

# Autism

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MATTERS



## Your Experiences

Pages 16 - 22

Info Autisme



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**OUR MISSION:** Creating a supportive and inclusive Ontario for Autism

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## News and Noteworthy

## Autism Ontario Speaks with Ontario Minister of Finance



## Autism Ontario's Values: CARE

**Collaboration** – We believe in the power of working side by side with individuals, families and communities to make informed choices about autism.

**Accountability** – We hold ourselves and others responsible to achieve successful outcomes through high standards of integrity and fiscal responsibility.

**Respect** – We value equity, diversity and inclusion, and we listen to understand.

**Evidence informed** – We use and create knowledge to guide our decisions and work.



**Editor's Note:** Inside the pages of *Autism Matters* we try to include a range of views about ASD and its impact on people. These views may or may not reflect our own, but we trust that diversity of views adds to the reader's insight about complex issues.

**AUTISM ONTARIO** met virtually with the new Minister of Finance, the Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy, on January 25, 2021 to present key matters of concern for the Ministry of Finance's pre-budget consultations. In a follow-up written submission, we expanded on the ideas briefly presented during the Zoom meeting. With input from our members, that document—Autism Ontario 2021 Pre-Budget Consultation Submission—may be read in its entirety on our website, located under the “news” tab.

**Key requests:**

**COVID-19 Vaccinations:** As people with developmental disabilities, such as autism, have been identified to be more vulnerable to the COVID-19 infection (Majnemer and McGrath, December 4, 2020), we ask that priority be given to them and their caregivers with the roll-out of the province's COVID-19 vaccination program.

**Ontario Autism Program:**

**Reduce wait times:** The majority of families with children with autism remain on waitlists for access to OAP services. Reduction of these waitlists remains one of Autism Ontario's Top 5 Priorities, where our 2018 province-wide parent survey indicated that 73.6 percent of caregivers identified waitlists as a large or a very large barrier.

**Implement the Education Committee:** Many autistic students have lost educational gains during the pandemic as they simply could not participate in online learning. We ask that the Ontario Government immediately implement a new Autism Education Committee as recommended in the OAP Panel Report in the section with specific recommendations for the Ministry of Education. This group could meet virtually during pandemic times to achieve the identified outcomes of the report and consider new information contained in Findings from the 2020 Autism Ontario Education Survey.

**Health and Mental Health:**

Provide supports and incentives to grow provincial capacity for mental health professionals who understand autism.

Implement the Mental Health Committee identified in the OAP Advisory Panel's Report in order to address the many gaps in providing health and mental health supports to people on the autism spectrum and their caregivers.

Older Teens and Adults – “Older Teens and Adults: Autism's prevalence rates are not only an alarming statistic for children and youth, but we are now seeing these numbers grow along with the children as they become teens and adults. More importantly, these students are now beginning to exit high school unprepared and unsupported for life as adults in higher numbers more than ever.”

Many recommendations were made with respect to continuing education supports, special services at home, ineligibility for Passport funding, mental health, employment and housing needs.

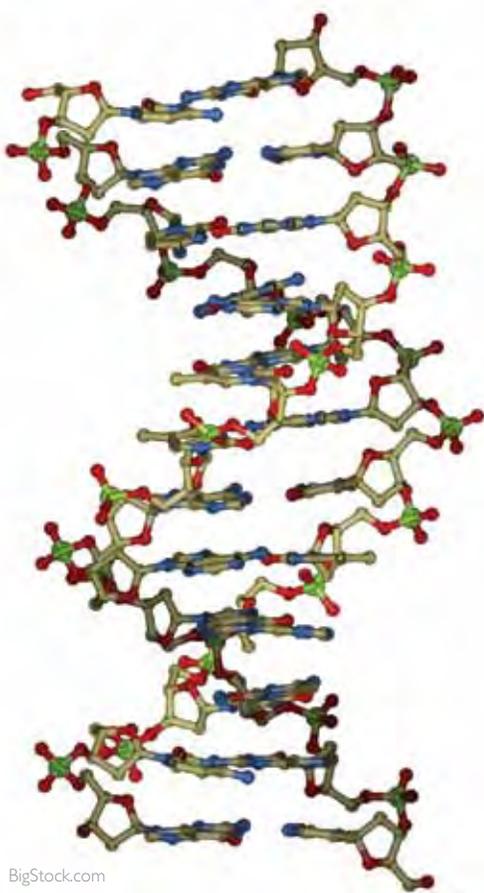
Margaret Spoelstra, Executive Director



# Genetics and Autism

## BREAKTHROUGH IN NOVEL GENETIC CONTRIBUTION TO AUTISM

by Michael Cnudde, Specialist, Communications and Resource Development,  
Autism Ontario



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Last July, a research team from The Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids), led by Dr. Ryan Yuen, announced it had discovered “wrinkles” in DNA that could provide a genetic cause for autism. Researchers believe this could represent a novel mechanism underlying the contribution to autism and other neurodevelopmental disorders.

In October, Autism Ontario invited Dr. Yuen and his colleagues, Dr. Stephen Scherer, the study’s co-author and Director of The Centre for Applied Genomics (TCAG) at SickKids, Dr. Evdokia Anagnostou MD, senior clinician scientist at Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital, and Ny Hoang, Genetic Counsellor in the Autism Research Unit at SickKids, to participate in a webinar to discuss the findings.

“**THIS IS ONE OF THE MOST EXCITING ADVANCES** in autism research in the last 15 years,” said Dr. Scherer. “And that’s captured by the fact that *Nature* journal published us...” Dr. Scherer called it a “huge achievement” for everyone involved, for both researchers and the families who participated in the research.

Being able to identify specific new forms of genetic contributors to autism will better enable earlier identification, he said. That will provide “entry points” added Dr. Scherer, for the development of novel therapeutics for those who choose to use them.

“Autism is considered a multifactorial condition,” explained Ms. Hoang. Likening autism to a cup filled with a number of factors, including both strong and weak genetic contributors, as well as environmental factors, she says the genetic factors are the most important. “In order to develop autism, you have to have enough susceptibility factors to fill that cup.”

“From studying thousands of families with children on the spectrum, we know that the genetic contribution to autism is highly variable,” she said. Examples of genetic variations in autism include gene deletions, duplications and spelling differences.

The tandem repeats, said Ms. Hoang—the “wrinkles” in DNA at the heart of the discovery—are sections of genetic instructions that are repeated and expanded. The



Being able to identify specific new forms of genetic contributors to autism will better enable earlier identification. That will provide “entry points” for the development of novel therapeutics for those who choose to use them.

discovery of tandem repeats is not new, as they are the underlying cause of several genetic conditions including Fragile X syndrome, myotonic dystrophy, Huntington’s disease, and many others. What is novel is the discovery of these tandem repeats in individuals with ASD, and the unique features of these repeats (i.e. different repeat sizes impacting many different genes).

“Those with long repeats affecting specific genes are likely to be the ones involved in autism,” said Dr. Yuen. “This breakthrough was only possible because of the availability of whole genome sequences.” To look for long repeats, he said, they took a statistical outlier approach. “If you look for genes with this specific repeat, it opens new opportunities in precision diagnostics, as well as pinpointing new targets for therapeutic testing.”

A discovery of this nature brings several benefits for families, said Dr. Anagnostou. First, she said, it can provide an “explanatory power,” where it removes some of the mystery associated with their child’s autism. Second, much earlier interventions can be developed and implemented, and third, she said, these interventions might be tailored to the type of autism that person has.

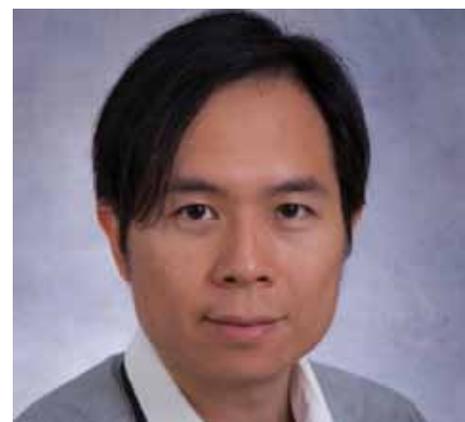
One of the big questions coming out of the discovery was the ability to predict the severity of autism. Dr. Yuen says that while it’s definitely worth looking at, they need a larger sample size than they currently have. “I don’t think we have a large enough number of genomes associated with the clinical outcomes,” he said. “I think it’s optimistic, so definitely it has the potential, but the limitation is the number.”

The genetic findings shouldn’t change the way a person with autism sees themselves, says Dr. Anagnostou. The findings don’t challenge the identity or traits of autism, she said, adding that these have been preserved by nature for many years and serve a purpose. “There’s no reason to use a genetic finding to change the way you think about yourself. If you’re interested in all the facts about genetic variation, that’s interesting information that may explain some of the differences you already see in yourself.”

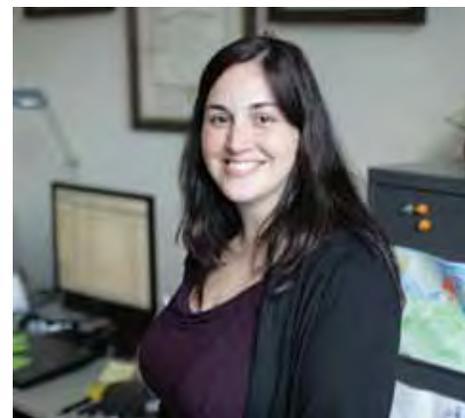
“We’re just scratching the surface,” said Dr. Scherer, noting that this was the most complex genetic variation they’ve so far studied. “I’m quite sure—this is my prediction—we’re going to see this type of genetic wrinkle in other genes—not just the ones we talked about today in Ryan’s paper, but possibly in every different genetic disorder that’s known. People haven’t looked yet. This is the first paper. Other studies are going to learn from this one. We’re going to continue to learn.” ■



*Dr. Steven Scherer*



*Dr. Ryan Yuen*



*Dr. Evdokia Anagnostou*



*Ny Hoang*

# You Spoke—We Listened

## THE AUTISM MATTERS READERSHIP SURVEY

by Michael Cnudde, Specialist  
Communications and Resource  
Development, Autism Ontario



**IN DECEMBER 2020**, we asked you where we should take this magazine. You provided some illuminating answers that will help guide our future direction.

We emailed the survey to 876 readers. Of that, 59 readers replied, giving us a response rate of 7.0 percent, a respectable return for this type of survey. Thank you to everyone who participated.

There were six questions. The first asked readers if they read *Autism Matters*, and 83 percent answered “always” or “most of the time.”

Drilling deeper, we found that you were either “interested” or “very interested” in content about public policy on autism and our continued advocacy efforts (78 percent), as well as research-based articles (75 percent). Articles by Speech Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapists and Applied Behavioural Analysis professionals tied at 71 percent with content by autistic teens and adults.

When we asked what could be improved in the magazine, many of you said they were happy with the magazine. However, many more of you told us we could do better, especially when it came to reflecting the greater diversity regarding race, gender, and age of our readership.

“I would like to see more culturally responsive tips, articles, research included,” wrote one reader. “As a Black woman, I do not see myself or my son represented in the magazine and he is now in his 20s. ASD does not see race or gender. No one is immune to being affected but you wouldn’t think so coming from the pages of the magazine.”

One reader wrote, “I would like to see either more focus on adults or maybe a special issue on adults,” while another added, “Maybe more about teen girls with ASD.”

To further illustrate the diverse nature of our community, a reader wanted to see, “more articles on individuals with lesser abilities. There seems to be a tendency to have some articles written by or about higher-functioning individuals. For those of us who cannot relate, it makes it difficult to connect or be inspired.” Another reader replied, “I read to learn and most of the content does not help our family. High functioning ASD.”

Your comments and feedback will continue to inform the direction of *Autism Matters*. ■

We need your help and your contributions. Share your stories, events, experiences and interests. Everyone’s experience is unique: what does autism look like for you? Celebrate and share your artistic side, as well. Send us your art, poetry or short fiction. Send your contributions and submissions to [michael@autismontario.com](mailto:michael@autismontario.com).



# Ministries and Agencies Work Hand in Hand

## PROVINCIAL FUNDING FOR AUTISM SPECIFIC ENHANCED TRAINING FOR EDUCATORS

by Ola Kusnierz, Webinar and Service Navigation Support Specialist, Autism Ontario

**ON JANUARY 10, 2021** Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education, was joined by Todd Smith, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) to announce that their ministries will be working collectively, along with Geneva Centre for Autism, to further assist educators in supporting children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The Ontario Government is allocating \$7.5 million to further provide specialized evidence-based training to teachers and educational assistants. Across the province, school boards will have access to two enhanced training programs through Sonderly, the training and educational division of Geneva Centre. Since 2005, Geneva Centre has been providing the educational community with Autism-specific training workshops and learning opportunities. For more information on the announcement, go to <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/59909/ontario-provides-funding-for-autism-training>.



