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*For immediate release*

**Autism Ontario Celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary – A Letter from our CEO, Margaret Spoelstra, and our President of the Board, Kim Moore**

**[Toronto, Ontario]** Autism Ontario is marking its 50th anniversary this year, and we learned that when people come together to create change, they can move mountains.

Our journey is one of hope, perseverance, and, most importantly, information and advocacy. A group of determined volunteer parents came together in 1973 with a shared goal to create a brighter future for their autistic children, and they founded the organization as a registered charity which sparked a movement that would impact the course of autism history in the province.

In the early years of Autism Ontario, knowledge and research about autism were scarce, options for education and support were almost non-existent, and many families were left with an unclear future for their children. Undeterred, these volunteers and allies worked tirelessly, establishing educational and health programs through many chapters and giving autistic children new opportunities to thrive and reach their full potential. Their passion and dedication paved the way for others to join the cause and make a difference.

In 1974, the organization achieved a major breakthrough by conceptualizing, advocating for, and raising funds to support the first residential and educational treatment program for adolescents with autism in Ontario. This groundbreaking initiative became Kerry's Place Autism Services, which provides community-based residential programs for individuals on the autism spectrum across the province.

Over the years, our name evolved to reflect our expanding mission. In 1985, the Ontario Society for Autistic Children became the Ontario Society for Autistic Citizens, recognizing that autism is a lifelong condition and that the needs of autistic adults must be addressed. In 1991, the organization became Autism Society Ontario, which, at that time, emphasized the importance of thinking about autism more holistically. In 2006, it became Autism Ontario, reflecting our goal of inclusivity and accessibility for all.

Built on the work of parent advocates, volunteers, and community partnerships, Autism Ontario continues to be a leading voice for change, providing support, resources, and education to autistic individuals and their families. Our legacy is one of progress, innovation, and unwavering dedication to autism advocacy and inclusivity. This milestone marks not only 50 years of advocacy and supports, but also 50 years of memories, progress, and strong friendships and partnerships made along the way.

Autism Ontario's 50th-anniversary celebration is a testament to the resilience and determination of the autism community; it represents 50 years of the heart and soul of Ontario that pushed for change. It is an opportunity to reflect on the past, celebrate the present, and look forward to the future — a future that looks brighter than ever. As we continue with our vision and mission, we will remain focused on building on our legacy of autism advocacy and contributing to autism inclusivity.

We are immensely grateful to the families, dozens of board members, countless team members, and the entire autism community for the invaluable contributions and unwavering goodwill you have shown. Together, we are making a profound difference in the lives of many.

**SUPPORT AUTISM ONTARIO'S 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY:**

[Make a meaningful donation today.](#) Your support makes a difference.

**ABOUT AUTISM ONTARIO**

[Autism Ontario](#) is the province's leading source of information and referral on autism whose mandate is to build a supportive and inclusive Ontario for autism. It provides autistic individuals and families across their life course with community-based access to meaningful supports, social learning opportunities, information, and connections. The organization's commitment to significantly and positively impacting the autism community is driven by its vision: Best life, better world, making autism matter!