

# PRACTICE MAKES PROGRESS



2011

Annual Report



SOUTH ASIAN AUTISM AWARENESS CENTRE

# MISSION

## WHAT WE DO

SAAAC was created with the intention of facilitating families in the South Asian community impacted by ASD with a special focus on the cultural elements they face that pose particular challenges. Our organization looks to create positive change in the lives of our participants through:

- Support of the cognitive, behavioural and physical development of our participants
- Creation of a supportive, open, and educational environment for parents and caregivers
- Raising awareness of the complexities of ASD in the larger South Asian Community

# PROGRAMS

## HOW WE DO IT

- Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)
- Speech Therapy
- Occupational Therapy
- SMARTS (- "Smart Arts": Music, Dance, & Art Therapy)
- After School Program
- SAFE (South Asian Family Empowerment) Project
- ASD Information Sessions
- Cultural Awareness Seminars

# REFLECTION

## A WORD FROM THE BOARD

What a difference this year made! If there is one way to phrase how SAAAC experienced 2011 it is that “everything has started coming together”. The organization, since 2008, has worked diligently to help its families. From serving youth to communicating with parents, recruiting volunteers to reaching out to the community, the spirit at SAAAC has lay in dedication, perseverance, and trust. But like any organization finding its place, there is nothing like vision and coordination to bring some direction to digging in your heels every day! Well, it arrived this year- coherent care.

The “integrative model”, the result of passionate discussion and preparation by our team in the lead-up to this year, is a term almost as synonymous as ASD around here. What it means is a service to our children in 2011 that, while revolving around the principles of Applied Behavioural Analysis (and the incomparable commitment of our ABA therapist), actively incorporates the provision of Speech Therapy, Occupational Therapy, and our SMARTS (Arts) programs. This culture of integration has been injected readily into our child intake, where a needs-based assessment is oriented specifically around those programs made available through the model. The recruitment of consultant speech, occupational, music, and dance therapists has fleshed out this service, enhanced by the involvement of a skilled volunteer base. Between our on-site and consultant therapists to our rolling volunteer evaluation and training sessions, coherent care isn't just a convenient term- it's a culture.

Ultimately, the model was meant as a specific response to the gaps our families encountered in their children's existing management through the system. It also was implemented to address the issue of Continuous Stream. One of the largest issues of access in the system revolves around those children who are either too young or too old for conventional services. Our intake process is sensitive to those children under 6 and over 21 who don't benefit from school coverage. Our After School program and integrative model were structured this year to bridge those age gaps in the vein of addressing Continuous Stream. If our latest multi-disciplinary feedback meetings with the parents are any indication, we appear to be doing just that!

Speaking of our parents, the notion of extending services to our parents was a new installment in 2011. ASD affects the whole family, and it was with this in mind that we were supported by the United Way this year to reach out to the South Asian family and address the issue of stigma and Fading Accommodation. Our SAFE (South Asian Family Empowerment) program has been a revelation. Complemented by “Coffee with SAAAC”, SAFE has explored stigma, built parent skills, opened up lines of communication, and laid the groundwork for our parents to recognize the amazing potential they themselves hold and the amazing things they have already done. The skills derived from the operation of SAFE have translated into other community organizations seeking out our assistance in providing cultural competence training. To think that we would be consulting for other organizations in 2011!

Of course, that is exactly the challenge. If 2011 could bring such change for our families and the organization, predicting the future is anyone's guess. But it can't stop us from setting goals. The overarching strategy of the organization is to identify children and families that need help at **any** stage in their development with an aim to equip a child with the skills to ultimately function on their own.

- The process of identifying people out in the community is hugely reliant on an effective outreach process. From our SAFE program we are slowly building a stronger schedule of sessions that are periodically being made available to the greater community in the hope of attracting more families that have not engaged with SAAAC. Between these sessions and our outreach through the Toronto District School Board and cultural competence training with various organizations we hope to act as an identifiable conduit for South Asian families in need.
- With increasing engagement in the community comes increasing volume- a great barrier to most services being effective. Our response is through the development of efficient case-management. We have, also through our SAFE program, begun developing a stronger Social Work component, going so far as to include it in our needs assessment and multi-disciplinary feedback meetings. With a more coordinated advocacy capability in the next 2 years, we aim to address volume as best we can.
- Finally, Continuous Stream is re-emphasized in the enablement of the newly turned adult with ASD. Our youth approaching 21 are in a position where being able to contribute to society will hold their futures in great stead. We have an upcoming project in place for 2012 that will aim to train and employ adolescent minds for adult futures.