Andrew Davis

Following this announcement Autism Ontario had the opportunity to speak with Andrew Davis, Director - Sonderly, Geneva Centre for Autism to further understand the enhanced training programs being offered and what the impacts of this province wide collaboration will be for both educators and families. We thanked him first, for his time.

**Autism Ontario:** Congratulations on such an exciting announcement. There are many aspects to such a large-scale training project. What is the one area that you are most excited about bringing to the education community?

**Mr. Davis:** The biggest aspect of this new enhanced training program is the fact that in addition to providing an option of a 15-hour beginner level autism training course or the advanced level BACB recognized 40-hour RBT training course on applied behavioural analysis, this program is taking the training one step further by also including a full-day live (virtual) follow-up session after completing the online course. The purpose of this day is to give educators an opportunity to actually practice using some of the key techniques and tools taught in the course.



**geneva  
centre for  
autism**

At Sonderly, we are primarily focused on impact. And in order to help educators make an even bigger impact, we wanted to do something to facilitate the transfer of knowledge learned in the course to implementation in the classroom. This enhanced training format provides the best of both worlds: efficient wide-scale distribution of core knowledge, and a targeted practice session led by a live trained facilitator.

**Autism Ontario:** With the extended training program being currently available and accessible to educators, what are the goals for the immediate agenda for the program?

**Mr. Davis:** We are currently communicating with the school board representatives that will be responsible for coordinating their board's participation in the program and bringing them up to speed on the process of administering the program for their educators. That said, the training packages are live and ready to go. As boards confirm their list of participants their courses will begin immediately.

**Autism Ontario:** Considering that this will be a long-term project, what are you hoping the long-term impacts are going to be?

**Mr. Davis:** Long term, I hope to hear that educators have not only learned valuable new information but have also begun implementing it in educational settings. I hope this leads to a better understanding of their students with autism, the use of effective strategies to support their learning, and an increase in the number of positive interactions a student with autism experiences while at school.

**Autism Ontario:** Many Ontario families are excited to hear that the school boards will have access to more extensive autism-specific training. Families are interested to know how/if this new training will fit into the current OAP program.

**Mr. Davis:** The funding for this particular program is specifically for educational assistants and educators in the 72 publicly-funded school boards. However, as I said to Minister Stephen Lecce, Minister Todd Smith, and MPP Robin Martin, autism doesn't fall neatly into the jurisdiction of one ministry or another, and the more that agencies such as Geneva Centre, and the Ministries of Education; Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS); and Health can coordinate with one another, the better off autistic individuals and their families will be.

**Autism Ontario:** Although the training is specifically focused on developing capacity within the school boards, is there a possibility that this training will further open the lines of communication between educators and OAP providers?

**Mr. Davis:** The role of Sonderly's training program in this case, is to help build capacity in the school system for the growing number of kids on the spectrum being recognized. The more educators have a clear understanding of autism and the evidence-based ways to support them, the more successful their daily interactions will be. With educators receiving training on the same concepts and principles being implemented in the OAP, Sonderly is helping to close the gap between these two systems. However, establishing and coordinating individual student goals extends beyond the scope of our training program, and

“the more that [ministries and] agencies work together, the better off autistic individuals and their families will be.”

will continue to be implemented by the agencies and school boards working directly with those individuals.

As Mr. Davis concluded, “the more [ministries and] agencies that work together, the better off autistic individuals and their families will be.” Sonderly's enhanced training program will further continue to educate and inform our communities about autism. Autism Ontario continues to advocate for the importance of community collaboration and education regarding autism. ■

# Ride for a Cause

YOU TOO CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

by Dominic Daguerre, Self Advocate

**THIS PAST SUMMER,** I had the honour of participating in a challenge that gave me the opportunity to make a difference. I had always wanted to leave a mark in my community but had never thought it was possible for a boy with autism. It is possible. Allow me to share my experience with you.

It all began with my mother's wonderful idea to sign me up for the Great Cycle Challenge Canada (GCC). She thought it would be a fantastic way to remain active while benefiting a remarkable cause. The goal of this incredible fundraiser is



Dominic Daguerre



for participants to collect donations in exchange for cycling a set number of kilometres in a one-month period. All funds collected benefit children diagnosed with cancer at Sick Kids Hospital. My set target was to cycle 100 km and raise \$500 during the month of August.

Once August was upon us, I decided I would bike 7-10 km daily. Not only did I achieve my goal of 100 km, but I crushed it by reaching 300km in one month! I even went door to door to canvass for funds. All on my own, I approached people from everywhere, introducing myself and explaining my challenge. This is not an easy task for someone on the autism spectrum. In no time at all, I had surpassed my fundraising goal of \$500 and received my official GCC riding jersey. However, the donations continued to grow, and I decided to aim even higher. My new quest was to collect \$2,500 and become the honoured recipient of a "Hero" jersey.

I had to overcome many obstacles during the challenge. First, I had to accept biking in the rain. Have I mentioned how much I dislike getting wet? Then, I had an accident involving mud. Did I fail to tell you how much I hate getting dirty? I also had to fix my chain several times. *Arrgh!* Once again, my hands got dirty. To top it off, I even took a spill which resulted in several cuts and bruises and I am terrified of blood. During each trial and tribulation, I was consoled by reminding myself that children with cancer are enduring far greater suffering. It helped me to focus on my goal and to remain calm even when faced with discomfort and distress. Time and time again, I got back on my bike and kept pedaling, never accepting defeat.

Finally, the challenge came to an end and I had raised \$3,341 for the children at Sick Kids Hospital. I was awarded my GCC Hero jersey which I wear with great pride. I will gladly participate again next year sporting my new jersey.

All in all, regardless of my autism, I had a wonderful opportunity to get involved and to contribute to an amazing cause. Never forget that every one of us can make a difference. Don't be afraid to take that leap! ■



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# Sleep Problems in Autism, Explained

## THE RAMIFICATIONS OF POOR SLEEP PATTERNS

by Hannah Furfaro, Guest Writer

**A GOOD NIGHT'S REST ISN'T GUARANTEED FOR ANYONE**, but it is downright elusive for many people with autism. Individuals on the spectrum often have trouble falling and staying asleep.

And that may worsen certain features of their condition, such as repetitive behaviors, which can, in turn, make sleeping even more difficult.

Given this disruptive feedback loop, sleep problems are among the most urgent concerns for families grappling with autism. But so far, this also happens to be among the least-studied aspects of autism.

Here's what researchers know so far about the causes and consequences of—and treatments for—sleep problems in autism.



### How common are sleep problems in children with autism?

A 2019 study, one of the largest to investigate the prevalence of sleep problems in autism, suggested that nearly 80 percent of autistic preschoolers have disrupted sleep. Sleep problems are twice as common among children with autism as they are among typical children or those with other developmental conditions.

## What types of sleep problems are common in autism?

People with autism tend to have insomnia: It takes them an average of 11 minutes longer than typical people to fall asleep, and many wake up frequently during the night. Some people with the condition have sleep apnea, a condition that causes them to stop breathing several times during the night.

Sleep in people with autism may also be less restorative than it is for people in the general population. They spend about 15 percent of their sleeping time in the rapid eye movement (REM) stage, which is critical for learning and retaining memories. Most neurotypical people, by contrast, spend about 23 percent of their nightly rest in REM.

## Does this lack of good sleep have consequences?

There is mounting evidence that too little sleep can exacerbate autism features, such as poor social skills. Children who do not get enough sleep often have more severe repetitive behaviours and a tougher time making friends than other people on the spectrum. They also tend to score lower on tests of intelligence. However, it is unclear whether these problems stem from poor sleep, contribute to it or both.

One 2009 study found that children with autism who have sleep difficulties are more hyperactive and easily distracted than those who sleep well.<sup>1</sup>

## Why do people with autism have difficulty sleeping?

Many people with autism have other conditions, such as gastrointestinal problems, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or anxiety, and each of those is known to disrupt sleep. Cramps from constipation, for instance, may keep a person with autism up at night. Sensory sensitivities to light, sound or touch may contribute to difficulty sleeping. Sleep problems may also be an indicator of depression in autistic people, though whether it is a cause or a result of

sleep difficulties is unclear.

People with these other conditions may also take medications that affect sleep. For example, many people with ADHD take stimulants, which are known to cause insomnia.

In some cases, people on the spectrum carry mutations that make them prone to sleep problems. Studies suggest that individuals with autism are more likely than typical people to have mutations in genes that govern the sleep-wake cycle or those that have links to insomnia. Some studies suggest that people on the spectrum carry mutations that affect levels of melatonin, a natural hormone that controls sleep.

## How can researchers assess sleep problems in people with autism?

Polysomnography is the most common and thorough type of sleep test. It tracks a person's brain waves, eye and limb movement, and breathing patterns during sleep. Because it requires multiple sensors, wires and computers, it is typically done in a lab.

But this gold-standard method is not always practical for people with autism, many of whom require specific routines at bedtime. At least one research group has brought polysomnography equipment into the homes of people with autism to try to get around this problem.

A less cumbersome sleep test is actigraphy, in which a wristwatch-like device records a person's movements throughout the night. People can use the device at home to record the amount of time a person sleeps each night.

Researchers can also learn about sleep patterns by interviewing families or asking them to maintain sleep diaries. But these methods are error-prone because they rely on people's memories.

## Are there treatments available to help people with autism sleep better?

In some ways, the fix can be straightforward: Establishing a routine, such as an

order of activities at bedtime, can often help a person fall asleep; so can changing the temperature or lighting in a bedroom. Sticking with regular bed and wake times can put the brain and body on a schedule that makes sleep more reliable.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved insomnia drugs, such as Ambien, for adults with autism but not for children. For more serious problems such as sleep apnea, clinicians sometimes recommend a nighttime breathing device such as a continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machine or, in rare cases, surgery.

But for many sleep issues, melatonin supplements may be a good option. Some research suggests the supplements help children with autism fall asleep faster and get better-quality sleep.

## Would better sleep improve quality of life for people on the spectrum?

Maybe. No large, definitive study exists on this topic. But research has shown that typical children and those with autism who undergo surgery to alleviate breathing trouble during sleep show better social communication and attention as well as fewer repetitive behaviours. Parents reported similar improvements in a small study of children with autism who took melatonin supplements.

Better sleep is "not going to cure autism," says pediatrician Angela Maxwell-Horn, assistant professor of pediatrics at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. But, she says, children with autism who get back on a regular sleeping schedule seem to learn better, are less irritable and have fewer problem behaviours. ■

### References:

<sup>1</sup> Goldman S.E. et al. *Dev. Neuropsychol.* 34, 560-573 (2009) PubMed

Originally published in *Spectrum, Autism Research News*, February 6, 2020 <https://www.spectrumnews.org/news/sleep-problems-autism-explained/>



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# One Game—Many Aims

## MAKING LEARNING FUN

by Caroline Lee, Speech-Language Pathologist (retired)

### An Introduction to Barrier Games

**BARRIER GAMES**, in which players give and follow verbal instructions without access to a visual model, are fun, easy to create and a great learning tool.

They can benefit children by expanding their listening, attending and turn-taking skills as well as their understanding and use of language.

Barrier games are suitable for children who are able to attend to table top activities, follow simple instructions and communicate verbally or through a voice output device, in single words, short phrases or sentences.

### How to play

Sit across from your child with a barrier, such as an upright file folder or book between you. The barrier prevents the child from seeing what you are doing behind the barrier. Provide identical materials on both sides of the barrier.

Perform an activity with the materials on your side of the barrier then direct your child to carry out the same activity on his side using his duplicate set of materials (*Put the red car in the cup*).

Lift the barrier and compare the placement of his materials with yours. If his response was incorrect, repeat, simplify or demonstrate as needed.



Increase the complexity of the directives in sequential steps and vary the materials.

Switch roles and have your child be the instructor. Sometimes make a deliberate "mistake" and have your child correct you, but beware that they do not try to change objects or pictures to match yours. Encourage them to adhere to what they originally said. There is much more than language development going on here.

### Materials

Use collections of real objects, pictures, photos and commercially available card sets and barrier games appropriate to the language and cognitive level of your child and specific to the language goal. Use augmentative communication as needed.

Write key words on flash cards to support your teaching regardless of whether your child is verbal or non-verbal, literate or non-literate. Incidental learning can only take place if we provide the opportunity.

