



autism
NOVA SCOTIA

**ANNUAL
REPORT
2020-2021**

*Leading with **Courage***

We begin by acknowledging that Autism Nova Scotia's ***Annual Report 2020-2021, Leading with Courage***, was created here in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq Nation. This territory is covered by the Treaties of Peace and Friendship, which the Mi'kmaq and Wəlastəkwewiyik (Maliseet) communities first signed with the British Crown in 1725. The Treaties did not deal with surrender of lands and resources, but established the rules for what was to be an ongoing relationship between nations.

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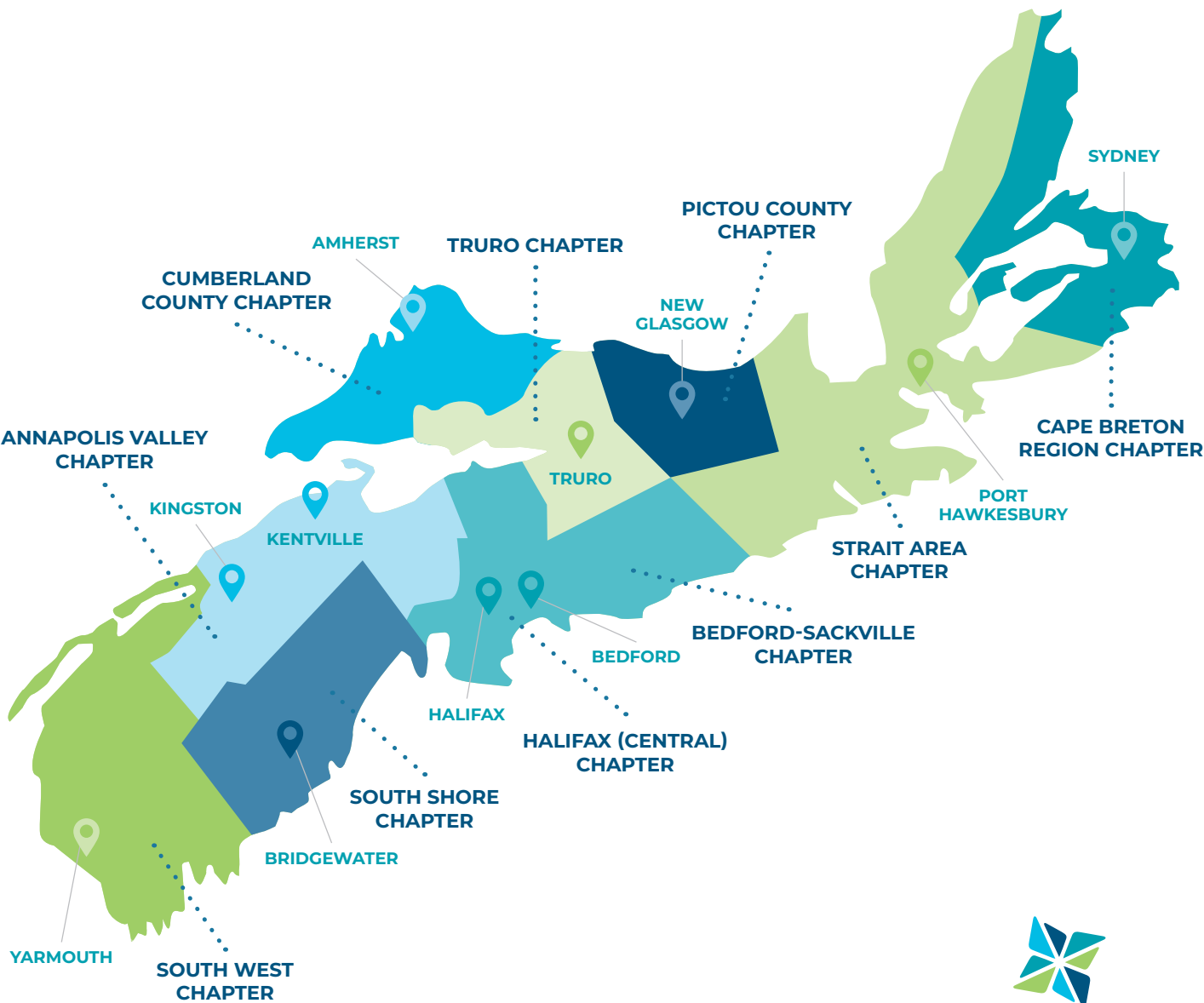




Illustration by Emma Fitzgerald

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Leading with Courage

As we began to reflect on our 2020-2021 fiscal year, a theme emerged – courage.

Just as we began to settle into 2020, our worlds changed suddenly and dramatically. Navigating COVID-19 demanded huge changes for people, communities, businesses and non-profits. While much of our community infrastructure shut or slowed down in those first weeks and months, Autism Nova Scotia mustered up the courage to continue. We immediately realized that the community we support would not only require a continuation of supports but that the isolation and anxiety surrounding the pandemic would result in increased and unique needs.

Our staff, volunteers, clients, families and caregivers bravely adapted to the remote nature of Autism Nova Scotia's programs and services and together we ensured that, to the best of our abilities, the needs of our community were met. In fact, we were awarded the 2020 Invisible Champion Award from the Bhayana Foundation, the United Way, and the Province of Nova Scotia in recognition of our transition to online programming during the pandemic.

Looking back, we're proud that not only have we pivoted and adapted effectively throughout COVID-19, but in many ways, we also thrived.

We continued to deliver programming in new ways, launched a number of pilot projects and initiatives and completed the organization's new five-year strategic plan. Luckily, much of the in-person stakeholder engagement took place prior to the arrival of COVID-19 and we were able to use the remaining months of 2020 drafting the 2020-2025 strategic plan which was formally adopted and launched to the public in early 2021. Our reimagined vision and mission expand on our hopes and dreams for Nova Scotia's autism community – and for Autistic people around the world.

If we were to come up with a second word to describe 2020-2021, it would be collaboration. None of our successes and initiatives would be possible without partnerships, shared knowledge and resources, and financial support.

On both the provincial and national stages, Autism Nova Scotia is increasingly called upon



to lead vital pilot projects and is entrusted with public funds to spearhead support programs for individuals on the autism spectrum from across Atlantic Canada. Whether it was collaborating with organizations such as the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorder Alliance (CASDA) and Canucks Autism Network in BC; partnering with companies such as Ubisoft; or stewarding provincial and federal funds, Autism Nova Scotia worked closely with other non-profits, businesses and governments to best serve the autism community.

With a provincial mandate, Autism Nova Scotia offers in-person or virtual programs for

Autistic individuals, families and caregivers in communities from Yarmouth to Sydney, and, in some cases, throughout Atlantic Canada. Although many of our chapters are located in towns and municipalities hours from the central office, Autism Nova Scotia operates as one organization and keeps connected through weekly rounds meetings, program development, and a shared commitment to our strategic plan, vision and mission.

On the program front, our established programs continue to be successful and we are working to meet the evolving and emerging needs of the autism community with new and



innovative programming. We are committed to continuing and increasing the presence of first voices and lived experience in program development and delivery.

Despite the drastic changes in workplaces during COVID-19, our employment programs have been able to continue by making necessary adaptations.

The scope of the programs we have developed over the last several years allows us to support Autistic individuals across their lifespan. Whether it's programming for toddlers and their families, assisting teens navigating the transition from secondary school, young adults developing healthy relationships or adults finding and maintaining meaningful

employment, our organization offers the autism community a safe place to connect and discover what they need in order to lead fuller lives. Autism Nova Scotia is a home for anyone on the autism spectrum and their families: our community's embassy.

We are so grateful for the tremendous generosity of the community, volunteers, donors, businesses and corporations, foundations, and governments who have supported our work. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts for supporting our mission and creating real change in the world for neurodiversity.

Our signature fundraising event, Walk YOUR Way for Autism, was able to be held in 2020 thanks to the commitment and creativity of event coordinators, volunteers, sponsors and participants. We look forward to seeing our province rally together once again for our second virtual Walk event in support of autism in September 2021.

This year's annual report reflects on so many of the highlights that took place during fiscal 2020-2021, but the stories and successes we share here are really snapshots of the enormous amount of work accomplished by staff, volunteers, and the autism community in Nova Scotia.

Last year was not without significant challenges. But in the spirit of the courageous and resilient autism community we serve, we met these challenges fearlessly and proudly moved closer to realizing our vision of a world where everyone can enjoy their lives fully in a society where autism is understood and accepted.

With gratitude for your support,

Dave Nicholson
Board Chair



Cynthia Carroll
Executive Director



“When Jack and I started Autism Nova Scotia in 2002, we never dreamed it would become the organization it is today. We responded to a desperate need for supports and programs for Autistic individuals and their families right across the province. I could not have imagined that in under 20 years, the organization would reach people from Yarmouth to Cape Breton, from Halifax to Amherst with so many unique and vital programs and services for Autistic people throughout their lifespans. I am so proud of the reality that has been born from our vision.”

– **Joan Craig**, Founder, Autism Nova Scotia

The Courage to Imagine

While our organization, and the whole world, has had to reimagine so much around how we do things and what our future looks like since the arrival of COVID-19 in March 2020, this work began for Autism Nova Scotia in late 2019 and continued through 2020. During that time, we prepared for the creation of a new five-year strategic plan. After surveying many of our stakeholders and hosting in-person planning sessions, facilitators completed the work of crafting Autism Nova Scotia's strategic plan for 2020-2025.

A strategic plan is a living document that defines an organization's vision, mission, priorities and goals as it focuses its work and resources for the years ahead. Our five-year strategic plan will help guide us through to 2025 and best meet the needs and wants of the 24,000 Autistic individuals and their families throughout Nova Scotia.



Our Vision

A world where autism is understood, accepted, and everyone is living their lives fully.



Our Mission

We are a community-based organization that builds understanding, acceptance, and inclusion for Autistics/individuals on the autism spectrum and their families through leadership, advocacy, education, training, and programming across the lifespan.



Core Values and Guiding Principles

This area of the strategic plan introduces the values that direct the approach to our work and the guiding principles that illustrate how these values will be brought to life. Over the next five years, Autism Nova Scotia will incorporate inclusion, respect, collaboration, acceptance and courage into our day-to-day activities and our longer-term projects. These core values will inform how we work toward achieving our vision.



