



autism
NOVA SCOTIA

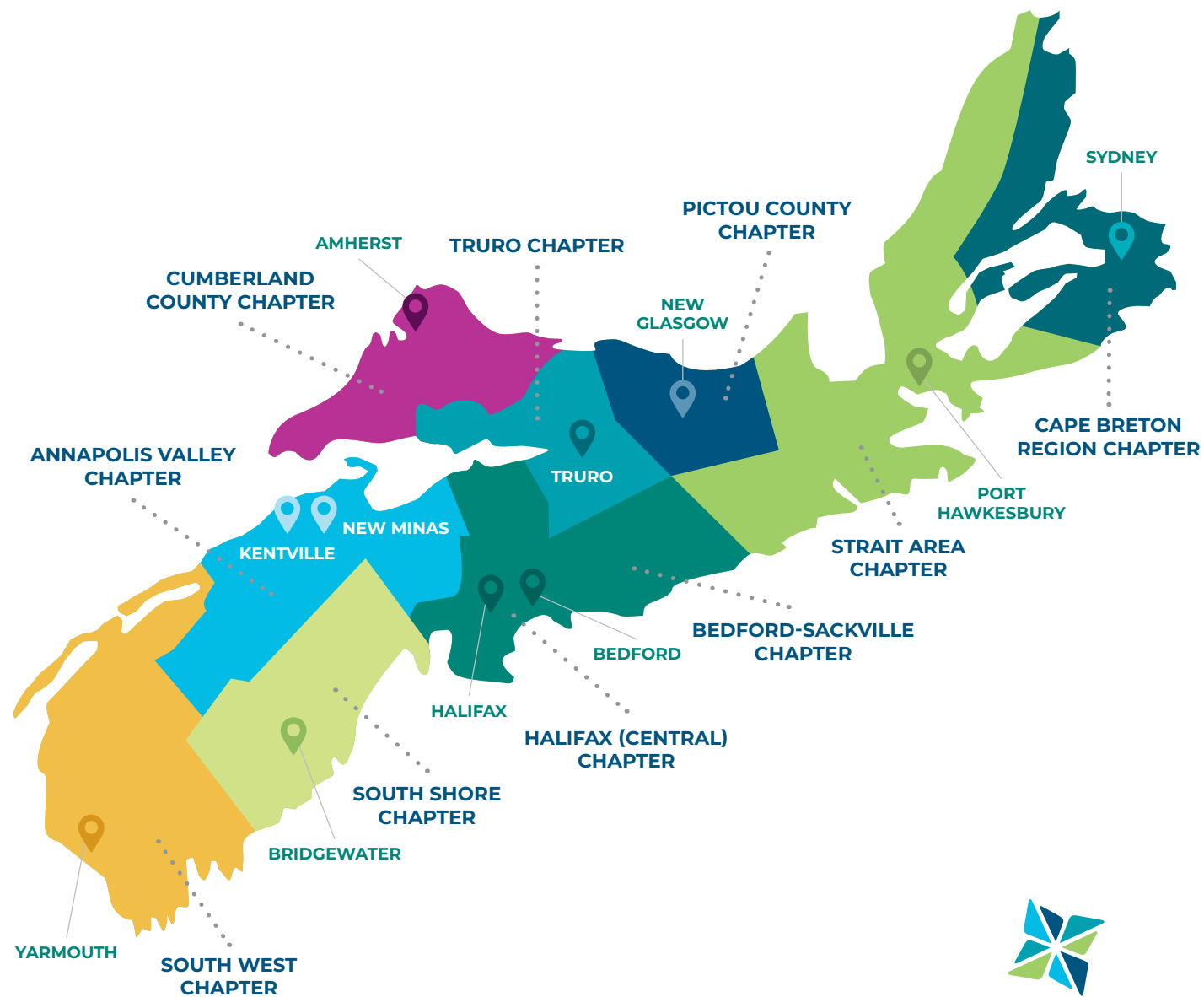
ANNUAL
REPORT
2023-2024

Action for *Equity*

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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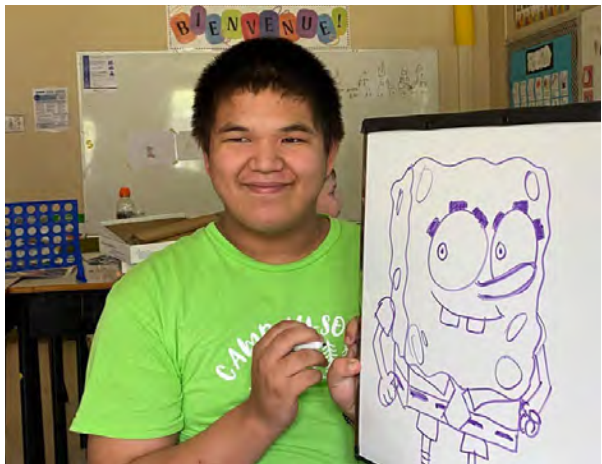




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Action for Equity

Members of the Autism Nova Scotia Board of Directors

Guided by the beacon that is our community, our goal is to ensure everyone in our province has access to vital supports and services. Autism Nova Scotia strives to be responsive to the needs of the community, in collaboration with Autistic individuals, their families, dedicated volunteers, and partners. Everyone deserves equitable access in the regions where they reside, and our 10 Regional Autism Centres across the province work diligently to provide that support.

This past year has been one of continuous learning and development for Autism Nova Scotia. Each of our rural Regional Autism Centres saw a record number of new contacts seeking support and a surge in Autistic individuals participating in our programs and services. We've focused on expanding our reach into rural communities to meet their unique needs.

A significant highlight came just after our March 2024 year-end. On May 15, 2024, we

proudly announced, alongside the Minister of Addictions and Mental Health and the Minister of Community Services, the launch of the Provincial Autism Action Plan. This plan aims to create a continuum of support and integrated services to support Autistic individuals across the lifespan.

The Autism Action Plan has been decades in the works, and will become a collaborative blueprint involving private, public, and community contributors. It aims to bridge gaps and create the equitable services the Autistic community deserves. We are very excited to begin work on this plan and see it come to life in 2025.

As we look back on Autism Nova Scotia's history, we reflect on the progress made towards inclusiveness in Nova Scotia and recognize areas that still need change. We remain committed to ensuring equitable access, support, and services for all Autistic Nova Scotians and their families, regardless of where they live. We deeply appreciate our families, partners, and funders for their support in growing our organization into what it is today.

Together, we will continue to work, advocate, and celebrate as we drive needed changes in our province.

Together, we can make Nova Scotia a model of inclusion and support for the Autistic community, setting an example for the country and the world.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Carroll
Executive Director



Dave Nicholson
FCMA, Board Chair





Thank you Cynthia

For an incredible 16 years, Cynthia Carroll's unwavering dedication and visionary leadership have propelled Autism Nova Scotia forward in remarkable ways. Always guided by the Autistic community, Cynthia has used her position to affect monumental change in the way policy, services, and supports have been introduced and rolled out across Nova Scotia. Cynthia's leadership is defined by her ethos that first voice representation is of the utmost importance in every action undertaken by Autism Nova Scotia. This is why a cornerstone of her legacy will be her championing of Autistic leaders and voices across our organization and across our province. Thank you, Cynthia. The Autism Nova Scotia staff and our community are deeply grateful for your service and commitment.

