



Early Childhood Community of Practice

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Background

Autism Alberta's Alliance is an initiative of Autism Society Alberta bringing together stakeholders from a diversity of sectors: education, employment supports, health professionals, researchers, housing, intervention specialists, sports/recreation, parents, Autistic persons and others.

In 2022/23, the Alliance formed numerous Communities of Practices to address various opportunities to improve experiences, services and care within and for the autism community.

Early Childhood Community of Practice

Background

Over the last few years, leaders from a number of organizations that provide early intervention services (i.e., funded by Alberta Education or FSCD) to children with autism came together to discuss common concerns and engage in solution-focused discussion. These virtual, ad hoc meetings resulted in a common understanding of the issues the sector is facing, concrete deliverables, such letters to ministries, as well as an opportunity to network with others working in the space. Although the group considered forming a Community of Practice and meeting on a more regular basis, this did not happen as meeting organizers were typically doing this work off the side of their desk. As result, the group was reactive typically coming together only when there was a pressing or significant issue to discuss.

Autism Alberta's Alliance graciously offered to support the group to form a Community of Practice. To be more specific, the Alliance offered the human resources and expertise required to organize and facilitate meetings. The goal was to create a sustainable Community of Practice and, ideally, position the group as a resource and source of solution-focused recommendations in the eyes of government and other stakeholders.

Purpose

The primary focus of the Early Childhood Community of Practice is to explore innovative solutions to address the service gaps/barriers that exist for children with autism or at risk for an autism diagnosis, age 0 to 6 years. Clinicians/service providers from all over Alberta can come together to:

- Share knowledge and experiences, including successes and challenges relating to services for children
- Share current evidence-informed practices for neuro-affirming care
- Share innovative approaches to service delivery
- Document the process and make recommendations
- Create a collaborative community

Steering Committee

- Co-chair: Dr. Kimberly Ward (Registered Psychologist, Executive Director Society for Autism Support and Services)
- Co-chair: Terri Duncan (Registered speech language pathologist, Executive Director Children's Autism Services of Edmonton)
- Shino Nakane (Provincial Director Autism Society Alberta)
- Amanda Downey (Alliance Strategist & Brand Lead Autism Society Alberta)

Participants

- Clinicians/service providers in the field

Meetings

- Community of Practice will meet every quarter, or otherwise determined by the Steering Committee
- An agenda will be circulated in advance of every meeting

Minutes

- Meeting minutes will be circulated to participants within two weeks of the date of the meeting



Expectations/Deliverables 2024

Deliverable - The Community of Practice intends to draft “practice guidelines” for services for young children with autism. The document will be brief (5 pages max) and include an introduction or executive summary specific to each intended audience. At a minimum we would like one for parents and one for government. The essential components will likely be the same, but the introduction will contextualize the work for the reader. It was also suggested that we include a brief summary of the evolution of autism supports (traditional ABA to more contemporary approaches).

Working Group – A small working group has been developed to create a draft based on the summary chart and the group discussions. A google document and task list has been created to allow us to work collaboratively.

Timeline – We are hoping to have a draft prepared by the end of March and schedule another Community of Practice meeting in April to review and discuss the document.