INCLUSION



COLLABORATION



ACCEPTANCE



RESPECT



COURAGE



Strategic Priorities and Goals

Imagining a future where Autism is understood and accepted and all Autistic individuals are living rich, full lives would be a mere fantasy if we did not define the goals we will pursue to realize this vision. Through the 2020-2025 strategic planning process, Autism Nova Scotia arrived at five priority areas within which we developed a number of measurable goals that will help to serve as our scorecard as we progress through the plan.



Delivering
Innovative Education
& Training



Advocating
with the Autism
Community



Building
Capacity in Our
Communities



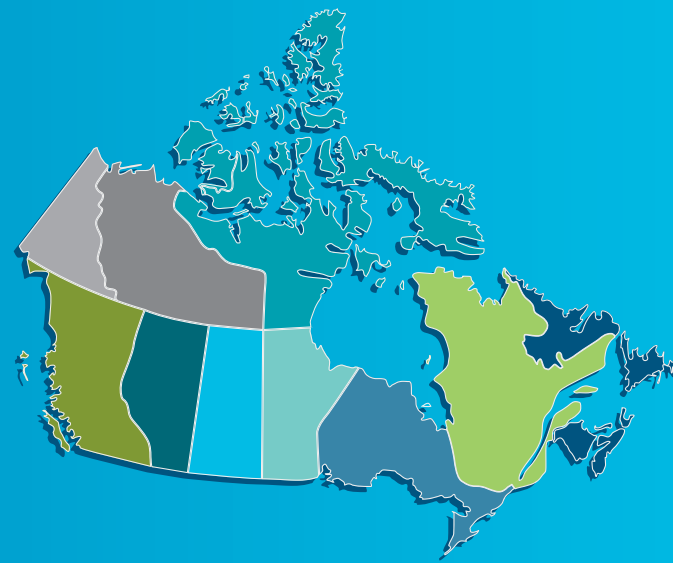
Programming
Excellence



Legacy
Planning

For nearly two decades, Autism Nova Scotia has collaborated with Autistic individuals, families, government and other stakeholders to build awareness, acceptance and inclusion for our province's autism community. The 2020-2025 strategic plan is our re-commitment to helping the 24,000 Autistic Nova Scotians live full lives through improved supports and services.

Advocacy on the National Stage



Since the federal government's commitment to a National Autism Strategy in late 2019, our organization has continued to push to ensure that the needs of the Nova Scotian autism community are reflected in the strategy and that it is action-based and incorporates meaningful input from autism experts, Autistic Canadians and their families, and provincial and territorial governments.

In May 2021, Autism Nova Scotia took part in the Canadian Association of Health Science's stakeholder engagement session to inform an autism assessment that will be presented to the Public Health Agency of Canada for consideration when developing the national strategy.

While we live out our mission within Nova Scotia, the autism community is stronger for our national connections. Last year, we continued working

closely with the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorder Alliance (CASDA) on the National Autism Strategy and the employment initiative, Ready, Willing & Able; we partnered with Canucks Autism Network to conduct a mental health needs and services scan for Autistic adults in Nova Scotia, Ontario, and British Columbia.

We also maintained regular connections with more than a dozen autism organizations across the country through the Provincial/Territorial Autism Network.

By pooling our collective resources and shared experiences, Autism Nova Scotia and other organizations across the country will be able to create best practices and reliable support models for all Autistic Canadians and their loved ones.

A Hub for Vital Resources

Born from a need to provide increased access to accurate resources, information, and supports for Autistic people and individuals with intellectual disabilities, and their families and caregivers, the Autism and/or Intellectual Disability Knowledge Exchange Network (AIDE) was launched in 2019 with funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada in partnership with the Pacific Autism Family Network.

The **AIDE Network** is made up of six hubs across the country and Autism Nova Scotia is proud to be home to the Atlantic Canada Hub.

AIDE resources created to date include:

- Funding support guides for Atlantic Canadians
- Housing toolkits for each of the Atlantic provinces
- Webinars on topics such as employment, person-direct planning, and respite services
- Asset map outlining programs and services in each region
- Free national lending library system



Building Capacity in the Atlantic Region

Autism Nova Scotia is a trailblazer when it comes to supporting autism communities and advocates across Atlantic Canada.

In April 2021, the Government of Canada's Future Skills Centre announced financial support for the **Atlantic Autism Supports and Employment Network** (AASEN), a regional employment skills collaboration that will be coordinated by Autism Nova Scotia.

AASEN will help build the capacity of autism organizations across the Atlantic provinces, and increase supports for Autistic individuals. Together, we can build a more inclusive labour market as the economy begins to recover from the effects of COVID-19.

Autism Nova Scotia's Leader Among Atlantic Canada's Top CEOs



In her 13 years with Autism Nova Scotia, executive director Cynthia Carroll has been instrumental in the organization's growth and in advocating

for inclusion, understanding and acceptance of autism and Autistic persons.

Benefitting from her leadership, Autism Nova Scotia has grown from three full-time employees in 2008 to a province-wide organization employing more than 100 people throughout 10 chapters. This year, Cynthia was named one of Atlantic Business Magazine's Top 50 CEOs in recognition of her excellence in leading the organization and representing Nova Scotia's autism community provincially and nationally.



“Over the past year, I’ve learned that the principles I subscribe to in my leadership role – collaboration, empowerment, and innovation – are valuable every day, but essential in a crisis or challenging time.”

– Cynthia Carroll, Executive Director of Autism Nova Scotia



Raising the Visibility of our Autism Community

Like most non-profit organizations, Autism Nova Scotia relies on the support of volunteers to bring our programs and services to life. In early 2020, Autism Nova Scotia received the **2019 Canada Volunteer Awards' Social Innovator Award for the Atlantic Region**. As we work toward a world where autism is accepted and understood, this recognition speaks to the success our organization and community is having in breaking down social and systematic barriers that Autistic individuals face when accessing early intervention, education, recreation, employment support and advocacy.

As you'll learn throughout the 2020-2021 annual report, the last year saw numerous changes to program delivery and support services as we adapted to the realities of the impact of COVID-19. In recognition of our quick, creative and effective transition to online programming during the pandemic, Autism Nova Scotia received a **2020 Invisible Champion Award** from the Bhayana Foundation, the United Way, and the Province of Nova Scotia. Additionally, Autism Nova Scotia recently received a **2021 Community Group Award** from the Halifax Regional Municipality.

While these awards offer staff and volunteers validation of their work, what is most gratifying is knowing that our work is being seen – that Autistic people and their families are being recognized. The importance of our mission and vision – the need for acceptance, support, and inclusion – are being heard and will be realized for our community.

Granting Post-Secondary Supports for Autistic Nova Scotians

In December 2020, we announced an exciting partnership with the Craig Foundation to introduce the **Amy Farnell Education Award**.

In honour of Amy Farnell, a long-time supporter and cherished friend, this education award will support eligible Nova Scotian students who identify as being on the autism spectrum and have been accepted into a full-time post-secondary program.

Supporting the next stage of a student's educational journey is critically important to us. Due to the generosity of the Craig Foundation, this award will ensure that many generations of Autistic students can pursue further education.

Autism Nova Scotia is truly grateful for the Craig Foundation's ongoing commitment to serving and supporting Autistic Nova Scotians throughout their life span.

“



“Amy always gave of herself for the benefit of others around her: helping, encouraging, and supporting so many during her lifetime. For me and my son, Robert, Amy’s friendship was a particular inspiration, especially in the early days when support for parents with children on the spectrum was not readily available. It brings me joy to remember my friend through this award, which so beautifully reflects her spirit while supporting the personal goals of adults with autism. It is exciting to think of the doors that will open for others in Amy’s name.”

– **Joan Craig**, Founder, Craig Foundation

Programs & Services Across Nova Scotia

Over the years, Autism Nova Scotia has experienced tremendous growth – not only in the scope of our mission and vision, but in our reach across the province. Through our 11 locations stretching from Yarmouth to Sydney, Autism Nova Scotia delivers programs and services and provides support and advocacy for the 24,000 individuals on the autism spectrum in the province and their families and loved ones.



Navigation Services for Family & Individual Support



Employment Programs & Services



QuickStart Nova Scotia
(Toddlers & Families)



