



**autism**  
NOVA SCOTIA

**20** YEAR ANNIVERSARY

**ANNUAL  
REPORT  
2022-2023**

*Trailblazing* Together







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Autism Nova Scotia acknowledges that we are in  
Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the  
Mi'kmaq. We are all treaty people.

We also acknowledge that people of African descent  
have been in Nova Scotia for over 400 years and we  
honour and offer gratitude to those ancestors of African  
descent who came before us to this land.

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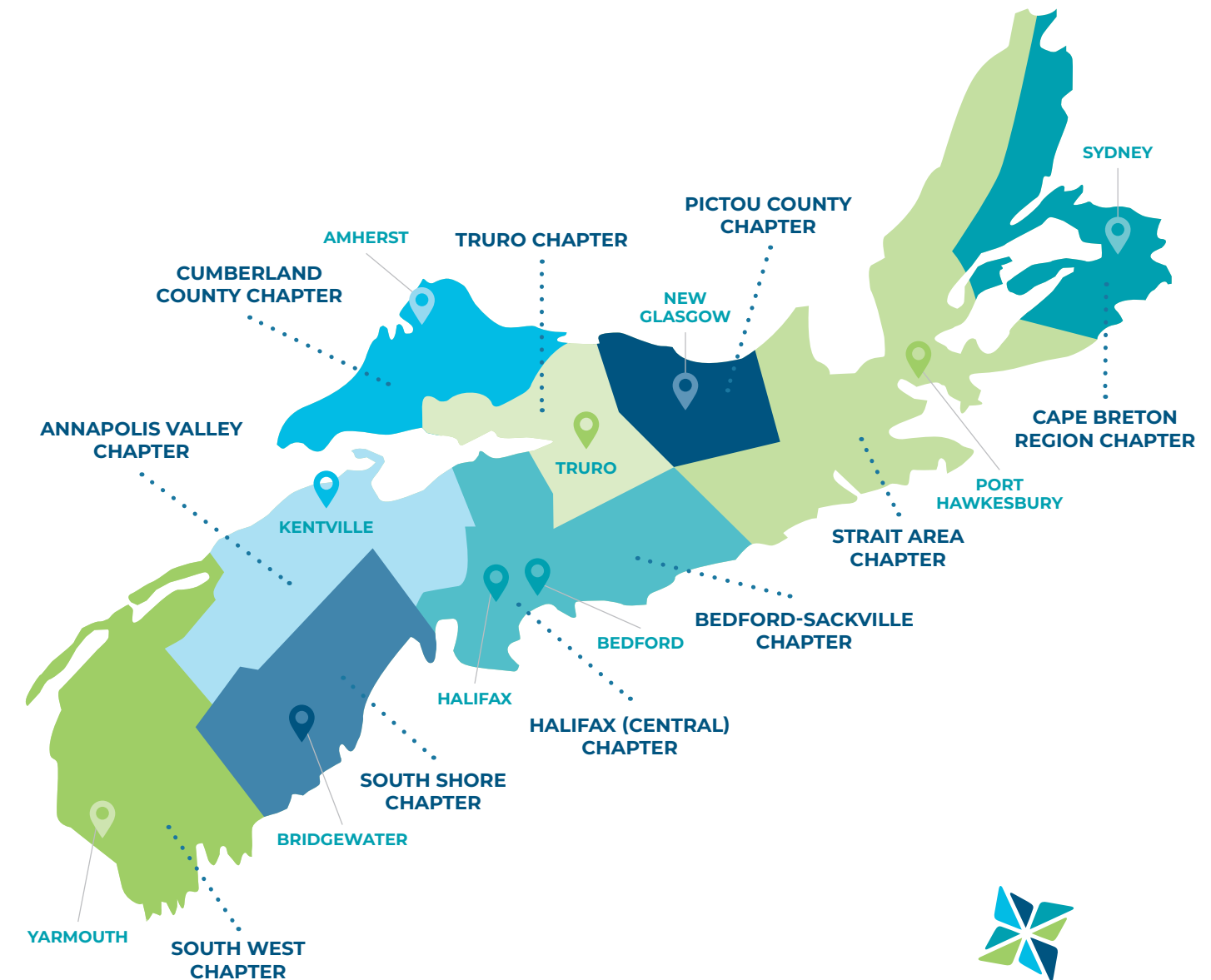
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Nova Scotia Operational Stress Injury Clinic,  
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**Dr. Robert Strang**

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## Trailblazing Together

As we reflect on last year and wrap up our 20th anniversary, we can honestly say it has been an incredible year for the autism community and our organization. Two decades ago, Autism Nova Scotia was founded by Joan and Jack Craig, and we would not exist today without their unwavering support and tenacious commitment. It is because of Joan, Jack, and trailblazers like them across the province that Autism Nova Scotia has grown into a robust organization that supports Autistic people across the lifespan, and their families.

In this past year, opportunities and possibilities have continued to expand. We are happy to share some of the highlights:

- With the support of the provincial government, QuickStart Nova Scotia, our

parent-mediated coaching program for toddlers, ages 12-31 months, expanded across the province. Since the launch of QuickStart Nova Scotia in 2018, 195 children in the Halifax Regional Municipality have been enrolled to astounding success. With the expansion, we will now support more than 100 additional children in the coming year alone.

- Pinwheel Wellness Centre (PWC) is Nova Scotia's first and only mental health support centre for Autistic adults supporting people across the province both in-person and virtually. With positive feedback from both those in the Autism community and the healthcare system, PWC is changing the way Autistic people are supported in their mental health journeys.