If 2011 has been a year to reflect on "everything coming together" it is because we have worked in vein to be a centre for consolidated care. Coordinating the care of our families and the services of our therapists with the assistance of our volunteers has been an exhilarating challenge. And if coherent care can deliver a coherent child, it will have been worthwhile. Ultimately though, we understand all this is a changing body of work up until the very last second. But it won't discourage us from trying and troubleshooting. After all, at SAAAC, we are guided by the principle that Practice makes Progress.

#### **Board of Directors**

*Founder & Executive Director: Geetha Moorthy*

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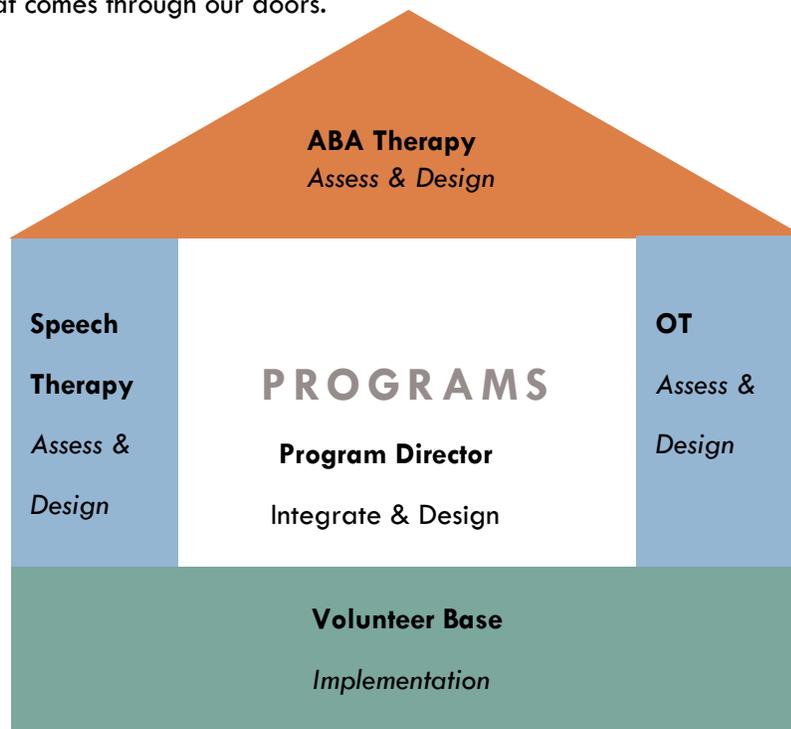
*Secretary: Meleni David*

*Treasurer: Suresh Tharmaratnam*

# THE FRAMEWORK

## INTEGRATIVE MODEL

The integrative model, introduced this year, is the basis for all of SAAAC's programming. This model has created an atmosphere of collaboration between our therapists, under the guidance of the Program Director, resulting in comprehensive support for the children we serve. Every child and adolescent is assessed by an Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) therapist, Physician (MD), and Social Worker at intake who subsequently designs a collective program for him/her. Based on a needs assessment the child is deemed eligible for speech and/or occupational therapies, further assessed by the respective with a program also designed. The designed programs are then carried out by our volunteer base comprised of trained post-secondary/ graduate students and professionals. The integrative model was derived from the premise that is well known for anyone working with children and adolescents: *practice makes progress*. Collaboration between therapists allow for respective therapists to incorporate elements of parallel disciplines into their own program design as well as create programs which complement one another. This synthesized approach to programming coupled with the accommodating support of volunteers and parents fosters a culture of intense support for every youth that comes through our doors.



