

President's Annual Report **for the fiscal period April 1, 2008 to March 31, 2009** **submitted June 3, 2009 at the Annual General Meeting** **of Autism Ontario – Durham Region**

Autism Ontario – Durham Region is a regional chapter of Autism Ontario, a non-profit registered charity in Ontario. This report highlights the growth of **Autism Ontario – Durham Region** in its mission to provide *information, support, friendship, and more* to families living with autism spectrum disorders in Durham Region.

First of all, a THANK YOU to our chapter's volunteers

Chapter Leadership Council

It has been said that the grass-roots passion exerted by parent volunteers is unmatched, and in 2008-2009 the Chapter Leadership Council (CLC) consisted *entirely* of **volunteers who are parents of children/adults with autism**. As you read this report, I'm sure you will agree the CLC deserves recognition for their teamwork and commitment to supporting the autism community in Durham Region:

Kathy Sima, Vice President & Fundraising Coordinator

Cheryl Barton, Secretary (resignation accepted April 24, 2009)

Tia Vetere, Treasurer & Event Coordinator

Karen LaHay, Advocacy Coordinator

Heather Seabright, Chapter Services Coordinator (resignation accepted October 11, 2008)

Al Maggi, Public Awareness & Media Coordinator (resignation accepted March 10, 2009)

Ana Marple, Volunteer Coordinator

The spouses and families of CLC members must also be acknowledged. The chapter could not function without their support.

Resignations were regretfully accepted from the 2008-2009 CLC from **Heather Seabright**, **Al Maggi** and **Cheryl Barton** before the end of the term. We are grateful for the contributions they made to the chapter. We wish Cheryl Barton and her family all the best as they settle in their new home in Singapore!

Karen LaHay has completed 3 one-year terms on the CLC and has declined to stand for nomination to the 2009-2010 CLC. We recognize Karen for her outstanding contributions to the chapter, and her continued dedication to her volunteer work.

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Key Volunteers

During 2008-2009 there were 3 key volunteers whose administrative support to the CLC was greatly appreciated: **Olivia Mattocks**, an ECE in Durham Region with no specific connection to autism, stepped forward to assist in processing online registration details and to manage event poster distribution to the Canada Post mailing list. **Stephanie Marple**, a long-time chapter volunteer, became the new Kids Up Front Ticket Coordinator enabling the chapter to resume its fabulous free event ticket offers for members. **Farah Mohammed** has provided consistent volunteer support toward a number of chapter events throughout the year – surely at some point you were welcomed by her smiling face as you signed in at one of our many registration tables! **Although it's not possible to name all the volunteers in this report, I want to ensure each one that every contribution of your valuable time, whether big or small, was deeply appreciated.**

*Report from CLC Member **Ana Marple**, Volunteer Coordinator: With all the events taking place over the last year, there were many opportunities for volunteers to become involved with our chapter. We added approximately 50 new names to our volunteer contact list. Some have taken on administrative tasks as well as assisting with events. A few expressed interest in taking on a CLC position.*

A note about the RCP Program in Durham Region

The Autism Ontario Realize Community Potential (RCP) Program was introduced in Durham Region in December 2006 with a fiscal year end of March 31. Annualized funding for the program from the Ministry of Children & Youth Services (MCYS), administered by the provincial office of Autism Ontario in Toronto, has been continued for another year beginning April 1, 2009. **Shona Vincent**, a full-time staff member of the provincial office, works in the community as the RCP Coordinator for Durham Region. RCP Speaker Events, Training Opportunities and Social Learning Opportunities are sponsored by the RCP Program through its own budget; **chapter funds are not involved**. The RCP Coordinator assumes responsibility for arranging all RCP-related activities, and oversees each program and event to completion. **Chapter volunteer resources provide support in some form to all RCP-sponsored activities.** The seamless collaboration between the CLC and the RCP Coordinator in Durham Region is exemplary. The allocation of RCP funds is directed by members of the autism community in Durham Region (parents and service providers) who may submit Speaker Event and Social Learning Opportunity proposals to the chapter's RCP Coordinator at any time. In 2008-2009, 156 new contacts participated in various aspects of the RCP Program as noted throughout this report.