### Language goals

#### Nouns/verbs

Use objects and pictures to teach new vocabulary and categorization (*Pick up the cup; Find the children who are jumping; Put all of the animals in the field*).

#### Prepositions

Provide real objects, such as a spoon, ball or toy car and "places," such as a box, plate or a cup. Give single step directives (*Put the spoon in the box*). Progress to pictures and magnetic scenes (*Put the girl beside the swing; Find the boy is hiding behind the tree*).

#### Descriptors

Use identical and contrasting items and pictures to teach: colour (*Find all of the red ones; colour the rabbit's ears brown*); size (*Pick up the big cup*); shape (*Put all of the circles together*); negative "no" and "not" (*Put the block that is not brown in the cup; find the horse with no tail*).

Use commercial card sets showing the same object with varied features (*Pick up the cat that has brown fur/a red bow/a pink nose*).

#### Sentence structure

Pronouns—use a boy and a girl figure and clothing (*Put on his hat; Put her hat on his head*).

Verb tense—use pictures of the same verb in different tenses (*Put "he will drive the car" beside "he drove the car"*).

Conjunctions—use objects or scenes (*Put the tree beside the house and the sun in the sky*) then describe what you see (*The tree is beside...*)

Each of you draw a picture that

contains stipulated features (*sun, flowers, tree*). Describe and compare using complete sentence structures (*Your flowers are blue and mine are red; Your sun is bigger than my sun*).

#### Question words

Model and encourage questions (*Whose turn is it? Is it your turn? Did I just have my turn? Who goes next you or me? Where is the car? Which one should I pick up?*)

#### Auditory memory and discrimination

Use noise makers, such as baby rattles and squeaky dog toys. Have your child imitate single sounds and gradually increase to a sequence of sounds.

#### Still a favorite game

The versatility of barrier games makes them the "tried and true" of language therapy. They can easily be simplified or made more complex to suit the child's language level and program goals, thereby always ensuring a positive learning experience. Let's play!

Caroline Lee is the author of Targeting Language Delays: Language and Reading IEP Goals. Activities for Children with Hearing Impairment, Down Syndrome and Autism (verbal and non-verbal) <https://www.targetinglanguagedelays.com/>



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# Running Before I Could Walk

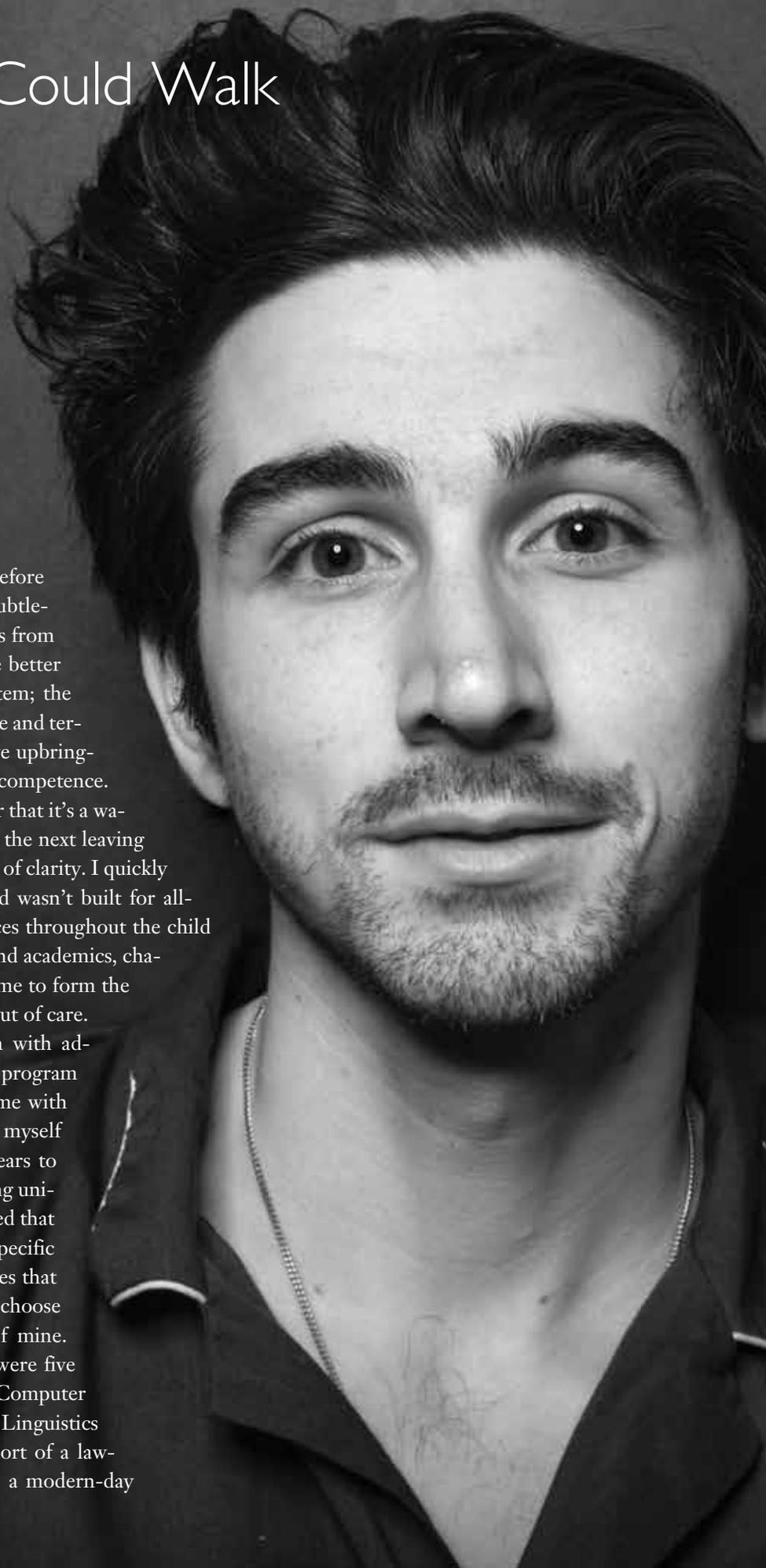
PASSION AND PROFESSION

by Anthony Spezzano, Self Advocate

**"I was born knowing nothing at all and have only a little time to change that here and there." — Richard Feynman**

**I WAS ALWAYS SOMEONE** who would run before they should walk; never quite adopting the art of subtleties until a little too late. Part of my candor comes from being the primary subject of conversation for the better part of all my childhood while in the foster system; the other is thanks to my remarkable diagnosis. A grave and terrible truth is that I didn't have the most conducive upbringing and married abandonment with feelings of incompetence. No one tells you the world isn't black and white or that it's a watercolour of greys that bleed from one shade into the next leaving every brilliant mind like mine grasping for strands of clarity. I quickly learned that exclusion is by design and the world wasn't built for all-seeing eyes like mine. I had to battle divided forces throughout the child welfare system, anxious and doubtful physicians and academics, chaotically neutral forks in the road that would lead me to form the only close partnerships I'd hold dear until aging out of care.

My undergraduate university journey began with admission into York University's Law and Society program where I thought the pursuit would've equipped me with all the prerequisites to attend Law School. I found myself in the company of equally ambitious folks for years to come—they became a second home while attending university, but my study swiftly changed once I learned that most post-graduate avenues needn't require any specific honours degree. While I was seeking opportunities that would indulge the curiosities, I thought it best to choose a fallback option aligned more with passions of mine. My degree was quite new and daunting—there were five studies amalgamated within Cognitive Science: Computer Science, Psychology, Information Technology, Linguistics and Philosophy. I thought if there's anything short of a lawyer, doctor or professor that I ought to become a modern-day



renaissance man. I always wanted to spend more of my time helping the community than studying away in my dormitory—I could be easily distracted by the needs of the many over the wants of a few. I created a few pseudonyms to generate passive income around study materials for just about every course and offered tutoring for the most tiresome of prerequisites for graduate school. I worked briefly as a remote Cognitive Science Research Assistant for The Mehrit Centre in Peterborough, which provides self-regulation resources. Our research focused on the maintenance of resilience in people in high pressure environments and building models for intuitive performance coaching in children and young adults.

I joined TD Securities in 2017 just after convocation and worked progressively as a seasoned Risk Analyst part of the Margin Accounts Group within Capital Markets and Risk Management. After the 2008 stock market crash, there was a huge emphasis placed on Risk Management in capital markets. Financial institutions and governments took this seriously and incorporated new regulations for over-the-counter derivatives.

My role is my first real foray into Capital Markets, making it a very exciting learning opportunity for me and is primarily focused on the effective and efficient mitigation of counterparty credit risk. Margin Accounts Group (MAG) responsibilities include over-the-counter (OTC) collateral margining, global client management and onboarding, exposure monitoring and control, dispute reconciliation, risk reporting, and so on. This is definitely a jack-of-all-trades role where you need a good level of experience in interpersonal skills, process optimization, financial derivatives, and managing robust systems in dynamic environments. I add value through contributions towards a proactive risk mitigation that highlights inefficiencies and implements solutions. In addition to wearing many hats, I work in collaboration with global teams with offices in New York, Toronto, London and Singapore in support of TD Bank's global trading businesses. Close partnerships with credit, middle office, legal, front office, trade settlements, and corporate treasury are required and involve strong communications skills.

Beyond work, I am a jazz and *Jeopardy* fan who loves Thai food and rock climbing (just not always in that order). I spend the better part of my mornings cycling, a good rundown of podcasts, and top it all off with an espresso (short black) and some frozen cherries. If you have any podcast recommendations or delightful recipes, send them my way—my family and friends will thank you! I have an affinity for dogs but an allergy that keeps most only at arm's reach. You can find me just outside Reggio Calabria, Italy once a year (conditions permitting) to take care of some livestock, tending to a cheese farm, and enjoying the mountain air. ■



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# INFO Autisme

## Peu importe, tu peux faire une différence!

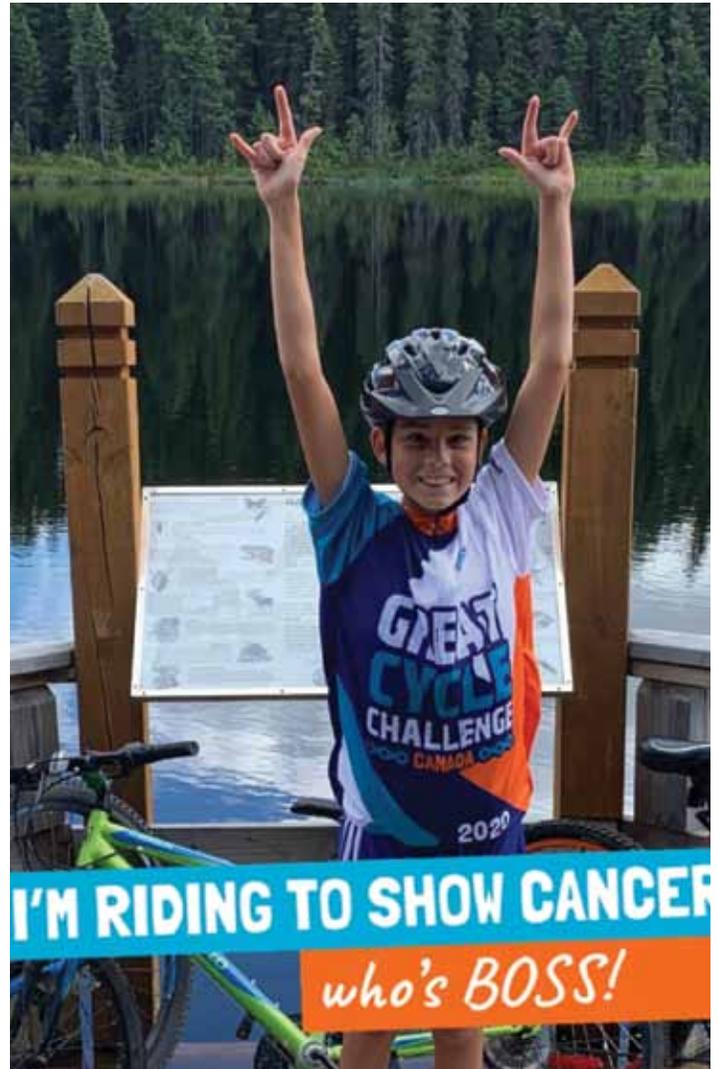
par Dominic Daguerre

**LAISSER SA MARQUE** dans la communauté était une possibilité que je ne croyais jamais accomplir. Cependant, cet été, c'est en plein ce qui est arrivé. J'ai eu l'honneur de participer à un défi qui m'a donné la chance de faire une différence. Imaginez, un garçon autiste qui s'implique dans le monde d'aujourd'hui. C'est possible. Permettez-moi de vous raconter mon expérience.

