



Annual Report 2019



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A note from the Executive Director

The mission of the SAAAC Autism Centre is to make autism services equitable for all Canadians. This year in particular felt as if our mission was reinvigorated through unique programs and events that brought the issues of service equity and accessibility into sharp focus.

2019 saw the conclusion of our Mobile Developmental Outreach Clinic (M-DOC), a two-year project supported by Autism Speaks Canada, that provided community-based point of care autism screening to low-income, racially diverse urban populations. The project provided an access point for families that may otherwise have had difficulties getting on a path to diagnosis and intervention. The M-DOC pathway ensured that children from culturally and linguistically diverse families accessed early developmental screening and interventions. Our evaluation partners at the McMaster Autism Research Team found that the M-DOC pathway decreased wait times to receive a diagnosis from 31 weeks to 16 weeks. We worked with incredible partners such as Earlyon Child and Family Centres and Health Access Thorncliffe Park who helped the project reach across multiple Toronto neighbourhoods. The M-DOC embodied the spirit of SAAAC's mission, and through collaboration and ingenuity, we were able to create a meaningful program that spoke to the growing diversity of our great city.

Our Access Counts Conference was another initiative that helped explore creative initiatives and strategies to support underserved communities impacted by autism and related neurodevelopmental disorders. The event was anchored by our keynote speaker, Dr. Vikram Patel, a pioneer in developing programs and systems that helped low-resource countries access critical mental health and developmental health services. The event hosted industry-leading speakers – including researchers and practitioners across sectors (health, education, employment, adult support and housing) that provided insight into accessible and inclusive educational and clinical practices. The event created a dialogue with local, national and international perspectives on inclusive education and community-based models of intervention.

In 2019, The Centre's work in Toronto, which has focused its efforts in helping newcomers



and other vulnerable communities, expanded internationally. In October 2019 a five-member team flew to Sri Lanka to conduct a needs assessment in the Kilinochchi District, where one in every five persons live in severe poverty. The purpose of the trip was to highlight areas for improvement in special education within Kilinochchi District, as well as Sri Lanka at large. The team was able to author a report and provide a clear and concise list of recommendations, which we are committed to bringing to life over the next five years.

These initiatives over the past year brought new life to our mission, and illustrated the impacts of striving for equity and accessibility for all. We will continue to build on the important foundations started this year to further our mission, and to further transform lives impacted by autism at home and abroad.



Access Counts Conference: Making Autism Care Accessible

By: Dr. Lindy Zaretsky, Board President



On September 25 & 26, we held our second annual conference Access Counts, which followed our highly successful first conference, Culture Counts. The SAAAC Autism Centre brought together local and global researchers, professors, clinicians, health and education practitioners, policy makers, service providers, volunteers, and families for highly engaging learning exchanges across sectors.

Together, through enlightening presentations and dialogue, participants learned how disability, race, culture, language, and socio-economic status all intersect and have significant impact on local and global research design, policy development, and assessment-informed clinical and educational interventions for children, youth, adults and their families living with autism.

Day 1 of the conference focused on innovative and bold research and practices in health and education for children and youth living with autism. The day was highlighted by the renowned Dr. Vikram Patel. Known for his pioneering work in building mental health support capacity in low resource countries, Dr. Patel spoke about global efforts to improve access to evidence-based interventions for autism. Other presentations in the day highlighted current practices that can unintentionally narrow pathways to opportunities and success, yet they also described alternative practices that can offer individuals greater access to learning and meaningful participation and inclusion in their schools and communities at large.

Day 2 emphasized access to adult services. Person-directed planning processes used to support with transitions to work, recreational activities, and supported housing options, were enthusiastically shared and appreciated. Legal implications for caregiving, and mental health supports for caregivers were also well received.

Feedback from participants strongly suggests that together, we are building our capacity to exchange knowledge, share resources, and design research, practices, and supports that are becoming more accessible to professionals, volunteers, and families in need in underserved and increasingly diverse communities.