- As a local delivery partner in Halifax, we experienced strong growth in the Ready, Willing and Able (RWA) program, a successful employment initiative for Autistics and/or people with an intellectual disability. Thanks to a recent federal investment into the program, Autism Nova Scotia has expanded RWA program delivery to include the region of Sydney, Cape Breton with a designated position that works with employers to promote inclusive hiring.
- Autism Nova Scotia became an Independent Living Support (ILS) service provider in late 2022. As an ILS provider, Autism Nova Scotia promotes independence, self-reliance, security, and social inclusion and helps people achieve their personal goals.
- After the announcement of a federal autism strategy in early 2023 and the recent passing of Bill-207, prioritizing a provincial strategy is essential. We are very encouraged by the federal government's commitment and will continue to work with provincial leaders to prioritize an autism strategy for Nova Scotia to ensure equity and inclusion across the province.

Though we have spent this past year celebrating our organization's rich history, our true focus is on the future: building an inclusive Nova Scotia, amplifying the voices of our Autistic community, and ensuring that everyone can live their absolute best life as we trailblaze a path forward together.

Sincerely,

**Cynthia Carroll**  
Executive Director



**Dave Nicholson**  
FCMA, Board Chair



**“We are excited to lead the change and growth Nova Scotia needs, together, for the next twenty years and well into the future.”**

”



# Trailblazing Together Into the Future

We will continue to advocate for investments in autism supports and services across the lifespan, collaborate with the autism community and other organizations to ensure equitable access for everyone across the province well into the future.



## 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.



## Our Strategic Pillars

Delivering Innovative Education & Training • Advocating with the Autism Community  
Building Capacity in Our Communities • Programming Excellence • Legacy Planning



## Core Values

Core values are used to determine the overall approach of an organization's work. Over the next two years, Autism Nova Scotia will continue to incorporate inclusion, respect, collaboration, acceptance, and courage into our day-to-day activities and our longer-term projects to achieve our vision.



INCLUSION



COLLABORATION



ACCEPTANCE



RESPECT



COURAGE



# Advocating with the Community

## Provincial Autism Strategy

To ensure that individuals and families in the province are receiving the services and supports they need on a day-to-day basis, a provincial autism strategy is key. Autism Nova Scotia believes that this strategy must be heavily informed by first-voice and lived experience.

A first step in creating this strategy is to convene cross-governmental departments to talk about the current investments and gaps in autism supports and services across the lifespan in Nova Scotia. Working together will be essential for the strategy to form the foundation of a working framework and partnership between government departments, community, and most importantly Autistic individuals and their families.

In the meantime, Autism Nova Scotia will continue to engage with government and policy-makers to develop crucial autism strategies, programs, and resources.



“I want to see a Provincial Autism Strategy for Nova Scotia. Having the right supports in place is key to helping all Nova Scotians with Autism live their best life and a Provincial Strategy ensures support and financial programs are there for all Autism families.”

– Ethan Rekunyk

## Inclusive Education

Autism Nova Scotia recognizes the essential needs of Autistic children and youth in our education system are not being fully realized.

We are concerned that post-secondary transition outcomes and experiential learning opportunities for employment and independent living after high school for Autistic people are not on par with their peers.

We are committed to working with education centres to support capacity building in these areas to ensure more favourable transition outcomes for students moving towards community, post-secondary and employment opportunities after high school and ultimately people living full lives.

## Equitable Access for Everyone

While Autism Nova Scotia has experienced incredible growth over the last 20 years, allowing us to support Autistic individuals across the lifespan, we recognize more work needs to be done to address the gaps in supports and services in both rural and urban areas.

With more than 32,000 Autistic individuals in Nova Scotia, there are growing demands on the services and systems in our province that present challenges around equitable access to supports and services for all ages.

We are fully committed to inclusion for Autistic Nova Scotians of all ages, and the families and people who love and support them.





## Accessible Resource Hub

Since 2019, Autism Nova Scotia has been home to the Maritime Hub for the **Autism and/or Intellectual Disability Knowledge Exchange Network** (AIDE). With six hubs across the country, AIDE aims to provide Autistic individuals and people with intellectual disabilities and their families/caregivers with up-to-date resources.

Through our Maritime Hub Coordinator, information and supports are shared with the broader community including families, clinicians, educators, health authorities, autism specialists, and organizations across the four Atlantic provinces. Over the past year, AIDE has supported Canadians with referrals and webinars on a variety of topics including Autism & Mental Health, QuickStart Nova Scotia: Helping Parents Get a Head Start, and Person Directed Planning: Supports on Building a Good life.

Autism Nova Scotia has also developed toolkits and conducted additional webinars pertaining to a variety of sexuality educational resources for Caregivers. Over the last year, our Maritime Hub Coordinator has uploaded over 100 community programs to the AIDE Asset Map including parenting resources, recreational programs and clinical programs within the Atlantic provinces.