Pour débiter, Maman a eu la formidable idée de m'inscrire au défi « Great Cycle Canada ». Maman croyait que ça serait du bon conditionnement physique qui viendrait en aide à une cause remarquable. Le défi consistait à pédaler un certain nombre de kilomètres afin d'amasser des fonds pour aider les enfants souffrant du cancer à l'Hôpital Sick Kids. Nous avions déterminé que j'allais pédaler 100 km et recueillir une somme de 500 dollars pendant tout le mois d'août.

Voilà que le mois d'août est arrivé. J'ai décidé de pédaler tous les jours. J'ai réalisé mon objectif de 100 km, puis j'ai atteint 200 km et finalement 300 km dans un mois! Je suis allé de porte en porte pour trouver des commanditaires. Par moi-même, j'ai approché les gens de partout en me présentant et en expliquant ma cause et mon défi. Ce n'est pas une chose facile quand on est autiste. En un rien de temps, j'avais amassé mon 500 dollars et j'avais reçu un dossard officiel GCC. De plus, la somme ne cessait d'augmenter. J'ai décidé de me fixer un nouveau défi, amasser 2 500 \$ pour être honoré comme héros du défi du vélo.

J'ai dû surmonter des moments difficiles pendant mon défi. J'ai dû accepter de pédaler dans la pluie. Est-ce que j'ai mentionné à quel point je déteste être mouillé? J'ai eu des accidents dans la boue! Ai-je dit comment je déteste être sale? J'ai dû réparer mon vélo à trois reprises. *Ouf!* Encore les



Crédit photo : Christina Daguerre

doigts tachés! De plus, j'ai même fait une chute qui m'a causé plusieurs plaies. Et moi, j'ai horreur du sang. Pendant toutes ces épreuves, je me consolais en me disant que les enfants ayant le cancer vivent de pires cauchemars. Je me relevais et je repartais en vélo. C'est ainsi que je n'abandonnais jamais!

Finalement, la fin du défi arriva. J'ai réussi à amasser une somme de 3 341 \$. Par conséquent, l'organisme m'a accordé un dossard héros que j'ai porté avec fierté.

Pour tout dire, moi, un garçon autiste, ai eu la merveilleuse occasion de m'impliquer et d'apporter une contribution dans le monde d'aujourd'hui. N'ayez pas peur, tentez votre chance. Vous aussi pouvez faire toute une différence! ■

# Le programme CARES

RECHERCHE, DÉVELOPPEMENT ET EXPÉRIENCE VÉCUE

par Ola Kusnierz, Responsable des webinaires et du soutien à la navigation des services

**SOUVENT, LES AIDANTS NATURELS D'ENFANTS AUTISTES** oublient de prendre soin d'eux-mêmes. Le programme CARES, mis sur pied par le SAAAC (South Asian Autism Awareness Centre) et maintenant offert aux sections locales de toute la province, a pour objectif d'aider les aidants à prendre soin d'eux-mêmes et de leur famille.

Conçu par Dr Shivajan Sivapalan et Kiruthiha Vimalakanthan, CARES est un programme semi-structuré et interactif de six à huit semaines qui offre aux aidants naturels, sous la supervision d'un facilitateur, un espace sûr qui les dynamise et les aide à relever les défis posés par la prestation de soins à une personne autiste et qui leur donne l'occasion de tisser de solides liens avec d'autres personnes qui partagent la même expérience.

Le programme fait appel à de nombreuses stratégies d'auto-soins et de pleine conscience fondées sur des données probantes, comme la gestion du stress, la pensée utile, l'auto-compassion et la résolution de problèmes. Ce groupe d'entraide unique en son genre donne aux aidants l'occasion de se recentrer sur eux-mêmes, ne serait-ce qu'une heure par semaine. Depuis deux années et demie, le programme a servi plus de 120 familles réparties dans 40 groupes.

« Professionnellement, j'ai toujours eu à cœur de combler les manques de soutiens en santé mentale et d'en améliorer l'accessibilité, en particulier dans les communautés diversifiées et marginalisées », indique Kiruthiha, qui termine actuellement la dernière année de son doctorat en psychologie clinique à l'Université de Waterloo et qui effectue son internat pré-doctoral à Surrey Place, à Toronto. Au SAAAC, Kiruthiha travaille principalement au développement et à la supervision du programme CARES.

« Au départ, CARES se voulait un programme de santé mentale à ressources limitées, adapté à la culture des familles servies par le SAAAC », signale Kiruthiha. « Sans être des professionnels de la santé mentale, les facilitateurs ont une solide formation et ont souvent vécu l'expérience de prendre soin d'une personne autiste. Ce contexte permet d'amener les aidants dans un espace sûr et non menaçant, où ils seront davantage portés à s'ouvrir sur leurs problèmes et à se recentrer sur eux-mêmes. Le programme a également été l'occasion de créer des expériences positives pour la communauté d'aidants que nous servions initialement, et qui avaient une expérience limitée ou même inexistante des services et des professionnels en santé mentale, tout en entretenant une grande méfiance à leur égard. »

« En tant que médecin de famille de profession, je crois en la possibilité de changer le paysage diagnostique actuel des enfants autistes », fait remarquer Dr Sivapalan, co-concepteur du programme CARES. « Le programme fait appel à un modèle de délégation des tâches pour offrir un soutien en santé mentale aux aidants naturels



d'individus autistes; concrètement, il les outille pour commencer à prendre soin d'eux-mêmes et de leur famille. »

Le programme se démarque par son format semi-structuré. Même si chaque séance doit couvrir certains sujets, les facilitateurs disposent de suffisamment de latitude pour répondre aux besoins particuliers de chaque groupe. Quand les aidants acceptent d'échanger sur leurs expériences personnelles, les facilitateurs sont formés pour vraiment privilégier et favoriser cet aspect; mais quand le groupe a besoin d'un meilleur renforcement des compétences ou d'activités davantage interactives, les facilitateurs ont également tout ce qu'il faut pour faire face à la situation.

Selon une aidante naturelle ayant participé au programme, « La partie la plus marquante réside dans la diversité de points de vue des autres parents. Comment ils composent avec diverses situations quand elles se présentent, et les précieux conseils des facilitateurs.

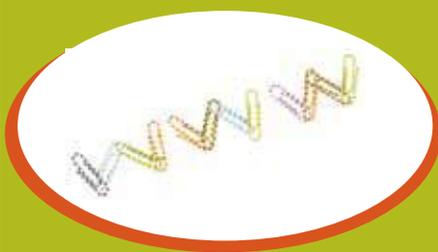
Connaître des perspectives différentes, des suggestions utiles auxquelles je ne penserais pas nécessairement, et apprendre à utiliser les outils du cahier de travail des parents pour faire face aux situations qui peuvent survenir. »

Le programme incite les aidants à « mettre un masque à oxygène avant d'aider les autres » et à réaliser que lorsqu'ils ne vont pas bien, ils ne sont pas à même de prendre soin d'eux-mêmes et de leur famille.

Pour cette aidante, les chapitres sur la gestion du stress et la communication assertive ont été ce qu'elle a retenu de plus important du programme. « Ils contenaient plein de bonnes idées, et j'ai pu intégrer à mon quotidien les autres outils présentés par notre facilitateur et les autres parents. Les conseils sur la communication assertive se sont révélés très utiles... C'est important parce qu'il n'existe pas beaucoup de programmes de ce genre pour les parents. Il est toujours réconfortant de pouvoir compter sur des

personnes-ressources spécifiques comme le facilitateur et d'élargir son réseau de soutien. »

Ultimement, les créateurs du programme souhaiteraient qu'il devienne un programme non seulement autosuffisant, mais aussi facilement accessible aux gens de différentes langues et différentes cultures. « Nous nous efforçons de faire écho à cette diversité culturelle », ajoute Kiruthiha. « CARES continuera d'évoluer avec la contribution de chaque nouveau participant. » ■



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Nous faisons appel à vous, aux contributions de la communauté de l'autisme de l'Ontario, pour notre blogue et pour *Autism Matters* et *Info Autisme!* Soumettez-nous vos créations de tout type : textes écrits, vlogues, œuvres visuelles, photos, etc.!

**Nous encourageons tout particulièrement les personnes autistes de tout âge à nous soumettre leur contribution.**

Pour obtenir plus d'information, proposer des idées et soumettre vos créations : [info@autismontario.com](mailto:info@autismontario.com)



# 10 choses importantes à savoir sur l'apprentissage de l'écriture

par Tania Clouthier, B.Sc, M.Sc. (Erg.),  
Erg. aut. (Ont.)



## 1. Traits de crayon pré-écriture | - ○ + / □ \ × △

**AVANT DE FORMER DES LETTRES**, les enfants doivent apprendre à produire les formes ci-dessus. En règle générale, un enfant saura produire un trait vertical vers l'âge d'environ deux ans. À six ans, la plupart des enfants peuvent dessiner toutes les formes. Habituellement, un enfant ne saura pas écrire toutes les lettres avant de pouvoir copier systématiquement un triangle. En pratiquant ces traits avec votre enfant, vous lui donnerez des bases solides sur lesquelles il pourra s'appuyer pour passer à la formation des lettres!

## 2. Force du haut du corps et stabilité des épaules

Pour maîtriser les mouvements délicats que nos mains doivent effectuer pour saisir et manipuler un crayon, un enfant doit posséder dans le haut du corps suffisamment de force et de stabilité pour faciliter ces mouvements. L'enfant peut développer naturellement par le jeu sa force et sa stabilité. Un terrain de jeu est l'endroit idéal pour se renforcer, par exemple en montant dans les glissoires ou en se balançant d'un barreau à l'autre d'une échelle horizontale! De plus, toute activité où l'enfant pousse



ou tire quelque chose, par exemple un chariot ou une luge, et toute activité de mise en charge, comme les locomotions animales (démarche de l'ours, rampement du crabe, etc.), sont des moyens efficaces de travailler la force et la stabilité.

### 3. Motricité fine

Le pouce, l'index et le majeur sont nos « doigts agiles ». Il faut qu'ils soient le plus efficaces et solides possible, pour pouvoir tenir et contrôler efficacement le crayon sur le papier. Organisez tous les jours des activités d'amélioration de la motricité fine et de renforcement des mains. L'utilisation d'articles domestiques courants, comme des pinces à linge et des bouteilles à vaporiser, peut aider à renforcer les doigts. Ramasser de petits objets et les placer dans des contenants (p. ex. des pièces de monnaie dans une tirelire, ou des Cheerios dans un bol) peut contribuer au développement de la motricité fine. Cherchez sur Internet « Activités pour développer la motricité fine chez les enfants » pour trouver d'autres façons amusantes de développer cette habileté.

### 4. Lettres majuscules

Les enfants ont plus de facilité à écrire les lettres majuscules. Leur tracé commence toujours par le haut, elles ont la même hauteur et elles occupent toutes le même espace vertical. Les majuscules sont différentes l'une de l'autre et sont plus faciles à identifier. Plusieurs lettres minuscules se ressemblent, et se

distinguent uniquement par l'endroit où on place le « bâton »; par exemple, les lettres a b d g p et q sont toutes des cercles avec un bâton! Il est facile de placer le bâton du mauvais côté ou au mauvais endroit. Au contraire, les lettres A B D G P et Q sont toutes formées différemment et ont un aspect très distinctif.

En commençant par familiariser l'enfant avec les majuscules, on peut jeter des bases solides sur lesquelles on appuiera l'apprentissage des lettres minuscules. Les minuscules seront alors plus faciles à apprendre parce que les lettres c o s v w x y z sont identiques à leurs majuscules, et j k t p et u sont semblables à leurs majuscules. Une fois qu'un enfant aura appris les majuscules, il connaîtra toutes les majuscules et presque la moitié de l'alphabet minuscule!

### 5. Jeux de lettres

Pas besoin d'utiliser un crayon pour apprendre les lettres! En fait, jouer avec les lettres est un excellent moyen, peu importe l'âge ou le niveau d'habileté, d'apprendre à former correctement les lettres par des activités multisensorielles amusantes et motivantes. Un enfant prêt à manipuler un crayon sait déjà comment procéder pour former les lettres correctement.

