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1666 Lincoln Road, Fredericton NB E3B 8J6

**Annual General Meeting
l'assemblée générale annuelle
REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF THE BOARD
Paul M McDonnell**

Monday, January 17th, 2022
Fiscal year: July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021

Board Members: Michael Elliott, Barbara D'Entremont, Greg Forsythe, Trisha Fournier-Hoyt (Treasurer), Ginette Hannan (Secretary), Katie LaCosta, Samantha Landry, Monique Lavigne, Liz McDonnell, Judy McKinney, Kim MacKeigan (Vice Chair), and Paul McDonnell (Chair).

Good evening everyone and welcome to the 2021 Annual General Meeting for Autism Connections Fredericton. For the second year in a row we cannot welcome you all to the Centre in person but we are pleased that we can make use of this virtual format and that we can at least carry on with the business of the centre. It is worth noting that while COVID-19 complicates our operations, more importantly, it creates unique challenges for families with children on the spectrum and for adults on the spectrum. We understand that these challenges run the gamut from a reduction in programs and services to greater difficulties in getting and retaining full time employment.

We try to fill the niches not covered by publicly-funded services and we try to provide a comfortable and supportive home base for our members. So, please let us know if there are any ways that we can assist you during these trying times.

The Board of Directors:

I would like to recognize all of our Board members and extend a heartfelt thank you to them all.

Being a member of a Board means that you are prepared to volunteer a lot of your time, that you accept the shared responsibility of maintaining and growing

this organization, and that you offer your unique talents to us to develop new programs, to improve old programs, to develop new services, and to assist with essential tasks like fund-raising. I am so pleased to say that all our Board members have offered diligent, energetic and unstinting services for no personal return. This Board has provided talent, energy and vitality to Autism Connections. I want to thank you all for your excellent service over the past several years during which I have served as Chair.

Our Executive Director:

This year was significant in that our Executive Director for the past 5 years, Rick Hutchins, has resigned and this past fall we were very fortunate to be able to hire Shannon O'Brien to replace Rick. Before I introduce Shannon, I want to extend a very special *thank you* to Rick on behalf of the Board and all our members. During the past five years Rick has transformed the Centre in many ways. He came to us with a wide variety of skills and experience but he did not have specific experience with autism. Over the past five years, he has learned a great deal about autism and the autism community, and has been committed to providing services and programs that meet the unique needs of all members of our community.

Rick worked hard and long hours, very often above and beyond the call of duty. We thank him for that dedicated service. He also brought us the benefit of his wealth of experience developed with many other organizations with whom he has worked. For example, Rick saw the value of partnerships with other agencies that allowed us to leverage more sophisticated programming. For example, we partner with UNB's Dr Michael Palmer to bring students in his Applied Behavior Analysis course to the Autism Centre to teach skills or to do academic tutoring. Rick also worked to develop partnerships with other departments at UNB such as Renaissance College, Arts 3000 and 4000 class projects, STU Social Work students, and students from the Community College. We provide students with practicum experiences while they provide us with services that allow us to operate programs or conduct projects. In this way, we can offer so much more to our membership. It's a classic "win-win-win" situation. During the past years, we have once again partnered with Autism NS to bring the federal government's *Ready, Winning and Able* job finding program to ACF. We also partnered with them to provide a special program for young adults on human relationships and sexuality. This past year, we have been developing a new relationship with the military community at Base Gaagetown and with their Military Family Resource centre.

To illustrate how far we have come under Rick's leadership, I can point out that we now have filled every square inch of the Centre with staff or projects and

could definitely use more space. We also are much more financially sound than when he started with us. We thank Rick for everything he did and we are now pleased to welcome our new and may I say, very talented, Executive Director.

Our New Executive Director:

Shannon O'Brien is not a stranger to us as she has been involved with ACF in a variety of capacities since 2017. She began her appointment on Monday, October 4th, picking up where Rick Hutchins left off.