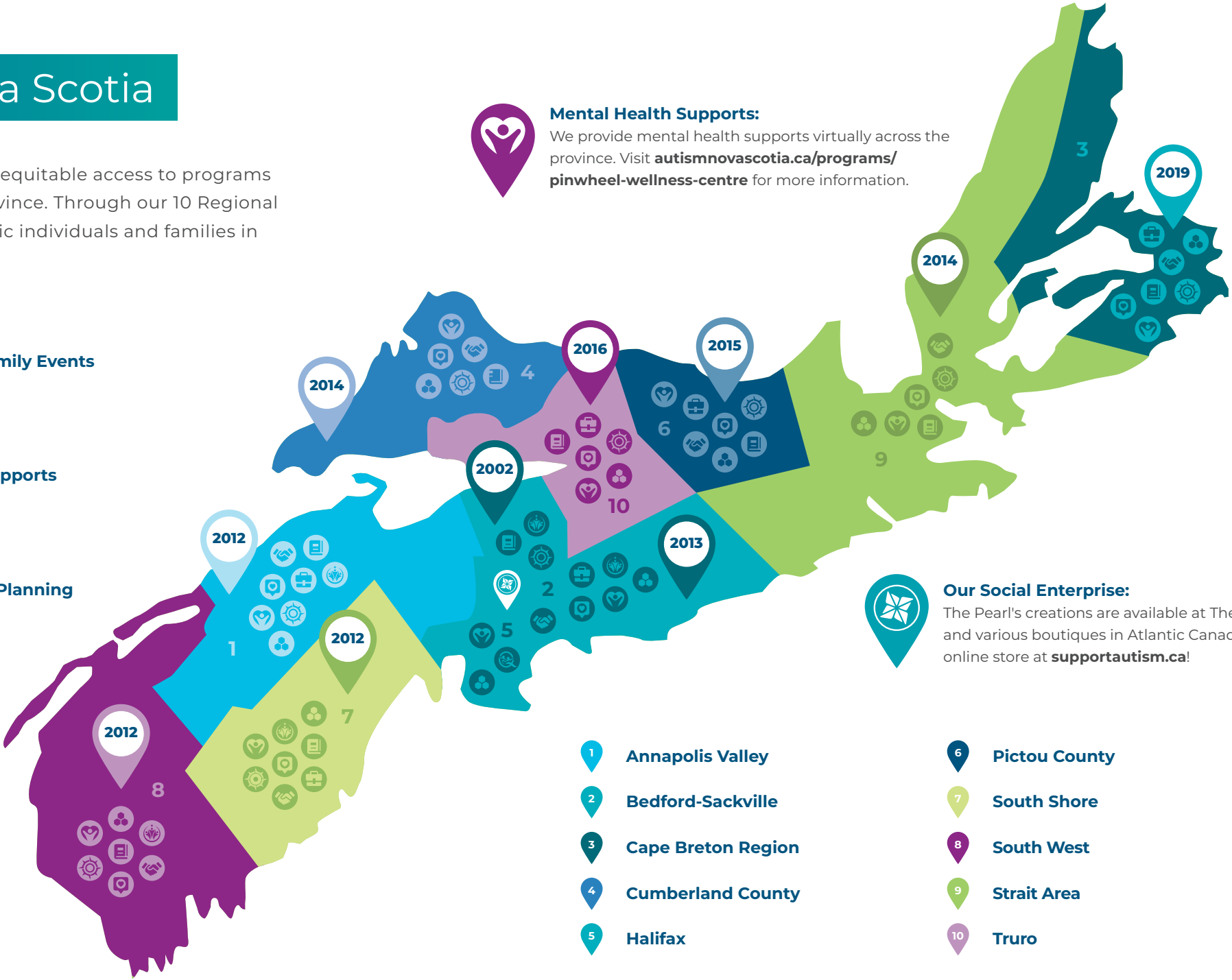
*The Impossible Conference, hosted by AIDE Canada; 2023*



# Programs & Services Across Nova Scotia

Over the last 20 years, Autism Nova Scotia has worked hard to expand equitable access to programs and services within the scope of our mission and vision across the province. Through our 10 Regional Autism Centres, Autism Nova Scotia supports more than 32,000 Autistic individuals and families in communities from Yarmouth all the way to Sydney, Cape Breton.

- **Navigation Services for Family & Individual Support**
- **Community & Family Events**
- **QuickStart Nova Scotia**  
(Toddlers & Families)
- **Mental Health Supports**
- **Social & Community Inclusion for Youth / Adults**
- **Person Directed Planning**
- **Education & Training**
- **Respite**
- **Employment Programs & Services**





# Together, Wherever We Are

In our post-pandemic world, resources and programs provided through our 10 locations were more important than ever before. We expect significant demand for more supports at Regional Autism Centers in 2023.



*“The South Shore Chapter of Autism Nova Scotia and especially its staff are the most compassionate, dedicated, and fun people, who consistently foster a spirit of inclusivity, acceptance and calming at every opportunity while also leading and creating a caring and close-knit community of like minded individuals who want to help and watch their loved ones flourish and enjoy every experience. My heart is full with gratitude, love and joy after my grandson's first swimming lessons session has concluded. Our family is full of more hope for the future now and feeling more connected, empowered, knowledgeable and finally heard. We are very fortunate to have the support, acceptance and understanding of such a kind and wonderful community.”*

– Grandparent of Swim Program Participant



Program Committees across the province participated in Strategic Planning PATHs. This included articulating their vision for serving the autism community, identifying strengths and barriers, then setting goals to advance their local Autism Resource Centre.

## DID YOU KNOW?



Our camp programs across the province provided **264** days of camp and made **1,363** individual points of contact with Autistic participants (1:1 calls, emails & meetings).

Preschool Parent Support/ Respite groups were launched in Pictou County and Cape Breton locations to include toddlers and their families. All locations continue to host caregiver support groups. Outreach to new locations across the regions now include Truro, Digby, Guysborough, Antigonish and Liverpool.

Five locations expanded Life Skills programs with local sensory-friendly, 1:1 Swim Programs. Water Safety and swim to survive abilities are considered life skills for Autistics.