"It has been so exciting to watch Autism Nova Scotia grow and see the impact it has made for the autism community across the entire province. You will forever be remembered as the person who changed the landscape for autism services and programs in Nova Scotia and the country. Thank you Cynthia, and we wish you the best on your next adventure and will continue to do our part in building upon your legacy."



Action for Equity, for Everyone

Autism Nova Scotia will continue to advocate for lifelong investments in autism supports and services, collaborating with the autism community and partner organizations to ensure equitable access for all throughout 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

Equitable Access

Autism Nova Scotia understands the importance of addressing the diverse needs of Autistic individuals in communities throughout Nova Scotia. This is why we are so excited about the announcement of the Autism Action Plan.

Our goal for this action plan is to outline various options for creating an effective, affordable, sustainable, and integrated service framework. This framework will support individuals at every stage of life — children, teens, and adults.

By combining the expertise and resources of different invested parties and first-voice individuals, we know this plan will improve the quality of life for Autistic individuals and their families. We also want to ensure fair access to essential services and opportunities throughout their lives, identifying and filling gaps.

Current Prevalence

In 2000, only one out of every 2,500 five-year-olds in Nova Scotia was diagnosed



with autism. By 2023, this number increased significantly to one in 31, with more than 32,000 Autistic individuals in Nova Scotia. This sharp rise highlights the urgent need for comprehensive support and services for Autistic individuals throughout their lives.

Time for Action

The National Autism Strategy, expected to be released by the federal government later in 2024, offers a unique opportunity to improve the overall well-being and support for Autistic individuals in Nova Scotia and reduce costs for the provincial government.

By taking advantage of this opportunity and adopting a comprehensive approach to support and services, Nova Scotia will make significant progress toward achieving full community, economic, and social inclusion for Autistic individuals.

The successful development and implementation of this action plan will be a significant milestone in Nova Scotia's commitment to supporting Autistic individuals and their families. We will continue to build capacity and advocate for the plan our community deserves.



“It is my hope that every single day someone in my province listens to an Autistic voice and begins to see how amazing my community truly is. I love that I have Autism Nova Scotia to walk with me on my life journey. I invite you all to grow and get to know my community. You will be so happy you did. Remember, acceptance is a great thing.”

– Payton Dicks, Autistic Ambassador

Enhancing Autism Education

The **Autism and/or Intellectual Disability Knowledge Exchange Network** (AIDE Canada) was launched in 2019 in partnership with the Public Health Agency of Canada as part of the Autism Spectrum Disorder Strategic Fund. Autism Nova Scotia is proud to be one of the regional hub coordinators serving the Atlantic Canada region.

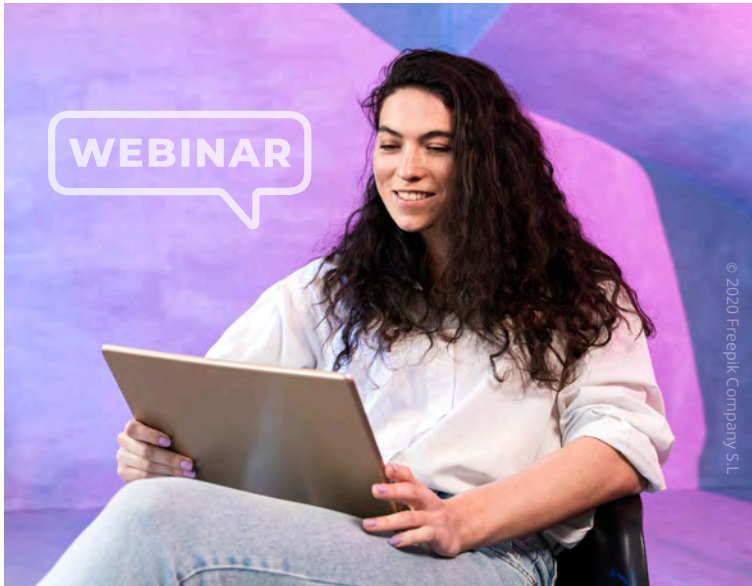
Over the last year, our Maritime Hub Coordinator worked with the Halifax Public Libraries to help create a new librarian course about sensory kits. The course is now available through the AIDE Canada website.

We also hosted three webinars with AIDE Canada:

Emergency Management: Being Prepared for the Unexpected, with Dave Aalders, the lead volunteer with EMO's Joint Emergency Management Mainland North Team.

Exploring Respite & its Importance for Caregivers, with Katie Ellick, our Central Region Respite Coordinator.

Post Secondary Supports, with Abby Lowry, our Post-Secondary Autism Support Services (PASS) Manager.



Programs & Services Across Nova Scotia

For more than 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



QuickStart Nova Scotia
(Toddlers & Families)



Social & Community Inclusion for Youth / Adults



Education & Training



Employment Programs & Services



Community & Family Events



Mental Health Supports



Person Directed Planning



Respite



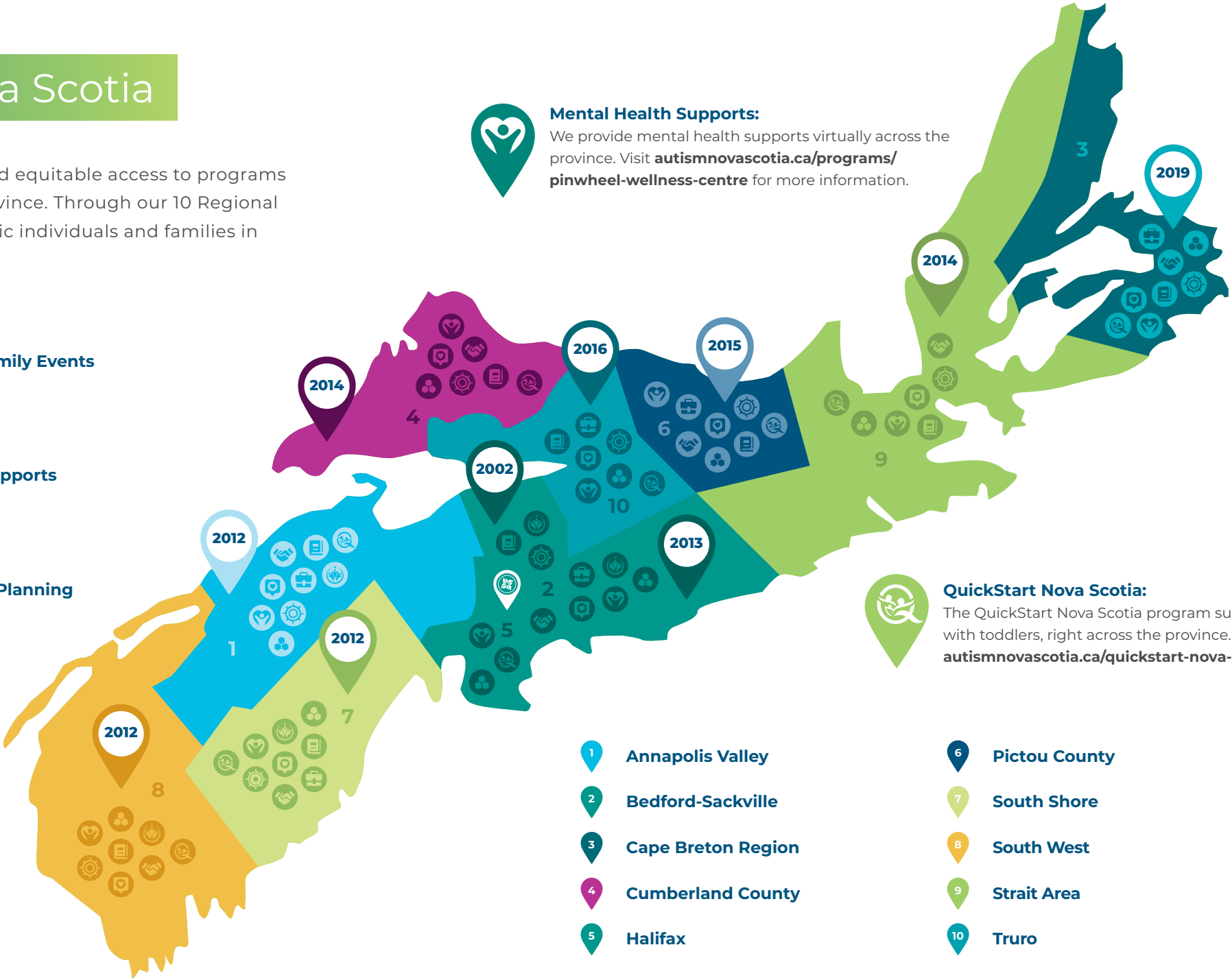
Mental Health Supports:

We provide mental health supports virtually across the province. Visit autismnovascotia.ca/programs/pinwheel-wellness-centre for more information.



QuickStart Nova Scotia:

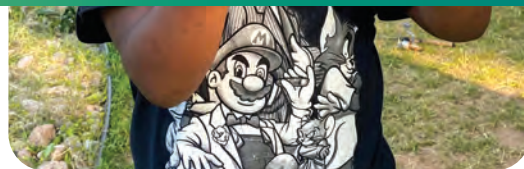
The QuickStart Nova Scotia program supports families with toddlers, right across the province. Learn more at autismnovascotia.ca/quickstart-nova-scotia!



- 1 Annapolis Valley
- 2 Bedford-Sackville
- 3 Cape Breton Region
- 4 Cumberland County
- 5 Halifax
- 6 Pictou County
- 7 South Shore
- 8 South West
- 9 Strait Area
- 10 Truro

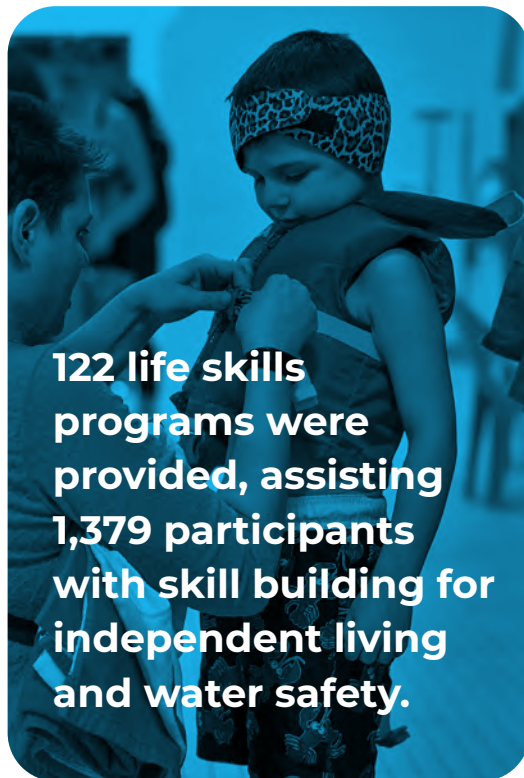


Building Equity in Rural Communities



DID YOU KNOW?

Our Regional Autism Centres hosted a total of **1,012 programs**



122 life skills programs were provided, assisting **1,379 participants** with skill building for independent living and water safety.

DID YOU KNOW?

528 recreation programs were offered, including **4,156 participants**



DID YOU KNOW?

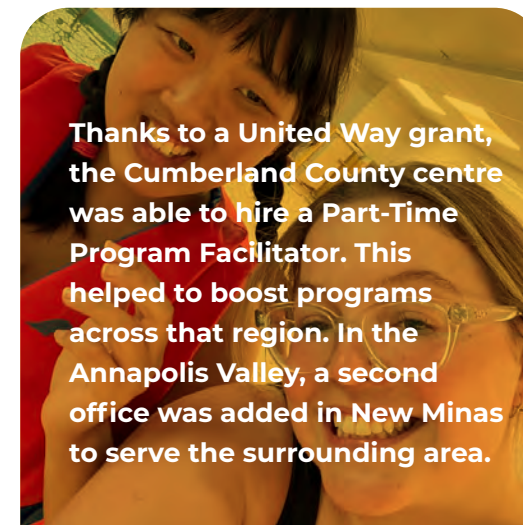
62 events were hosted for the community, providing a place to belong for **595 people**



17% more Autistics were served at social groups



271 social groups were led in 2023-24 and attended by **2,216 participants**



Thanks to a United Way grant, the Cumberland County centre was able to hire a Part-Time Program Facilitator. This helped to boost programs across that region. In the Annapolis Valley, a second office was added in New Minas to serve the surrounding area.

DID YOU KNOW?

New diversity-affirming groups were launched, including:

- 2SLGBTQIA+ peer support group in Cape Breton Region
- Autistic-led late diagnosed adult peer support group in Pictou County



Providing Equitable Access Across our Regions

Regional Autism Centres are a trusted resource for Autistic people and their families, caregivers, and service providers across the province. **Last year, our Autism Support Coordinators received 937 support inquiries (averaging 78 calls per month). This was a 20% increase in support requests over the previous year.**



482
inquiries from families & caregivers



277
inquiries from professionals & service providers



165
inquiries from Autistic individuals



Thanks to summer camps across the province, this past year was the largest to date:



summer students hired for 2023 camps 20% increase from 2022



days of camp in communities across Nova Scotia were provided by expanded summer programming



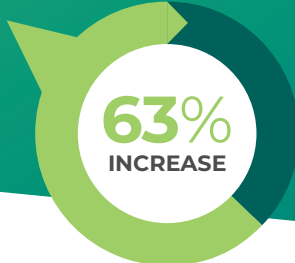
Overall, 2023 summer camp served 39% more Autistic participants than in 2022



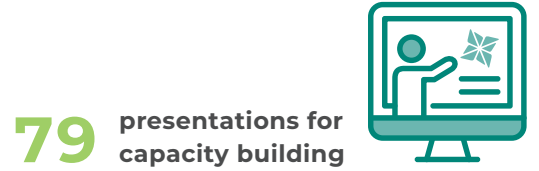
When combining data from all areas of support, Regional Autism Centres engaged with **21,250** people! Almost half of these connections (**9,000***) were directly with those who are diagnosed with autism or self-identify as Autistic.



