well as the diversity of the stakeholders present was noted as a true measure of the networking and partnership levels in our community.

Raising Awareness

Autism Edmonton staff and volunteers worked regularly to connect with the community, raising awareness and offering information on available resources at multiple fairs. This year's efforts reached over ten thousand people and highlights included participation at the Alberta Teachers' Convention, at the Autism Speaks Walk, at the Alberta non-profit symposium, and the International Day of Conference. Additionally, staff from Autism Edmonton presented at the Edmonton Catholic School Division Planning Session – Community Conversation as well as at the Autism Leadership Conference in Ottawa. We're very proud of this contact with the community at large and our plans for the coming year is to increase these opportunities substantially as the response indicates a need and interest.

Internal Growth and Transition

With the hiring of a new Executive Director, internal adjustments formed part of the transition work of the organization. Building on the good work from prior year, efforts were spent on the following initiatives:

- Development of a succession and leadership development strategy through the establishment of a management team decision-making structure and a revised organizational structure with identified lead roles for responsibility and accountability;
- Audit and updating of the organization's liabilities and benefits insurance;
- Review and updating of the organization's policies and preparation for the development and / or approval of financial and administration policies;
- Budgeting strategies for a 24- month cycle given Gala and the Casino's bi-annual schedule;
- During the first six months of our 2015-2016, extensive work was expended on the potential move of the organization's offices to another facility. Planning was detailed and involved all staff one way or another for months;
- Throughout the entire fiscal year, extensive work was also expended on our organization's ability and knowledge relating to fund development. New systems, processes and practices were developed and implemented. Staff also participated in an Endowment Sustainability Series, exploring new opportunities for financial stability.

Our Favourite 2015-2016 Stories:

We have so many favourite stories from this past year including our first "Cycle Ambassador", a touching story about a village "raising" a fence for a few young children, shouldering our fellow citizens from Fort McMurray any way we could, the launching of a Medical Sensory Series in partnership with the Glenrose Dental Clinic and CASE, and the story of a donation of 4 iPads that changed lives for children and a young adult.

Looking forward to...

In the coming year, we are looking forward to launching a brand new, original project with the Glenrose Clinic which will add an outreach component to our navigation services work and which will introduce a greater connection with communities from Red Deer North (including the NWT) whose families have been diagnosed in the Glenrose Clinic.

We will also be so fortunate to enjoy the services of a full time Adult Coordinator for the first time.

Conclusion

2015-2016 was a hugely busy and successful year in our long history, and already there are strong indications of an equally busy, rewarding 2016-2017 to come. We extend our thanks to all of our many, many partners, community members, sponsors and donors for the ongoing support and trust placed in us.