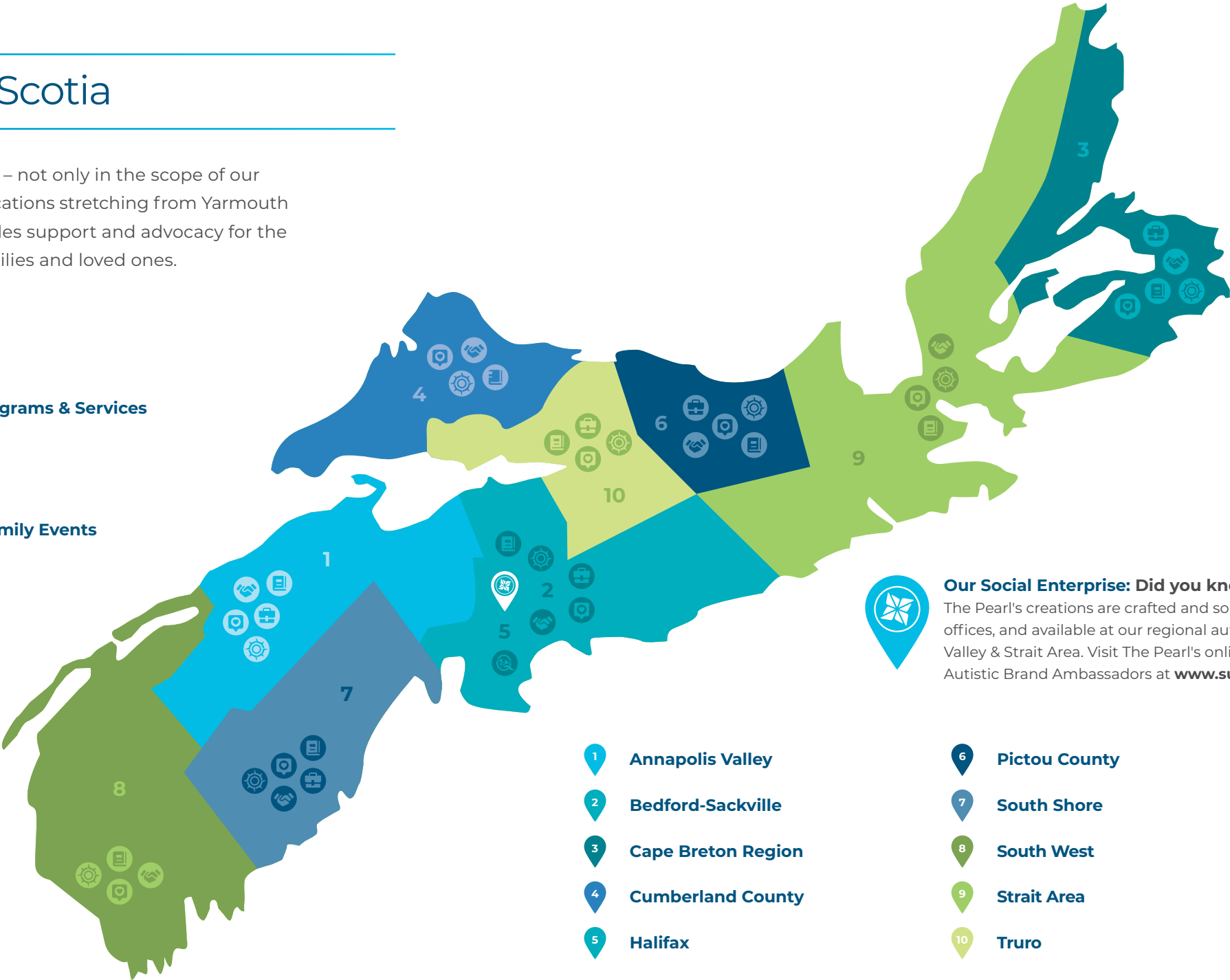
Community & Family Events



Social & Community Inclusion for Youth / Adults



Education Sessions
(Professionals, Volunteers, Families, Service Providers)





Success Around the Province



DID YOU KNOW?



Autism Nova Scotia hosts a weekly 'Rounds' meeting with all of our chapters to focus on our provincial reach and ensure that families right across the province are best supported.



“Thanks so much for putting on summer camp this year! This week has been absolutely amazing, both my boys loved it and it gave me a much-needed break! Thanks so much again for continuing to put on amazing programs for families. So happy our community has such a wonderful chapter and I'm so grateful.”

– Parent/Caregiver of Truro chapter's summer camp participant

Our South West centre introduced a number of new initiatives this year including a virtual parent support program, the addition of a sensory room, and the offering of the Person-Directed Planning Pilot project.



Participant Aurora Hutt and ANS Truro Chapter Summer Staff Colleen Matheson.

Last summer, our Truro chapter held its first summer camp ever in a covid-safe setting. For ¾ of the youth who attended camp, this was their very first opportunity to participate in summer camp programming.



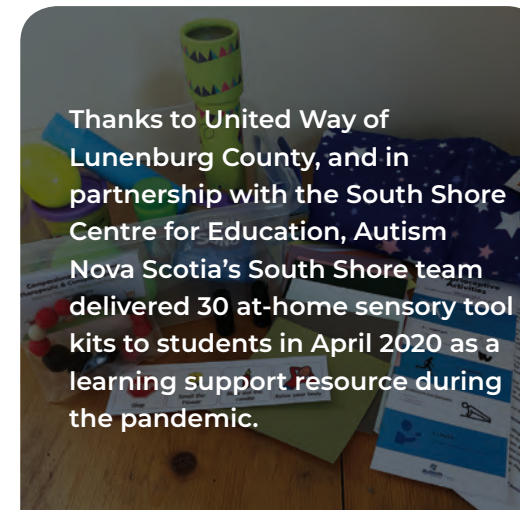
Autism Nova Scotia's chapter serving the Annapolis Valley experienced exciting growth with the opening of its second location – the Kentville Autism Centre! Their Kingston Autism Centre also underwent improvement projects, including the addition of a youth/adult lounge area and a community meeting area.



DID YOU KNOW?



All our regional autism centres adapted quickly to COVID restrictions and offered virtual programs that actually created opportunities for more people to participate in programs and activities who would normally be unable to attend due to distance, childcare, and other factors.



Thanks to United Way of Lunenburg County, and in partnership with the South Shore Centre for Education, Autism Nova Scotia's South Shore team delivered 30 at-home sensory tool kits to students in April 2020 as a learning support resource during the pandemic.



“You guys did a wonderful job given the current world crisis. I really appreciated the continued support during the pandemic and being able to come together when we needed each other most.”

– Virtual Club Participant from Annapolis Valley Chapter



During the winter, Autism Nova Scotia in Strait Area offered a Learn to Skate program for Autistic children with the support from the Town of Port Hawkesbury, minor hockey coaches, and volunteers from the local high school hockey team, and a free Sensory Skate on Fridays in partnership with Richmond Recreation.

Our Strait Area chapter saw significant growth in its program services and delivery this year, fostering strong connections in Port Hawkesbury, Guysborough, Mulgrave, and Richmond.

The organization's chapter in Cumberland County recognized that the area's autism community needed extra support last summer and received funding from the Atlantic Compassion Fund to provide Autistic individuals, families and caregivers with weekly activity kits.



DID YOU KNOW?

Over half of Autism Nova Scotia's locations (Annapolis Valley, Bedford Sackville, Cape Breton Region, Halifax, and Truro) adapted COVID-safe summer camp programming in 2020. In addition, our chapters in South West & Pictou County provided staff to local partners hosting summer camps to support their Autistic campers.



Caleb, program participant in Cape Breton Region

"Call it what you want but Wednesday is 'Club Night' for Caleb and boy does he ever look forward to it. There's a skip in his step as he prepares to leave and never any hesitation in walking through the door for some fun and friendly activities. As a parent, it makes me happy to see him happy. There's no better feeling than that."

— Julie, parent of program participant in Cape Breton Region

DID YOU KNOW?

Last year Autism Nova Scotia developed a Provincial Education Committee, drawing on the expertise and experience of families and chapter support coordinators from across the province. This committee created and delivered many online webinar sessions such as:

- Preparing for Our New Normal (Covid-Response)
- Transition to Adulthood
- Behaviour Supports
- Employment Supports and Services

Enhancing Community Programs Across Nova Scotia

Autism Nova Scotia has 11 locations around the province, each offering its own unique social inclusion programs to address the local community's needs as expressed through consultations with families and their responses through a needs assessment survey.

Autism Nova Scotia is proud to share we offered **42** social & community inclusion programs for Autistic youth and adults at our local regional autism centres this past year.

SOCIAL & COMMUNITY INCLUSION PROGRAMS OFFERED AT OUR REGIONAL AUTISM CENTRES

Annapolis Valley	13	Cumberland	4
South Shore	4	Strait Area	2
Cape Breton	3	Pictou	9
South West	1	Truro	3

SOME OF OUR SOCIAL & COMMUNITY INCLUSION PROGRAMS ACROSS THE PROVINCE INCLUDE:

Autism Arts, Chat N' Chill, Conversation Skills Group, Dungeons & Dragons Club, Family Skate, Girl Strong Program, Healthy Relationships, Sexuality & Autism, Life Skills Program, Virtual Club, Virtual Netflix Parties, School-Aged Social Group, Teens & Adult Social Group, Sip N' Connect, Women's Autism/Autistic Project, summer camps, therapeutic horseriding, swim programs, martial arts, yoga, curling, cooking, and so much more!

To learn more, visit www.autismnovascotia.ca/programs



In addition to programs like Girl Strong, Person-Directed Planning, community yoga, as well as both in-person and online social events, the South Shore location is proud to start offering Employment Works in 2021.



Moving Forward & Walking with Courage

Building Community Capacity During Covid

Our annual Walk the Walk for Autism is always an important time to gather together, not only to raise the vital funds needed to support the autism community, but to celebrate our work, the contributions of volunteers and sponsors and move forward in building understanding and acceptance of autism throughout our communities.

Last year, COVID-19 prevented our community from gathering in-person for our annual Walk. As we did with so many of our programs, staff and

volunteers quickly adapted the event so that it could be reimagined while meeting the necessary Public Health protocols. Instead of cancelling the event due to restrictions, our flexible team created a way for folks to do what they love to do – come together, even virtually, in support of Autism Nova Scotia.

True to our broader mandate, the 2020 Walk – renamed **‘Walk YOUR Way’** – was tailored to meet each participant's unique needs. Supporters could walk when they wanted and where they wanted. While our participant numbers were understandably reduced, those who did take part were happy to have the choice to make it their own – whether that meant taking their dog for a walk or hitting the trails for a nature hike.

WALK YOUR WAY 2020 SUCCESSES



154

Total number of teams



930

Total number of individual walkers



\$115,700

Total funds raised



73

Sponsors across the province

“

“My highlight from last year was going out to walk and seeing all the other participants in the community doing their own walk. There was no set route or location but it was awesome to see all the people wearing 'Walk YOUR Way' t-shirts walking throughout the community. The slogan was certainly fitting.”

– Amy, South West Chapter Walk Participant

“Our Walk for Autism looked very different from previous years, but we are amazed by the efforts and resilience of our participants walking and raising funds during these challenging times.”

– Catherine, Vice Chair of Autism Nova Scotia & South Shore Chapter Committee Chair

“It was amazing to see families support our chapter all across the lifespan. From families that have just begun their autism journey - some children still awaiting a diagnosis, and wanting to support our cause because they know they will soon be ready or have just begun using our supports and services - to families supporting youth and teens all the way to adulthood.”

– Sam, Cape Breton Region Autism Support Coordinator

”

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QuickStart Continues to Grow

Parenting requires courage and parenting children on the spectrum often requires additional skills and supports. QuickStart, a parent-mediated coaching program, empowers caregivers of toddlers with a suspected, provisional, or confirmed diagnosis of autism to best support their child's development.

In response to COVID-19, QuickStart developed an online version of its programming for participants to access from home. As restrictions have fluctuated over the past year, QuickStart has continued with the delivery of this online version as well as offering hybrid programming combining supports provided online, at-home and, when possible, at Autism Nova Scotia.