Shannon has a degree in psychology with a Certificate in Applied Behaviour Analysis from the University of New Brunswick. For the past year, Shannon was our Employment Counsellor, working with autistic adults across the province to help them acquire and maintain meaningful employment. Prior to returning to ACF, Shannon held a position as a Behaviour Specialist that allowed her the opportunity to make a difference in First Nation operated schools and within First Nation communities on the North Shore. Shannon, having previously owned and operated a family business, is well versed in aspects of running an organization. She possesses strong skills in leadership, public relations, marketing, communications, and even construction skills. Based on her first two months, I can confirm that Shannon is developing exciting new plans for ACF, and that she is an organized, 'get-er-done' kind of director. She also brings the same kind of positive energy to ACF that we saw in Rick. Welcome Shannon!

Changes to the Board:

Amberee Hardy moved to Ontario earlier this year and has therefore resigned from the Board. We thank her for her excellent service. I have now completed two 3-year terms as Chair of the Board. This is the maximum set out in our By-Laws. As such, it is time for me to resign as Chair and accordingly, we held an election at our November Board meeting and the Board elected Barbara D'Entremont as our new Chair. Her term will begin at the conclusion of this AGM.

Barbara has been a member of the Board of Directors since May 2015. She is a full professor in the Psychology Department at UNB, and teaches courses on child development and clinical psychology at both the undergraduate and graduate level. Her research has been focused on autism spectrum disorders among other topics. She is a licensed psychologist with over 20 years' experience and she also maintains a small private practice.

The New Executive: When the By-Laws were changed back in 2015, we included a new executive position called, "Past Chair". The idea was that the person who retires as Chair has experience that could be helpful to the new

Chair. I will be the first person to hold that position. The executive after tonight's meeting will include the following:

Chair: Barbara D'Entremont

Vice Chair: Kim MacKeigan

Past Chair: Paul McDonnell

Treasurer: Trisha Fournier-Hoyt

Secretary: Ginette Hannan

ACF Future Goals: For the past several years we have worked at developing a strategic plan for ACF. The plan identified four key areas:

1. Programming - existing and potential
2. Client Services- includes web site, resource guide, library, branding
3. Succession planning and human resources
4. Revenue, expenses and overall finances

However the two most important were a) to secure and stabilize funding for the Centre and b) to enhance our programs and services. While we have not solved the problem of how to make ACF self-sufficient with stable funding, we have done well with fund-raising and we have developed some services that bring significant income to the Centre such as our skills courses and partnerships with agencies like Autism NS and UNB. At present we have only one full time staff person, our ED, and one part-time bookkeeper, Barb Lockhart. For some time now it has been clear to us that we need to employ some additional staff on either a part-time or a full-time basis. Specifically, we need an Office Manager and a Director of Programming.

Granting Agencies and Fund Raisers:

ACF is very grateful to the many granting agencies that have supported us over the past two years, specifically, the Windsor Foundation, the Fredericton Community Foundation, Federal Government's Summer Job Program and NB summer employment Program. We reported last year that we were successful in winning a grant from the Windsor Foundation for \$42,000. This grant will enable us to further refine and develop our information services such as the Autism Resource Manual and it will also allow us to upgrade our library resources. We are still working on this project. In addition, we have had excellent support over the years from the Fredericton Community Foundation and most recently they supported our summer day camp program, Camp Marvel. It also received funding from the NB Children's Fund. These agencies are a lifeline for many of our programs.

Beyond the granting agencies, we host two major fundraisers each year (Superhero Walk & Fun Run and the Spares & Strikes Bowl-A-Thon). These

fundraisers were very successful once again because of the generosity of many people. The goal for the bowling campaign was \$20,000 but we were thrilled that the final total was \$31,000! So, we want to extend our sincere thanks to the many wonderful people who contributed to ACF through each of these events.

I think I speak for the Board when I say that we look forward to continuing our efforts toward achieving self-sufficiency and developing our services and programs so that they meet the practical needs of the autism community to a greater extent. Also, we look forward to being able to welcome all of you to the Centre in person in the near future. Stay safe and be well!

Respectfully submitted,
Paul M McDonnell
Chair
Board of Directors