

# 2022/23

## ANNUAL REPORT

JULY 1, 2022 - JUNE 30, 2023



LET'S RECAP →

# MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR & THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

During the pandemic, we surveyed our members to identify the most critical needs of our community. Four needs were identified, and we have worked to address them all year: housing, employment, mental health support, and social connections. With limited resources and a small team of dedicated employees, Autism Edmonton took strides to tackle each of the four and has been incredibly successful so far, both in terms of the incredible growth of the organization as well as the number of individuals served across our range of programming.

Housing and Employment services offered by Autism Edmonton reached a new level of impact this year. Our new Housing Coordinator successfully found permanent housing for individuals and families in addition to co-founding the Autism Housing Network of Alberta (AHNA) and launching new resource guides in partnership with the Autism Society of Alberta. Our E3 Employment Program, in collaboration with Meticulon Consulting Inc., has expanded our partnerships with community employers to welcome participants to the program. We continue to face the challenges of these difficult economic times, and these programs, in addition to our Pantry Food Program, work to help our members fulfill fundamental needs.

Autistic individuals and their loved ones come to us for support with mental health in various ways. Everything we do supports mental health and eases the everyday obstacles that arise for our members, whether through our peer discussion groups, resource navigation, or advocacy in times of need.

Our work in fostering social connection is vital. Many of our programs are designed to unite people, whether in pursuing a home, a career, or a greater understanding of autism and the challenges that autistic individuals face. We are also proud of the fantastic work our program teams do daily to facilitate our Occasio and League Social-Recreational Programs and bring our thousands of members together in activities across the city. We will continue to educate businesses and organizations on how they can help us create spaces that are not only accessible but also equitable.

So, where do we go from here? The demand for our programming has only increased steadily in the past year. As a result, in achieving our vision that all autistic individuals have a life full of possibilities, we must maintain and expand these critical services for our members, facilitating meaningful conversations and dialogue with autistic self-advocates and stepping up to meet the growing need for support in our community. As has been the case since 1971, Autism Edmonton will do its very best to represent, support, and uplift the thousands of autistic individuals who come to us for assistance.

We want to thank our current and outgoing Board of Directors for the gift of their time and energy as we continue to meet the ambitious goals of our strategic plan. Their guidance will be critical, and we are excited to continue working alongside them. In addition, we cannot thank our staff enough for being the beating heart of this organization. Finally, we are very grateful for every donor generously giving to Autism Edmonton to help us realize a more inclusive and accessible city for autistic individuals. Whether a few dollars a month or a significant one-time gift, the ripple effect of your contribution is felt throughout the organization and, most importantly, by our members. On behalf of them, five thousand strong, thank you.



**Melinda Noyes**  
*Executive Director*



**Lisa Laferriere**  
*Chair, Board of Directors*

# LANGUAGE MATTERS

## Autism Edmonton aims to amplify the voices of autistic and neurodivergent individuals, families, and carers.

To really understand autism, it is essential to listen to and value what autistic people say about their experiences.

Language is constantly evolving, and there is no universally accepted language that has been agreed upon, but it is imperative that we take direction and listen to those who are educating us on their own experiences and how they want autism-focused language to be used.

Autism Edmonton is making a conscious effort to update its language on all fronts, as directed by the self-advocacy community.

With the feedback we have received and as an act of commitment and solidarity with the self-advocate community, Autism Edmonton has decided to update its Mission and Vision statements to reflect identity-first language.

**Previous Vision:** All people on the autism spectrum have a life full of possibilities.

**New Vision:** All autistic people have a life full of possibilities.

**Previous Mission:** To enhance the lives of people on the autism spectrum through knowledge, services and inclusive opportunities.