SUMMARY OF PROGRAM'S SUCCESS

28 Months 

Average age of children when starting the program

45 

Families benefited from online of hybrid programming since the beginning of the pandemic

88% 

of families have reported maintaining the skills learned following the program

62 

Children registered

69 

Registrants took part in monthly webinars

1,525 

Visits were made with caregivers and children

— “ —

"Overall, we gained a lot from QuickStart and learned about skills that we had no idea we should be working on. The highlights are the approaches and strategies for our son's development overall. Doing things like waiting him out, prompting him, redirecting, finding his interests and following his lead. Can you imagine where we would be if it wasn't for the QuickStart program? He transformed so much in such a short period of time."

— QuickStart Nova Scotia Parent Participant

"These sessions are so much fun for my kid and we have, at the same time, learned a lot too. Our kid is showing tremendous improvements in a lot of areas and in some areas, we are able to identify her strengths and build on them. Despite lockdown and other restrictions, they were super professional. If needed, sessions were taken online but when sessions are done at home, I can't emphasize enough on the care and effort they take to make sure they do pre-screening, wear PPE, maintain all the regulations and still deliver a first-class home session."

— QuickStart Nova Scotia Parent Participant

— ” —

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Safely Apart...Together

When we think back to spring of 2020, we remember how disorienting and isolating those early days of COVID-19 were for us. For many Autistic individuals, the sudden changes were felt even more strongly, and our social inclusion team quickly sprang into action to ensure that those most affected by the isolation could maintain important social connections.

Using technology such as Zoom, KAHOOT and KAST, we held regular events like Virtual Netflix Parties and Virtual Trivia Nights for the community to meet online and enjoy social activities together. Virtual Family Sessions were offered bi-weekly through Facebook Live with programming for families and a weekly virtual social program, Virtual Club, was developed for teens and adults.

In addition to providing Autism Nova Scotia's clients with ongoing programming, the online nature of Virtual Club made it possible for Autistic youth and adults from across Atlantic Canada to take part.

"I love the virtual club because not only is it a safe means of keeping up with and meeting everyone from social group during the COVID pandemic but also we get to meet new people as well whom we might not get a chance to meet otherwise." – **Victoria**, Adult Participant

"I like the virtual club because I like to hear what the other kids are doing and talk about different activities."

– **Cole**, Teen Participant



A Safe Space for Unique Perspectives

Statistically, Autistic women often find themselves underrepresented in autism programs. With a unique set of barriers and experiences different to those of Autistic men, their voices can sometimes go unheard in predominantly male-dominated autistic spaces.

In late 2019, Autism Nova Scotia brought to life the vision of two Autistic women with the creation of the Women's Autism/Autistic Project. Originally a pilot project based in our Halifax office, the program is now offered online for Autistic women from across the province to socialize, connect and explore their communities, while fostering a sense of belonging.

More recently, a teen group of the Women's Autism/Autistic Project was created in December 2020 for girls on the spectrum living in Nova Scotia. The volunteer-led group meets online twice monthly for interactive games and activities.



"Our son did more activities and engaged in more communication with his peers than I've seen him do before. He loved being part of this program." – Parent

Building Bridges to Greater Independence

Last year, Autism Nova Scotia, with funding from the Department of Community Services' Disability Support Program, launched a pilot program focused on building self-determination and autonomy of participants. The **Bridges to Success** program is structured around five core pillars: social connection; recreation and leisure; community exploration; self-regulation; and life skills.

Over the course of the 28-session program, facilitators worked with Autistic individuals and their support workers to reach goals set by participants. Some of participants' successes included significant increases in their ability to advocate for themselves and communicate their needs, wants, interests, and boundaries.

"This program far exceeded my expectations. I have seen incredible growth in my client. This has resulted in decreased anxiety, loneliness and furthered my client in their path toward independence. This not only affects my client, the participant of the program, but me as a care worker and their friends and family."

– Support Worker of Participant



“The facilitator really listened to me and helped me make plans that focus on my needs. I’ve never had that before.”
– Program Participant

Making Dreams a Reality

Most people have dreams – visions of what they want to do, who they want to be – but for many, finding the supports required to achieve their personal goals can be challenging.

In June 2020, Autism Nova Scotia launched the **Person-Directed Pilot Program** (PDPP) in partnership with the Disability Support Program. Working with individuals with autism, disabilities and/or mental health concerns, PDPP supports people as they move toward their goals and dreams for the future.

The PDPP program facilitators work with participants to explore seven pillars: social connection; community engagement; recreation and leisure; employment and volunteering; life skills; housing; and self-care.

Since its launch, the PDPP team has worked with individuals in the Central and Western Region of Nova Scotia pursuing a diverse array of goals – from

publishing novels and passing a driver’s test, to starting a business and expanding one’s social circles.

The need for supportive housing has been a common theme for program participants who often spend years on waitlists. Through the hard work and creativity of individuals and their support networks, PDPP facilitators have successfully advocated alongside individuals for alternative housing options that are providing them with new levels of independence and advanced quality of life.



“The program has brought me renewed hope.”
– Program Participant

“
I have made a lot of strides in the right direction in terms of my relationships with my family and my friends and I feel like what I learned in the course has led me to having healthier relationships with these people.
”
– Program Participant

Piloting a Course for Healthy Relationships

Since launching its pilot program, Healthy Relationships, Sexuality & Autism (HRSA), Autism Nova Scotia has been at the forefront of sexuality education for adults on the autism spectrum in Canada. With funding support from the Public Health Agency of Canada, the organization has scaled HRSA and built partnerships with eight community-based autism service providers in Atlantic Canada.

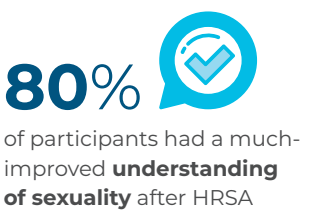
Highlights from the past year of HRSA include the adaptation of the program to a videoconferencing format that has allowed Autistic adults to participate from anywhere in Atlantic Canada.

In 2020, HRSA also developed a free accessible sexuality resource library created by sexuality

educators and an Autistic advocate. This resource library is designed for people with autism, caregivers, professionals, and those seeking accessible sexuality information. The resource library is available on Autism Nova Scotia’s website and listed on the Sex Information & Education Council of Canada’s (SIECCAN) website resource page.



Based Off Early Evaluation Results



“The HRSA program has had a profound impact on my overall wellbeing in many different ways. It has taught me about body parts and behaviours that I personally never knew existed. And it has taught me about how to have stronger and better relationships of all kinds. This program will have a forever positive impact the entire rest of my life.”

– Program Participant



Autism

arts

The Courage to Express Oneself

Since 2006, Autism Nova Scotia, in partnership with the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, has offered Autism Arts, a program that allows Autistic children and young adults opportunities for creative expression while building a sense of belonging in their communities.

This year, we proudly released **Autism Arts**, a book celebrating the program that was created in partnership with the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia and published by Goose Lane Editions.

Capturing the impact of the program and its 15-year history through the stories and images within this beautiful publication would not have been possible without the unwavering financial and visionary support of Joan Craig and The Craig Foundation. Their generosity has enabled Autistic individuals to benefit from art exploration and self-expression through this weekly program.

To round out Autism Acceptance Month in 2021, we hosted a digital event featuring speakers such as our executive director Cynthia Carroll, the Art Gallery's Curator of Education and Public Programs, Dale Sheppard, co-founder of Autism Nova Scotia & The Craig Foundation, Joan Craig, and the Honourable Suzanne Lohnes-Croft, Nova Scotia's Minister of Communities, Culture and Heritage.



“
When I first saw
the [Autism Arts]
book,
I was ecstatic.
It was a dream
come true.

– Joan Craig,
Founder, Autism Nova Scotia

Capturing Creativity & Community for the Big Screen

Autism Nova Scotia's **Video Project**, a program where Autistic adults gather weekly to produce a short film, celebrated its fourth anniversary of moviemaking magic this year!

For the 2020 premiere of the Video Project's short film, *Invited to Death*, the team saw tremendous growth and raised the bar on the professional quality of their production thanks to the mentorship and leadership provided by hiring an Autistic facilitator.

Participants actively led the project each step of the way – from storyboards, to script development and then finally the editing of the video. This year, the team had to overcome the challenges and adapt to the production delays brought on by COVID-19. In November, the team proudly premiered *Invited to Death* on social media with an interactive red-carpet event and saw over 600+ views on its opening night.

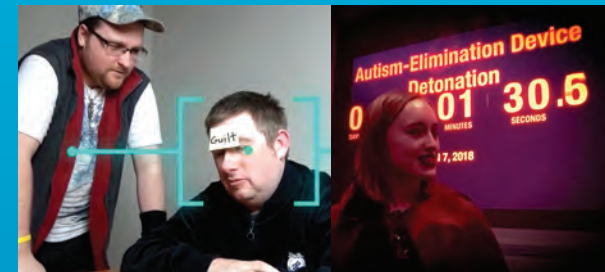
Video Project's director, Nick Hasey, who has been with the group since 2016 shares, "What we're trying to show is that anyone with autism can do anything out there. We have our own talents, our own ideas, and our own hearts."



“

“I think Video Project is the best thing that has ever happened to me.”

– **Nick**, Video Project Participant and Director of *Invited to Death*



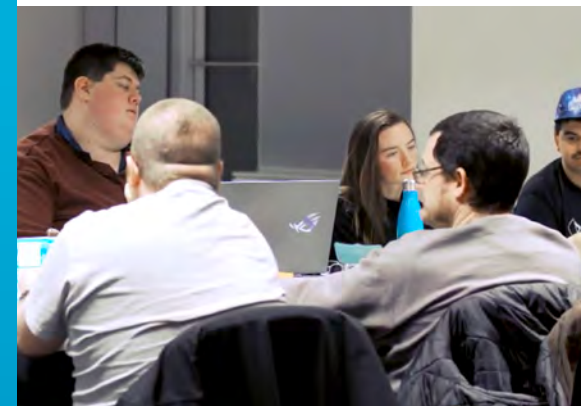
This year, the Video Project crew was featured on *Accessible Media Inc's* documentary series, *Our Community* - a half-hour episode that highlights people, places, and organizations that have made life more enjoyable for Canadians with a disability.



“

"There's a phrase that I've come up with called 'Autistic Oxygen' which is just when Autistic people get together it's about not having to hold your breath so much, that the air you breathe in around you is more for you that when you leave that you feel more energized, that you know that the people are going to get you."