## DID YOU KNOW?

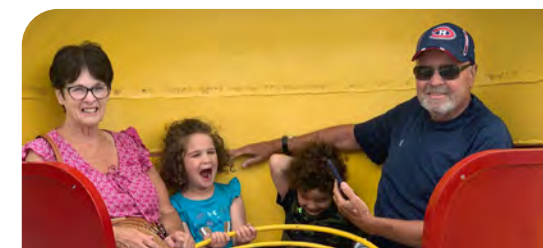


Cape Breton, South Shore and Truro now have new locations to support programs and services that have expanded across their regions.

A Cooking Program for Youth/Young Adults was piloted at the Cumberland County location to build skills for meal planning and cooking experience for independent living.



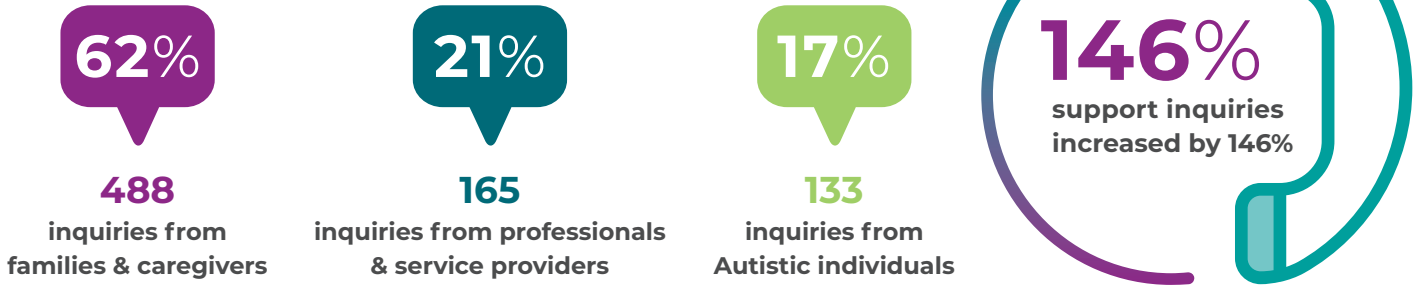
Autism Support Coordinators continue to conduct Annual Needs Assessment Surveys to gain direct feedback from those we serve. These surveys are used to inform program planning and priorities in each region.






# Community Engagement & Connections

As we strive for family and recreation opportunities, our Regional Autism Centers are a valuable first point of contact for Autistic individuals, parents, caregivers and other service providers. **This year, our Autism Support Coordinators received 787 support inquiries (averaging 66 calls per month!)**



2,148



Empowered 2,148 Autistic individuals across the lifespan to experience inclusion in their community and connection with peers through social groups, a significant **increase of 135%** over last year.

4,427



4,427 Autistic individuals participated in our inclusive recreation programs in rural Nova Scotia, which was about **367 people per month**.

13,200  
connections across the province



When combining data from all areas of support, Regional Autism Centres engaged with **13,200** people! Almost half of these connections (**6,575**) were directly with those who are diagnosed with autism or self-identify as Autistic.

5,000+



Autistics/caregivers were supported by the Potential Program

The **Potential Program** significantly surpassed its target of supporting over **5,000** Autistics/caregivers.

43 presentations for capacity building



Facilitated **43 presentations** for capacity building at the community level.

1,278  
people attended educational sessions/events



Our Regional Autism Centres had the opportunity to build greater autism awareness, acceptance, and positive support perspectives for **1,278** people who attended our educational sessions/events.



# Making Strides Together

Autism Nova Scotia's signature fundraising event, **Walk YOUR Way**, was cancelled in 2022 due to Hurricane Fiona. But even a natural disaster didn't discourage our dedicated participants and teams.

People across the province refused to let the weather stop them and organized their own Walks, when it was safe to do so. 188 teams and 1,080 walkers raised \$164,000 in support of Autism Nova Scotia's programs and services in local communities. Although the event looked very different for many people, we are so grateful for the generosity of all participants and our event sponsors for stepping up and coming together despite the odds.



## Walk YOUR Way 2022 Successes



### Thank You to Our Sponsors!



## Walk Makes a Global Impact



Chris Richards is a member of the Royal Canadian Navy and a father of three. With two Autistic children, Chris has strived to advocate for the Autistic community. He takes pride in the opportunity to participate in Walk YOUR Way and, for the past four years, has organized a Walk regardless of his geographic location. Although it is not certain where Chris will be stationed this year, he is confident that he will be walking with his team during Walk YOUR Way 2023.

## Hurricane Fiona Donation



Even though Hurricane Fiona resulted in cancelling our in-person event, we wanted to ensure that all food donations returned to the community, so the Walk YOUR Way team donated snacks and water to Feed Nova Scotia.





# Celebrating Local

The 9th annual **Best of Local Gala**, presented by Stewart McKelvey, was an incredible evening that celebrated Autism Nova Scotia's 20th anniversary in the community. With over 150 attendees, the event raised more than \$110,000 for Autism Nova Scotia's programs and services.

Guests enjoyed local culinary tastings from two chef stations hosted by Dhaba Casual Fine Dining and Ori Foods. Attendees also enjoyed watching Jen Richard from Hali Cheese Boards create a beautifully curated charcuterie board and lively music entertainment from Leona Burkey.

A highlight of the evening was the presentation of our inaugural Trailblazer award to our beloved founder, Joan Craig, for her lifetime commitment to advancing the work of Autism Nova Scotia. In addition, the Ben James Summer Camp raffle raised \$26,000, supporting Autistic children, youth and adults.

Thank you to our partners, sponsors, and donors for their continued support.



## THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS

### PRESENTING SPONSOR



### MEDIA PARTNER



### GOLD SPONSOR



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### BRONZE SPONSORS





# Expanding Supports Across the Province

**QuickStart Nova Scotia** is a parent-mediated coaching program designed to empower parents and caregivers of toddlers with a suspected, provisional, or confirmed diagnosis of autism to teach and support their child's development.

QuickStart Nova Scotia expanded program delivery across the province last year. This included hiring 21 new staff to support the rollout of the program in rural communities. Since January 2023, the program is actively seeing families in all four provincial zones (Central, Eastern, Northern and Western). This interdisciplinary program supported 111 families across the province this last year. Next year, the program plans to support 150 families, including families in indigenous communities across the province.



## Summary of Program Successes

**111**   
children registered in 2022/23

**62%**   
increase in program referrals

**44**   
families received enhanced supports such as ESDM, targeted sleep, and behaviour support

**311**   
children have participated in the QuickStart NS program to date



QuickStart Nova Scotia is made possible with support by the Government of Nova Scotia

**“The growth we saw in our child was/is incredible! We loved all the support we received from the entire team.”**

– Parent, QuickStart Nova Scotia

**“Our Parent Coach was very non-judgemental and approachable. We loved working with her and learning all about helping (my child) be the best he can be.”**

– Parent, QuickStart Nova Scotia

**“I loved the one on one coaching in an area that my child was comfortable in. I found it allowed us to focus more on what we were doing.”**

– Parent, QuickStart Nova Scotia



## Working with Families

Enhanced supports have continued with a main focus on Early Start Denver Model (ESDM) to assist staff training needs for the expansion of the program. This year alone the program has helped 56 families with enhanced supports such as the ESDM service, targeted sleep and behaviour support.

Autism Nova Scotia was so happy to offer 550 Play Guides and Kits to families across the province!

**32**   
children enrolled in ESDM training family program

**24**   
children accessed targeted intervention supports

**550**   
Play Guides and Kits given across the province!



# Creating Connections by Experience

Autism Nova Scotia's social inclusion and recreational programs provide a variety of fun and inclusive activities for Autistic individuals across the lifespan. The majority of programs are designed with a person-directed lens focused on community building, exploration and companionship.

## A Safe Space

The **Women's Autism/Autistic Project** wrapped up its fourth year and is now available virtually and in-person. Created by Autistic individuals who experienced gaps in the service landscape, and led by two dedicated volunteers, they have created a space where women can feel safe and supported.

**47** WA/AP participants



## Bridging Community

**Bridges to Success**, which is funded by the Department of Community Services Disability Support Program, focuses on life, recreation, and skill development to encourage individuals to explore and engage in the community. The program is centered around person-driven plans to help participants work towards their goals. Bridges to Success recently received permanent funding, ensuring access to the program for years to come.



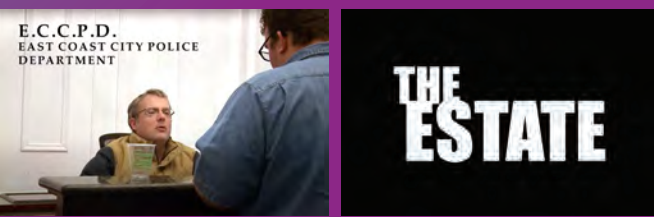
## Summer Camp Memories

**Ben James Summer Camp** ran at full capacity in both Halifax and Dartmouth in 2022. Campers visited many fun places in the community, such as the beach, wave pool, touch tank, Discovery Centre, Sportsplex, and the community garden.



## Red Carpet Ready

Last year, we hired an Autistic facilitator to lead our **Video Project**, which was entirely developed and produced by program participants. After a full year of hard work, *"The Estate"* premiered at the Halifax Public Library, showcasing the group's video skills to the community.







## Painting the Way

**Autism Arts** encourages children, youth and young adults to explore the mediums of art through self-expression. In partnership with the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, the program creates the opportunity for community belonging, friendship and recreation.



**63** Autism Arts participants



**29** Autism Arts volunteers

## New Connections

The launch of our new Respite Database offers several new opportunities for respite connections across the province. Our **Weekend Rec & Respite** program continues to offer participants the chance to come to have fun with peers over the weekend and allow families to access Respite.



**81** new database families  
376% increase over last year



**31** new respite providers  
216% increase over last year

## Lifespan Series

**Autistics Aloud**, a grassroots magazine, published its 3rd edition in the lifespan series focused on the diagnosis and featured the work of 11 Autistic creators. The team is looking forward to publishing their 4th and final edition of the lifespan series, the Pride edition, which will focus on the work of 2SLGBTQIA+ Autistics creators.



## A Future of Possibilities

Our **Person-Directed Planning Program** (PDPP) is a cross-disability program offered in the central and western regions. PDPP is a process of imagining what a person's idea of a positive and possible future looks like and then bringing together the resources and connections that will help them turn ideas into goals. PDPP works with people to discover and work towards their personal vision of a positive and meaningful life.



**The Person-Directed Planning Program gave me the confidence I needed to set goals. The program facilitators supported me by making sure I was on the right path to achieving my goals.**

– Ashley Thomas, PDPP Participant

## PDPP Success Story

Metzli Michel, a PDPP participant last year, is a queer artist attending Dalhousie University who combines their knowledge of human psychology with their love of creativity to encapsulate peaceful moments of the world through vivid brushstrokes.



Metzli is skilled in traditional acrylic paint and enjoys the freedom of digital art. They are inspired by the natural beauty around them and like to bring light into people's lives through art. Their passion for fostering connections and artistic drive blend to create their artwork.

Metzli was honoured to be the featured artist at Steve-O-Reno's Cappuccino this past winter, achieving a personal goal developed through PDPP.