Chapter Membership

During this fiscal period, membership peaked at an all-time high of **146** in January 2009. This is likely due to the ongoing focus of the CLC toward adding value to membership in Autism Ontario – Durham Region. For the third year in a row, chapter members continued to receive preferential pricing on chapter events and RCP Speaker Events. Thanks to the efforts of our fundraising team, the CLC was once again able to offer free admission to chapter members at the Family Fun Day & BBQ in August 2008, and the Family Christmas Party in November 2008. Through a partnership with Kids Up Front Foundation (Toronto), chapter members also received free tickets to sports events valued at a total of \$544. In addition to preparing agendas and recording CLC minutes for all monthly business meetings, CLC Member **Cheryl Barton**, Secretary, continued to contact and welcome all new members, while those renewing their membership received

Chapter members as of April 2008: 128 as of January 2009: 146 overall increase: 14% 2007-2008 increase: 29% 2006-2007 increase: 30%
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personal thank you messages, and lapsed members received renewal reminders, all as demonstration of the CLC's commitment to the increasing the value of membership.

Information

E-News

The CLC of Autism Ontario – Durham Region is committed to ensuring that families affected by autism spectrum disorders have streamlined access to practical information. Community service providers and private agencies forward information about upcoming events and workshops to the chapter; this info is then edited and shared with the E-News Group approximately once per month as *E-News*, a compilation of chapter news and community information distributed via email. An online registration form enables families and community service providers to sign up for the free service. All issues of *E-News* are archived on the chapter's website for reference. The chapter also forwards News/Nouvelles from the provincial office of Autism Ontario to the E-News Group. It is important to remember there are many families in Durham Region that do not have access to the internet, therefore a Canada Post mailing list is maintained for families without internet access (35 families as of March 31, 2009) so they can be notified of upcoming chapter events. **It should be noted that the combined total of E-News recipients and families on the Canada Post mailing list (1,103 as of March 31, 2009) is the most accurate reflection of the total number of families served by the chapter, as compared to the number of chapter members.**

E-News Group

as of April 1, 2008: 866
as of March 31, 2009: 1,068

annual increase: 23%

2007-2008 increase: 75%

Telephone contacts

After sharing space for 2 years in Greenbank (north of Uxbridge) with our wonderful landlords at the Precious Minds Resource & Learning Centre, on March 1, 2009 the chapter office moved to a more central location in Durham Region and became a subtenant of the Durham Association for Family Respite Services at 850 King Street West in Oshawa. In addition to the office phone line, as a service to the community the CLC provides a toll-free phone line. All calls to the 1-866 line are recorded as voicemail messages and managed by volunteers who respond within five business days (or less). An average of 35 calls per month was made to the toll free phone line during the fiscal period. 41% of all calls to the toll free line (172 calls) were from first-time contacts to the chapter. Parent and community service provider inquiries regarding adults over age 18 were referred to CLC Member **Karen LaHay**, Advocacy Coordinator responsible for Teen & Adult issues. Parent and community service provider inquiries regarding children and youth age 18 and under were referred to the RCP Coordinator, **Shona Vincent**. In addition, Shona received 314 telephone calls at the chapter's office in Oshawa for a **grand total of 733 incoming phone contacts during the fiscal period.**

Calls to toll-free 1-866 phone line

from April 1, 2008 - March 31, 2009: **419**
in 2007-2008: 474
in 2006-2007: 280

Email inquiries

It is challenging to track statistics for emails received by the chapter; however, the estimated number of emails received by the chapter from **new contacts** for this fiscal period is **112** (by coincidence, the same number as the previous fiscal year). Similar to the handling of phone calls, parent inquiries regarding children and youth 18 and under were forwarded to the chapter's RCP Coordinator (who directly received 1,095 emails), while the Advocacy Coordinator responded to email inquiries regarding individuals with ASD over age 18.

Website

Hosted by Autism Ontario, the chapter's website, www.autismontario.com/durham, forms part of the provincial organization's main website. This arrangement is an advantage not only for the chapter, but also for the community as the main site contains valuable information with links to provincial autism resources, while our chapter's site focuses on local information and resources. Using a colour-coded menu system (green for the provincial website; blue for chapter websites), both branches of the site are easily accessible from any of our chapter's web pages. The website continues to be an enhancement to communication with the community and enables the chapter to convey up-to-the-moment information about events, workshops and resources.

Speaker Events & Training Opportunities

This term, the RCP Program sponsored 7 Speaker Events and Training Opportunities on various topics of interest to the autism community with a total of 196 parents, caregivers and professionals supporting individuals with autism in attendance.