– **Patricia**, Video Project Facilitator & Editor-In-Chief of *Autistics Aloud*



© 2021 Still Images from AMI's *Our Community*

Autistics Aloud
a grassroots magazine

**ARE YOU AUTISTIC/HAVE AUTISM?
AND LIVE IN CANADA?**

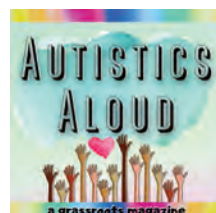
You can submit art, poetry, photography, an essay, a video link (and more) to be published in our Magazine!

www.autisticsaloud.ca

autisticsaloud@autismns.ca

TOPICS

EDUCATION: DEAR TEACHER PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE	DIAGNOSIS: FORMAL AND SELF-DIAGNOSIS / SELF-IDENTIFY
<p>This Edition will explore Autistics experiences with teachers and the advice or suggestions we'd give to them - past, present, or in the future.</p> <p>What can Teachers do better for Autistic learners? What are they already getting right?</p> <p>Has your experience with teachers changed since the Covid-19 pandemic? In what ways have your interactions with teachers changed? Are they better or worse now?</p>	<p>We are looking for stories that represent the diverse experiences of Autistic people including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People who were diagnosed at a young age • People who were diagnosed during their teenage years • People who were diagnosed in adulthood • People who have self-diagnosed/self-identify • People seeking/receiving a diagnosis during the Covid-19 pandemic <p>What has your experience been like? What challenges have you faced? What positive impacts have a diagnosis and/or self-discovery/self-diagnosis made in your life?</p> <p>What do you wish people knew about autism diagnosis in Canada or in your province or Territory?</p>



Follow **Autistics Aloud** on Social Media @autisticsaloud [f](#) [@](#) [t](#)

Celebrating Autistic Voices

For more than 15 years, *Autistics Aloud* has been a platform for sharing creative projects such as stories, essays, poems, songs, art, photography, interviews and more. Created by Autistic people for Autistic people, this magazine has published the work of at least 40 different Autistic creatives.

In 2020-2021 *Autistics Aloud* completed the second year of the three-year *Lifespans* project series. Upcoming issues include 'Diagnosis: Formal & Self-Diagnosis/Discovery' and 'Dear Teacher – Past, Present and Future.'

First voice representation in media matters and the growth and national success of *Autistics Aloud* has been led by Editor-in-Chief, Patricia. Thank you for all your work in supporting the creative voices of Autistic Canadians.



“I’m a materials engineer studying for a master’s at Dalhousie (I basically just learn how to melt a lot of metals.) I adore animals, reading, science, and jigsaw puzzles. I was diagnosed late, and often I can’t say what I’m thinking or feeling but I can communicate well by writing! I love that I can connect to our community and share ideas through *Autistics Aloud*, even during the pandemic. I love reading about other people on the spectrum, and listening to their experiences and ideas. I’m really lucky to be part of this community.”

– **Danielle**, *Autistics Aloud* Contributor

“My experience with the PASS program has been extremely transformative in assisting me in my academic life. I have worked with a couple of eager and well-informed coordinators who went head-over-heels to find different options to approach university life challenges as well as daily improvements to my personal well-being. The program has opened my eyes to new attitudes and means of improving my mental state and I couldn’t be more thankful. I look forward to reconnecting with the program in the Fall.”

– Alex, PASS Student Participant

Building Tools for Success

Since its creation in 2016, **Post-Secondary Autism Support Services**, or PASS, has helped Autistic youth navigate the transition from high school to their early adult years. The primary goal of PASS is to support students in the development of skills that will lead to academic success and greater independence. Using a person-directed approach, the PASS program works to create plans that are unique to each individual’s needs and supports each person in creating the life that is right for them.

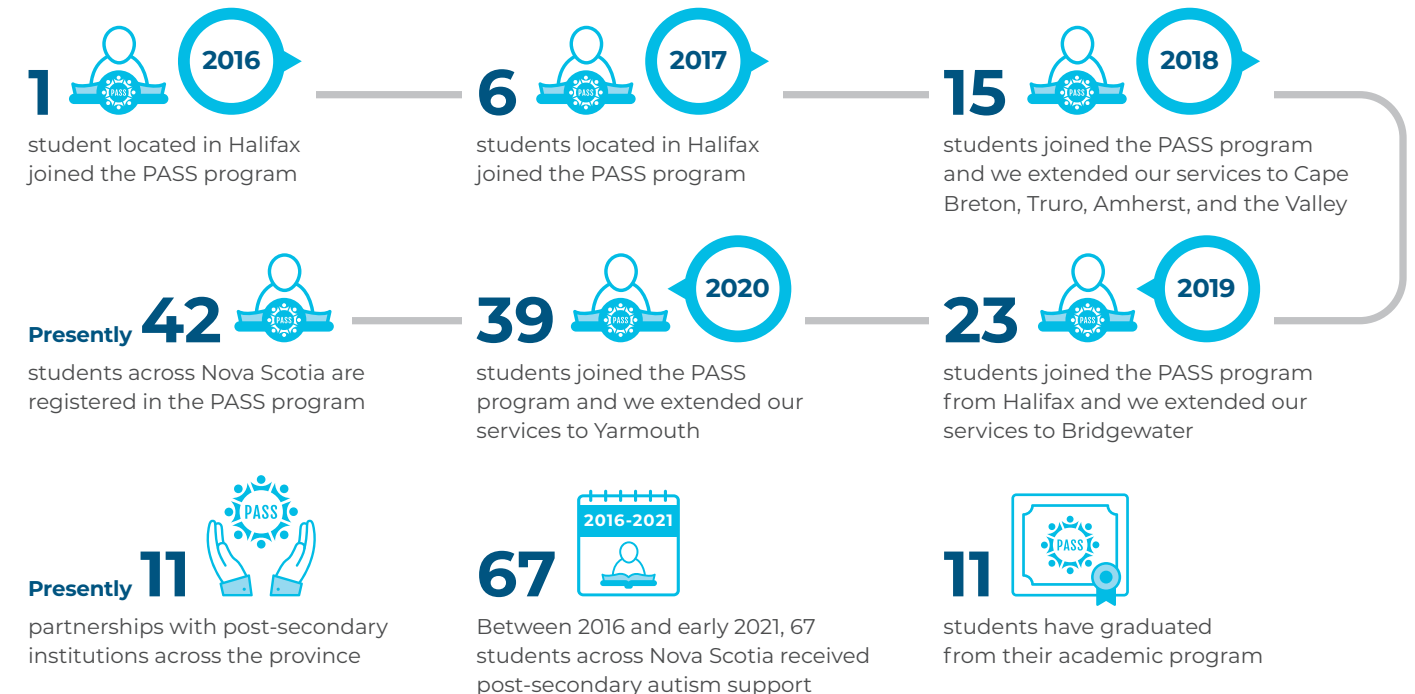
Working closely with post-secondary institution staff, faculty and student support services, PASS aims to share practices and an understanding of autism spectrum disorder that will lead to a deeper acceptance of autism and more inclusive settings for learners across the lifespan.

"Thanks to Post-Secondary Autism Support Services, or PASS, I'm seeing Alex grow from someone who didn't like to draw attention to himself or express his wants and needs to a person whose confidence is developing and who is beginning to advocate for himself. While I am so proud of him and the milestones he's reaching, what I'm most in awe of is the fact that he is proud of himself. I'm so grateful for the impact that PASS is having on Alex's life – thank you!"

– Parent of PASS Student Participant

PASS Program Timeline

In its first five years, PASS has experienced significant growth and program reach.



“In my role as a PASS Specialist, I support Autistic individuals in their post-secondary lives. Working with students and their families, I help to set goals and provide tools and techniques that will allow them to be successful. There are so many skills that just aren’t taught in the classroom; tools that are necessary for the transition into university or college. By meeting students where they are and determining with them what support they’ll need to meet their goals, PASS empowers participants to push through the challenges of this time in their life and celebrates each milestone they reach.” – PASS Specialist

Autism Nova Scotia's Ecosystem of Employment Education & Support

With generous funding and support from the Department of Labour and Advanced Education – Post-Secondary Accessibility Services and the Department of Community Services – Disability Support Program, we are able to provide an ecosystem of employment teaching and support for adults on the autism spectrum – Employment Support Group to Launch Pad/ EmploymentWorks pre-employment program to Career Quest job searching group to Employment Coaching to long-term paid employment opportunities that otherwise would not be possible.



EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT GROUP

Weekly, virtual discussion group for individuals at any stage of their employment journey.



A national initiative connecting job seekers to inclusive employers & systems of support within the community. The RWA team connects Autistic individuals/individuals on the spectrum who are looking for employment or post-secondary supports with partnered employers, and supports those employers with their inclusionary hiring goals and practices.

A Journey Through the Ecosystem

Meaningful employment can be a key part of a healthy, balanced life as it provides pride and satisfaction for the individual, as well as opportunities for important social connections, personal growth and greater financial independence.

In 2019, Hannah participated in her first Autism Nova Scotia program, LaunchPad – the initial phase of the organization's ecosystem of employment programming. Over the next two years, Hannah took part in CareerQuest, benefitted from on-the-job supports and secured long-term paid employment.

Amidst the COVID-19 openings and closures, Hannah has been working at Playdium, an entertainment and games venue in Dartmouth. When asked what she most enjoys about her role and how the supports from Autism Nova Scotia helped prepare her for the job, she said, “The fact that I’m able to do my job in a way that makes my managers and co-workers happy and that it has allowed me to push to do things I wouldn’t even think I would be able to do before.”



Hannah now shares her successes in her journey to long-term employment as a leader/coach in Autism Nova Scotia's employment programs. She credits her growing confidence with skills she

learned through the programs and cheers on her peers just beginning their employment journey with these words of advice:

Don't be discouraged, do your work to the best of your ability, and eventually you'll get to where you need to be if you keep believing in yourself! – Hannah, Program Participant



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“Employment Support Group has helped me understand that everybody – on the spectrum or not – has different points of view on how having a job or trying to get a job feels sometimes and that we can find ways to cope with all that.” – Program Participant

Shared Experiences, Shared Voices

Autism Nova Scotia is committed to a mission of understanding, acceptance and inclusion for Autistic individuals and is excited about the development of increased opportunities for first-voices in the organization's work.