Exemples de jeux de lettres :

- Suivre du bout du doigt le tracé de lettres tactiles (p. ex. lettres en papier sablé)
- Construire des lettres sur une

planchette avec de la pâte à modeler

- Dessiner des lettres dans l'air
- Dessiner des lettres dans des bacs sensoriels
  - o Bacs humides : pudding, crème fouettée, yogourt
  - o Bacs secs : sel, haricots, pâtes

### 6. Prise du crayon

Pour acquérir une bonne prise du crayon, une excellente stratégie consiste à utiliser des outils d'écriture courts, environ un à deux pouces. Cassez vos crayons à colorier et coupez (ou raccourcissez-les en les aiguisant) vos crayons! S'il n'est pas en mesure de tenir l'outil d'écriture dans toute sa main, l'enfant sera obligé d'utiliser ses doigts et en maîtrisera plus facilement la prise.

### 7. Écrire entre des lignes

Il existe de nombreux types de papier ligné. Certains peuvent être trop complexes et/ou visuellement déroutants pour les enfants. Débuter avec du papier à double ligne permet d'acquérir une solide base, à partir de laquelle on peut faire la transition vers divers types de papier. Pour plus de détails sur les doubles lignes, consulter ce lien de *Learning without Tears* : <https://www.lwtears.com/programs/double-lines> (en anglais)

### 8. Espacement

Les enfants doivent apprendre à espacer adéquatement les lettres et les mots. La méthode des spaghettis et



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boulettes de viande permet d'enseigner ce concept tout en s'amusant. L'enfant espace les lettres avec un spaghetti, et les mots avec une boulette de viande. L'emploi d'accessoires ajoute un volet multisensoriel et ludique à l'apprentissage de ce concept! Pour les spaghettis, vous pouvez utiliser des pâtes sèches ou cuites, ou encore des Wikki Stix (ficelles de cire). Pour les boulettes de viande, vous pouvez froisser en boule un petit morceau de papier, un Wikki Stix ou un cure-pipe.

Si la notion d'espacement demeure problématique, demandez à l'enfant d'écrire les lettres dans des cases. Une lettre par case, et une case vide entre chaque mot.

L	e		c	h	a	t			
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### 9. Cohérence et pratique

Apprendre ou réapprendre à écrire demande du temps et de la pratique.

Soyez cohérent dans vos méthodes d'apprentissage. Par exemple, utilisez le même langage et tracez toujours la lettre de la même façon, quand vous montrez à votre enfant comment écrire. Familiarisez-vous avec les séquences de traits appropriées et montrez à l'enfant comment tracer la lettre. Votre enfant pourra ensuite vous imiter et copier lui-même la lettre sur son papier.

Si vous souhaitez approfondir l'apprentissage de l'écriture, vous pourriez investir dans un programme approprié. La plupart des programmes incluent tout ce dont vous avez besoin, et des guides d'enseignement. Un exemple : les livres *Handwriting without Tears* de *Learning without Tears*. Lien vers les ressources en français : <https://shopping.lwtears.com/category/french>

### 10. Consultez un ergothérapeute

Les ergothérapeutes sont des professionnels de la santé qualifiés qui

peuvent évaluer les habiletés d'écriture de votre enfant. Si votre enfant semble avoir des difficultés dans ce domaine et vous ne savez pas quoi faire, communiquez avec un ergothérapeute, qui aidera à cerner les points forts et les points faibles de votre enfant et vous recommandera comment lui inculquer les habiletés nécessaires pour maîtriser la communication écrite.

### Références

Beery K.E. et Beery N.A. (2010). *The Beery-Buktenica Developmental Test of Visual-Motor Integration Sixth Edition Administration, Scoring and Teaching Manual*. 30-47  
*Handwriting Without Tears*. (2018). *Get Set for School. Readiness & Writing Pre-K Teacher's Guide* ■

## L'autisme, c'est important

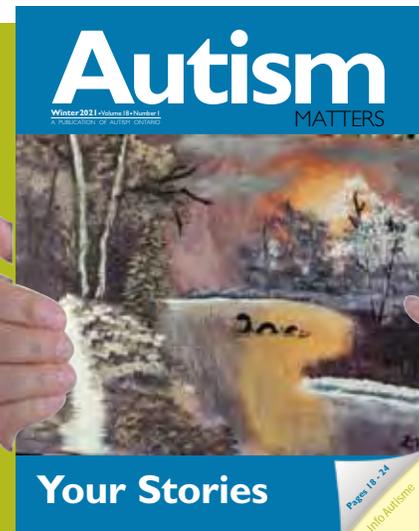
Parents, assurez-vous que l'école de votre enfant favorise l'inclusion des enfants qui ont un trouble du spectre de l'autisme.

**Autism Matters** contient des articles fort intéressants pour les membres du personnel enseignant et pour les parents. Ces articles sont rédigés par des cliniciens ou cliniciennes, des éducateurs ou éducatrices ainsi que des chercheurs ou chercheuses, ou encore par des élèves et des adultes autistes qui acceptent de nous livrer leurs histoires personnelles.

Les membres d'Autisme Ontario reçoivent automatiquement cette revue trimestrielle. Nous invitons les écoles à s'inscrire comme membres professionnels d'Autisme Ontario. Cette inscription leur permettra de recevoir tous les numéros d'**Autism Matters** et leur procurera aussi de nombreux autres avantages.

Si l'un de vos enfants fréquente une école publique ou une école catholique de l'Ontario, demandez à la direction ou aux enseignantes et enseignants à l'enfance en difficulté de devenir membre professionnel d'Autisme Ontario et continuer ainsi de travailler à faire de votre école et de votre collectivité un milieu de vie inclusif pour les élèves qui vivent avec un trouble du spectre de l'autisme.

Pour de plus amples renseignements, visitez le site **autismontario.com**.



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### AutismONTARIO

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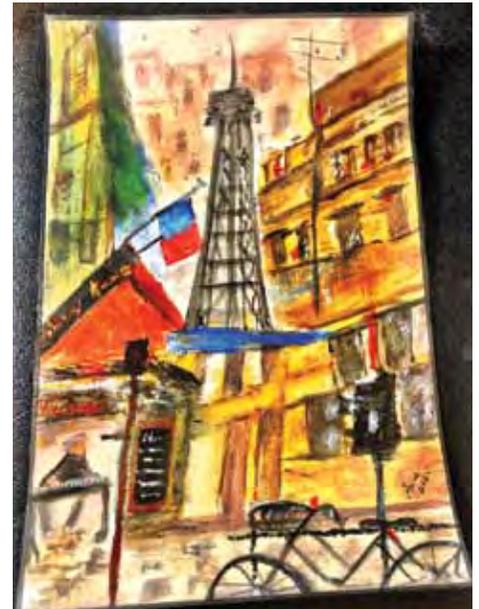
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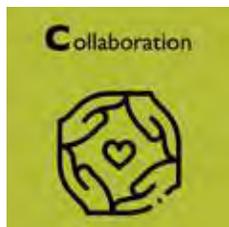
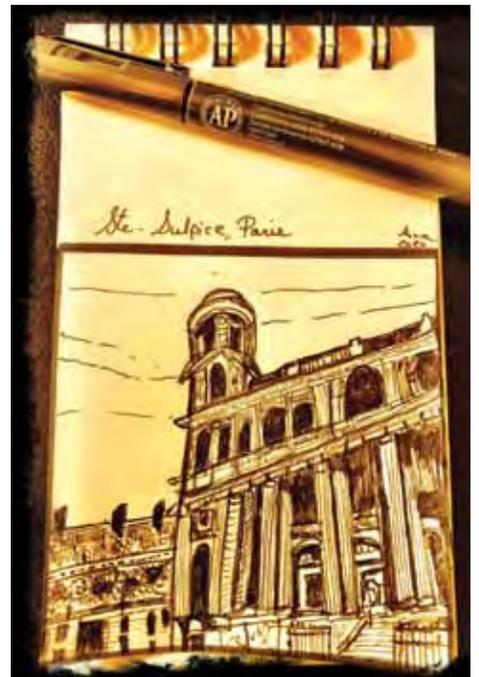
# Ressources

**Autiste, bientôt majeur :** La chaîne TVA offre accès à la première saison de cette « série docu-réalité qui nous plonge sans tabou dans le passage de l'adolescence vers l'âge adulte de jeunes autistes et dans la réalité de leur entourage. C'est sans filtre que des jeunes autistes et leur famille nous ouvrent grandes les portes de leur intimité. »

<https://www.qub.ca/tvaplus/recherche/autiste%20bient%C3%B4t%20majeur/episodes>



**A pour Autre :** « Cet outil interactif s'adresse d'abord aux jeunes vivant avec un trouble du spectre de l'autisme (TSA). Cette expérience ludique vise à sensibiliser à la réalité de l'Autre, l'Autre étant parfois le neurotypique, parfois le jeune présentant un TSA. Peu importe la cause des difficultés à interagir socialement, le temps consacré à l'expérience de cette plateforme web permettra de développer des compétences ou du moins de susciter des réflexions. » Deux clips (moins de six minutes chacun) offrent des choix selon la situation ainsi que des conseils et explications, visant le quoi (habiletés sociales) et le pourquoi (compréhension sociale). <https://www.apouraautre.ca/> ■



► Revivre des souvenirs de Paris en temps de quarantaine

*Ces deux œuvres d'art sont de la main d'Anne Gingras, qui les a dessinées en se remémorant son séjour en France.* ■



## Liste des fournisseurs du POSA

La Liste des fournisseurs du Programme ontarien des services en matière d'autisme (POSA) énumère les superviseurs cliniques qui offrent des services comportementaux financés par l'entremise du POSA (y compris les services comportementaux achetés à l'aide des budgets pour les services aux enfants ou d'un financement provisoire ponctuel). Cette liste consiste en une base de données accessible au public qui comprend actuellement plus de 200 cliniciens offrant des services d'ACA dans les diverses régions de l'Ontario.

**Trouvez un fournisseur!**  
[www.oaproviderlist.ca/fr](http://www.oaproviderlist.ca/fr)



StoryBlocks.com

# Autism and Trauma

LISTEN TO THE VOICES TO SAFEGUARD THE FUTURE

by Stephanie Moeser, MSW, RSW  
Therapist, Rediscovery Counselling

**IN MY WORK WITH MY CLIENTS,** I work from a trauma-informed perspective, including those on the autism spectrum. Essentially this means that I work under the assumption that any of my clients may have experienced some form of trauma in the past. When I conceptualize trauma, I think of it in broad terms. For example, children, teens and even adults on the autism spectrum are at an increased likelihood to have experienced bullying. Most people view bullying as obviously negative but they don't necessarily view it through a trauma lens.

I think this is a mistake. The experience of bullying and the memories of these experiences can leave autistic people traumatized. They may relive the memory over and over and they may also be hyper aware of changes in others that could indicate a repeat of these experiences. This is an important reaction as it helps keep people safe; however, at times this "alert" system may be activated at the slightest sign of a change of tone of voice, or if someone makes a mistake, and they fear being talked down to or humiliated.

Bullying is not the only trauma that people on the spectrum experience. Day-to-day existence in a neurotypical world could bring other aspects of trauma. For

Evidence informed



example, someone I know recalls the elementary school experience when a well-meaning teacher encouraged and prompted her to participate in an art project that caused her a great deal of sensory challenges and in turn both physical and emotional pain. She told me about that experience in great detail as though it happened yesterday. Both a certain colour and a certain smell connected with the memory and the sensations can cause the experience to come flooding back. People with disabilities, including those on the spectrum, are unfortunately at an increased risk to experience abuse. This reality is also something that we all need to be aware of and safeguard against as much as possible.

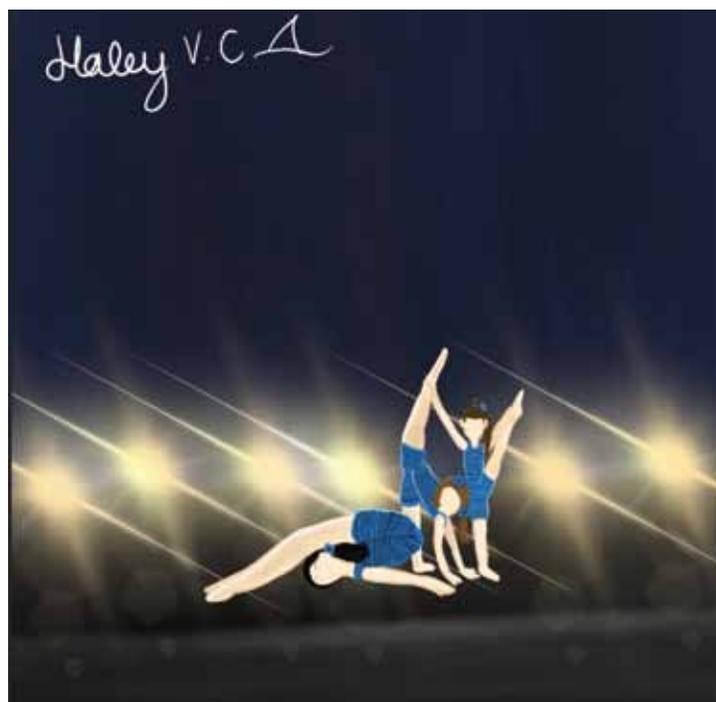
This short article allows me only to touch upon the impacts of trauma in a surface way. There is much more to the topic, and it needs more research and education. However, there are some takeaways that I think are imperative. If, for example, someone's behaviour suddenly changes in a certain environment or around certain people, pay attention to this. The correlation doesn't mean that an event causing trauma has occurred, but in all cases, the need to be aware of distress in others is important.