**New Mission:** To enhance the lives of autistic people through knowledge, services and inclusive opportunities.

"I am an autistic adult. I choose my words very carefully as I describe myself in this way, and to you right now. Autism is how I perceive my external and internal worlds. It is the way I communicate, plan my life, show love, and dominates how I spend my time. To me, autism is a clear, integral, and obvious component to who I am. When it was suggested to me that I alternatively refer to myself as someone with autism, so as not to let myself be defined by a disorder, I was taken aback. To me, autism is not a disorder, but rather a condition of who I am and a valuable neurotype. Though yes, autism is challenging, stigmatizing, and debilitating.... to me, it is also powerful, thoughtful, and beautiful. Resisting my whole integration of autism with my entire self, would be a rejection of a huge part of myself. My lived experience as an autistic person has proven to me that being proud of myself, means being proud of my autism. It is me. I am it. I wouldn't change this. When you call me an autistic person, you are showing me that you accept my autism as beautiful too. Thank you for listening to our autistic voices and following our lead on how we want to be viewed."

**Jessica B, Self-Advocate**





# SUPPORT SERVICES

## THE LEAGUE

**497** PARTICIPANTS  
**56** NEW PARTICIPANTS  
**49** ACTIVITIES THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

## PARTNERS OF AUTISTIC ADULTS DISCUSSION GROUP

**79** PARTICIPANTS  
**12** MEETINGS

## AUTISTIC ADULTS DISCUSSION GROUP

**153** PARTICIPANTS  
**12** MEETINGS

## THE GOLDEN JOURNEY DISCUSSION GROUP

**79** PARTICIPANTS  
**8** MEETINGS

## PARENTS OF AUTISTIC ADULTS DISCUSSION GROUP

**51** PARTICIPANTS  
**11** MEETINGS

## LGBTQ2S+ DISCUSSION GROUP

**73** PARTICIPANTS  
**12** MEETINGS

## AUTISTIC WOMEN'S DISCUSSION GROUP

**131** PARTICIPANTS  
**18** MEETINGS

## MEMBERS

**769**

NEW MEMBERS

**5,127**

TOTAL MEMBERS

## OCCASIO

**4690**

RESPIRE HOURS

**119**

NEW PARTICIPANTS

**3,578**

DIRECTED TO RELEVANT SERVICES THROUGH  
OUR RESOURCE NAVIGATION PROGRAM

## THE PANTRY FOOD SUPPORT PROGRAM

**1,449** HAMPERS  
**701** INDIVIDUALS SUPPORTED  
**33** NEW INDIVIDUALS RECEIVED FOOD SECURITY  
VALUE OF **\$72,500!**