The changes to office spaces, work routines, and the labour market resulting from COVID-19 highlighted the need for a safe space where Autistic individuals could seek support with the unique employment challenges of the past year.

The Employment Support Group, virtually led by Autistic facilitators, brings together Autistic adults to discuss challenges and successes around finding and maintaining employment. The group is guided by the principles of 'equal work for equal pay' and 'nothing about us without us.'

“

“The Employment Support Group helped with adapting to COVID-19 and work.”

– Program Participant

“Talking with the other participants in the group has helped me improve my resume and has given me a good idea of what to expect in the workforce.”

– Program Participant

”



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In Our Words: Employment Support Group (ESG)

Our ESG team held a weekly zoom call and helped give a voice to people to talk about their employment experiences and questions. We created an open space to provide support for those who needed it, and to hear about their experiences in the workplace. Some people had been laid off, some were looking for their first job, but everyone was welcome to join and ask questions.



JESSICA

"Including other voices and quiet people in the conversation."



MATT

"Getting to know new people and using my sense of humour to help others."

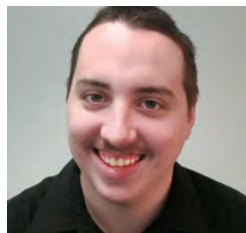
Employment Program Highlights

TRAACE Piloted in South Shore Schools

TRAACE (Transition Readiness and Autism Community Employment) is an adapted curriculum for the Career Development 11 and Workplace Health and Safety 11 classes taught in Nova Scotia high schools. The TRAACE curriculum focuses on pre-employment skills development and learning which, combined with volunteer work placements in their communities, allows Autistic students/students with autism across Nova Scotia to better prepare themselves for the transition out of high school and into their chosen post-graduation pathway. TRAACE was piloted in 2020-21 in schools in Nova Scotia's South Shore Regional Centre for Education. When COVID-19 restrictions ease, TRAACE will be rolled out in other areas of the province. Many thanks to the South Shore Regional Centre for Education for hosting and supporting TRAACE's pilot phase in its schools.

Cape Breton Region Kicks Off LaunchPad Sydney

Last year, Autism Nova Scotia's **LaunchPad** program expanded into the Cape Breton Region with the creation of 'LaunchPad Sydney.' The program is designed to help Autistic individuals develop the skills they will need to enter the workforce through classroom lessons and real-life work experiences.

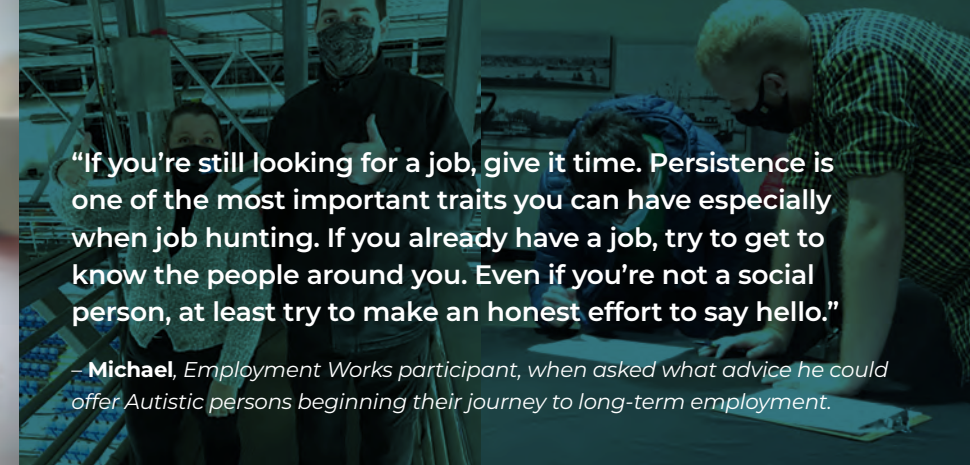


"I really enjoyed meeting other people at LaunchPad Sydney. The work experience was awesome. My favourite tasks were helping the different businesses preparing and setting up for events." – Shawn, LaunchPad Participant



"If you're still looking for a job, give it time. Persistence is one of the most important traits you can have especially when job hunting. If you already have a job, try to get to know the people around you. Even if you're not a social person, at least try to make an honest effort to say hello."

– **Michael**, *Employment Works* participant, when asked what advice he could offer Autistic persons beginning their journey to long-term employment.



EmploymentWorks Expands to Pictou County & South Shore Chapters

Autism Nova Scotia focuses on expanding supports across the province, more and more programs are being implemented beyond the Halifax Region. In 2020-2021, **EmploymentWorks** (EW) was launched in Pictou County and the South Shore, joining the program's other rural locations in the Annapolis Valley and Truro. The 24-week, evidence-informed program provides employment preparedness training and experiential learning and work experience for Autistic adults. In the past year alone, nearly 40 individuals benefited from the program which was adapted to online delivery and virtual employment simulations to meet COVID-19 restrictions.



Career Quest Launched in New Brunswick

While our organization's mandate is provincial, recent years have seen Autism Nova Scotia lend its support and expertise to organizations and autism communities throughout Atlantic Canada. In 2020, we partnered with **Autism Connects Fredericton** and **Autism Resources Miramichi**. Thanks to funding from Ready, Willing & Able, our person-centred job searching support group **Career Quest** is now available for Autistic adults in New Brunswick.



Partnerships for Accessible Workplaces



Ready, Willing & Able (RWA) is a national partnership of Inclusion Canada, the **Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorders Alliance** (CASDA) and its member organizations. The aim of this partnership is to connect Autistic individuals with employers

and support employers in providing workplaces that understand and accept autism and Autistic employees. Last year, Autism Nova Scotia's RWA outreach coordinator contacted Jordan Robb, a human resources generalist with **Ubisoft's Halifax** studio. Ubisoft is a global online game development company with nearly 20,000 employees across 55 countries.

Robb was immediately interested in working with Autism Nova Scotia to form an employment partnership through RWA. "I quickly learned that

partnering with RWA would offer a lot of benefits. Besides being a resource for new hires, RWA has offered great advice and feedback when it comes to making job postings and the hiring practice more accessible," says Robb.

Shortly after their initial discussions around RWA, Ubisoft made a job offer to a recent Computer Science graduate on the autism spectrum who was recommended by Autism Nova Scotia's RWA outreach coordinator. While the successful candidate was thrilled to have gained a well-paid full-time job with a global tech company, Ubisoft was just as happy with their new hire and the supports offered through RWA. "Our team here is excited to have her start – new people bring fresh perspectives, problem solving skills and creative ideas," says Robb. "We want to create a studio as diverse as those who play our games."

© 2020 Ubisoft Halifax

RWA's Employment Recovery Program

COVID-19 and its impacts on society have further revealed the gaps that have existed in workplaces for Autistic people and persons with intellectual disabilities. Inclusion Canada and the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorder Alliance (CASDA), in collaboration with Ready, Willing & Able, created an initiative aimed at improving inclusion through addressing hiring and support needs that emerged in response to COVID-19. The Employment Recovery Project provided funding for an Autism Nova Scotia-led program, the Hub and Spoke Sharing Network, that created a virtual community designed to build agency capacity and drive the development and application of innovative methods of supporting job seekers and employees with autism or intellectual disabilities.

Exploring the Spectrum Expands Autism Training & Education Provincially

In working toward our vision of a world where autism is understood and accepted, Autism Nova Scotia devotes time, resources, and expertise in educating service providers on how to best support Autistic individuals so they can live their fullest lives.

One such initiative is the organization's training arm, 'Exploring the Spectrum' (ETS). Launched in 2018, ETS is our second social enterprise developed with a focus on providing training and building community capacity for professionals, organizations, agencies, and any service providers who support Autistic individuals.

This year, ETS saw a period of significant growth in demand for training across the province. Our team provided province-wide training in collaboration with the Nova Scotia Career Development Association (NSCDA) to deliver a robust and customizable curriculum surrounding strategies and best practices to use when supporting Autistic persons accessing employment support services.

"This training is important for societal growth. Helping others understand that acknowledging the way people learn changes how they perform." – NSCDA Trainee

With support from Ready, Willing & Able, ETS is developing a course with the addition of our Online Education Training Coordinator, 'Autism and Employment Supports 101' for free to targeted employment supports agency partners across Atlantic Canada. After the pilot phase, this course will be adapted and offered on our e-campus platform for anyone supporting Autistic individuals in employment.

A key milestone for the education sector saw ETS collaborating with the Department of

Education and Early Childhood Development as well as the Tri-City County and Halifax Regional Centres for Education on a pilot project to deliver autism coaching and training for teacher assistants.

In the coming year, Autism Nova Scotia is looking forward to working with Indigenous organizations and consultants to develop a First Nations Respite

training program. Made possible in part by funding from the Department of Health and Wellness, this training will respond to a growing demand within First Nation communities for culturally responsive and appropriate respite supports for Indigenous families with loved ones on the autism spectrum.

Volunteers & Students

Many of Autism Nova Scotia's programs wouldn't be possible without the commitment of our students and volunteers. While their contributions are invaluable to our work and the individuals and families we serve, our organization provides students and volunteers hands-on experience that helps them to achieve personal, professional and academic goals.

Although opportunities for volunteers and students were limited due to Public Health restrictions and protocols, with some creativity and flexibility, we continued to benefit from their support. We are so grateful for the wonderful volunteers and students who bring new energy, ideas, and skills to our programs and enrich the lives of Autistic Nova Scotians.

"I love the hands-on experience Autism Nova Scotia provides. Although I am a student, the organization's team makes me feel like my opinions and contributions are valuable to the development of Autism Nova Scotia."

– Baillie, Child & Youth Care Student, NSCC



"The D&D program is always the highlight of my week. Seeing the players work together and laugh together is an amazing experience."

– Geoff, Virtual Dungeons & Dragons Volunteer



Volunteer Contributions

Despite having limited in-person programming for over half a year, the Annapolis Valley chapter's group of dedicated volunteers logged in **over 950 hours in 2020 alone**.

Thank you to all our volunteers at every one of our regional autism centres across Nova Scotia for supporting the delivery of our programs and services throughout the pandemic. We could not have made it through this year without all of you!

