



ANNUAL REPORT
2020-2021

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A note from the Executive Director

This annual report covers 2020 & 2021—two years marked by great uncertainty, tragedy, and resilience. Like all the world, the SAAAC Autism Centre was deeply impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Overnight we were forced to evaluate critical aspects of operations and make difficult decisions.

Though the pandemic was the dominant feature of 2020, the incredible resiliency of families and the innovation and dedication of staff is what I will always remember. As always, our community of supporters stood right alongside us. Business and community leaders helped us quickly transition to virtual services, helping procure the technologies and offering technical expertise to be able to serve 300 families during the pandemic.

I am also happy to report, due to the great leadership provided by our Board of Directors, and support from multiple avenues including both the federal and provincial governments and generous donors, we were able to keep our incredible staff working and enabling them to continue to create change in their community.

Though the pandemic created opportunities for our organization to re-examine ourselves—our mission, our operations, and our infrastructure—I understand the brunt of this pandemic was felt by those on the autism spectrum and their caregivers. It was not easy for our families to lose critical in-person interventions and support groups. We knew the mental health

of caregivers would be greatly affected during this period, and this is why we partnered with Autism Ontario to bring our CARES Caregiver Support Program to families across Ontario virtually. We were able to serve nearly 250 families, many of who reported improved mental health and quality of life following involvement in the program, with changes noted even after the first session.

If 2020 was a year filled with uncertainty, 2021 was a year filled with possibility. In 2021, we were invited to join the Toronto Autism Services Network (TASN), which is a group of seven agencies – Geneva Centre for Autism, Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital, Kerry's Place Autism Services, Lumenus Community Services, Strides Toronto and Surrey Place – with decades of experience providing high-quality services to children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and their families. It was an honour to join this esteemed group and work collectively to provide critical autism services to families in Toronto. Together, the network will deliver critical programming mandated by the Ontario Autism Program including Caregiver Mediated Early Years; Entry to School; and Urgent Response Services.

As the pandemic plunged the world into a period of uncertainty, it also encouraged innovation and moments of self-examination. As we slowly emerge to life after the pandemic, the lessons learned and resiliency built will serve us for years to come.



Board of Directors

2020

- Dr. Lindy Zaretsky – President
- Dr. Mohammad Zubairi - Vice President
- Dilani Gunarajah – Secretary
- Tony Balasingham - Treasurer
- Erasiah Kobikrishna – Director
- Ajantha Ganeshalingam – Director
- Nishan Duraipappah – Director
- Sady Magendran – Director
- Geetha Moorthy – Director

2021

- Dr. Lindy Zaretsky – President
- Glenn De Baeremaeker – Director
- Ajantha Ganeshalingam – Treasurer
- Sady Mahendran – Director
- Tony Balasingham – Director
- Dilani Gunarajah – Director
- Erasiah Kobikrishna – Director
- Dr. Chris Pasarikovski – Director
- Nishan Duraipappah – Director
- Dr. Meera Mather - Director



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](#).

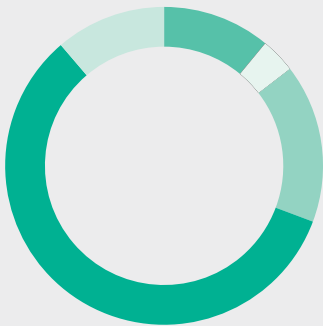
All figures consolidated for SAAAC were audited by Truster Zweig LLP Chartered Accountants.

Reporting period ending: 2021-03-31

Revenue

- Received donations \$193,410.00 (10.98%)
- Non-receipted donations \$63,128.00 (3.58%)
- Gifts from other registered charities \$284,480.00 (16.15%)
- Government funding \$1,021,881.00 (58.02%)
- All other revenue \$198,308.00 (11.26%)