196 parents and professionals attended 7 RCP Speaker Events in 2008-2009

Support

Autism Support Groups

The chapter's commitment to provide support for families living with autism expanded in 2008-2009 to four autism support groups for parents/caregivers when the CLC realized a goal and launched CHAT-East in Bowmanville (Clarington) in October 2009, sponsored by the RCP Program in Durham Region. There is no charge to attend autism support groups; all groups meet monthly throughout the year (with the exception of December), and offer peer-to-peer support from parents of children, youth and adults with autism.

Autism support groups for parents/caregivers from April 1, 2008 to March 31, 2009 combined average monthly attendance: 21 average first-time attendees per month: 6

The autism support group co-hosts for April 2008 to March 2009 were:

CHAT North in Greenbank: Kathy Sima, Lisa Wilson (CLC Members)

CHAT-Central in Whitby: Karen LaHay (CLC Member), Beth Goswell, Karen Lewis (chapter member/parent volunteers)

CHAT-West in Pickering: Al Maggi, Cheryl Barton (former CLC Members) and Ana Marple (CLC Member)

CHAT-East in Bowmanville: Shona Vincent (RCP Coordinator) and Tia Vetere (CLC Member)

Beth Goswell tendered her resignation as co-host of CHAT-Central in May 2009. A chapter volunteer for many years and a former CLC member, Beth is well-deserving of a rest! We appreciate Beth for her long-standing dedication to supporting families in Durham Region.

Since January 2008, Autism Ontario – Durham Region has engaged in a partnership with **FOOTPRINTS respite program** at CHAT-West. The partnership is in direct response to parent comments regarding the challenge of finding appropriate childcare so they can attend an autism support group. FOOTPRINTS staff provide on-site respite at CHAT-West for up to 4 individuals with autism age 13 and under, and coordinate on-site babysitting services for their siblings through volunteers from Dunbarton-Fairport

United Church. FOOTPRINTS staff handle pre-registration; Autism Ontario – Durham Region handles advertising/promotion for the service. A nominal hourly fee is charged by FOOTPRINTS for the respite service, and by the babysitters who care for the siblings. This arrangement enables parents to attend an autism support group with the knowledge that their children are receiving care from staff and volunteers trained to support individuals with ASD, with the added convenience of babysitting service for siblings. : **In the period April 2008 to March 2009 average monthly attendance in on-site respite for children with ASD was less than 2, with an average of only 1 child per month in sibling babysitting. In the new fiscal year, it is hoped this valuable service will be utilized by parents to its full potential.**

Family Support Plans

The RCP Coordinator in Durham Region is available to meet 1:1 with parents to develop support plans to ensure families are connected to available resources in the community. During the fiscal period, the RCP Program Coordinator engaged in **154 one-to-one parent meetings** for families caring for children and youth 18 years of age and under. CLC Member **Karen LaHay**, Advocacy Coordinator, handled requests for support from families caring for individuals with ASD over the age of 18, as well as requests from adults affected by ASD.

Friendship

Social Learning Opportunities

Report from provincial office staff member, Shona

*Vincent, RCP Coordinator in Durham Region: This past year, the Realize Community Potential (RCP) Program in Durham Region was able to provide a number of opportunities and consequently a great deal of support to the community. The RCP Coordinator was able to develop and run 15 Social Learning Opportunities such as Family Days at the Toronto Zoo, swimming pools, Nova's Ark, as well as Social Skills Groups, Magic Lessons, Play Skills Groups, Sibling Support Groups, Yoga Programs, etc. making **1,356 spaces in these activities available to the community.***

RCP Social Learning Opportunities:
1,356 spaces in various programs were made available to the community

All concepts for Social Learning Opportunities were proposed by families and service providers in the community. Some programs were facilitated by community service providers, including Balanced Life Yoga, Grandview Children's Centre, Exceptional Learning Centre, Precious Minds Resource and Learning Centre, and Kerry's Place Autism Services.

Family Events

Report from CLC Member Tia Vetere, Event Coordinator: This was a great year for chapter family events. The BBQ was very popular with approximately 200 guests enjoying the entertainment and a special surprise: an ice cream truck! There were some great crafts and activities including a scavenger hunt and a terrific raffle table. At the Family Christmas Party, over 300 people attended and we had a fabulous Santa who handed out a gift to all 75 children. Donations from the community enabled chapter volunteers to select and wrap all the gifts. Every family received a free photo with Santa, thanks to Evan Linnell of Magic Portraits. The atmosphere was very festive and fun.