If you are a neurotypical person, your interaction with the world, the sensory environment, social situations and social pressures are experienced differently from those on the autism spectrum. Operating from a trauma-informed stance means that it is important not to superimpose our neurotypical ideas of what may cause trauma onto those on the spectrum. We must listen to the experiences of autistic voices and value what they tell us about what causes them harm. We need to prioritize those voices and respond in ways that are safely supported, and provide empowerment and choice. Only once someone feels safe and their experiences are validated, can tools be put in place to support healing. ■

feature EXPERIENCES

# I'm Alive!

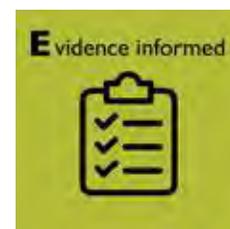
Artwork by Haley Van Camp, Self Advocate





# Top 10 Things You Should Know About Learning to Print

by Tania Clouthier BSc, MSc (OT), OT  
Reg. (ON)



## 1. Pre-printing strokes | - ○ + / □ \ × △

**PRIOR TO PRINTING LETTERS**, children should know how to draw these shapes. Typically, around two years of age, children will develop the vertical line. By six years of age, most children are able to draw all of the shapes. Usually, it is not until a child can consistently copy a triangle that they will have success with learning to print all of their letters. Practice these strokes with your child to develop a stronger foundation for letter formations.

## 2. Trunk strength and shoulder stability

In order to develop the finer movements our hands require for grasping and manipulating a pencil, a child must have the upper body strength and stability to facilitate such fine movements. This can develop naturally through play. Playgrounds are a great way to build strength. Climbing up slides and swinging across monkey bars are fun ways for growth. In addition, any pushing or pulling activities such as wagons or sleds, as well as any weight-bearing activity such as animal walks (i.e. bear walk, crab



walk) are effective ways to build strength and stability.

### 3. Fine motor skills

The thumb, index finger and middle finger are our "skilled fingers." We want them to be as efficient and strong as possible to help achieve an efficient grasp and to control our pencils on paper. Provide daily opportunities for fine motor and hand strengthening activities. Using household items such as clothespins and spray bottles can help develop strength in the fingers. Picking small items up and placing them into containers (i.e. coins into a piggy bank; cheerios into a bowl) can help with fine motor development. Do a quick internet search for "Fine Motor Activities for Children" to learn more fun ways to develop this skill.

### 4. Capital letters

Capital letters are easier for kids to print. They all start at the top, they are all the same height and they all occupy the same vertical space. Capital letters all look different and are easier to identify. Several lower case letters look the same and it is a matter of where the "stick" goes that defines the letter. i.e. a b d g p and q are all circles with sticks. It is easy to place the stick on the wrong side or in the wrong place. A B D G P and Q are all formed differently and have a very distinct look.

Introducing capitals first can build a strong foundation leading to more success with lower case printing. Lower case letters are then easier to learn because c o s v w x y z are the same as their capitals *and* j k t p and u are similar to their capitals. After learning capital letters, children will be skilled with all capitals and nearly half of the lower case alphabet.

### 5. Letter play

You do not have to use a pencil to learn letters. In fact, letter play is a great way for a variety of ages and skill levels to learn the correct formations through fun

and motivating multi-sensory activities. Once a child is ready to manipulate a pencil, they will already be familiar with how to form the letters correctly.

Letter play examples:

- Finger tracing over tactile letters (i.e. sand paper letters)
- Build letters on mats with playdough
- Draw letters in the air
- Draw letters in sensory bins
  - o Wet bins: pudding, whip cream, yogurt
  - o Dry bins: salt, beans, pasta

### 6. Pencil grasp

A great strategy to help develop efficient grasps is to use short 1-2 inch writing tools. Break your crayons and cut (or sharpen down) your pencils and pencil crayons. If a child does not have the option to hold the writing tool with the whole hand, it will force them to use their fingers and help facilitate development of an efficient grasp.

### 7. Printing on lines

There are many types of lined paper available for printing. Some can be too complex and/or visually confusing to children. Starting with a double line can build a good foundation to transition successfully to a variety of styles. For more details on the double line please check out this link from *Learning without Tears* <https://www.lwtears.com/programs/double-lines>

### 8. Spacing

Children have to learn proper spacing between letters and between words. Spaghetti and meatballs is a fun way to teach this concept. Spaghetti spaces between letters and meatball spaces between words. Using props adds some multisensory learning to this concept and makes it more fun. For the noodles, you can use dry or cooked noodles or Wikki Stix. For the meatballs, you can scrunch up a small piece of paper, Wikki Stix or a pipe cleaner into a small ball.

If a child continues to have difficulty

with spacing concepts, try using boxes to print in. One letter per box and one empty box between words.

T	h	e		c	a	t			
---	---	---	--	---	---	---	--	--	--

### 9. Consistency and practice

Learning or re-learning to print takes time and practice. Try to be consistent with how you teach your child. For example, using the same language and drawing the letter the same way each time you teach it. Become familiar with proper stroke sequences and model the letter to your child. Your child can imitate you and draw their own letter onto their paper.

Should you wish to complete printing practice with your child, investing in a printing program may be beneficial to you. Most programs have everything readily available and guides to help you teach. For example, the *Handwriting without Tears* printing books from *Learning without Tears*.

### 10. See an Occupational Therapist

Occupational Therapists (OT) are skilled healthcare professionals who can assess your child's printing abilities. If you feel your child may have challenges in this area and are unsure what to do, contact an OT. They can help determine your child's strengths and weaknesses and provide recommendations to help develop the skills required to become successful with written communication.

#### References

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- Handwriting Without Tears*. (2018). *Get Set For School. Readiness & Writing Pre-K Teacher's Guide* ■

# Superheroes on the Spectrum, Activate!

KNOW YOUR STRENGTHS



BigStock.com

by Vicky McGrath, Self Advocate

**ONE OF THE INTERESTING THINGS** about my autism is that even though I've had a 25-year career and own my own business, in some areas I am quite emotionally immature. In fact, my 16-year-old daughter even says that she is more mature than me! As an example, I am still a big fan of many Disney movies, superhero movies like *Guardians of the Galaxy*, *X-Men* and *Avengers*, and the *Harry Potter* series. I can watch these movies repeatedly. Fortunately, my daughter enjoys watching these movies with me, but my husband doesn't like to watch any movie twice and doesn't like the *Harry Potter* movies at all.

While superheroes in movies usually have amazing superpowers going for them, such as the power of strength, invisibility and telecommunication that they control at will, it occurred to me while listening to the speakers of the Au-Some Conference 2020, that they also had superpowers! I listened in amazement as each speaker talked about their gifts, resilience and adaptability. What struck me most was that everyone had unique talents that made them who they are. If only these superpowers could be what autism is known for and not as a disability or a deficit.

What is it about superheroes that capture my attention? For me, it is the characteristics of determination, courage and persistence to achieve the greater good in the face of apparently unsurmountable challenges. While in daily life, I may not be working with a team of intergalactic warriors, I see these characteristics as strengths in myself and others with autism and I recognize and appreciate how these strengths can build self-esteem, help us contribute our gifts and encourage a positive mindset.





*Vicky McGrath is a wife, mom, and business owner and was diagnosed with autism in 2019, at age 50. Vicky has an undergraduate degree from Trent University and a Master's degree from Cambridge University. She spent 20 years in the government sector in the environmental field before making the jump to business ownership. Currently, she is owner of a private home care company, caring for elderly clients in the safety of their own homes and is also a professional speaker on hiring and retention of employees with autism. Vicky is also a runner and triathlete, having completed several marathons, half marathons and triathlons including half Ironman and three full Ironman triathlons. It was during a long training ride in 2006, before her (not to be) third Ironman that Vicky crashed her bicycle, broke some ribs, punctured her lung and sustained a concussion which launched her path of self-discovery, resulting in her autism diagnosis in 2019.*

So, shine on autism superheroes!

It's an opportunity for you to think about your gifts and talents. If you are energized and elevated by music, share this as a gift with others. If your talent is sports, how can you inspire others to take up the joy and challenge of sports? When riding your bicycle, if you relish and revel in the freedom it gives you, how can you contribute to freedom for others?

If we can see ourselves as superheroes, contributing our gifts, talents, and strengths even just to win the battle of autism stigma and overcome social barriers and constructs, this is a great outcome! And if you face failure and unlikely odds, let this be guidance to try another way. Even Harry Potter had to learn each and every spell and enchantment at a disadvantage—starting from 11 years old when many of his peers had known their gifts from birth. So, shine on autism superheroes! Do not yield to your fear of failure: you are up to the challenge of elevating awareness through your talents and gifts.

What superpowers do you have to share with the world? ■

## What is AIDE Canada?



by Reina Amante, Project Coordinator:  
Partnership and Content Specialist, Autism  
Ontario

**THE AUTISM** and/or Intellectual Disability Knowledge Exchange Network (AIDE Canada) is a national knowledge network that provides accurate, up-to-date, and useful information and resources to the people who need it. This includes self-advocates, family members, caregivers and service providers. AIDE Canada provides information, tools and resources about Autism and Intellectual Disabilities across the lifespan.

Autism Ontario is one of six AIDE Hubs in Canada—alongside Quebec, Calgary, Nova Scotia, Yukon and BC. AIDE Canada created the hub network to ensure that the information provided is relevant to people living in different regions of Canada.

Autism Ontario leads the AIDE Ontario Hub in Partnership with Holland Bloorview, REENA, South Asian Autism Awareness Centre (SAAAC), PooranLaw, and Empowered Kids Ontario (EKO). The AIDE Canada project offers the opportunity for Autism Ontario to collaborate with these partners to provide a comprehensive resource and knowledge development hub. ■



# The CARES Program

RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND LIVED EXPERIENCE



StoryBlocks.com

**FOR CAREGIVERS,** self-care is often not a priority. The goal of CARES, a program developed by The SAAAC Autism Centre and now available to chapters across the province, is to help caregivers look after themselves as well as their families.

CARES is a facilitator-led, interactive, semi-structured six-to-eight-week group program developed by Dr. Shivajan Sivapalan and Kiruthiha Vimalakanthan. The goal is to create a safe space where caregivers can feel empowered to overcome the challenges of supporting individuals with an autism diagnosis, while fostering strong bonds with others who share their experiences.

“Addressing gaps in and improving access to mental health supports, especially in diverse and marginalized communities, has always been a professional passion of mine,” said Ms. Vimalakanthan, who is in her final year of a PhD in clinical psychology at the University of Waterloo and is in her pre-doctoral residency at Surrey Place in Toronto. Kiruthiha’s primary role at SAAAC is the development and supervision of the CARES program.

The CARES framework incorporates many self-care practices and evidence-based strategies to improve mental health, such as mindfulness, stress management, helpful thinking, self-compassion, and problem-solving. The program offers caregivers a chance to bring the focus to themselves, even for just an hour a week. And it’s successful: over the past two-and-a-half years, CARES has served more than 120 families in 40 groups.

“The program was developed as a low-resource, culturally responsive mental health program supporting SAAAC’s families,” said Ms. Vimalakanthan. “The group facilitators, while not mental health professionals, are well-trained and often have lived experience of supporting individuals with autism. This eases caregivers into a safe, non-threatening space where they are more able to open up about their





Dr. Shivajan Sivapalan

Kiruthiha Vimalakanthan

challenges and focus on themselves. This was also an opportunity to create positive experiences for the community of caregivers that we initially served, who have little to no experience with, and a lot of wariness towards, mental health services and professionals.”

The semi-formal nature of CARES makes it unique among support groups. Although there are topics and material to cover for each session, there is enough flexibility to allow facilitators to respond to each group’s unique needs. When caregivers are willing to share their own experiences with each other, facilitators prioritize and support that; when a group requests more skills-building or interactive activities, the facilitators have lots of material to support that need as well.