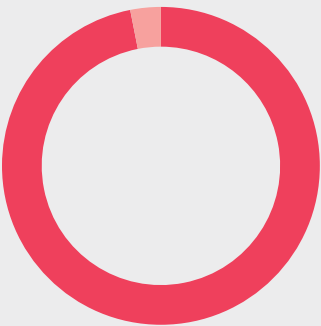
Total revenue: \$1,761,207.00



Expenses

- Charitable programs \$1,320,890.00 (96.91%)
- Fundraising \$42,165.00 (3.1%)
- Gifts to other registered charities and qualified donees \$0.00 (0.00%)

Total Expenses: \$1,363,055.00

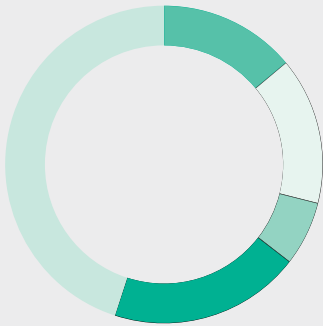


Reporting period ending: 2020-03-31

Revenue

- Received donations \$219,021.00 (13.93%)
- Non-receipted donations \$235,820.00 (15.00%)
- Gifts from other registered charities \$103,040.00 (6.56%)
- Government funding \$306,732.00 (19.51%)
- All other revenue \$707,249.00 (44.99%)

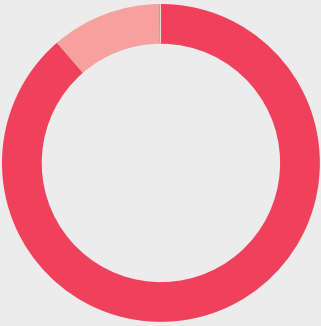
Total revenue: \$1,571,862.00



Expenses

- Charitable programs \$1,503,209.00 (88.65%)
- Fundraising \$190,022.00 (11.21%)
- Other \$2,343.00 (0.14%)

Total Expenses: \$1,695,574.00



Caring for Caregivers

At SAAAC, we know that thriving parents raise thriving children. Parents who are less stressed and able to care for their own mental health are more resilient towards the challenges of caring for a loved one with ASD. Our view was recently corroborated by the Ontario Autism Program advisory panel report, in which it was noted that caregiver training and education in addition to support groups were critical elements in foundational family supports

The SAAAC CARES program helps parents gain the skills and knowledge to address their own care and, in turn, to provide better care for their loved ones. This program situates parents in a safe space to share their experiences as caregivers of children with ASD and learn about taking care of their own mental health.

In this highly interactive, semi-structured eight-week program, parents learn about topics such as stress management; relaxation techniques; the cognitive-behavioural model and cognitive restructuring; self compassion; and problem-solving and assertive communication skills.

In 2021, CARES served 348 families and was offered at 22 sites across the province. We trained 39 facilitators to deploy the program at SAAAC as well as at partner agencies such as Autism Ontario, Surrey Place, and EarlyON. According to data collected in 2021 about the CARES program through our Quality of Life measure, caregivers reported increased improvement in their mood, ability to function in daily life, and overall sense of well-being.

The program has grown to support the diversity of caregivers in Ontario: in addition to English, CARES is offered in French, Tamil, and Urdu. Translation of materials for additional language support is underway.

The program is also being expanded with pilot versions aimed to target complex needs in addition to autism and to support a wider variety of caregivers (e.g., grandparents, siblings).

Learn more at thecaresprogram.org

cares



Empowering Caregivers to Become Teachers

In the last two decades, the increasing emphasis- and added evidence on autism intervention during the early childhood period- have brought the fields of developmental science and Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) together resulting in the emergence of Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Interventions (NDBI). Evidence has shown that NDBIs achieve more substantial and accelerated child learning and behavior changes, and they are particularly well suited to the infant and toddler autism population.

Some of the hallmark features of NDBI include teaching functional skills for increasing quality of life; a focus on enhancing motivation and engagement in treatment; embedding active opportunities for teaching in the natural environment; and following the child's lead and interests when selecting teaching materials and activities.

In 2021, the SAAAC Autism Centre partnered with AlphaBee to deliver a type of NDBI called JASPER, a play-based intervention that teaches social communication skills. JASPER- also known as Joint attention, symbolic play, engagement, and regulation- is targeted at

children 12 to 48 months. In the first year of programming, the partnership, entitled Early Connections Autism Services, served 155 families. Nearly 70% of families reported seeing an improvement in their child's social communication skills and development.