Metzli's art on display at Steve-O-Reno's Cappuccino



# Trailblazing a Path to Independence

Autism Nova Scotia is committed to supporting Autistic individuals live their best lives, including fulfilling their goals as adults. Our organization has developed several programs and partnerships to directly support individuals find success in the workplace and increase acceptance and inclusion among employers.

## Community Leadership

Community Leadership is a program designed to support Autistic youth in developing leadership and employment readiness skills while having the opportunity to volunteer at non-profits in their community.

Responding to the demand to support high school students in their school journeys, Autism Nova Scotia ran three Community Leadership program groups in the Halifax Regional Municipality. Now the team is piloting Community Leadership in the Annapolis Valley thanks to a partnership with the Department of Education.

## Career Advancement

Last year, our Employment team also supported a group of Autistic adults in completing an Individual

Professional Development Plan through the Ready, Willing and Able Career Opportunities Program. Through person-directed career planning, this program supported employees in identifying their short and long-term career goals and connected them with valuable skill-development opportunities to progress in their chosen industry.

## Atlantic Autism Support Employment Network (AASEN)

The AASEN project was designed to support Autistic individuals, specifically from underserved areas, in finding meaningful employment opportunities. As part of this project, Autism Nova Scotia worked with employment partners to help them understand inclusive practices and accommodations for Autistic individuals in the workplace. Last year, AASEN bridged 31 participants into local employment opportunities.

## Employment Successes

The AASEN project was completed by building a network between autism support organizations across the Atlantic provinces last year.

In addition, Autism Nova Scotia facilitated Autism and Employment Support Training in partnership with the Nova Scotia Career Development Association across the province.



*“Autism cuts across every segment of society, yet not every part of that segment has equal access to the tools they should. Striving for equity by providing tools and resources within these segments is important for the success of our communities.” – Andrew, Employment Coaching Participant*



*“I joined the Community Leadership program because of the important skills the program can provide. I got a lot of valuable skills and experience from the program, such as resume building, managing mental well-being and maintaining conversation. I was recently accepted at Dalhousie University for Computer Science, and I want to thank my family and friends for helping me through times that were challenging.” – Lucas, Community Leadership Participant*



# Supporting Enhanced Post-Secondary Outcomes

**Post-Secondary Autism Support Services** (PASS) supports Autistic youth across the province navigate the transition from high school to college or university and develop 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 individual needs and supports each person in creating their own unique path.

Being responsive to feedback, the community identified an unmet need that the program could offer high school students additional support before starting their post-secondary journey. In 2022, the PASS Summer Institute was developed and piloted. Six students enrolled, six students completed the program, and five enrolled in the general PASS program continuing to work on their plans.

PASS receives funding from the Nova Scotia Grant for Services and Equipment via Post-Secondary Accessibility Services (PSAS), a government service that also provides incredible support and advice to students in the PASS program.

## Positive Impacts of PASS

**“My favorite part of the PASS (summer) program was meeting people and seeing that I'm not alone. I used to be fearful of the fact that I would be alone in college and left to find all of the help I needed on my own. Meeting people in the program helped me and realized that I'm not alone and people in the past and future will be getting the same help that I got.”**

– PASS Summer Student

**“From what I observe, this program has been a tremendous support for him since he joined in the New Year. He seems to be very motivated and appears to us to be working hard at the skills set out by the goals of the program. In general, he is very comfortable to be a part of the program and has connected well with his specialist.”**

– Parent of PASS Participant

## Learning Together to Build Self Autonomy

- Last summer, PASS supported a student who requested the use of a cue sheet. The student independently advocated for the use of a cue sheet for two months. The professor was impressed by the student, and they granted the accommodation to the entire class for the semester.
- Last year, two students were labelled negatively at school because of their anxiety and responsive behaviours. PASS helped these students navigate post-secondary, learn essential skills, and establish a positive connection between the students and their school. Through this support and the hard work of the students, they both graduated from their post-secondary program.



## Amy Farnell Education Award



In partnership with the Craig Foundation and the Farnell family, Autism Nova Scotia was thrilled to again offer

the Amy Farnell Education Award to eligible Autistic Nova Scotians pursuing post-secondary education. Named after long-time supporter and cherished friend Amy Farnell, the award has supported 41 Autistic students across the province since its launch in 2021, and given out more than \$150,000 in education funding towards tuition costs.

“This award is allowing me to pursue my goals! I appreciate that this organization focuses on showcasing the many talents that individuals with Autism bring to the table.”

– **Dylan Ratchford**  
2022 Award Recipient, Sydney, Cape Breton





## Holistic Mental Health Support

**Pinwheel Wellness Centre** is Nova Scotia’s first mental health support centre for Autistic adults who are experiencing mild-to-moderate mental health distress. The multi-disciplinary staff provide mental health support with holistic lenses that are specialized based on the needs of Autistic clients, covering counselling therapy, occupational therapy, nursing, sexual health and social work.

An equally important aspect of Pinwheel is providing placements for students completing practicum in social work, counselling therapy, occupational therapy, and health promotion. In fact, Pinwheel provided placements for 10 students last year, who will carry their knowledge and experience with them as they embark on careers across our healthcare system.

Pinwheel is very grateful for the support from Government of Nova Scotia and its efforts to collaborate with community in the mental health space. As we strive to meet the tremendous need in the community, last year Pinwheel became available across the province through virtual and phone appointments. As we move forward, we will continue to enhance Pinwheel’s offerings through expanded specialized supports.