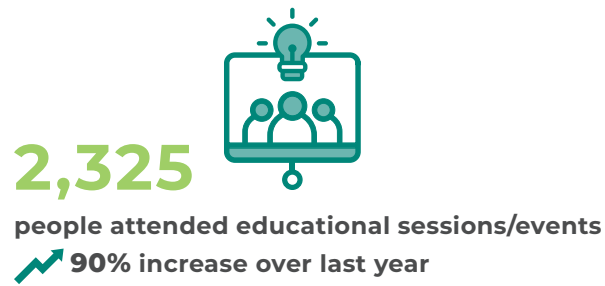
support groups were led, serving 195 individuals/families



These 29 support groups addressed the desire for greater connection and belonging in the community.



Facilitated 79 presentations that were focused on enhancing the skills, resources, and abilities of local individuals and organizations, empowering them to effectively address various issues and challenges within their communities.



Our Regional Autism Centres had the opportunity to build greater autism awareness, acceptance, and positive support perspectives for 2,325 people who attended our educational sessions/events.

Walk YOUR Way: Community Resilience

Walk YOUR Way looked very different in 2023 with the impact of flooding and forest fires in many of our local communities. Despite these natural disasters, our community rallied, showing resilience in coming together for our first in-person Walk since 2019.


This special event would not have been possible without the generosity of our incredible community, Walk YOUR Way participants, volunteers, and sponsors. We cannot thank you enough for celebrating the Autistic community in accessible spaces and to continue to build understanding, acceptance, and inclusion for Autistic individuals and their families.



Walk YOUR Way 2023 Successes

174 
Total number of teams

1,160 
Total number of registered walkers

\$169K 
Total funds raised

Thank You to Our Lead Sponsors



DHL Express – Walk Champions

DHL became involved in Walk YOUR Way in support of their colleague and teammate Myles Knight. Myles is a Lead Hand at DHL Express in Dartmouth, and he is Autistic. Participating in Walk YOUR Way was an easy choice for Myles knowing that he had the support of his DHL family and friends.

Myles also works hard to make sure everyone at DHL feels like they belong and are valued. He is a current member of the company's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging committee. Recently, he won an award for being the Employee of the Year at his local DHL, showing how much everyone values his contributions. Let's all walk alongside Myles, working to ensure that everyone feels accepted.





Best of Local: Celebrating a Decade

A big thank you to everyone who attended **Best of Local**, presented by Stewart McKelvey, and helping to raise critical funds for Autism Nova Scotia. For the past ten years, Best of Local has been embraced by our community and has helped to raise critical funds in support of the valuable and inclusive programs we offer. This support is important, and often life-changing for many Autistic people across our province.

It was a meaningful event filled with love and inspiration. Alex Turpin, summer camper, and Mikayla Fisher, camp counselor and employee, shared their incredible experiences from Ben James Summer Camp. The Inclusive Choir from The Club Inclusion shared their beautiful voices with us.

Thank you to our sponsors, who once again showed their commitment to Autism Nova Scotia – our event would not have been possible without your contributions. Our heartfelt thanks also go to our chef partners and local vendors Smokehouse Brewery, LN Chocolatier, Posh Thali Grazing Co., and Chef Rob MacIsaac who helped make our event a true celebration of the best of our province.



THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS

PRESENTING SPONSOR



MEDIA PARTNER



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SILVER SPONSORS



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Summary of Program
Successes

165 
children registered in 2023/24

39 
families received enhanced supports
such as ESDM, targeted sleep, and
behaviour support

465 
children have participated in the
QuickStart NS program to date

5 Year Milestone 
QuickStart NS marked its five-
year milestone in spring 2024

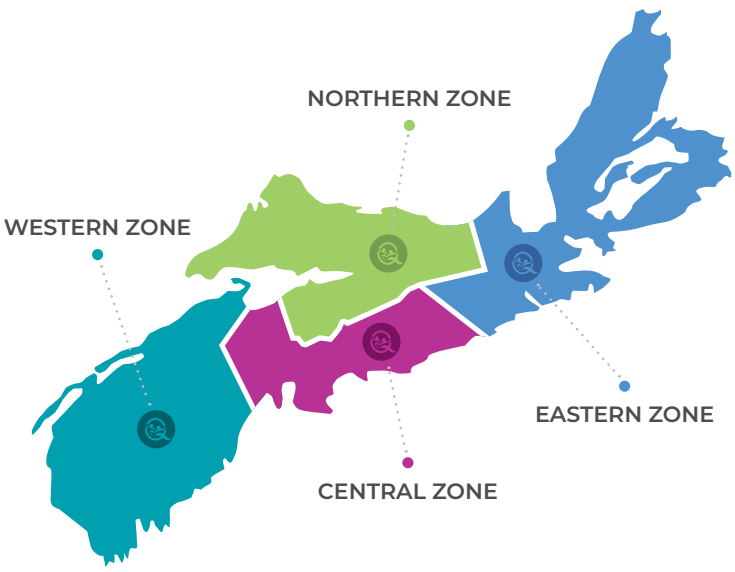

NOVA SCOTIA
QuickStart Nova Scotia is made possible with
support by the Government of Nova Scotia

Empowering Families
Across the Province

Over the last year, **QuickStart Nova Scotia** worked to empower parents in supporting their child by operating at full capacity, achieving the targeted outcomes of the continued provincial expansion. The goal for last year was to enroll 75 children in the Central zone, and 25 children each in the Eastern, Northern, and Western zones.

The overall target was to reach 150 families province-wide, and the program successfully exceeded that goal with 165 families.

The program also extended support to 39 families through services like Early Start Denver Model (ESDM), targeted sleep, and behaviour support. In May 2024, QuickStart Nova Scotia is excited to mark its five-year anniversary.



Enhanced Supports

Enhanced supports remain focused on ESDM families, addressing staff training needs for program expansion. This year, 39 families received support, including ESDM services and targeted sleep and behaviour assistance.

Furthermore, the program piloted Play and Connect, a drop-in program for caregivers. With the support of funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada, through Société Santé en français and Fédération des parents Acadiens de la Nouvelle-Écosse, the play guide is nearing completion for release in French.

27 
children enrolled in ESDM training family program

12 
children accessed targeted intervention supports

130 
French play guides were created with support of
funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada



“I’m no longer feeling as though I’m walking on eggshells around my child.”

– Parent, QuickStart Nova Scotia

“Friendly caring staff gave me lots of information and ideas on how to improve my child’s learning skills and were able to work around my time.”

– Parent, QuickStart Nova Scotia

“I just want to say how thankful I am for a program like this. I am always a little nervous having strangers in my home, but (the Parent Coach) took that anxiety away immediately.”

– Parent, QuickStart Nova Scotia



Breaking Boundaries with Inclusive Programs

Autism Nova Scotia's social inclusion and recreational programs offer a range of engaging and inclusive activities for Autistic individuals across the lifespan. Programs are designed with a person-centered approach, emphasizing community building, exploration, and friendship.



