



## **Autism Ontario Announced as Recipient of Autism Speaks Canada 2021 Community Grant**

Autism Ontario is pleased to announce that it is a recipient of the Autism Speaks Canada 2021 Community Grant, alongside its partners [Variety Village / Variety – the Children’s Charity \(Ontario\)](#) and [Apex Academy Online](#), and [Partners for Planning](#) for the Strong Minds Through Active Bodies: Promoting Autistic Mental Health Through Physical Activity and Planning project.

Autism Speaks Canada 2021 Community Grants fund evidence-informed projects to support mental health services and social engagement opportunities for autistic people and their families across Canada. Grants are awarded through a rigorous review process, including a community panel of self-advocates, family members, friends, service providers, and research experts across Canada.

Strong Minds Through Active Bodies will be an online digital resource that helps to establish accessible physical fitness environments for autistic youth and adults while addressing barriers and supports to accessing fitness and recreation programs. Curriculum content will be hosted on the Apex Academy Online portal and will be informed by autistic youth and adults in addition to subject matter experts.

Says Marg Spoelstra, Executive Director of Autism Ontario, “It is an honour to receive this Community Grant alongside our partners. The grant represents the ability to collaborate on a transformational curriculum for students in the physical activity and kinesiology fields that we are creating together with autistic youth and adults, practicing professionals, and academics. The curriculum will include the development of practical routines and lesson plans, planning approaches, ideas, and activities within the online learning environment for use in our communities of practice.”

“Variety Village / Variety – the Children’s Charity (Ontario) is excited to collaborate and partner with Autism Ontario in our successful application to introduce Strong Minds Through Active Bodies,” says Archie Allison, Director, Access, and Awareness, Variety Village. “This new initiative will actively engage autistic youth and adults as stakeholders to increase awareness of the mental health benefits in sport, fitness, and health with an online resource for students and practitioners. This informed approach will create more accessible and inclusive programs, services, and organizational responses to promote participation for everybody.”

“Autism Speaks Canada is pleased to provide support to this important project through our 2021 Community Grants program,” says Kathi Cosgrove, National Program Director, Autism Speaks Canada. “The benefits of movement and exercise on both mental and physical wellbeing are vast and well documented; however significant barriers may impede autistic youth and adults’ participation in formalized physical activity. This digital resource, which critically involves those with lived experience in the development of content, will be far reaching in its ability to increase access to inclusive fitness and recreational programming for autistic youth and adults.”

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For more information, email Autism Ontario’s media team at [media@autismontario.com](mailto:media@autismontario.com).

**About Autism Ontario:** Autism Ontario has a history of over 49 years of representing thousands of families and people on the autism spectrum across Ontario. We are the only organization in Ontario that has elected volunteer parent representation in all areas of the province through our seven Regions. We advocate with and on behalf of all people on the autism spectrum and their families – at all ages and stages of life, reflecting a wide range of expression and abilities. To connect with us, visit [www.autismontario.com](http://www.autismontario.com).