# THE PATH

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

### *Fading Accommodation*

South Asian culture is a vibrant assortment of various languages, sonorous sounds, scintillating dishes and beautiful traditions. Yet within this cornucopia of sights and sounds there exist certain stigmas around disability that contribute to a philosophy of isolation for many parents impacted by ASD. Factors contributing to these stigmas include, but are not limited to: the absence of a terminology/definition for ASD, parents' lack of English skills, as well as culture-specific beliefs. All of these work to exacerbate existing stigmas. Understanding that many of the parents that seek out our services are being marginalized on some level, and have often fallen into a lifestyle of insularity, SAAAC seeks to be as supportive as possible to parents from the moment they engage the organization. We adhere to a policy of accommodating as much as possible to their needs in order to combat the pervasive culture of enclosure that we encounter. As parents become more independent and confident in their abilities we gradually attenuate the amount of services provided for them specifically; and in some cases push them to take on leadership roles with newer parents or in other aspects of the organization.

...accommodating as much as possible to [parents'] needs in order to combat the pervasive culture of enclosure...

### *Continuous Stream*

A common grievance parents come to us with is the gap in support services for adolescents transitioning into adulthood. Programs on offer have a limited time frame and, after their child reaches 21, parents are often left in the dark with very limited options for their son or daughter. With no school and waitlists for day treatment programs there are a number of factors which often culminate in crises for these parents as they are faced with the vagaries accompanying the transition period for their youth from full-time school to often—full days at home. SAAAC's Continuous Stream seeks to address this issue by providing support and services for its

participants from preschool to “post- school”. SAAAC is always seeking out new initiatives that help to implement such principles, keeping in mind independent living is the end goal for every individual we work with—and nothing less. Working for a prolonged period with our youth helps build healthy & trusting relationships with both them & their parents.

**...providing support and services for its participants from preschool to “post-school”**



# STEPPING STONES

## PROJECTS 2011

### *SOUTH ASIAN FAMILY EMPOWERMENT (SAFE)*

Funded by the United Way York Region and in collaboration with East Metro Youth Services, SAFE was launched this year with the goal of educating parents and creating a cycle of mentorship amongst them. The goal is to provide parents with a well-rounded knowledge base on issues surrounding ASD, through workshops, biweekly discussions, and seminars. The outcome of the project is to see our current parents and caregivers mentor new families that have children recently diagnosed with Autism and other related developmental disorders. Workshops have focused on various subjects ranging from financial planning and transition preparation to social skills development and toilet training. The reasoning behind the SAFE initiative was to make parents and caregivers aware of their own skills and abilities as keys to unlocking their children's success over any healthcare professional. By creating awareness about services and the "world of Autism" at large, our organization believes the parents and caregivers we serve will make more informed choices that ultimately affect the children they are so relentlessly committed to.

Parents and caregivers who participate in the SAFE project have shown enthusiasm in workshops on assistive technology devices and listened intently to yoga instructors teach on de-stressing techniques. Monthly "cafe-style" discussions have been an invaluable tool in helping gauge both topics of interests and levels of comprehension in the weeks preceding and following workshops.

**"I have gained so much important information from these sessions; I really can't wait for the next one!" Ronnie Solomon (Parent)**

In essence, SAFE speaks to the family orientation of the South Asian culture and utilizes it as an asset in dealing with the challenges posed by Autism, and thus far has resulted in a resounding success.

## SMARTS

Within the South Asian context, the arts are often seen as a secondary priority—as an after-thought in the social, academic and emotional development of a child/youth. At SAAAC, we have made it a point to incorporate the arts into our programs as we strongly believe that the arts need to be fostered alongside—not below—other priorities for the children/youth we serve. We believe that a balance of both academic and arts programs are vital to the healthy growth of our participants. SMARTS, derived from the idea of “smart arts”—learning through different art forms, is a result of this belief. This year SAAAC has introduced Music Therapy for kids under 9 to complement its existing Music Therapy for adolescents. Music Therapy has been a success among the young group, with children enjoying the music they create while simultaneously learning important social skills such as turn taking and active listening.