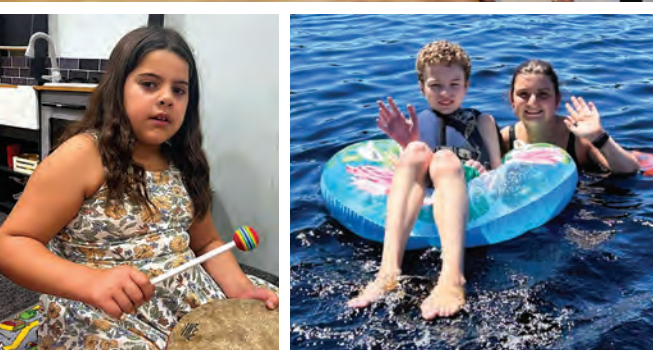
Accessible Recreation Opportunities

Ben James Summer Camp had its highest attendance ever in 2023, with 112 campers in all age groups. To support this increase, we hired 27 staff members for the camp. The recreation program also continued to offer the **Women's Autism/Autistic Project** and a **Supported Social Group** for teens aged 13-17, in addition to the adult groups.



Autism Arts in Halifax temporarily relocated to the YMCA due to fire system work at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. The team was also excited to collaborate with Recreation Nova Scotia to develop a training program focused on delivering inclusive recreation in the community. In addition, the **Weekend Recreation and Respite** program is now proudly supported and funded by the Mental Health Foundation of Nova Scotia.

The recreation team was pleased to partner with various organizations to offer sensory-friendly collaborations, including the Halifax Wanderers, Neptune Theater, United Dartmouth Football Club and Special Olympics.



By the Numbers

295 
Social Group Participants
(95 teens + 200 adults)

18 
Supported Social Group Participants
(6 teens + 12 adults)

63 
Autism Arts Participants
(21 children + 21 teens + 21 adults)

116 
Dungeons & Dragons Participants
(38 teens + 78 adults)

12 
Bridges to Success Participants

10 
Video Project Participants

39 
Women's Autism/Autistic Project Participants
(7 teens + 32 adults)

48 
Weekend Recreation and Respite Participants

"We have been involved with social group for 12 years now. It has provided our son with an environment where he can see himself in a positive way. He has cultivated a network of peers to practice his social skills, in a very low-stress way. Social group nights have become a highlight in his week. I am truly thankful to have the very best people working with my son."

– Caregiver of Social Group Participant





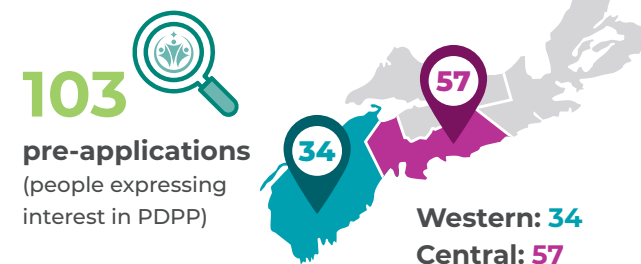
Enriching Futures

Person Directed Planning Program (PDPP) works with individuals who self-identify as having a disability to discover and work towards their vision of a positive and meaningful life. The program is offered in the South Shore, South West, Annapolis Valley and the Halifax Regional Municipality.

Through working with a Person Directed Planning Facilitator, participants can create value-based goals and have support with connecting to resources, programs and supports within their natural support systems, like friends and family as well as broader community-based organizations.

Participants work towards goals in areas including employment, recreation and leisure, social connections, and life skills such as organization and budgeting, mental health, and overall wellness.

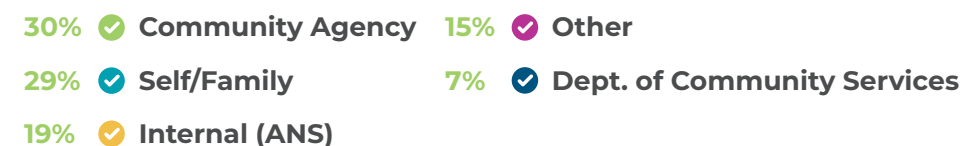
PDPP Successes



“My facilitator was fantastic and made me feel like I was making progress and helped encourage me along the way. I am incredibly happy with the facilitator I had!”

– PDPP Participant

Referral Sources



Empowering Independence

Independent Living Support (ILS) is a community-based program that provides individuals with one-on-one assistance from a Community Living Coach. Using a person-directed approach, the ILS team and Community Living Coaches assist individuals in achieving their independent living goals.

In 2023, Autism Nova Scotia supported eight new ILS participants, many of whom moved into their own apartments for the first time in their chosen communities. The ILS team has helped participants with daily living tasks and in developing a broader support network, including family, friends, health professionals, and community organizations.

Strategic partnerships within the ILS program include GEO NS, which provides internet and technology access to participants who otherwise would not have it, and the Department of Community Services' Disability Support Program, the main referral pathway for ILS participants. This collaboration ensures that participants receive

financial support and access to wrap-around services, enhancing their quality of life.

Additionally, Autism Nova Scotia's programs such as Post-Secondary Autism Support Services, Employment and Community Transitions, and Pinwheel Wellness Centre have been valuable resources for ILS participants. For example, the partnership between ILS and Pinwheel provides participants access to an Occupational Therapist, further supporting their independent living journey.





Autistics Aloud: Celebrating Milestones & Embracing New Beginnings

Thanks to the support from Autism Nova Scotia since 2005, **Autistics Aloud** is approaching its 25th anniversary next year as a fully Autistic-led grassroots publication. It has had different editors and gone through some changes, but has always stayed true to its core principle, the disability rights mantra, "Nothing About Us Without Us."

So it is in the spirit of change that this year will be about endings, but also about beginnings for this ever-evolving publication.

The LifeSpans series made its debut in 2020. Its aim was to be a platform for Autistic Canadians to have their voices heard on topics that not only impact us but define our very existence. It covered, What is Autism?, Health, Diagnosis, and Education.

Then in September 2023 the LifeSpans Series concluded with the publication of the 2SLGBTQIA+ Pride edition. Six of the 10 Autistic contributors were new to being published in this series.



With five editions under its belt the series was able to share the first-person perspective of 41 Autistic Canadians. What an incredible accomplishment. Autistics Aloud could not be prouder of each one of them.

With the ending of the LifeSpans series, Autistics Aloud was ready to take on a new beginning. Autistics Aloud is thrilled to announce the launch of a new quarterly published Five-Question interview series, entitled "Conversation".

The first interview is already completed and shared! Autistics Aloud had the pleasure of chatting with the super talented Autistic artist, Madisyn Snow. It was amazing getting to know Madisyn and sharing their beautiful art with everyone.

Going back to the LifeSpans series to wrap up this awesome year, Editor-in-Chief Patricia George-Zwicker achieved an important goal they had for the magazine - getting it into school libraries.

A teacher from West Bedford School made a kind request to have copies of the LifeSpans series placed in the school library. The librarian happily agreed, so Patricia took the opportunity to deliver all five magazines in person during Autism Acceptance Month.

Here is to continuing the "Conversation"!



Navigating Late Autism Discovery

The **Late Diagnosed/Self Discovered Autistic Hangout Project** (LDX-ACHAT) aims to fill the gap in support for those who consider themselves as starting their Autistic journey later in their life.