### Pinwheel Successes



**“Excellent service, great people, calming atmosphere, very inclusive and accessible.”**

– Pinwheel Wellness Centre Client

## Creating Healthy Relationships

Autism Nova Scotia is proud to offer the Healthy Relationships, Sexuality & Autism (HRSA) program, a comprehensive sexuality education program for Autistic adults, and the only one of its kind in Canada. We want to thank the Mental Health Foundation of Nova Scotia for their funding of this program.

Over the last two years, Autism Nova Scotia has adapted and expanded the HRSA adult curriculum to support a youth demographic. Covering many of the same topics as the adult program, the youth program offers Autistic youth and their caregivers access to sexuality education. The HRSA caregivers' program was also adapted over the last year to support caregivers' capacity to support their Autistic family members in accessing sexuality education online in the home environment.



Visit the Sexuality Education Store:  
[exploringthespectrum.ca/sexuality-education-store](https://exploringthespectrum.ca/sexuality-education-store)

In 2022, HRSA partnered with Canucks Autism Network, a non-profit in British Columbia, to facilitate the first HRSA Adult program in that province. In 2023, the HRSA team trained a facilitator from the Canucks Autism Network staff to be an HRSA educator, and they are currently running their first independent program.

In February 2023, the HRSA adult program began delivering the program in-person for the first time since 2019. Currently, the HRSA Coordinator and Sexuality Educator is able to support participants across the province through online program facilitation.

The HRSA team has created the Sexuality Education Store on the Exploring the Spectrum platform. The store provides comprehensive sexuality education activities and information sheets, piloted within the program, that can be used one-on-one or in a group learning setting.



# Working Together with Purpose

Since 2012, **The Pearl**, a social enterprise of Autism Nova Scotia, has sold a variety of jewellery and accessories made by and for family, friends and Autistic individuals to the community.

In addition to promoting acceptance and inclusion, The Pearl acts as a skills development platform for LaunchPad, an Autism Nova Scotia program that gives Autistic individuals valuable work experience. Over the last year, participants were back in full swing managing the Halifax Seaport Market booth. The Pearl also received wonderful support from the community at many events, including holiday pop-ups and the Best of Local gala event.

One of the many treasured items produced last year was The Pearl's 2023 Autism Arts Calendar, which sold out not once, but twice!

Shop online: [supportautism.ca](https://supportautism.ca)



## LaunchPad Successes Since 2015

In partnership with the Department of Advanced Education, there have been a total of 97 graduates. 58 secured employment, 10 pursued post-secondary education and 10 pursued entrepreneurship, resulting in 73% of participants finding employment.



**“I was SO impressed with how well he did at The Pearl. No visible anxiety or anything. As a parent of someone on the spectrum, I cannot express to you how happy we are!”**

– Parent of LaunchPad Participant

**“I feel a lot more confident with speaking to customers which is something I did not want to do before coming to LaunchPad.”**

– LaunchPad Participant

**“I love working at The Pearl and going to the market on Saturdays.”**

– LaunchPad Participant





## Building Community Capacity

Over the last year, **Exploring the Spectrum**, was pleased to see increases for both in-person training and education sessions delivered to organizations. This comprehensive training program works to build the capacity of career practitioners and their agencies, by enhancing their knowledge of autism and their ability to recognize, accommodate, and provide individualized support for Autistic individuals and the neurodiverse community.

As one of our valued partners, we were happy to provide training to the Nova Scotia Career Development Association's members throughout the province, with both in-person and online

instruction. Exploring the Spectrum hopes to continue with hybrid and in-person training for more partners.

A new course was added to the Exploring the Spectrum eCampus titled "Understanding Autism: Building Inclusive Communities". This course provides learners with essential information about autism, while also providing best-practice support strategies to support Autistic individuals.

Through our training activities, we forged new partnerships with Northwood, Harbourview Lodge Continuing Care Centre, L'Arche Homefires and Peter Green Hall Children's Centre. We value these partnerships and look forward to delivering this inclusive training to more people in the future.

***"I highly recommend Autism Nova Scotia's training to any organization or individual seeking to improve their understanding of autism and enhance their support for individuals with autism. Their training is an excellent investment in your members' professional and personal development."***

– **Connie Corse**, NSCDA Training Manager



23

Exploring the Spectrum provided in-person training for 23 organizations



406

individuals accessed online courses via the Exploring the Spectrum eCampus

**"I am writing to recommend the training provided by Autism Nova Scotia to our members. We continue to be excited to have a strong partnership with Autism Nova Scotia. Several members of our organization from around the province have attended training sessions and found them extremely informative and beneficial."**

**The training was well-organized and covered a wide range of topics related to autism. The presenters were knowledgeable and engaging. The interactive sessions allowed our members to share their experiences and learn from each other. We also have had the pleasure of inviting their staff to present at our conferences and have been consistently impressed with their knowledge, expertise, and engaging presentation style.**

**Autism Nova Scotia's presentations are always well-organized, informative, and relevant to the audience's needs. Their presenters are knowledgeable and passionate about their work and can effectively communicate complex information in a way that is easy to understand.**

**In addition to their excellent presentation skills, Autism Nova Scotia is committed to using evidence-based practices and staying up-to-date with the latest research in autism. They can provide practical strategies and solutions rooted in the latest research, making their presentations informative and actionable."**

– **Connie Corse**, NSCDA Training Manager



# Family Support in HRM

Autism Nova Scotia’s Family Support team helps Autistic individuals, and their families navigate services and supports in local communities and around the province. This team also provides resources and advocacy for individuals and families, and helps people as they transition across the lifespan.