Family Events:
200 to 300 people attend

... and More:

Public Awareness & Media

Volunteer Chapter Ambassadors were invited by community service providers to participate in many speaking engagements during the fiscal year, including presentations at Durham Continuing Education, Durham District School Board, Durham College, Oshawa Public Libraries, Grandview Children's Centre, as well as Together for Autism presentations at schools within the region.

In 2008-2009, Autism Ontario – Durham Region continued its commitment toward supporting the Autism Ontario province-wide public awareness and fundraising campaign, **Together for Autism (TFA)**. **54 schools, daycares, businesses and organizations participated in the campaign in Durham Region.** Although the awareness raised is immeasurable, over **\$5,953.44** in fundraising income was generated in Durham Region alone. For the first time in the campaign's history, \$457.93 of the funds will be invested in the local community; TFA remains committed to supporting autism research with the balance. The CLC would like to acknowledge TFA Campaign Coordinator, **Bonnie McPhail**, and former campaign Co-chair, **Ron Harrison**, for their dedication to raising awareness about autism. We are proud to have both Bonnie and Ron as members of the Durham Region chapter of Autism Ontario!

Advocacy

Students affected by autism in our community have representation on their behalf at monthly Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) meetings at the Durham District School Board (DDSB) and the Durham Catholic District School Board (DCDSB). This term, Representative **Duncan LeBlanc** and Alternate **Elisabeth Graham** attended DDSB SEAC meetings. Representative **Pennie Wace** and Alternate **Gilaine Funnell** shared responsibility for attendance at DCDSB SEAC meetings. Duncan, Pennie and Gilaine have been nominated by the CLC to continue in their roles for 2009-2010, along with new chapter member/parent volunteer **Wendy Dunn** who will replace Elisabeth Graham as Alternate Representative to the DDSB. Approval of these 4 nominations is pending from the respective SEACs for the DDSB and DCDSB.

Over the summer, **Elisabeth Graham** will move with her family to Niagara Region. For over 10 years, Elisabeth has been a tireless advocate for families supporting children and youth with any barrier to learning in Durham Region, including autism. After many years as a volunteer for the chapter and an impeccable reputation in the community, Elisabeth will be missed!

*Report from CLC Member **Karen LaHay**, Advocacy Coordinator: Advocacy activities have included continuing to build reciprocal relationships with local community partners including Durham Regional Police Services, Emergency Medical Services, Fire Services, St. John Ambulance and Epilepsy Durham. The goal to raise awareness about Autism Spectrum Disorders has been realized through education sessions and/or information sharing. In September 2009, the chapter was a proud sponsor of "Autism Risk Management Training for First Responders" presented by Dennis Debbaudt. Resources for adults on the autism spectrum continued to be researched and shared via the website, E-News and upon request. Follow up with local MPPs regarding Autism Ontario's public policy paper "Forgotten. Ontario Adults with Autism & Adults with Aspergers" was initiated.*

As a parent and chapter President, I also advocate for the autism community by serving as a volunteer for the Collaborative Services Delivery Model Group in Durham Region, an initiative of the Ontario Ministry of Education as recommended by the Joint Ministers' Reference Group on Autism. The Group meets bi-monthly at the Durham District School Board in Whitby.

Resources

In addition to the chapter's E-News publication and website, in 2008-2009 the chapter remained firm in its commitment to provide autism resources to the community. CLC Member **Karen LaHay** continued to foster a partnership with the Oshawa Public Libraries (OPL), managing the chapter's annual donation of \$1,000 of autism resources to the public library system in Durham Region. Through this arrangement, autism resources are made available to the public across the region through inter-library loan. A detailed list of items donated to the library can be found on our chapter's website on the "Resources" page. According to Community Development Librarian **Alison McCullough** at OPL, these resources are being accessed on a regular basis by the local community.

Strategic Planning

Further to the chapter's previous grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) for strategic planning purposes (now completed), in 2008-2009 the chapter was in a position to apply for an operating grant from OTF for the purpose of hiring administrative staff to oversee fundraising and volunteer recruitment. Under the leadership of chapter Secretary, **Cheryl Barton**, an OTF subcommittee was struck including chapter President **Lisa Wilson** and chapter volunteer **Carol-Anne Sullivan**. Extensive preliminary work was completed on this file by Cheryl; however, grant application plans were placed on hold near the end of the fiscal term, pending additional volunteer resources to assist with completion.