The group connects online via Zoom and covers topics such as masking as an Autistic person, employment, disclosing autism to others, and the pros and the cons of late diagnosis/discovery. The group's most passionate discussion was about society's perception of Autistic adults versus lived experience.

Many in the group indicated this is the only time they are able to connect to their Autistic peers. When viewed through that lens, LDX-ACHAT highlights just how important such programs are to Autistic adults.

30



late diagnosed/self-discovered Autistics were able to access support through LDX-ACHAT

Employment & Community Transitions

Autism Nova Scotia is dedicated to helping Autistic individuals lead fulfilling lives and achieve their personal goals as adults. We have created varied programs and formed partnerships to assist individuals in finding success in the workplace while promoting acceptance and inclusion among employers.

Employment and Community Transitions programs are continuing to expand across Nova Scotia with support from the Government of Nova Scotia, including the Departments of Community Services and Advanced Education, in addition to ongoing partnerships with Inclusion Canada and The Sinneave Family Foundation.

EmploymentWorks Partnership Highlight

Friends For Life Daycare became a new employer partner for EmploymentWorks Halifax, marking the first childcare setting for an EmploymentWorks work experience. Participants shadowed staff and engaged with children in various rooms, reading stories, and participating in activities. Many had limited prior exposure to childcare, and the centre was accommodating to their comfort levels, employing inclusive practices. The positive experience led Friends For Life Daycare to express interest in continuing this partnership.

EmploymentWorks Halifax:

Increase in participant registration:



EmploymentWorks Sydney:

Increase in participant registration:



EmploymentWorks (Truro, Valley, and South Shore)

Increase in participant registration:



“This program really helped me learn about all sorts of jobs and employment details. I now have the confidence to know I can get a job.”

– Kira Callaghan, EmploymentWorks Participant

“I’ve been learning things I didn’t know before and it has been helpful for me to help make decisions in the future about where I would want to go to look for work.”

– Christian, EmploymentWorks Participant

Career Quest:

Increase in participant registration:



40 individual goals were achieved by 27 unique participants

Examples of individual goals: starting and maintaining conversations, following instructions to complete tasks, completing tasks within a specified time frame, asking for help when needed, managing anxiety, staying focused on a task to complete it, professionalism, etc.



“My experiences were fun and enjoyable to say the least. Autism NS has not only given me a chance of employment but a chance to find out what I’m passionate about, and that’s helping other individuals who struggle whether at the workplace or just at home. Thank you for connecting me to employment with the Employment and Wellness Support Group, as well as other future opportunities.”

– Jason Chipp, Ready, Willing & Able Participant



Community Leadership

This past year, the **Community Leadership** program was offered in Halifax, Horton High School, and New Germany Rural High School. Students from rural locations have expressed gratitude for bringing the program to their schools and feel that they are gaining valuable experiences.

In Halifax, participants have described Community Leadership as a safe space that positively impacts their week. Both Halifax and rural participants have gained employment and been accepted into postsecondary schools with the support of the program.

Last year, 30 participants joined the Community Leadership program in Halifax, which exceeded our goals. In addition, 24 students participated in the program in rural areas.

Community Leadership Partnership Highlight

Since the Community Leadership program began in July 2022, Mission Mart was one of our first volunteer experience partners. Staff and volunteers have consistently gone above and beyond to ensure that Community Leadership participants enjoy their time. Thank you to the incredible team at Mission Mart and Souls Harbour!

38 goals completed by Community Leadership participants in 2023-24



“Community Leadership makes me feel heard and seen. I can count on my friends here to cheer me up after a long day at school.” – Community Leadership Participant

Healthy Relationships, Sexuality, and Autism

The **Healthy Relationships, Sexuality and Autism** (HRSA) program is a comprehensive sexuality education program designed specifically for Autistic adults. The program introduces concepts of sexuality and relationships using interactive, sex-positive, and inclusive sexuality education lessons.

The HRSA team has been working hard to restart the HRSA-Adult program in Halifax. Staff are also being trained to deliver HRSA in the South Shore, Annapolis Valley, and Cumberland County regions, with programs set to begin later in 2024.

HRSA-Youth, the tailored youth-focused complement to our HRSA-Adult program, has been adopted and implemented in a pilot program in schools in Nova Scotia, allowing students to earn credit for taking part in this inclusive course. The program aims to have this program adopted more broadly in the next year, to ensure all kids in Nova Scotia can learn these important concepts in a supportive environment.

Ready, Willing & Able

Ready, Willing & Able (RWA) was pleased to begin a successful new partnership with Symcor. RWA established this relationship through Symcor’s corporate head office, connected with a local Halifax contact, and met the corporate team online. RWA also presented to the Halifax team in-person, the Vice President of the company, and the Human Resources team across Canada virtually. As a result, the program secured two hires in Data Entry and one as a Processing Associate. The team hopes this success will lead to Symcor collaborating with Ready, Willing & Able at all their Canadian facilities.

68 

hires provincially through Ready, Willing & Able

19 

unique employers across the province have hired

113 

job seekers were added to the Job Seekers Database

54 

interviews were completed through Ready, Willing & Able; of which 20 individuals were hired

279 

intakes were completed with job seekers seeking employment support and/or navigation, province wide

Community Groups (e.g., agencies, organizations) connected in regions around the province:

Truro: 59
Annapolis Valley: 57
Cape Breton: 47
Halifax: 18



Employment Coaching

377 

instances of pre-employment coaching delivered province wide

Guiding Educational Success


The transition to post-secondary education can be uniquely challenging for many young people. Autism Nova Scotia's **Post-Secondary Autism Support Services** (PASS) program supports Autistic adults from college or university acceptance through to graduation. Using a person-directed approach, PASS allows students to choose their goals and how they want to achieve them. Goals can range from campus navigation and organization to study skills and group work. PASS helps participants increase independence, improve organizational skills, manage anxiety, enhance social skills, and achieve personal and academic goals.

PASS also assists students in accessing and advocating for accommodations. This includes reviewing common accommodations, examining documentation to determine health professional recommendations, and preparing for accommodation meetings. The PASS team can attend these meetings, provide moral support, take notes, and remind students of their goals.

In 2021, a Summer Program was introduced to help high school students transition to post-secondary education. Now in its third year, the program is offered on Brightspace, a widely used learning platform, with support from NeonTrain. The program includes an orientation and eight weekly sessions, with student feedback shaping the content each year. Highlights include current PASS students sharing their experiences in week four and a tour of St. Mary's University and an ice cream outing in week eight.

The 2023-2024 year has seen many opportunities for the PASS team to connect and collaborate. Notable partnerships include AIDE Canada, Dalhousie University and their Social Work Clinic, Acadia University, and Saint Mary's University.

27  
new PASS students in 2023-24

225  
students supported through
PASS since 2017

43  
student referrals in 2023-24

20  
students supported advocating
for accommodations

16  
partnerships with post-secondary
institutions across the province

10   
collaborations with high school
and post-secondary

PASS Impacts

“The most significant takeaway from the experience was using time management to stay on track with post-secondary education and events outside of school. My plan to incorporate this experience is to apply information on where my classes are and studying for upcoming assignments and tests.”