Tour to Sri Lanka



According to UNICEF approximately 10.6% of school aged children in Sri Lanka have a disability. Unfortunately, of this number only .04% attend school.

For many years, the SAAAC Autism Centre's leadership has wanted to develop autism service capacity in low-resource countries. This is a natural progression from the Centre's work in Toronto, where for over 12 years, SAAAC has focused its efforts in helping newcomers and other vulnerable communities' access critical autism services and information.

In October 2019, a five-member team from SAAAC travelled to northern Sri Lanka to conduct a needs assessment in the Killinochi District, where 1 in every 5 persons live in severe poverty. The purpose of the trip was to highlight areas for improvement in special education within Killinochchi District, as well as Sri Lanka at large.

Over the course of two weeks, the team visited 17 Special Education Units from four different educational divisions in the district and conducted interviews with teachers, parents and administrators of the 200+ children enrolled across the district.

The team identified 3 key challenges including inadequate teacher training; lack of standardization across the special education system; and teaching based on narrow conceptualization of intelligence.

The team found that the development of a clear and concise Special Education policy based on Sri Lanka's national commitment to Inclusive Education, in conjunction with teacher training and additional front line worker (Educational Assistants) training, would have the potential to transform the Killinochchi District Special Education System over the course of a few years.

The SAAAC Autism Centre, and its partners, are committed to bringing these recommendations to life over the next five years.



Access for all: The Mobile Developmental Outreach Clinic



Toronto is a city made up of many diverse communities. Among these communities, a large percentage of newcomers remain isolated from available services due to barriers to access such as language, accessibility, little to no social support, financial constraints, cultural barriers and little awareness about developmental delays.

Studies show that children from newcomer communities are often diagnosed later than their peers in other communities. The result is that they miss out on the critical period of early intervention at 2-5 years of age. Later intervention leads to poorer outcomes.

The Mobile Developmental Outreach Clinic (M-DOC) initiative, which was generously funded by Autism Speaks Canada and Holman Community, was created to provide community-based point of care autism screening to low-income, racially diverse urban populations. The project provided an access point for families that may otherwise have had difficulties getting on a path to diagnosis and intervention.

Led by Dr. Shivajan Sivapalan, the M-DOC team travelled to various neighbourhoods across Toronto, partnering with over 10 Early ON Family & Child Centres and organizations like Health Access Thorncliffe Park to provide developmental awareness presentations, developmental screenings, and post screening support.

Our evaluation partner, McMaster Autism Research Team, found that the M-DOC improved access for 108 families, particularly through the M-DOC's multiple access points. The M-DOC program showed shorter wait times to diagnosis and post-diagnostic services, with a lower average age at diagnosis (3 years compared to 5.5 years). Families received a diagnosis within 16 weeks of them meeting with a health professional compared to the typical 32 weeks it normally takes for Ontarians. 100% of families rated their overall experience with the M-DOC as "Satisfied" or "Very Satisfied" and were highly satisfied with getting to talk about everything they wanted, feeling listened to, and feeling welcomed at the clinic.

The M-DOC pathway ensured that children from culturally and linguistically diverse families accessed early developmental screening and interventions, and how such initiatives may be the future for autism screening in underserved communities.

PROGRAM PARTNERS

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SAAAC's Executive Director Receives Prestigious Awards in 2019

2019 was a very big year for our Executive Director, Geetha Moorthy. She was recognized with two prestigious awards including RBC's Canadian Women Entrepreneur Award (Social Change) and Autism Ontario's Autism Ontario's Gerry Bloomfield's Professionals Award. Previous esteemed recipients of the award include Director of the Centre for Applied Genomics at SickKids Hospital, Dr. Stephen Scherer and the Former Premier of Ontario, Kathleen Wynne.