951 Volunteer Hours in the Annapolis Valley Region



Leadership Opportunities Through Student Practicums

An essential component of Autism Nova Scotia's mandate is our student placement program. It is an honour to be a part of our students' academic and professional growth, and the organization benefits from their involvement. Creating opportunities for students to work alongside staff in observing, participating, facilitating, and developing programs allows them to meet their goals and helps us to further develop an understanding and acceptance of autism in future professionals.

Hours of Student Support Breakdown 2020-2021

- 32% Social & Community Inclusion
- 23% Family Support & Respite
- 16% Post-Secondary Autism Support Services
- 16% Employment Supports
- 11% Person-Directed Planning
- 1% Exploring the Spectrum



LAUNCHPAD SUCCESS



Total number of LaunchPad graduates



58

Paid employment outcomes



Entrepreneurial ventures launched



10

Enrollment in post-secondary



73%

Employment outcome

Crafting Connections

In March 2020, the Halifax Seaport Farmers' Market suddenly closed with the arrival of COVID-19 to Nova Scotia. Without a physical home to sell its products, **The Pearl's LaunchPad** program was forced to move entirely online. The pre-employment program's participants adopted new roles as Brand Ambassadors and took to The Pearl's web store and social media platforms to help the social enterprise continue its sales during the pandemic. The 'new' team of Brand Ambassadors earned 25% commission from each sale they made online and developed essential skills for the workforce.



"The Pearl was a great work experience and I learned a lot. The most valuable thing that I learned through my work experience with The Pearl was learning to be more charismatic. It helped when dealing with customers and making the videos. My favourite part about being a Brand Ambassador was making the promotional videos. I loved how they turned out."

– Jarod, LaunchPad Participant, The Pearl's Brand Ambassador

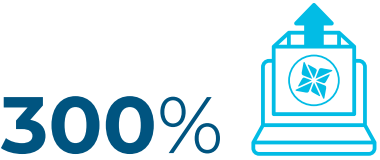


The Pearl, now in its tenth year, supports the autism community by providing opportunities for neurodivergent artists to showcase their creations within the community. This year, The Pearl ran a contest inviting the Autistic community to enter a design for a tote bag. The response to the contest was impressive and The Pearl received many beautiful and diverse submissions. Julianna Brewer designed the winning concept titled *I Belong, You Belong, We Belong*, which sold out on The Pearl's website in less than 12 hours!

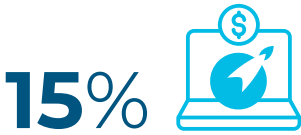
Pictured in photo on right: Julianna Brewer proudly showcasing her winning tote bag design.



ONLINE SALES A SUCCESS!



Online sales **increased by 300%** over the **previous year**



of online sales were **generated by LaunchPad Brand Ambassadors**



Our sales-savvy Brand Ambassadors earned more than **\$475 in commission**

Providing Respite for Caregivers

“Thank you so much for your concern and support. COVID isolates us as families, but parenting children on the autism spectrum can add to the loneliness.” – Respite Recipient

“I was amazed with the resiliency of families and individuals. They became creative and accessed respite virtually with their respite providers. It was important to maintain a connection in these times and they certainly did what they could.”

– Anna, Respite Coordinator

Growth of Respite Database

In collaboration with the Nova Scotia Respite Partnership, we conducted a bilingual survey to examine how we could better support families and individuals, especially during COVID-19. From these results, we have begun expanding and enhancing our Respite Database to better respond to the needs of families.

Here's the significant growth our database experienced over the past year:



52
new families registered on the Respite Database



74
We received applications from 74 new respite providers on the database



857 Participants
Autism Nova Scotia's central Respite Database now contains 857 participants in the Halifax region

Strengthening Sibling Roles & Relationships

Over the years, we've learned that a vital aspect of supporting Autistic individuals is wrapping our supports and services around their family and/or loved ones. This year, we launched **SibsCONNECT**, a play-based educational program for children with a sibling on the autism spectrum. The program aims to support neurotypical siblings in helping them maintain a positive outlook on their role in their families, while encouraging the continuing understanding and advocacy for their Autistic sibling!



3 Cohorts
In the last year, Autism Nova Scotia worked with 3 cohorts of the SibsConnect program



3x
Since launch, interest and registrations have tripled

100% Satisfaction Rate



Families who have attended have provided consistently high feedback

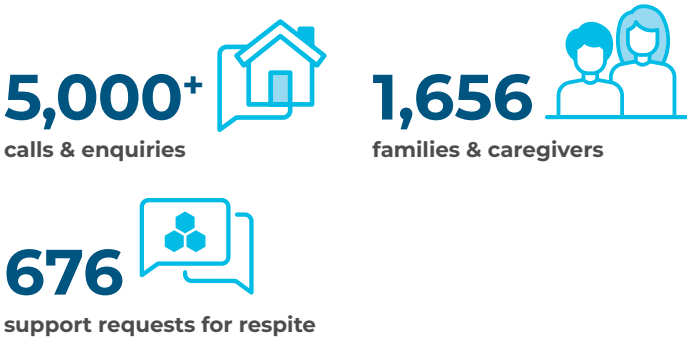
“Their relationship has vastly improved since he has been involved with SibsCONNECT, all due to his efforts and what he has learned. He now actively involves and greets his brother. Before he didn't get a response so he didn't think he needed to bother.”

– Caregiver of SibsCONNECT participant



Staying Connected with Families

Family Support continues to be a service in high demand among our clients. In the Halifax region alone, we fielded more than **5,000+ calls and enquiries**, and worked with **1,656 families and caregivers** in need of support. In addition, there were **676 support requests** for respite.



Despite the sudden onset of restrictions and limitations brought on by COVID-19, our Family Support department didn't experience any gaps in the delivery of our services throughout this past year.

In 2020, Autism Nova Scotia's Family Support department quickly developed resources for individuals and families dealing with the stressors and new realities of living during the pandemic. These resources included social stories around COVID-19 related topics, handwashing guides, colouring pages, virtual interactive field trips, and more.

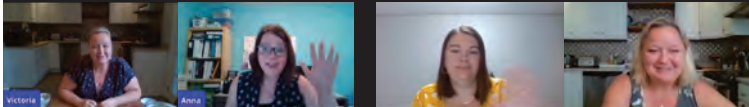
Supporting Adults on the Spectrum

Traditionally, there are significant barriers for adults seeking a formal diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder. Currently, Nova Scotians do not have a publicly funded route to diagnosis once they are adults.

To help alleviate some of the financial burden that accompanies the diagnosis process, Autism Nova Scotia received a \$40,000 grant from the provincial government's Department of Health and Wellness to connect adults with qualified and experienced psychologists to obtain a formal assessment for, and diagnosis of autism.

2020 Virtual Summer Programming for Families

With the assistance of the Program team, Family Support developed a creative way for families to receive support and programming last spring and summer. Livestreamed on Facebook, Virtual Family Sessions were held bi-weekly and brought a variety of activities such as music therapy, stretching and meditation, and bubble making virtually into the homes of Autistic children and their families.



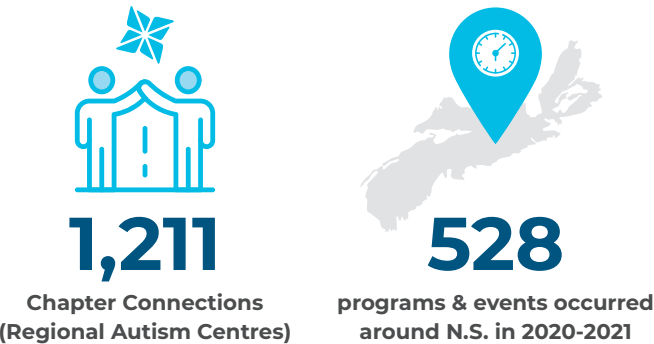
Connections Across the Province

The number of events and information sessions delivered by Autism Nova Scotia during 2020-2021 was understandably impacted by COVID-19.

While there were decreases in events held throughout most of the year, we saw a significant increase of 77.7% in events and programs offered around the province from the second quarter in 2020 (during the first lockdown) to the first quarter in 2021 at the end of the fiscal year.

Furthermore, when comparing the last quarter of 2020-2021 with the same time period in the previous fiscal year (pre-pandemic), we saw an overall 10% increase in events offered across the province.

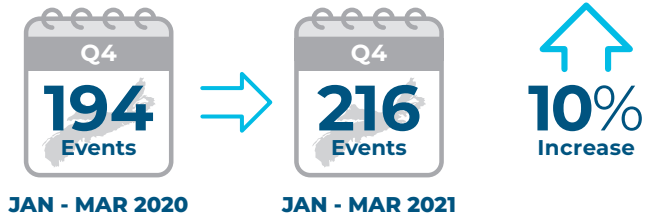
This incredible recuperation of our programming and services hints at the recovery of all our Regional Autism Centres' scope of services and support as we move closer to the post-pandemic era.



Comparison of events across Nova Scotia during first lockdown vs. end of year quarter:



Comparison of events in Q4 of 2020 to Q4 of 2021:



A Place for *Everyone* to Enjoy

Inclusive Play Park

Autism Nova Scotia has partnered with the Region of Queens Municipality to build an inclusive playground in the town of Liverpool in the spring of 2022.

Currently there are no public outdoor recreation spaces on the south shore that are inclusive of disabled persons' needs, including people with autism. This playground will be built next to the Queens Place Emera Centre and Mersey Skate Park. This site is also located near Queens Manor senior citizens' residence, as well as group homes and residences for persons with disabilities, which will make this a full-family, all-abilities recreation destination.

The playground will include features such as a wheelchair accessible splash pad, wheelchair accessible swings and merry-go-round, and other fun inclusive playground equipment and features.

Creating the ideal space for the whole community to come together, the playground will allow children, youth, and adults of all ages and abilities to enjoy safe and healthy outdoor recreation.

To date, we have raised over \$350,000 for this exciting project, but we still have a way to go! If you would like to support building an inclusive playground in the south shore, please contact Autism Nova Scotia at giving@autismns.ca.



"Several years ago, a small group of people had a dream of creating a play park in rural Nova Scotia in order for people of all ages and abilities to enjoy fun in a safe outdoor environment.

That vision resulted in the creation of a partnership between Autism Nova Scotia, Region of Queens Municipality and private donors. Our community is very proud of this tremendous feat by a group of determined individuals.