Last year, Autism Nova Scotia worked alongside a local family to provide the Halifax Regional Police with updated autism training modules for onboarding and existing front line police officers. In addition, the team worked with partners around the community to create sensory friendly and accessible spaces in places like Development Nova Scotia, Neptune Theatre, Service Canada, Sunnyside Mall and Halifax Shopping Centre, museums and more.

The team was extremely happy to support families and caregivers in schools, advocating together with them and collaborating with school staff. In addition to sharing how to create inclusive environments for all students, they also provided classroom autism presentations and talked with students about how to be a good friend.



Through provincial education sessions, Family Support delivered four provincial education sessions last year: Celebrating Acceptance with Autistic Voices, Autism and Mental Health, QuickStart Nova Scotia; Helping Parents Get a Head Start, and Person Directed Planning; Supports on Building a Good Life.

## Central Region Support

**1,064**   
families & caregivers supported

**1,830**   
calls & enquiries

**101**   
support requests for respite

**Autism Nova Scotia created an inclusive online community events calendar that is accessible to everyone on our website.**

## Get Everyone Online

Family Support manages the GEO (Get Everyone Online) program for Autism Nova Scotia. GEO provides free high-speed internet and new devices to families who would otherwise be unable to afford this service. Last winter, two families in our community received internet services and devices.

## Local Connections

Our Bedford-Sackville location, which supports families across the Halifax Regional Municipality, offers in-person caregiver meetings once a month, where caregivers can build relationships and find support. They also host family-friendly activities like accessible swims and dances, offering Autistic individuals the chance to build social skills during fun and inclusive all-ages events.

*“Thank you so much for spending the morning with the primary classes at Sackville Heights Elementary. It's so important for our little ones to see how they can be a friend to children with autism. I am sure they enjoyed your visit and the story as well. I look forward to more visits like this!”*

*– Early Intervention Autism Specialist, Halifax Regional Centre for Education*

*“Thank you so much for your presentation this morning and for all the information. We are very pleased to be a partner with Autism Nova Scotia and specifically the services/pillars that you support.”*

*– Facilitator, Student Services, Halifax Regional Centre for Education*





### ACT Workshop

Through Autism Nova Scotia's trained ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) facilitation team, an in-person workshop took place in fall 2022 with parents and caregivers who have children on the spectrum. ACT helps caregivers to recognize and accept thoughts and feelings that can sometimes become out of control. ACT worked with caregivers to find new ways to relate to these thoughts and cope with everyday struggles. ACT also helps to develop compassion towards caregivers themselves and with others.

*"A fantastic ACT experience. We all cared, shared and learned from one another - both facilitators and participants. The workshop was a wonderful opportunity to review our own understanding of the principles and practices of ACT. We were a team that learned from each other while embracing new caregivers as they experienced ACT."*

– Facilitation Team

## Gift of Time & Passion

Autism Nova Scotia recognizes and thanks our many volunteers across the province for their generous gift of time and energy. As a non-profit organization, our programs could not run without the help of our wonderful volunteers.

### Student Support Volunteers

- 40% 🕒 Recreation
- 31% 🕒 Pinwheel Wellness Centre
- 18% 🕒 Family Support
- 11% 🕒 Regional Autism Centres



### Social Inclusion Volunteers

- 53% 🕒 Autism Arts
- 15% 🕒 Social Group
- 32% 🕒 D&D







# Celebrating 20 Years of Understanding, Acceptance, & Inclusion

For the last decade, Grant Thornton has been a dedicated partner of Autism Nova Scotia. From sponsoring events and encouraging staff to serve on volunteer committees, to fully embracing the value of inclusive hiring, Grant Thorton has been a constant pillar of support.

In 2022, Grant Thornton helped Autism Nova Scotia kick off our 20th anniversary with an incredible \$20,000 donation from the Grant Thornton Foundation. As a part of the Foundation's "Greater Purpose" campaign, this generous gift has made a direct impact on the lives of the individuals and families served by Autism Nova Scotia.

*“Our organizations both have a shared purpose to create a place to belong and a sense of belonging – we both do this using understanding, acceptance, and inclusion.”*

– **Jillian Murray**, Partner & Grant Thornton Foundation Board Member

*Pictured in photos are Cynthia Carroll of Autism Nova Scotia and Grant Thornton team and family members*

# The Power of a Small Community

During Covid lock-down, Gwen Issacs found a sense of community in a Facebook Group dedicated to playing games and donating proceeds to Autism Nova Scotia. She began making friends and some group members asked if they could start playing bingo.

“Bingo is fun, engaging and will raise money,” said Gwen. “I enjoy running the group and treat it like a full-time job.”

She began by inviting 20 members and hosting five bingo games a night. For months Gwen organized 10 games a night, dedicating over 30 hours a week to the group. With interest from around the country, the group now plays 20 sold-out games three times a week.

**“Our story goes to show how a small group of people can make a big impact on the community.”**

– **Gwen Issacs**, Community Fundraiser



To date, the Facebook group has over 100 members and has raised more than \$15,000 for Autism Nova Scotia. Gwen's son is Autistic, and she wants to show him the value of giving back to the community.

“My son understands that we're helping others, and because of his diagnosis, he feels connected to what I'm doing," said Gwen. "Members of the group also feel connected to him and enjoy receiving updates on how he's doing."

# Calling All Community Fundraisers!

Hosting your own fundraising event in support of Autism Nova Scotia is easy, rewarding, and makes a real impact. To learn more or register your event, visit [autismnovascotia.ca/get-involved](https://autismnovascotia.ca/get-involved)











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Inclusion ✨ Respect ✨ Collaboration ✨ Courage ✨ Acceptance