– PASS Summer Student

“My PASS Coordinator was absolutely fantastic. He and his supervisor did their best to go above and beyond. I honestly appreciate their efforts.”

– PASS Participant

“Working with Autism Nova Scotia over the last few years has provided an amazing amount of educational support for myself, faculty and to the participants of the programming. The development of the PASS program has provided one-to-one support on campus which has proven to be very valuable. This is not only for the student receiving the service, but also for the faculty who observe this support and to the student services team.”

– Post-Secondary Education Service Provider

Amy Farnell Education Award

In partnership with the Craig Foundation and the Farnell family, Autism Nova Scotia is thrilled to 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 57 Autistic students across the province since its launch in 2021 and provided more than \$180,000 in education funding towards tuition costs.



“I’d like to thank Autism Nova Scotia for choosing me as a recipient for the Amy Farnell Education Award. I am a proud Autistic individual

with a goal to ultimately help other Autistic people comfortably and confidently advocate for themselves and their needs. In the future I intend on educating as many as possible on autism, and promoting autism acceptance, for all of us, everywhere.”

– Lilly Ann Yakimchuck
2023 Award Recipient, Sydney, Cape Breton



Advancing Adult Mental Health

Pinwheel Wellness Centre (Pinwheel) is a community-based mental health centre that supports Autistic adults who are experiencing mild-to-moderate mental health distress. Pinwheel stands as a committed response to the first-hand experiences of Autistic adults and their supporters to help address gaps in mental health support and service capacity.

Pinwheel offers services province-wide from a holistic, person-centred, neurodivergent affirming framework that respects the autonomy of the client to have agency in collaborating in their own support. This is reflected in Pinwheel's multidisciplinary team to optimize these health pillars including knowledge, occupations, physical, spiritual, community, social, emotional, and environmental health.

In May 2023, during the wildfires that greatly impacted our province, Pinwheel supported families by creating a sensory-friendly space at the emergency family shelter in the Canada Games Centre. From July to October 2023, natural disasters

continued, and severe floods inundated the Bedford Place Mall, rendering the Pinwheel office unusable. The team quickly shifted, and services were offered remotely and from the Sun Tower offices until early October, when Pinwheel moved back to a restored facility.

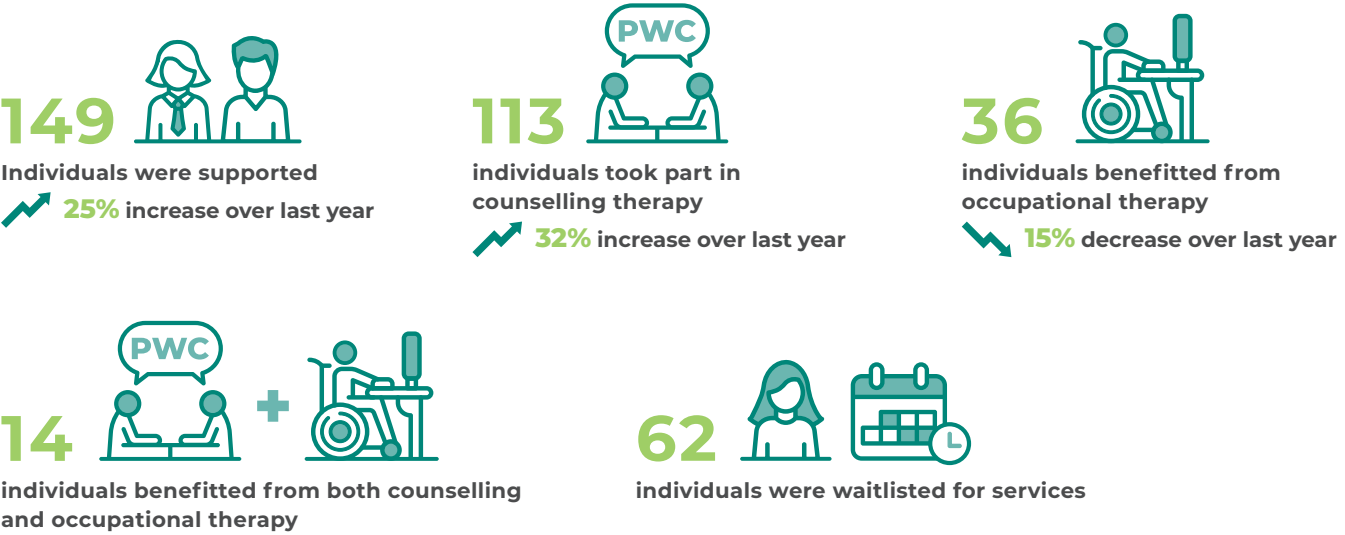
In Summer 2023, Pinwheel began exploring partnerships to enhance mental health expertise. This led to a partnership with Nova Scotia Health Authority and the introduction of Dr. Mahmoud Gad, a psychiatrist experienced with Autistic individuals, as a regular case consultant in early 2024.

Pinwheel was invited to the Dalhousie Social Work Clinic and Cobequid Community Mental Health to discuss supporting Autistic clients. Student placements from partnering institutions in Occupational Therapy and Social Work were also welcomed. Recognizing the need for broader support, Pinwheel developed a guide to free mental health resources, particularly for Autistic Nova Scotians.

Group offerings expanded to provide mental health support, fostering connections and community among clients. In early 2024, a groups coordinator was appointed to oversee and run various group

offerings, allowing for more regular sessions and broader outreach. New groups, including an Interoception group, are anticipated later in 2024.

PWC Successes



Crafting Change, One Gem at a Time

For more than 12 years, **The Pearl's** social enterprise team has created and sold a variety of jewelry and accessories. All proceeds from the sale of these items support programs and services at Autism Nova Scotia.

The Pearl also functions as a skills development platform for EmploymentWorks, which is part of our Employment and Community Transitions department. Participants learn how to manage a working float, prepare designs, count inventory, and are part of The Pearl sales team. Their customer service experience takes place in the classroom, pop-up booths, the Halifax Seaport Market, and in online orders from their website, supportautism.ca.

Over the last year, The Pearl was proud to receive an order from Trucking Human Resource Sector Council Atlantic for 200 "The Power of Being You" sweaters for their Advancing Women in Trucking Conference. The Pearl also designed a special key chain for an Air Canada Vacations event. The Autism Arts calendar was successful once again, selling out within days!

In addition, The Pearl donated to local community initiatives including L'Arche Halifax and the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre.



“

"I think working at The Pearl is great. It does somewhat surprise me that I can try to go to workplaces to participate in professional experiences such as The Pearl. These workplaces were helpful in learning more about what it means to get involved in the workplace and what tasks need to be done. I had a good time at The Pearl organizing jewelry, using the POS system and doing customer service. Keep up the great work guys! I don't think there's anything I dislike about The Pearl."

– **Matthew Fisher**, *EmploymentWorks Participant*


EmploymentWorks Successes Since 2015

In partnership with the Department of Advanced Education, there have been a total of 110 graduates. 12 pursued post-secondary education, 28 attended community events and 143 days were spent out in the community.