## ADVOCACY

**386** INDIVIDUALS SUPPORTED THROUGH A COLLABORATIVE AND PERSON-CENTERED APPROACH.

**147%** INCREASE IN DEMAND FOR ADVOCACY SUPPORTS OVER LAST YEAR

## VOLUNTEER STATS

**392**  
BOARD HOURS

**880**  
EVENT HOURS

**930**  
PROGRAM HOURS

**2,102**  
TOTAL HOURS

TOTAL SAVINGS OF  
**\$60,000+**

## EDUCATION

### AUTISM 101

**21** PRESENTATIONS  
**685** PARTICIPANTS

### AUTISM 201

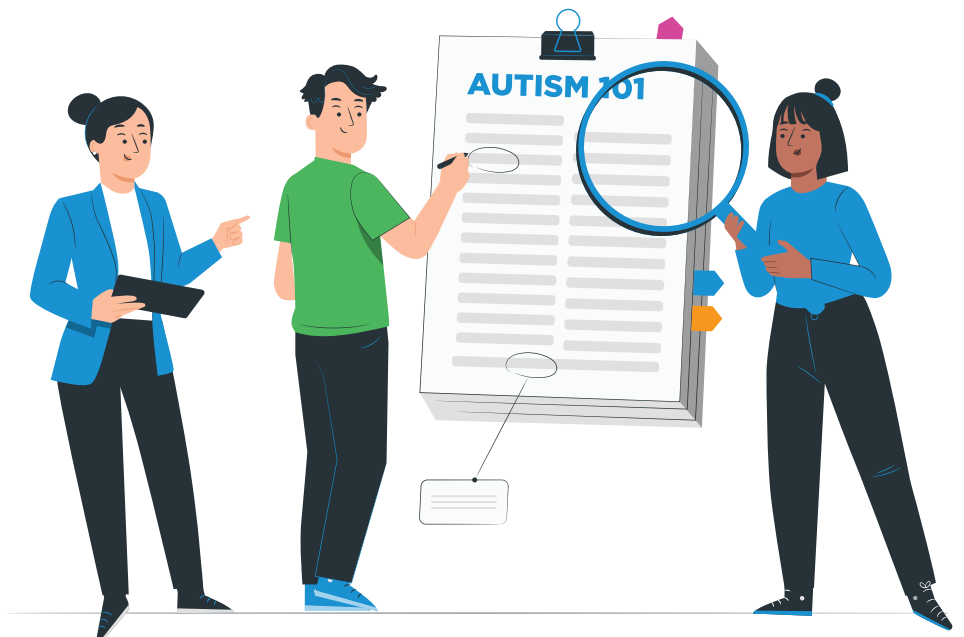
**9** PRESENTATIONS  
**463** PARTICIPANTS

### NON VIOLENT CRISIS INTERVENTION

**1** WORKSHOP  
**14** PARTICIPANTS

### STAY HOME ALONE

**1** SESSION  
**16** PARTICIPANTS



## WHAT OUR MEMBERS ARE SAYING:

"My first introduction into the AE community was the Autistic Women's Discussion Group and it has been life changing for me. Meeting other women who truly understand and can empathize with the specific struggles that come with being a woman on the spectrum has been incredibly validating and encouraging. Oftentimes autism can be an isolating experience. Not because we don't want to connect, but simply because we connect differently. Having a space where I was able to meet with other women who enjoy connecting in the same ways that I do has helped to release the shackles of self-isolation that had been holding me back long after the pandemic had ended. Not only that, but the friendships I have found there have been both nourishing and nurturing. I'm so grateful for the sense of community I have found within this group and am thankful to Autism Edmonton for offering this program."

- Catherine, Autism Edmonton Member

## SOCIAL MEDIA



# FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRE

Autism Edmonton is honoured to lead the FRC program alongside the Autism Society of Alberta and Autism Calgary. The FRC program is in partnership with the Autism Society of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, Peace Autism Society, Chinook Autism Society, Inclusion Lethbridge, and the Crowsnest Community Support Society and started in June of 2021.

*Autism Edmonton takes great pride in leading the Training and Resources component of this provincial initiative.*

50+ Available Training options including:

- Abuse Prevention and Response Protocol
- Positive Behaviour Supports
- Trauma Informed Care
- Individual Support Planning (ISP)
- Non Violent Crisis Intervention (NVC)
- A resource guide of toolkits, videos, and provincial resources that span across all disabilities

## TRAINING INFO SESSIONS

**66** SESSIONS

**1305** PARTICIPANTS

## NON VIOLENT CRISIS INTERVENTION TRAINING (PROVINCE WIDE)

**6** WORKSHOPS

**69** PARTICIPANTS

## AUTISM 101

**4** PRESENTATIONS

**197** PARTICIPANTS

**AUTISM EDMONTON LEADS THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE FOR ALL FRCS ACROSS THE PROVINCE. IT CONNECTS OUR FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRES WITH OUR GOVERNMENT, ENSURING THE VOICES OF AUTISTIC ALBERTANS ARE HEARD. THIS VAST PROGRAM IS AVAILABLE THROUGH FUNDING AND PARTNERSHIPS CREATED WITH THE AUTISM SOCIETY OF ALBERTA**





# NEW PROGRAMMING



EDUCATE EMPOWER EMPLOY



Everyone is deserving of meaningful employment and earning an income in an equitable workspace. However, autistic individuals are often under or unemployed. Autism Edmonton has reacted to the staggering statistic of unemployed autistics by creating a new program. **E3 - Educate, Empower, Employ.**

In the first year of this program, we have welcomed 32 individuals over 5 cohorts to this program. The E3 program supports autistic individuals with employment skills coaching, supportive job search, resume and cover letter, and mock interviews. Through this process we have supported individuals to find and maintain meaningful employment.