The CARES program encourages caregivers and parents to take the approach of “putting on your oxygen mask before helping others” when it comes to self-care, and to realize that when they’re not feeling well, they can’t take proper care of themselves or their families.

“The most impactful part of the program,” said a caregiver who participated in a CARES group, “was the different perspectives from the other parents. How they cope with various situations as they arise and our facilitators’ helpful input. Knowing that there are different insights, helpful suggestions that I myself would not necessarily think of, and then learn how to utilize the tools in the parent workbook to help in these situations that may arise.”

The biggest takeaway for the caregiver was the stress management and assertive communication chapters. “It was insightful, and the extra tools presented by our facilitator and other parents, led to new tools for me to incorporate in my everyday life. The tips to practice assertive speech have come in quite handy... It is important because there aren’t many programs like this for parents. Having contacts that you can reach out to specifically—such as the facilitator and knowing that you have an extra support system—is always welcomed.”

“As a family doctor by profession, I believe in the potential for change to the current diagnostic landscape for children on the autism spectrum,” said Dr. Sivapalan, who is co-developer of the CARES program. “The CARES initiative employs a task-shifting model to provide mental health support for caregivers of individuals on the autism spectrum, which effectively means that it creates an avenue for caregivers to begin to take care of themselves.”

CARES’ creators are looking to have the program not only become self-sustaining but also widely available across different cultures and easily accessible in various languages. “We try to represent these cultural diversities in our program,” said Kiruthiha. “CARES will continue to evolve as we learn from each new caregiver that participates in the program.” ■

The CARES program encourages caregivers and parents to take the approach of “putting on your oxygen mask before helping others” when it comes to self-care...

# Connor's Story

## A PASSION BECOMES A PROJECT

by Connor McCurdy, Self Advocate



**MY NAME IS CONNOR** and I am 20 years old. I love *Thomas and Friends*—it's my favourite show. I love *The Railway Series* written by the Rev. W. Awdry and his son Christopher.

I make my own *Thomas* fan series on YouTube. My channel is called *Duck Show Studios*. My stories are about a variety of characters. I try to stay true to the original *Thomas* books and TV show, and I film the stories with my wooden engines. I started filming the stories in 2018 with my first season. Season One has stories which are sort of mismatched because one could be from the fall of 2018 and then some could be from the spring of 2019 because I filmed them, and I wasn't sure what I wanted to do with them.

My psychologist filmed most of the earlier ones—it was her idea to film the stories that I write. I wasn't sure if I wanted to pitch the stories to Mattel Creations or upload them on YouTube.

I found a way to post them legally on YouTube because Mattel likes it if you post stuff without political messages and other things. A lot of my earlier stories focused on a Steam Team member. The wood models of Nia and Rebecca were not out at the time, so they were not in my stories, but I discovered focusing on the same characters for a long time made the stories dull.

The reason I did this was just for Mattel because the Steam Team has the characters they really wanted to push. Most of those stories were cut because I didn't like them as much as the others. My writing improved in Season Three. Season Three is my favourite season. It was filmed in late 2019 and in early 2020. Season Four was filmed in 2020 and it has a lot of 'likes.' Now I am uploading Season Five which I filmed between March and May of 2020. I have been working on lots of upcoming projects since May of 2020, and I'm working on more. I will make an

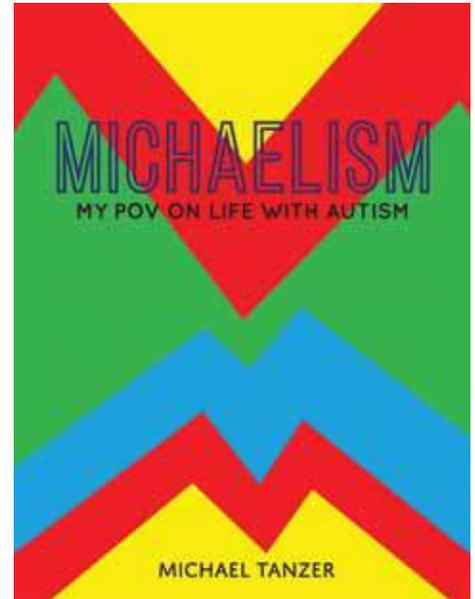
update video talking about future projects to be posted in 2021.

I do all my own voice acting. This is because I can voice act quite well. Some of my favourite characters to voice include Duck and Ace (also two of my favourite characters to write). A counsellor of mine, and a very good friend, named Jordan, made my channel for me and helps edit the videos and post them. If you're reading this, thank you Jordan! Writing these stories is my passion. My favourite characters in the show and books include Duck, Donald and Douglas, Oliver, James, Edward, Merlin, Stephen, Thomas and Marion. I also film trains at my local train station with my good friend Taylor (*The Taylor With Autism 2005* is his channel), and I have reviewed *Thomas* episodes and toys as well. If you want to check out my channel, that would mean a lot to me. Thank you. I would recommend Seasons Three, Four and Five. ■



# Michaelism, by Michael Tanzer

AN INCREDIBLE, POSITIVE FORCE



Reviewed by Courtney Weaver, Self Advocate



Michael Tanzer

**MICHAELISM: My POV on Life with Autism** is candid, clever and catchy. Published in 2020, the 64-page book is written by a young adult and self-proclaimed Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Advocator (awesome title), Michael Tanzer. Supplemented with a foreword by his therapist Janet Arnold and a closing message from his parents Kathy and Russell Tanzer, the book is 16 chapters long, with Michael proudly describing his point of view on 16 topics that make him whom he is—from ASD and accomplishments to money and math, just to name a few. Each chapter is infused with a chapter summary at the end as well as Japanese expressions (words and calligraphy). Michael's hand drawings also appear; particularly in the second half of the book. There are also a few pages dedicated to Japanese words (which he loves).

Michael's positivity permeates the entire book. Even in the chapters that deal with more difficult topics including death and targetism (Michael's word for bullying that takes advantage of someone's trustingness) as well as his own challenges, his message (and sentiment) of never giving up doesn't waver. Quotes about persevering are continually interspersed throughout the book.

His bracketed interjections also add liveliness and sometimes humour to his story and sentences. A good example of this is in the first chapter where he describes his point of view on himself and mentions his parents' efforts to expand his food and taste palette. The interjecting of, "Blagh!" right after mentioning how his parents got him to smell any new take-out they ordered is a perfect example of comedic timing.

Through his message of optimism and animated writing style, Michael directly challenges the reader to rethink various ideas they may have about autism. For instance, he makes the point that everyone has hobbies and yet the hobbies that people with ASD have can sometimes be called obsessions, which makes them sound like they are a bad thing. He follows up this point by suggesting that the reader should ask themselves why a hobby that a person with ASD has looks like an obsession. Michael goes a step further in his book by suggesting that certain collective action needs to happen for everyone to benefit. For instance, he stresses the need for other children that do not have ASD to be educated by parents and teachers on ASD and how to be

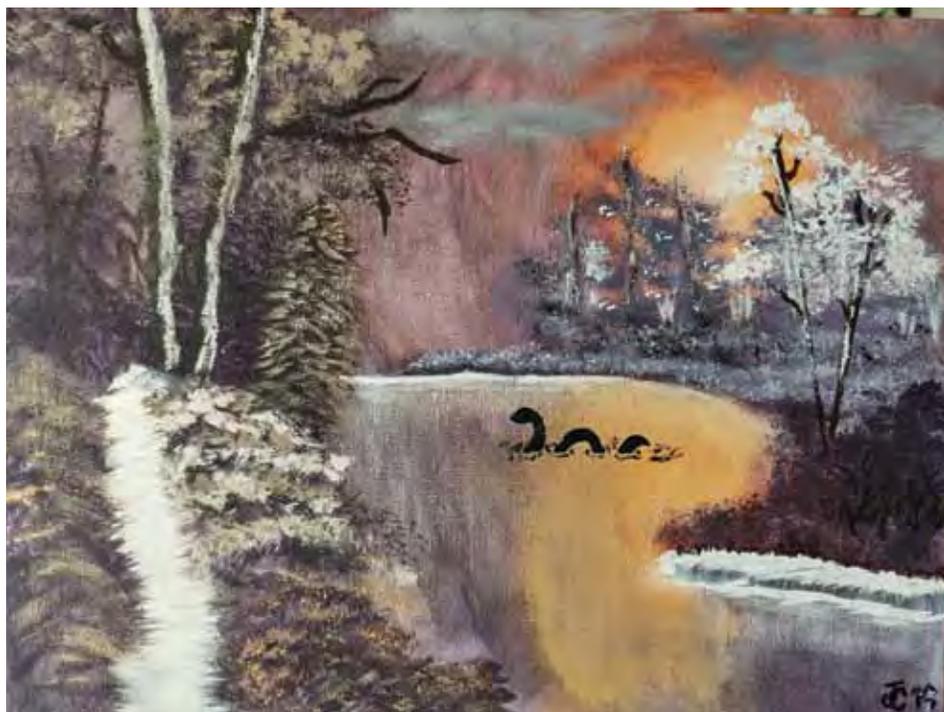
more friendly, instead of having the focus just be on the social skills of the person with ASD. As a result, everyone would be taught how to be kind. While this is not outrightly mentioned in the book, in my view, these and similar actions could raise collective empathy in society.

In short, as a result of the reasons mentioned earlier about theme and text, Michael's book is one that effectively catches the reader's attention and calls for positive rethinking and action.

Precisely because of his candidly described challenges with mastering the English language, reading some sentences may be a little difficult because of grammar, punctuation, and vocabulary structure. However, this in no way detracts from the messages Michael stresses and summarizes throughout the book. Also, as Michael mentions, the way the sentences are written conveys how he speaks. They are examples of his Michaelism.

Whether or not you are looking for a book by a self-advocate, if you want a book that is readable, filled with an exuberant message of perseverance that will also directly challenge you to re-think your ideas of autism and provides ideas for positive societal change that would benefit all, I recommend Michael Tanzer's *Michaelism*.

Michaelism: My POV on Life with Autism, by Michael Tanzer is now available for purchase on Amazon.ca. ■



## About the Cover Artist

**MY NAME IS JACQUELINE COTTRELL.** I am autistic and 30 years old. I belong to the North-East Chapter of Autism Ontario. I have an associate degree in Recreation Therapy and a BA in Psychology. I want to eventually focus on Art Therapy and improve mental health services for seniors. I love creating art, whether it be drawing, painting, sewing, beading, or upcycling.

My art can be viewed on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/Lucky-SpaceAce13-Creations> ■



## Get Creative with Autism Ontario



We're looking for submission from you, the Ontario autism community, for *Autism Matters* and our blog!

Written pieces, vlogs, music, visual art, photography, and more, are welcome!

**Autistic people of all ages are especially encouraged to submit**

Please email questions, ideas, and submissions to [info@autismontario.com](mailto:info@autismontario.com)

## Poems by Meg Erickson, Self Advocate



# Blurred Reality

THE DAYS STILL PASS TOO QUICKLY  
YET WHAT MAGIC IS CAPTURED.  
WHAT IMPACT HAVE I LEFT?  
I WANT TO SHARE THE SAME AIR  
AS OTHERS.  
MY SPACE THESE DAYS IS JUST  
TOO EMPTY.  
THE LONELINESS HAS NEVER BEEN  
SO LOUD.  
MY DAILY SOUNDTRACK MIGHT NOT  
BE ABLE TO BREAK THROUGH  
THIS UNCERTAINTY.  
WHEN CAN LIFE GET BACK  
INTO FOCUS? ■

# Quarantine

I WAKE UP ON THE DARK SIDE OF THE STREET  
URGED INTO THIS NEW WORLD  
MY SOUL FILLED WITH SHOCK  
MY BODY REQUESTED SLEEP  
I WASN'T EXPECTING DISORDER  
SO I FOUND SOME STRUCTURE  
A LITTLE PURPOSE SURROUNDED BY  
MY CIRCLE OF CONFUSION  
MY RACING MIND

HOME FOR WEEKS  
HOW CAN I ESCAPE THIS PLACE  
PARADISE ISLAND OR UNFORGIVING PRISON  
OR IS THIS EXACTLY WHAT I ASKED FOR?

THE GLOBE IS GLOWING  
WITH ALL THE MASKED WORKING HEROES  
DIFFERENT PLACES, DIFFERENT FACES  
BIG RISKS. BIG HEARTS. WILL SET US FREE.

BETTER DAYS WILL ARRIVE  
NEW EYES FOR THE FUTURE  
ECHOES OF 'SOCIAL DISTANCING' WILL EVENTUALLY DISAPPEAR  
VIVID MEMORIES LOCKED DOWN  
WAS THIS A BLESSING IN DISGUISE? ■



**Have you or someone you know experienced barriers finding suitable housing as an autistic adult?**

Share your experience with the 'Housing through an Autism lens' project and help build solutions!