Fundraising & Donations

An (unaudited) financial report will be submitted by CLC Member **Tia Vetere**, Treasurer, at the chapter's Annual General Meeting on June 3, 2009. A key highlight in the report will be the chapter's **Good Works expenditures** for the fiscal period totaling **\$39,460.38** (\$36,000 in 2007-2008).

Revenue year ended March 31, 2009: \$51,526.39 year ended March 31, 2008: \$45,791.62 year-over-year increase: 12.5%

Chapter revenue and subsequent good works are dependent primarily upon the momentum of the chapter's fundraising program.

*Report from CLC Member **Kathy Sima**, Vice President & Fundraising Coordinator: In the past year, the CLC moved away from holding large fundraising events, such as a golf tournament or gala, which involve an intensive use of our volunteer resources, and instead focused its efforts on partnering with local community supporters and organizations. Our major fundraising event was our participation in the 2008 Scotiabank Toronto Waterfront Marathon / Half Marathon & 5k Charity Challenge in September. This was our 2nd year being an official charity of this event, and our team of 20 participants raised over \$13,000 in pledges, up considerably from the previous year's total of just over \$5,000. The chapter saw a sizeable increase in general, corporate and memorials donations this past year. We were honoured to be the Charity of Choice for the Ajax-Pickering Board of Trade's annual Business Excellence Awards in October, and also received generous donations from the Rotary Club of Pickering and the Toronto East District Masons. Through our chapter members and volunteers' connections, significant donations were received from the Bank of Montreal Employees Charitable Foundation, Mister Keys Limited / Teopia, Power Worker's Union Local 1000, TD Securities' Employee Charity Auction, Telus, Warner Bros. Entertainment Canada, and other businesses. As well, several people organized events that raised funds for Autism Ontario-Durham Region, including the Elvis and Buddy Tribute show and the Range Road Band night at On the Rocks.*

Fundraising efforts enable the chapter to support its family events and operating expenses, and other important initiatives, including: the purchase of autism resources for donation to the public library system in Durham Region; a donation to Together for Autism for awareness activities; two Autism Ontario educational scholarships; and, the 2009 Family Funding Program to support recreational opportunities for individuals with autism between July 1 – August 31, 2009. Funds for the 2009 program will be disbursed in the coming weeks.

The CLC believes that the chapter should *not* rely on families supporting individuals with autism to generate fundraising income. Instead, we turn to the community at large to support the chapter's charitable activities. We do seek support from the autism community in Durham Region by asking families to *promote* our fundraisers and *invite* friends, family, co-workers, and employers to participate and contribute.

Looking forward to 2009-2010

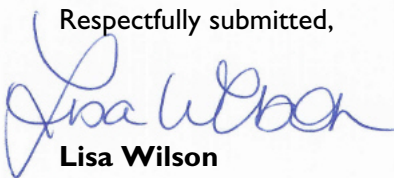
During the past term, the CLC worked hard to maintain the explosion in the chapter's growth from the previous 2 terms. In order to continue the range of services the chapter currently offers to the community, and to move toward reaching more families supporting the estimated 3,800 individuals with autism in Durham Region, in the upcoming term the CLC will need to continue its focus on the active recruitment of mature volunteers to assist the CLC with day-to-day administrative and fundraising tasks. If you know someone who has the time and skills to assist the CLC with these tasks or other important awareness initiatives in the community, please consider encouraging them to volunteer for Autism Ontario – Durham Region. Being a parent of a child with ASD is *not* a pre-requisite to volunteering, although we do find volunteers whose lives have been touched by autism, either through a family or work connection, prove to be most committed to supporting the autism community.

A final thank you

After 4 consecutive terms as part of the CLC, the last 3 as chapter President, I have declined to stand for nomination to the 2009-2010 CLC. The past few years have been a time of incredible personal growth for me, thanks to my volunteer work and the friendships I have made on the CLC. The youngest of my four sons was diagnosed with autism just a few months prior to my initial volunteer involvement, so for me chapter work has been a meaningful part of a journey that has prepared me to serve the community in another capacity. I will continue to be involved as a volunteer for Autism Ontario – Durham Region in 2009-2010, and look forward to serving under its new leadership, which is sure to be excellent.

Thank you for taking the time to learn about Autism Ontario – Durham Region. By doing so, I am hopeful you will be inspired to contribute to the chapter's mission to provide information, support, friendship and more to families living with autism spectrum disorders in Durham Region.

Respectfully submitted,



Lisa Wilson
President, 2006-2009 (parent volunteer)