*"I believe the most helpful part of the employment program for me has been the one-to-one job coaching sessions I've been receiving with Todd. He has helped me to feel more confident in the many job skills that I already possessed but was unable to see due to the many negative working experiences in my past. I also think that the workshops have been helpful, especially the one on disclosure."*  
- E3 Participant

*"I would recommend the employment program to anyone on the spectrum who is wanting to be employed. It helped in a few different areas of my career plus I was able to be challenged setting goals, financial literacy and building community. I am looking forward to what's to come in my future employment endeavors."*  
- Janae, E3 Participant



**AUTISM HOUSING  
NETWORK OF ALBERTA**

*"First and foremost, thank you. You are the first person who has really made a difference to my housing situation in the sense that you really dove in and gave concrete support for me. I desperately needed that. I'm moving into a building that is quiet, and an apartment that is spacious and a very nice manager who now knows that I am Autistic/ND and has stepped up more than once as an advocate for me. Thanks, Drewe. Your help meant a lot to me at a time when I felt in real despair."*  
- Client of AHNA

Autism Edmonton and Autism Alberta in partnership with the Sinneave Family Foundation have created an exciting new program to advance housing opportunities for autistic adults within the province of Alberta. We are focused on improving access to, and quality of housing through relationship-building, awareness, and advocacy.-

Closing out the first year of this program we are happy to report we have supported 10 individuals find permanent housing and have no intention of slowing down anytime soon. Not only does this incredible program support autistics to find housing, it also supports individuals in keeping their current housing if they are at risk of losing it and educates tenants on their rights. Through relationship building we have secured impactful partnerships with both affordable housing partners and market providers.

**The roadmap to permanent housing looks different for everyone and we are thrilled to offer supports and resources for individuals at any pitstop.**



# LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Equity and inclusion are not just buzzwords; they are the way forward, embedded into everything we do. Autism Edmonton has been proudly serving the autistic community for over 52 years. Starting from humble beginnings and a group of dedicated volunteer parents, Autism Edmonton now employs 13 full-time staff with an additional 12 casual staff. This small but mighty team provides services and programs to the over 5,000 members seeking support, resources, and navigation. These services are in high demand, and Autism Edmonton's gap-filling role is integral to ensuring individuals feel seen, heard, supported, and included.

Currently, in Edmonton, **1 in 38** individuals is diagnosed as autistic, which means there are roughly **30,000** autistic individuals in Edmonton. This stat does not include undiagnosed individuals or the neurodiverse community as a whole. This data indicates that approximately **6.5% of families** have an autistic individual in their household and that 6.5% of Edmonton's population is not included, heard, or considered.

**Accessible, but not equitable.** Though our community has made strides to improve the accessibility of public spaces, this may not always include measures to improve accessibility for the neurodivergent community. Though social service agencies and other charitable non-profits try to create inclusive spaces in our offices and workplaces, what if we could expand autism-inclusive policies and practices across the entire community in all the spaces we live, work, and play? Research shows that neurodivergent individuals experience consistently lower rates of community inclusion compared not only to non-disabled peers but also to those in other disability categories. Therefore, bold and ambitious solutions are necessary to address these barriers for the autistic community here in Edmonton.

Looking to the future, Autism Edmonton will continue to find innovative and creative ways to engage the public in education and understanding. Working towards an Autism Friendly City supports Edmonton's growth plan. Our 6.5% stat will continue to rise, and community inclusion for all matters. Sensory accommodations are easy to implement when organizations choose to take action. These measures benefit not only neurodiverse individuals but their loved ones and the broader community. Social participation is vital to living a fulfilled life and enables everyone to live lives full of possibilities.



## CONNECT WITH US

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