**“The most memorable moments for me at SAAAC are seeing the kids eyes light up when I bring out the instruments!” Tamara Leszner-Rovet (*Music Therapist*)**

Our visual arts component allows participants to try their hand at various mediums from painting to print making. These activities promote fine motor skills development and social skills. Participants have expressed excitement over the sensory wonders of finger painting and continue to eagerly explore the various creative avenues available to them in the world of visual arts. SAAAC’s dance program uses the classical Indian dance of Bharathanatyam as both a therapeutic tool and creative outlet for its participants. This centuries-old dance form has shown to be the perfect mix of discipline and expression for participants.



## *Coffee with SAAAC*

Coffee with SAAAC is simply a place for creative outlet! It all began with a simple vision of uniting parents going through similar, yet unique experiences. In the past, during after school sessions, many parents would converse within their small circles about personal experiences, social issues and events in the community.

In an effort to promote social connectedness among parents of SAAAC, we introduced a monthly social session called “Coffee with SAAAC”. Many of the parents are extremely busy catering to the needs of their children in an attempt to enhance their lives, and very often forget to take some time out for themselves. Over some refreshments and warm cups of coffee, the parents are invited to express themselves through informal sessions conducted by our very own volunteers. This has been a great opportunity to reach out and empower the individuals who act as the foundation of each child’s growth. “Coffee with SAAAC” is also a channel for volunteers to take a leadership role and create a programming plan to enable the parents to take part.

The September session involved ice breaker activities, giving parents the chance to become familiar with one another and grasp the concept of expressing themselves alongside other adults. This introduction seems to have intrigued the parents further and increased their willingness to participate in future sessions. The second session entitled “Expression of the inner self” was held in October. The parents were asked to illustrate their inner thoughts and/or how they perceive oneself through a simple drawing. With merely a blank canvas in front of them some parents drew metaphors identifying the important factors in their lives and images that symbolize themselves and what they stand for. One parent drew a spring, saying that he feels all the weight and pressures of the family are on me but I eventually have to spring back up. Many of the parents shared that this exercise allowed them to reflect on their feelings and thoughts and share their vulnerabilities with one and another. With incredibly positive feedback from both parents and volunteers, “Coffee with SAAAC” is here to stay.

**“One parent drew a spring, saying that he feels all the weight and pressures of the family are on me but I eventually have to spring back up.”**

# THE FUNDS

## FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

### STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

<b>AS AT MARCH 31</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2010</b>
<b>ASSETS</b>		
CURRENT ASSETS		
Cash	\$ 60,047	\$ 25,303
Accounts receivable	<u>3,150</u>	<u>650</u>
	\$ 63,197	\$ 25,953
<b>LIABILITY AND FUND BALANCES</b>		
CURRENT LIABILITY		
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	\$ 2,000	\$ 424
BALANCE	<u>61,197</u>	<u>25,529</u>
	\$ 63,197	\$ 25,953

AUDITED FINANCIALS AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST

**STATEMENT OF OPERATIONS AND CHANGES IN NET ASSETS**

<b>YEAR ENDED MARCH 31</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2010</b>
REVENUES		
Fund raising	<b>\$86,801</b>	\$32,585
Contribution	<b>7,925</b>	7,875
	<hr/>	
	<b>94,726</b>	40,460
EXPENDITURES		
Rent	<b>34,977</b>	10,568
Therapy	<b>12,859</b>	-
Consulting fees	<b>5,000</b>	-
Supplies	<b>3,146</b>	2,964
Raffle prizes	<b>2,070</b>	765
Office	<b>852</b>	423
Interest and bank charges	<b>154</b>	211
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	<b>59,058</b>	
14,931		
EXCESS OF REVENUES OVER EXPENDITURES	<b>\$35,668</b>	\$25,529
BALANCE, BEGINNING OF YEAR	<b>\$25,529</b>	-
BALANCE, END OF YEAR	<b>\$ 61,197</b>	\$ 25,529

*Audited Financials by Alphonsus & Associates Chartered Accountants*

# THE FUNDERS

## OUR SUPPORT

The South Asian Autism Awareness Centre has benefitted from the copious support of the community it serves. The overwhelming majority of SAAAC's funding is through private fundraising efforts and the relentless generosity of individual donors.

To find out how you can contribute:

Visit: [www.saaac.org](http://www.saaac.org)

Call: 416-824-8847

Email: [info@saaac.org](mailto:info@saaac.org)

*We are there for them because you are here for us*