JASPER enjoys a strong research base that substantiates their efficacy for improving meaningful outcomes, and SAAAC is incredibly excited to deliver such an intervention for the years to come.



Changing the Giving Game: Goodness Gift

Goodness Gift is an employment social enterprise established in 2018 to provide training and paid work opportunities for individuals on the autism spectrum and related developmental conditions. The enterprise is a socially conscious gifting solution, incorporating locally sourced products including food, lifestyle, and home decor. The enterprise provides job-specific training in three key sectors: retail fulfillment, warehouse management, and inventory management.

The Goodness Gift was created out of an acute need to address the substantial employment barriers that exist for individuals with developmental conditions.

Supported by the Toronto Enterprise Fund and the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, the Goodness Gift operated throughout the pandemic in a limited

capacity. Through the implementation of social distancing protocols and strategies such as curbside pickup, the Goodness Gift was able to train and employ 22 individuals over the course of 2020 and 2021.

The enterprise continues to have strong Christmas sales with the bulk of its sales coming for the holiday season. Sales grew from \$45,000 in 2020 to \$70,000 in 2021 as more people became aware of the Goodness Gift. The next step for the enterprise is to establish year-round demand, which will allow the enterprise to hire and retain staff for long-term employment.

Learn more and give the gift of employment at goodnessgift.com



Network of Care – Joining the Toronto Autism Services Network

In 2021, the SAAAC Autism Centre joined six other distinguished organizations to create the Toronto Autism Services Network (TASN). The seven agencies – Geneva Centre for Autism, Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital, Kerry’s Place Autism Services, Lumenus Community Services, SAAAC Autism Centre, Strides Toronto and Surrey Place – bring decades of experience providing high-quality services to children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and their families.

The network’s supports are coordinated with other clinical services to create a comprehensive, wraparound support team that can make informed decisions to meet each family’s individual needs. With this shared vision of support, families with an autism diagnosis will benefit from a single access point to receive consistent, high-quality, family-centred autism services in Toronto. The network will work

collaboratively to deliver critical programs mandated by the Ontario Autism Program including the following:

- i) Caregiver mediated services where caregivers learn therapeutic strategies and techniques from professionals based on their child’s individual needs.
- ii) Entry to school services to help young children access critical services when they will benefit most, and to prepare them to enter school.

The SAAAC Autism Centre is honoured to be part of an esteemed group of organizations looking to support families across Toronto. We hope to bring a lens of culturally responsive care to the group and work collaboratively to make services accessible for all families in the region.



Providing Support in a Virtual World

Many of us found ourselves in a virtual world in 2020. With mandatory lockdowns to limit the spread of COVID-19, our Centre, like so many countless others, had to find alternative methods to deliver services. For SAAAC, the transition to virtual was not easy. There were cost, capacity, and technical expertise issues. Overnight we had to address and build IT infrastructure. This is where our incredible community proved to be so vital.

Incredible organizations like DXC Technology, Holman Community and community members provided us with the funding and technical expertise to transition quickly to a virtual format. Within 30 days, we were able to shift 80% of our programming to an online format. We worked with organizations such as Quartet Services to enhance our digital security and ensure our online services complied with the Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA). The work that was accomplished in this time of tremendous stress and uncertainty is a remarkable achievement.

Over the course of the year, our CARES Caregiver Support program launched virtually across the province in partnership with our partners, Autism Ontario. We hosted a number of virtual events, including our fundraiser, Walk-A-Thon, which encouraged individuals to be active at home and in their community while raising funds for SAAAC.

The pandemic created extreme changes to the learning environment that none of us could have foreseen, but the things that we have done and learned will have an impact on our operations for years to come. Collectively, we have so many more tools in our toolkit than we had a year ago. As we begin the process of rebuilding and navigating a return to in-person services, we are going to continue to build programming that is accessible outside of our physical classroom. The conversations this pandemic has started about the essence of teaching and learning, in some ways, are just the beginning.





Building · Tomorrow · Together