An accountant by trade and widely recognized for her accomplishments as an Indian Classical dancer, Geetha Moorthy founded the South Asian Autism Awareness Centre (SAAAC) in 2008 as a direct response to the growing need for awareness and support for South Asian families impacted by ASD and related developmental disorders in Toronto. The Centre began with a handful of families and volunteers, initially



operating out of Geetha Moorthy's basement. In subsequent years, the Centre expanded its scope and services to support a variety of communities that typically lacked access to critical ASD services and resources due to language barriers, low incomes, and lack of networks.

The SAAAC Autism Centre has now grown into a full-fledged Centre composed of a multi-disciplinary team of behavioral therapists, speech therapists, dance/music instructors, case managers and administrative staff, serving more than 350 families with the support of 21 staff members and 170 trained volunteers. In 2019, with the support of the City of Toronto, SAAAC moved into its new 11,000 sq ft facility in Scarborough.

"The SAAAC Autism Centre is not a story about one person, it's about the contributions of thousands. I want to thank all the incredible volunteers, donors, board of directors, families, staff, and children that have worked collaboratively to make this Centre a valuable resource

to many."

Geetha Moorthy

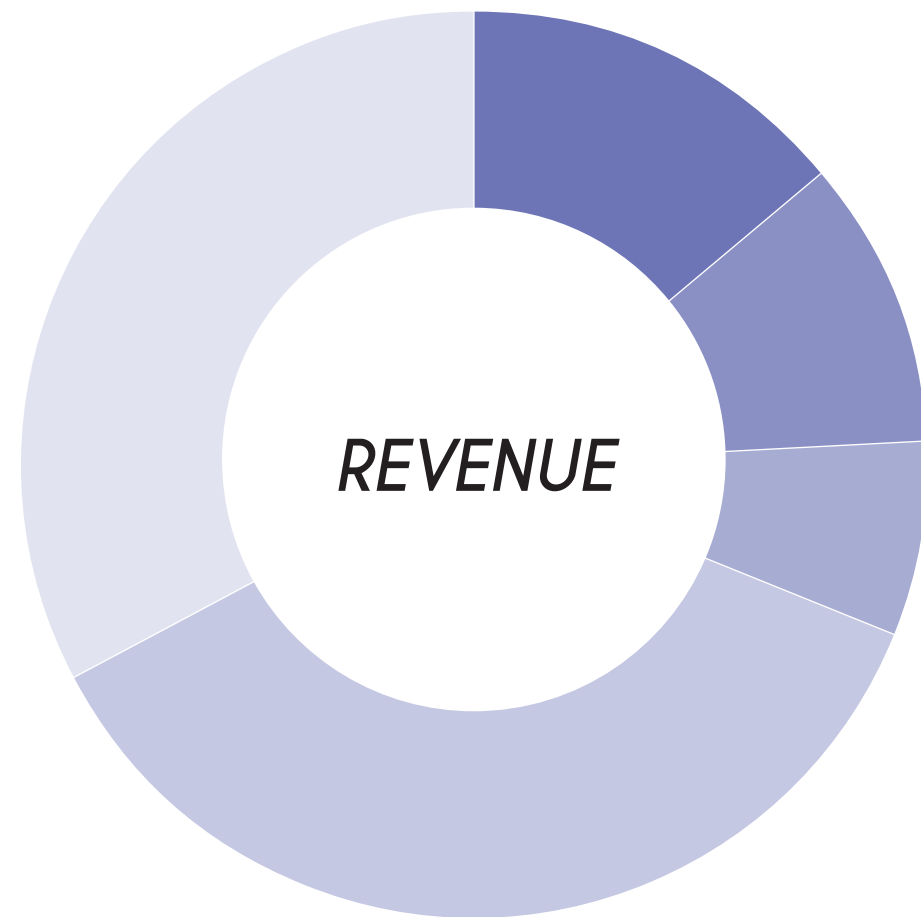


2019 Financial Overview

The SAAAC Autism Centre takes incredible pride in our transparency. We understand the faith our community has placed in us with their hard-earned money – whether that is individual donors, business leaders, foundations, government ministries – we are committed to using community funds to transform communities. We are incredibly appreciative of our supporters and are committed to building innovative programs, healthy operations, and happier lives.