Share your story at  
[www.Hal-Lab.ca](http://www.Hal-Lab.ca)



StoryBlocks.com

# What You Leave Behind

## AN INTRODUCTION TO PLANNED GIVING

by Monica Richardson, Fund Development Manager, Autism Ontario

**“What you leave behind is not what is engraved in stone monuments, but what is woven into the lives of others.” – Pericles**

### What is Planned Giving?

**“PLANNED GIVING”** is a phrase that charities use and donors almost never say. In a nutshell, it means you create a charitable gift now that goes to the organization you love and will support in the future, after you pass on. It is also often called “legacy giving” or “gift planning.”

Planned giving takes some thought and preparation, and because of this, you should consult a lawyer and financial planner. The easiest planned gift is part of something you should have anyway – your Will.

### Is it complicated? Does it take a lot of work?

It’s not really a lot of work. Everyone should have a will, and ideally it should be prepared in advance, with some advice from a lawyer and financial consultant, particularly if you have a loved one with special needs that must be considered. Including a discussion about planned giving to these conversations takes just a few more minutes, and your lawyer may in fact bring up the topic before you do.



Some planned gifts provide life-long income to a charity. Other gift plans use estate and tax planning to provide for a charity and heirs in ways that maximize the gift and minimize its impact on the donor's estate.

### Can I donate stocks and mutual funds?

The donation of securities, such as stocks, mutual funds, or other investments is surprisingly straightforward and may even be beneficial for you at tax time.

According to National Policy 12-202, *Revocation of Certain Cease Trade Orders*, which is a national policy in force across Canada governing the donations of securities, "...in most jurisdictions of Canada, a disposition of securities by way of a bona fide gift, made in good faith and not as part of a plan or scheme to evade requirements of securities legislation, would generally not be considered a 'trade' under securities legislation."

This means generally, under securities law, a gift or a donation of a security

is not considered a trade and it is not subject to securities law. However, you do need to be careful. You may get into trouble if you are deemed to have received "valuable consideration," whether it is a gift from the charity or the write-off of the value of the donation on your taxes.

There is also disposition of your capital gain. If you donate a security, there is a result in a capital gain, which is taxable. There are a number of ways of legally making a donation and minimizing your capital gains exposure, such as donating through organizations such as *Canada Helps*. However, it's always a good idea before you do anything, to check with your tax specialist.

<https://www.canadahelps.org/en/why-canadahelps/ways-to-give/benefits-of-donating-securities/>

### Why should I consider a planned gift?

A gift in your Will lets you leave a legacy to a cause you believe in and will ensure your memory lives on.

### What are some tips when you plan your legacy?

1. Talk to your family about your wishes. End-of-life conversations can be tough but discussing your wishes ahead of time makes decisions much easier for your loved ones after you pass away. It also removes any room for doubt regarding your wishes on their part.
2. Get professional advice. A financial advisor can help you explore the various legacy options to find the best fit for you and your family. Once you've made your decisions, a lawyer can put together the nuts and bolts of a Will.

*Considering a planned gift to Autism Ontario? Reach out to our Chief Financial and Information Officer, Gary Martini-Wong, [gary@autismontario.com](mailto:gary@autismontario.com).* ■

# Autism does matter

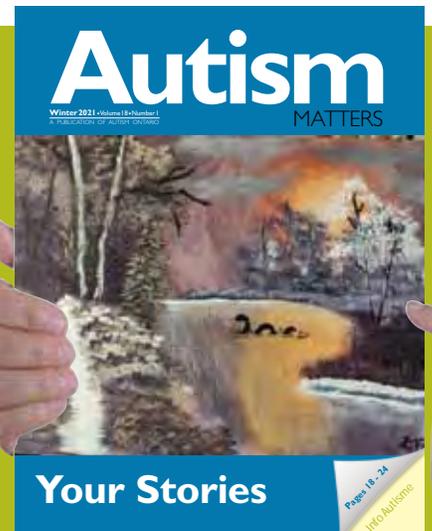
**Parents, make sure that your child's school is an inclusive place for children on the autism spectrum.**

**AutismMATTERS** contains valuable articles for educators and parents, written by clinicians, educators and researchers as well as personal stories by students and adults on the spectrum.

Members of Autism Ontario receive this quarterly publication free. We encourage schools to register as professional members of Autism Ontario, which will give them a subscription to every issue of **AutismMATTERS** along with many other benefits.

If you have a child in an Ontario public or Catholic school, please encourage your school's principal or special educators to enroll as a professional member of Autism Ontario to make your school and community an inclusive place for students on the autism spectrum.

For more information, visit [autismontario.com](http://autismontario.com).



**Autism**ONTARIO

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# In Your Corner

HIGHLIGHTING CHAPTER SUCCESSES, ACTIVITIES AND IDEAS. A SPACE DEDICATED TO SHARING, LEARNING AND FINDING WAYS TO SERVE OUR FAMILIES LOCALLY.

by Brittany Sherwood, Chapter and Volunteer Supervisor, Autism Ontario

**OUR CHAPTERS WERE BUSY** recently bringing families across the province a variety of virtual programming and take-home kits. Here's a glimpse of what went on this winter:

Autism Ontario's **SIMCOE CHAPTER** is incredibly thankful to receive continued funding from Delta Bingo and Gaming to support programs like its virtual "Kids Club." This group gets kids moving, grooving and crafting, with a new theme each month. This holiday season, we were able to host 30 children along with their families, for a virtual craft night in partnership with Wild Life Fitness.

"Over the past few months, we've really seen this program grow and while we can't wait to be together in person again. It's been

wonderful to see new connections forming online and so many creative art pieces after each class!" said Liz Smith, a parent.

The **CENTRAL WEST REGION** ran various virtual programs this past winter including yoga, martial arts, dance and fine arts. The chapter's families especially enjoyed a virtual cooking program led by Chef Anthony Go, a chef-in-training from George Brown College and adult with autism, alongside the volunteers from Big Spoon Lil Spoon McMaster and Mississauga Chapters. For five weeks, Chef Anthony led 50 children with autism on a culinary adventure where they

*Central West gets cooking!*  
Below left - Lucas Tsioros; Below - Kartik Iyer;  
Top right - Arden Riddell; Bottom right - Jack Deogrades

learned new skills and made a tasty meal for their families. This program was made possible through the generous funding provided by President's Choice Children's Charity. The chapter looks forward to starting the program's second season in late February.

The **NIAGARA CHAPTER** has continued to offer families take home kits and virtual programs. We are excited to see the creative work completed by the participants.





◀ Giancarlo Congi from Autism Ontario's Windsor Chapter works on his snowman kit. This alligator is one of the finished examples.

new business on social media, and got to work.

If this was not great enough, Gabriele partnered with Mom Squad, a Facebook group that uses their platform to raise money for Sick Kids Hospital and other local charities. He created a Mom Squad Dance Mix from suggestions from Mom Squad members, with a portion of each USB sold

One grateful family said, "With all of the changes going on, and her little world being turned upside down, these kits have made her days brighter."

Things at Autism Ontario **WINDSOR-ESSEX CHAPTER** have been both busy and exciting. Before the holidays and in the new year, they put out a bunch of fun take-home kits and online activities such as Gingerbread House Decorating, Ice Cream Cone Tree Decorating Kits, Various Holiday Arts & Craft Kits, Adopt a Stuffed, Christmas Choir, Colouring Contests and much more.

The chapter has also been doing its best to support local businesses in the Windsor-Essex area such as Oven 360 (Pizza Kits), Superbowl (Nacho Kits), Christine's Bake Shop (Hot Chocolate Bombs), The Art Lab (Science Kits), Cracked Cage Crafting Co.

(Charcuterie Board Fundraiser), and many more.

The chapter expresses its gratitude for the support from the kind and generous community in Windsor-Essex!

Autism Ontario **PETERBOROUGH CHAPTER** was pleased to partner with Papa's Pizzaland Peterborough and offer a family pizza making kit to make at home.

Gabriele Condello, a student with autism at St Luke Learning Center, found a creative way to showcase his computer skills and his love for music. Gabriele loves to develop playlists and make CDs. When a close friend asked him to make one for her, Gabriele came up with the idea for Play Your List. He created his logo, downloaded the music, created artwork for CD covers, purchased all the materials he needed, marketed his

*A notice to our Chapters: The Chapter Corner is your space to highlight your successes and share stories of how you're making a difference in your communities.*

*By contributing, you are:*

- Accessing thousands of families, professionals and agencies
- Providing ideas and insight to other Chapters for activities, programs and events
- Building a stronger community across Ontario
- Demonstrating what you've accomplished locally
- Creating opportunities for dialogue and increased information sharing

*To share your stories, please submit ideas and content to christa@autismontario.com.*



## The OAP Provider List

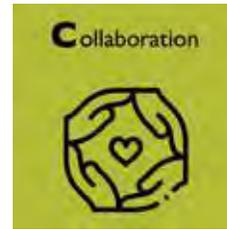
The Ontario Autism Program (OAP) Provider List is a listing of Clinical supervisors of behavioural services funded through the Ontario Autism Program (including behavioural services purchased using childhood budgets or interim one-time funding). The OAP Provider List is a publicly available database which has grown to include over 200 clinicians providing ABA services across Ontario.

**Find a Provider!**

**[www.oaproviderlist.ca](http://www.oaproviderlist.ca)**



◀ Alexandre Vautour of East Region relaxes with his family as he watches the lights of Upper Canada Village.



going to Autism Ontario's **YORK CHAPTER**, of which he is a proud member. Gabrielle is excited to give back to an organization that has supported him at camp and various programs throughout the year.

The **EAST REGION** of Autism Ontario finished up the year by offering an exclusive virtual tour of Upper Canada Village's Alight at Night. The popular event had been sold out for weeks with guests wanting to

experience the beautiful heritage buildings covered in over one million lights. Autism Ontario families were able to experience the magic from the comfort of their own home and were even provided popcorn from the Happy Popcorn Co. One family wrote, "We just wanted to send a quick note to say thanks for the virtual tour of UCV. Our children loved it and were delighted with the popcorn. We appreciate

the efforts you put into creating the video for us. You have been very creative in finding ways to keep our kids engaged, and it is greatly appreciated!"

Our **DURHAM REGION CHAPTER** provided Holiday Goody Bags to families in the community to brighten their holidays! ■



## Yes! I want to make a difference helping people on the autism spectrum.

Direct my donation to:

- Provincial Office
- My Chapter \_\_\_\_\_
- Wherever most needed

I would like to donate:

- \$25  \$50  \$100  \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed is my cheque made payable to Autism Ontario

OR

I'd prefer to pay with my credit card. Please charge to:

- VISA  MasterCard

Card Number: \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_

CVV Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Expiration: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

From all the families, volunteers and staff at Autism Ontario, thank you!



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

Prov: \_\_\_\_\_ Postal code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please send this completed form with your donation to  
Autism Ontario

1179 King St. W., Suite 004  
Toronto, ON M6K 3C5

Incorporated as Autism Ontario  
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# Community Connect

[autismontario.com/communityconnect](https://autismontario.com/communityconnect)

[autismontario.com/fr/communityconnect](https://autismontario.com/fr/communityconnect)

## Autism Ontario CommunityConnect is a centralized community portal that is home to:

### Service Listings

Search for autism-related services such as mental health professionals, occupational therapists, speech language pathologists, social workers, ABA providers, and more!

### Learning Resources

Webinars, fact sheets, helpful articles, personal stories, and more to assist you on your journey from diagnosis onward.

### Autism Ontario Events

Virtual and local programs to support autistic people and their families, including support groups, information sessions, recreational activities, and more!

## CommunityConnect d'Autisme Ontario est un portail communautaire centralisé qui héberge :

### Répertoire de services

Chercher des services reliés à l'autisme (professionnels de la santé mentale, ergothérapeutes, orthophonistes, travailleurs sociaux, fournisseurs d'ACA, et plus!)

### Activités d'Autisme Ontario

Des programmes virtuels et locaux pour venir en aide aux personnes autistes et à leur famille, y compris des groupes de soutien, des séances d'information, des activités récréatives et bien d'autres choses encore!

### Ressources d'apprentissage

Webinaires, articles utiles, fiches d'information, récits personnels et plus encore pouvant vous accompagner dans votre cheminement à partir du diagnostic.

#### HAS YOUR ADDRESS CHANGED?

Send your old mailing label and your new address to: Autism Ontario, at the address below.

PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT # 40910519

CUSTOMER # 1012283

RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO:

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