How fitting that a "playground for everyone", inspired by and fundraised by our community, is almost ready to break ground in spring 2022." – Mayor Darlene Norman, *Region of Queens*



Autism Nova Scotia Shines with the Support of Music

In November 2020, Leona Burkey hosted the 6th annual **Shine Blue** concert in support of Autism Nova Scotia. The idea of the 'Shine Blue Show' first originated in 2015 when singer-songwriter Leona Burkey released a record titled, *Wave Theory* inspired by life with her young son on the autism spectrum. Quickly the show become a yearly tradition with proceeds raised to directly support Autism Nova Scotia's programs and services.

This year, Leona and her band hosted two shows for the first time ever. One of the shows was dedicated to supporting her local region's chapter in Strait Area. She shared the stage with **Shine Blue** faithfuls Jon Cornwall and David Bradshaw, who both donated their time and talent, as well as special guests, Tom Rich and Phil Sedore.

"Celebrating neurodiversity is a big theme in my world and raising funds and awareness through these Shine Blue Shows is so dear to my heart. Special thanks to the Carleton and Bras D'Or Lakes Inn for being such fine and supportive host venues - despite covid hiccups we had our biggest year yet for funds raised in support of Autism Nova Scotia and the Strait Area Chapter. We look forward to the 7th Annual in the fall of 2021!"

– Leona Burkey, *Singer-Songwriter*

\$3,500

Total funds raised

\$1,350

raised for Strait Area Chapter

\$2,150

raised for Central Chapter





Stewart McKelvey's financial support has been key to helping Autism Nova Scotia make significant strides towards serving the Autistic community and those who love them.

We are so grateful to Stewart McKelvey for their dedication and commitment.

"Stewart McKelvey is proud of its long history of support for Autism Nova Scotia and its mission of building understanding, acceptance and inclusion for all. With values closely aligned with our own and a shared culture of hard work and innovation, we know that the important work of Autism Nova Scotia will have a lasting impact on the lives of individuals on the Autism Spectrum and their families across the province."

– Lydia Bugden, Partner, Stewart McKelvey

Our Gratitude



in lieu of being able to attend the cancelled event.

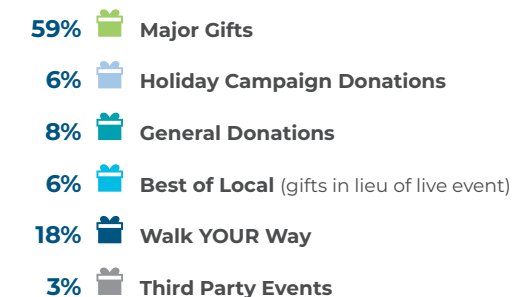
Thank you so much for your ongoing generosity!

While we were unable to host our signature fundraising gala, **Best of Local**, many event supporters made direct gifts to Autism Nova Scotia in 2020. Of all funds raised in the last fiscal year, 6% were made

Individual & Corporate Giving

Last year was a year like no other, but donors stepped up and did so much to help our community survive and thrive.

Even though we couldn't come together for events last year, you adapted and showed your support in new ways – and we can't thank you enough!



When you donate to Autism Nova Scotia, you can choose to:

- Support Autism Nova Scotia's work across the province
- Designate your gift to your favourite Autism Nova Scotia program
- Direct your donation to the Autism Nova Scotia Chapter in your region
- Celebrate a special person or occasion with a gift in their honour
- Pay your respects with a donation in memory of a friend or loved one

To make a gift, visit autismnovascotia.ca/donate; call **902-446-4995**; or email giving@autismns.ca

Why We Give

"We give because of our eight-year-old daughter, Ruby, who was diagnosed at two-and-a-half, and her six-year-old sister Clara. Our girls are an inspiring example of how our children, whether autistic or neurotypical, can flourish with the appropriate guidance and supports.

When our daughter was diagnosed, the first call we made was to Autism Nova Scotia. They patiently listened to our concerns and fears and provided us with some resources to explore. That was a call we will never forget.

We see the wonderful initiatives Autism Nova Scotia is doing in our community. Providing employment opportunities, workshops, camps etc. We can see that donations are being put to good use.

We need a strong advocate for those on the autism spectrum, and their families and friends. By donating to Autism Nova Scotia, you are supporting an organization that is advocating every day for understanding, acceptance and inclusion."

– **Rayonie**, mother of Ruby and Clara



Pictured in photo: Rui, Rayonie, Ruby, and Clara Ferreira

"When our daughter was diagnosed, the first call we made was to Autism Nova Scotia. They patiently listened to our concerns and fears and provided us with some resources to explore. That was a call we will never forget."

"We believe Autism Nova Scotia has made a huge difference in the lives of many families that would otherwise have very little access to these programs."



Pictured in photo: Dave Reynolds, Kyle and Brandon Avery, and Brenda Reynolds

"For nearly twenty years now, my husband and I have been involved with the autism community. When our twin grandsons were first diagnosed, we knew we were going to be as supportive as possible.

We believe Autism Nova Scotia has made a huge difference in the lives of many families that would otherwise have very little access to these programs. That is why we donate to this very worthwhile organization. The people who provide the services, organize, work behind the scenes are extraordinary, dedicated folks that deserve our sincere thanks and support."

– **Brenda**, grandmother of Kyle and Brandon

Thank you to families like the Ferreiros and the Reynolds/Averys who give back to Autism Nova Scotia in so many ways. It's because of you that we do the work we do.

It's because of you that we **can** do the work we do.

In Memoriam

IN MEMORY

- Sylvio Amino

Braeden Kyle Bannister

Arthurene Bell

Frederick Boyd

Donna Cadegan

Robert Scott Carroll

Henry Clothier

Meagan Blaire Comeau

Sub-Lt Abbigail L. Cowbrough

Jack Craig

Mary Ethel Craig

Donald Croft

Shawn Graham Currie

Edith Ebsary

Amy Farnell

Sonya Fisher

Barb Foley

Jacob Grant

Ann Hutt

Rosa E. Kovacs
- Nancy Elizabeth Logue

Alex and Selena Lovell

Kelly MacPhee

Professor Arnie & Norma McAllister

Alice McCulloch

Jimmy Mitchell

Caitlin Morris

Dale Moses

Sheelagh Nolan

Shirley Pearce

Joan Pink

Frank Powell

Florence Plumridge

Cpt. Heidi Stevenson

Merlyn Sauntry

Deker and Brenda Taylor

Sheila Trépanier

Adriana van Oirschot

Theresa Warren

Barbara Zwicker

LEAVE A LEGACY SUPPORTERS

- Cynthia Carroll

Edwin C. Harris

(in memory of Patricia Harris)

David Martin

Deker & Brenda Taylor

February 20, 2021

Deker Taylor, age 31, and his mother Brenda Taylor, sadly passed away in a fire at their home in Digby, Nova Scotia on February 20, 2021.

Deker was well known as the friendly giant, as he liked to watch over all the children who knew and loved him. He was well known for his love of wrestling and cars; you wouldn't see him without an action figure or Hot Wheels car in his hands. Deker was loved by everyone who knew him, but the special bond between him and his mother was like no other.

Brenda was well known in town for delivering the paper for many years and her work at McDonald's. She had a heart of gold and showed that to her family, friends or a stranger on the street. She also had a love for shopping at Frenchy's and Bethany Bargain Bin, but anyone who knew her knew her one true passion in her life was her son, Deker, who joined her in getting her wings on the same day.

We remember these precious members of our community, and wish peace to their family and friends.

Tribute Donors

Giving a donation in honour of or in memory of someone special is a thoughtful way to recognize those you care about and make a postive impact.

Our gratitude goes out to the generous donors who gave tribute gifts on behalf of loved ones and everyone who donated in their names between April 1, 2020 and March 31, 2021.

IN HONOUR

- Ainsley

All of the Staff at Autism Nova Scotia

Carol Angell, Justin & Family

Owen Anstey

Danny and Gaby Badour

Junior and Cathy Bolt

Brenda and the boys

Chris & Leona Burkey

Bill and Bonnie Cameron

Cynthia Carroll

Kathy Chaddick

Alistair Craggs

Liam Conrad

Heather Coulter

Joan Craig

Lian Cunningham

Harrison Czapalay

Dennis & Sheree d'Entremont

Payton Dicks
- Aiden Donahue

Vicky Ettinger and Team All in the Family

Adriana Francis

Kobe Francis and Keiland Stevens

Allistair Fraser

Ally Garber

Grammie and Grandpa Bob

Beryl Hatt

Lisa Hayden

Dr. Hermann High

Allison Jones

Cameron and Evan Lawrence

Gerald Patrick LeBlanc

Luke

Haley Lundy

Pam MacIlreith

Tiffany MacInnis

Diana Magliaro-Gallant
- John and Laureen Maw

Melanie and Krista

Chase Newton

North Nova Education Centre (NNEC)

Morgan Oulton

Owen

Papa and Nana Susan

Stéphane Piccinin

Rachel Pink

Jake Robertson

Steen Sollows

Ophelia Stone

Lauren Sutherland

Ronald & Sharon Verge

Connor Taverner

Jennifer Whytock

Yinhui and Changjing

The Hewitt Foundation – A Tradition of Support

The Hewitt Foundation is a private Canadian foundation established in 2017 by the Hewitt family. The Foundation's purpose is to help bring about meaningful and sustainable social, economic and cultural change by granting, investing and collaborating with organizations and partners. Today, the Hewitt Foundation is one of Canada's largest private charitable foundations.

The Hewitt family, their businesses, and their Foundation have been valued friends to Autism Nova Scotia since 2006, and they have provided instrumental support for some of our most important initiatives.

In 2020, the Hewitt Foundation made an incredible five-year pledge to support our province-wide delivery of critical programs and services. Their commitment has enabled significant expansion of every one of our regional autism centres, thereby ensuring Autistic Nova Scotians and their loved ones can access the resources they need no matter what community they call home.

In addition to their contribution towards our service delivery growth, the Hewitt Foundation has also made a generous donation to empower Autism Nova Scotia's digital expansion. This gift will allow Autism Nova Scotia to meet the emergent needs for an accessible, user-friendly digital home, which we look forward to unveiling in 2022.

Our endless gratitude goes to the Hewitt Foundation and the wonderful family who started it all. Your legacy of support is changing the lives of Autistic Nova Scotians and their families across our province and beyond, and we cannot thank you enough.



Thank You!

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