

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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OTF grant helps Autism Ontario and OAAI launch report led by autistic adults, caregivers and allies on service gaps and needs in Ottawa

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – Ottawa, Ontario – June 21, 2021 - Creating a supportive and inclusive Ontario for autism is the mission of the Autism Society Ontario, also known as Autism Ontario. In 2019, the organization was awarded an Ontario Trillium Foundation Seed Grant of \$70,000 over 12 months to convene the Ottawa community of autistic adults, family caregivers and allies to ask what services are needed to live a fully connected life. In partnership with Autism Ontario, the Ottawa Adult Autism Initiative (OAAI) published the final report that features results of the 2020 online survey and consultations. The complete report can be found on OAAI's website at <https://ottawaadultautism.com/>

Recognizing the grant, Joel Harden, MPP of Ottawa Centre stated: "*The Ontario Trillium Foundation Seed grants support research and development by testing new ideas and different approaches in communities across Ontario. This grant helped Autism Ontario in convening the Ottawa community of autistic adults and their families to research what services are needed to live a fully connected life. The project impacted over 600 people living in our city and contributed to build inclusive and engaged communities. The work being done by Autism Ontario is true community building, and this grant helped them to continue their incredible work. Congratulations to all those involved in this project!*"

This project and report represent a culmination of community engagement and vital work that happened over the last year and a half. Through meetings and online engagement, the initiative created opportunities for a diverse sample of the Ottawa adult autism community (autistic adults, their families, and support/service organizations) to voice opinions and provide input on needed services/supports.

"*Centering the voices of autistic self-advocates and working together to make this community consultation a reality for Ottawa was a significant achievement. The momentum generated with OTF's support has brought into sharper focus the gaps and opportunities that the Ottawa Adult Autism Initiative is committed to addressing for years to come,*" says Marg Spoelstra, Executive Director, Autism Ontario.

The project was also an opportunity to gather information about existing supports/services and service gaps. This information will be used as the foundation for designing a network responsive to the needs of the community. "*The Ottawa Adult Autism Initiative values the*



opportunity to partner with Autism Ontario in this ground-breaking initiative to create a new way for our adult autism community to more easily connect with necessary supports and services, based on the lived experiences of adults on the autism spectrum and their families/allies,” says the Ottawa Adult Autism Initiative Steering Committee.

Central to this project are the leadership, perspectives, and guidance of autistic self-advocate members of the OAAI steering committee like Courtney, Morgan, and Edward. In a discussion about the challenges and barriers that can prevent autistic adults from obtaining and maintaining a good quality of life: Courtney shares that *“having that insider knowledge [is critical] because...we are aiming to improve the quality of life for [autistic people]. It only makes sense to have self-advocates play a central role on this and other related projects.”* Morgan agrees, stating that *“...the more autistic self-advocates out there, the more perspectives you get on the issue at hand.”*

Edward joined the project as a self-advocate because he *“...want[s] a better future but also hopefully [can contribute to] making sure there’s better services in Ottawa for autistic adults.”* This report brings into focus seven main themes, all focused on the need to improve quality of life for autistic adults and their families; key to achieving this goal is the development of accessible, desirable, and flexible services in the region for adults over 18. Courtney considers this access to be necessary, stating *“there needs to be a wider societal understanding that autism for an individual doesn’t end at 18 or 21 years old...It’s a whole life, holistic living experience that needs to be reflected in services...and also in understanding, too.”*

Watch the OAAI self-advocates in their Autism Minutes videos on the OAAI YouTube channel at: <https://youtube.com/channel/UCqke9ue8mt8Se-N30p4R5Ew>

The [Ottawa Adult Autism Initiative](#) is a grassroots group whose membership includes adults on the autism spectrum, family members, allies and professionals. All share a passion for creating an accessible and relevant support network for autistic adults, designed by and for the autistic community. Autism Ontario supports the vision and work of the OAAI in its commitment to create a comprehensive, community-driven network of services and opportunities for autistic adults.

[Autism Ontario](#) has a 48-year history of representing thousands of people on the autism spectrum and their families across Ontario. We advocate alongside and on behalf of autistic people and their families – at all ages and stages of life, reflecting a wide range of expression and abilities.



The [Ontario Trillium Foundation](#) (OTF) is an agency of the Government of Ontario, and one of Canada's leading granting foundations. OTF awarded more than \$115 million to 644 projects last year to build healthy and vibrant communities in Ontario.

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