110 
EmploymentWorks graduates to date

12 
Enrollment in post-secondary

28 
attended community events

143 
days out in the community

Building Knowledge & Inclusion

Exploring the Spectrum (ETS) provides training and education for professionals, agencies, and service providers who support and work alongside Autistic individuals. This social enterprise of Autism Nova Scotia provides the most recent, cutting-edge, and evidence-based knowledge then puts it into a practice-based context.

Last year, Exploring the Spectrum delivered education and training to help build capacity in the community by enhancing Autism knowledge, and more importantly, by creating safe spaces while promoting acceptance and equity for everyone.

With support from internal experts from various programs within Autism Nova Scotia, including Employment and Community Transitions, Post-Secondary Autism Support Services, and QuickStart Nova Scotia, ETS was able to provide specific industry training to different professional sectors. The team also provided training in the education sector with the aim to improve understanding, foster inclusive practices, and equip educational professionals with the tools and strategies needed to create supportive learning environments.

ETS and regional staff around the province continued to offer community presentations to many organizations in rural communities, while promoting local resources.

The team was proud to maintain our partnership with the Nova Scotia Career Development Association, providing career practitioners with Autism and Employment Supports training. ETS also worked with Petal Productions who provided instructional design to customize the new modules. The ETS sexuality store expanded to include resources for Healthy Relationships, Sexuality & Autism, an important educational program also offered by Autism Nova Scotia.

Exploring the Spectrum was honoured to provide educational training sessions to many organizations and institutions, including:

- Acadia University
- Department of Community Services Family Support
- Department of Labour Skills and Immigration
- IBM
- Mi'kmaq Child Development Centre
- Saint Mary's University



“Thank you for your time, effort, and energy and for being brave enough to identify to the world about certain traits you have regarding autism. I used to hide it from everyone in all workplaces. That was beyond stressful. Just surviving a regular work environment, with sounds lights and textures was often more exhausting to me than the actual work I do. That was an issue at school or any other place you can think of.” – Ivana

“Engaging presenter who provided a perspective on how to work with people with autism that I had not considered before.” – Anonymous

“The instructor was very knowledgeable and provided some great examples and responses to our questions.” – Anonymous

“Great use of language and I appreciate you sharing appropriate vocabulary. This presentation was delivered with clarity and sensitivity, and I appreciate that.” – Anonymous

“Amazing presentation and fantastic presenter! It was a very engaging and insightful presentation. Thanks for the knowledge!” – Anonymous

“The Training was fantastic and will help me so much with working with our clients.” – Anonymous

”



Strengthening Families & Communities

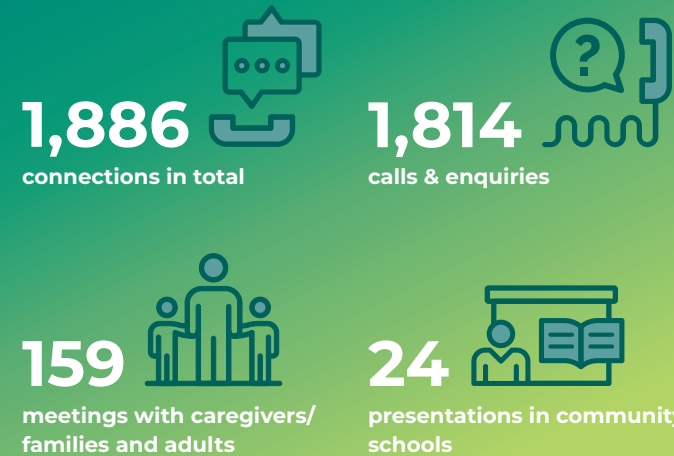
Families are integral members of the community, and the **Family Support Team** in the Halifax Regional Municipality works to help families navigate through education, services, advocacy, and community opportunities.

The Family Support Team offers a variety of in-person community presentations and facilitated over 20 community and school presentations last year.

Community Presentations

The North Grove, Military Family Resource Center, CBBC Career College, Department of Community Services, Cobequid Community Health Centre, Federation of Foster Families Conference and Dalhousie Health Services.

Central Region Support



School Presentations

Spryfield Elementary, Colonel John Stewart Elementary, Joseph Howe Elementary, Sackville High School, Sunnyside Elementary, Oxford School and Alderney Elementary.

In the community, Family Support attended the Carson Exports Car show, Sensory Santa at the Halifax Shopping Centre, and a Get Air event in partnership with the Doug Flutie Jr. Foundation for Autism. The team also supported a new opportunity to host a Sensory Easter Bunny event at Mic Mac Mall.

“Heartfelt thanks to the Family Support Team at Autism Nova Scotia for coming to CJSES Grade 6 Class to provide an amazing, interactive presentation supporting autism acceptance. We appreciate you.”

– Terra Crowe, Schools Plus



Enhancing Respite Access

Last year, Autism Nova Scotia completed its first full year of using the new respite database to assist individuals and families in accessing respite providers. With the initial transition now complete, new ways were found to utilize the database effectively.

Thanks to exceptional students from Dalhousie University's School of Social Work, the team created a community calendar. This calendar aims to raise awareness of offerings throughout central Nova Scotia that present excellent respite opportunities for individuals and families.

Respite Support



“This was a wonderful experience for our family at Get Air. Please thank everyone involved for making this possible. The kids had so much fun and my son was totally in his element.” – Caregiver

Soaring Together with Autism Aviators

Autism Aviators is a program for Autistic individuals and their families who have upcoming travel plans or those who want to learn more about air travel.

Last year, we were excited to once again partner with the Halifax Stanfield International Airport for our first event since 2019. The event included a walk-through of the airport experience, from check-in, and security screening to waiting at a gate in departures. Participants also had the chance to visit the observation deck to watch planes arrive and depart.

More than 80 people joined us for this event, and each participant received an official Autism Aviators certificate for their participation.

80+



people attended Autism Aviators



The Heart of Our Organization

Autism Nova Scotia extends a heartfelt gratitude to the dedicated volunteers across the province for their generous contributions of time and energy. As a non-profit organization, our programs thrive thanks to the invaluable support of these amazing individuals.

Student Support Volunteers

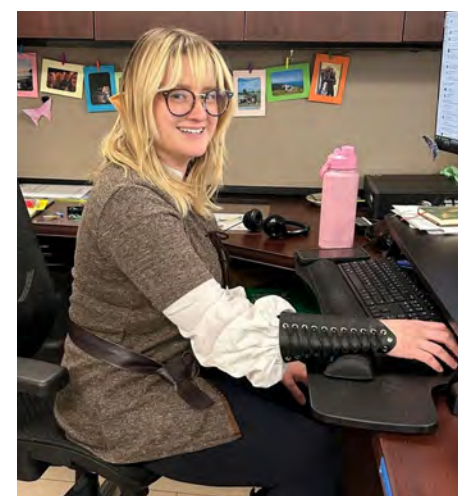
- 30% Regional Autism Centres
- 19% HRSA
- 19% Family Support
- 17% Pinwheel Wellness Centre
- 12% Recreation
- 3% QuickStart Nova Scotia



Social Inclusion Volunteers

- 56% Autism Arts
- 26% Social Group
- 16% Dungeons & Dragons
- 1% Women's Autism/Autistic Project
- 1% Pinwheel Wellness Centre







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Inclusion ✨ Respect ✨ Collaboration ✨ Courage ✨ Acceptance