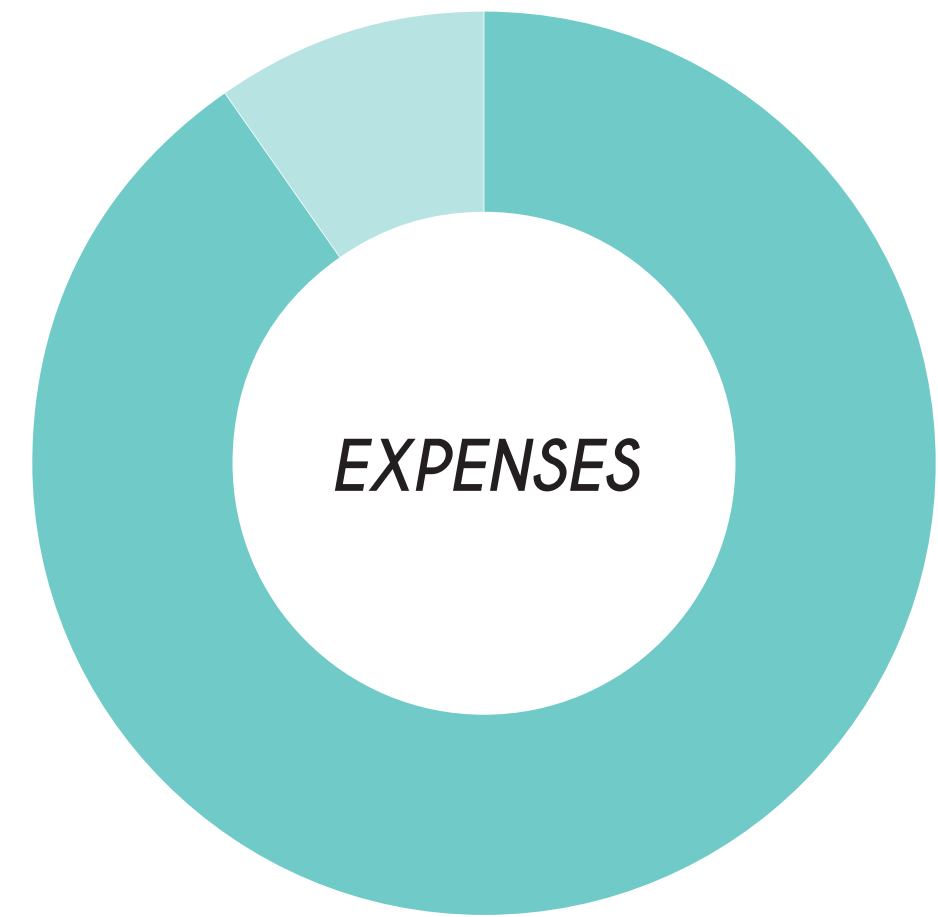
Our financial overview can be found on the Canada Revenue Agency charitable organization's website: *All figures are compiled from our fiscal period April 1, 2019 to March 31, 2020

**All figures consolidated for SAAAC were audited by Truster Zweig LLP Chartered Accountants



- Receipted donations \$193,223.00 (13.95%)
- Non-receipted donations \$144,486.00 (10.43%)
- Gifts from other registered charities \$93,765.00 (6.77%)
- Government funding \$500,615.00 (36.14%)
- All other revenue \$453,010.00 (32.71%)

Total Revenue: \$1,385,099.00



- Charitable programs \$1,161,098.00 (90.45%)
- Management and administration \$0.00 (0.00%)
- Fundraising \$122,554.00 (9.55%)
- Political activities \$0.00 (0.00%)
- Gifts to other registered charities and qualified donees \$0.00 (0.00%)
- Other \$0.00 (0.00%)

Total expenses: \$1,283,652.00

Board of Directors



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