

## **Autism Connection Annual General Meeting Chair's Report**

Good evening everyone and welcome to the Annual General Meeting for Autism Connections Fredericton. Once again, we have decided to hold our meeting using a hybrid of online and in-person venues. Before I begin the meeting, I want to go over a few housekeeping items related to the hybrid format. If you are joining us remotely, I ask that you put your microphone on mute, unless you are speaking. If you have a question or comment, please raise your hand to speak – either here in person, or you can raise your virtual hand. If you are online, you can also use the chat function. A board member will be monitoring the online attendees for me and will alert me to any online comments or questions. Please be patient with us – it can sometimes be challenging to manage both in-person and virtual attendees but we will do our best.

### The Board of Directors

I would like to offer my sincere gratitude to our board of directors. Our board members offer their time, without pay, to help sustain and grow this organization. They help to organize and run events, they fund raise for us, they develop programs, set up our IT, and generally support Shannon in her role. Their dedication, expertise, skills, and talents have allowed ACF to flourish and grow over the years. To all the board members, my sincere thank you for all the work you do.

### Board Executive

There have been no changes to the board executive. The current executive is:

*Past Chair:* Paul McDonnell

*Chair:* Barbara D'Entremont

*Vice Chair:* Michael Elliot

*Treasurer:* Trisha Fornier-Hoyt

*Secretary:* Katie LaCosta

### Changes to the Board

#### Resignations

In August 2023, Kim MacKeigan resigned from the board. Kim had served a board member since 2010. In her 13 years of service, Kim served in many capacities but principally as Vice Chair for several years. Her professional input, her awareness of services in NB, and her willingness to volunteer for a wide variety of tasks were greatly appreciated.

#### Additions

In May, 2023, Chantal Bériault joined the board of directors. Chantal works as a Financial Management Advisor with the RCMP. Along with financial and accounting knowledge, Chantal brings expertise in human resources, personnel, administration, and management. Chantal also has non-profit and community service experience, along with experience planning special events and fundraising. Chantal participated in in both our major fundraisers this past year – the Superhero Walk/Run and Bowling for

Autism. Chantal has also been assisting Trish and Shannon as we transition to new accounting and HR software. On behalf of the Board, I would like to extend a warm welcome to Chantal.

### Executive Director

Shannon O'Brien continues to be employed as the Executive Director. Shannon is most capable. To say that ACF is continuing to thrive and grow under Shannon's leadership would be an understatement. I think it is fair to say over the past year we have experienced exponential growth. Our programs continue to grow and the diversity of programs being offered has increased. For example, we offered 527.5 hours of programming between November 18 and December 18, 2023. Looking back at our Profits and Loss Statements for November 2022 year to date compared to November 2023 year to date, shows total income going from \$184,285 to \$309,104. Shannon continues to build relationships with numerous community partners. One of those was Hockey NB Neurodiverse Hockey, which allowed us to launch No Limits Hockey this past fall. Last summer we had 15 students employed and another 3 on "standby" to cover vacations and sick days. Thirteen of those students were funded by grants or other external funding sources. Many students come back to us in successive years. All this speaks to Shannon's excellent grant writing, fundraising, administration, management, and HR skills. We are extremely fortunate to have Shannon as our Executive Director. Shannon, on behalf of the Board, thank-you for all the hard work you have put into this organization. We truly appreciate it.

### ACF Relaunch

One of the most exciting things that happened to us last January was that we moved into our expanded space. We went from 2246 sqft to 3615 sqft. This expansion is part of what has allowed us to expand our services. On May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023, we hosted a Relaunch in celebration of our expansion. Approximately 80 people attended including Government, Military, and Police representatives. Shannon was interviewed by CBC and Shift NB. We dedicated the afterschool space as the Paul and Liz McDonnell Family Room, in honour of Paul and Liz, who have given countless hours of their valuable time, not just to this organization, but to the autism community of New Brunswick.

### Strategic Planning Update

Our last strategic planning session was in 2020, before we expanded into our new space (more on that below). We identified 4 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. A brief update on our progress is outlined below.

*Programming – Existing and Potential.* We are offering regular programming in 4 different programs: skills enrichment; complex skills enrichment; adult mentorship; and afterschool programming. We continue to offer special programs including No-Limits Soccer, No Limits-Hockey, Parent Support Groups, Drive-By Santa, and Home Alone. We submitted a proposal for a pilot for a transition from school program for high school students to the Department of Post Secondary Education Training and Labour. We have not had a reply.

*Client Services* – We continue to keep our website and social media accounts up-to-date. In conjunction with our relaunch we adopted a new logo which can be seen at the top of the agenda.

Succession planning and human resources – We have 2 regular employees – Shannon O’Brien and our part-time bookkeeper, Barb Lockhart. We continue to contract the services of Wendy Weller, BCBA to supervise students delivering service. We have two employees to provide services for the Complex Skills Enrichment clients: Mary-Soleil Soucy and Bailey Lemieux. Both Mary-Soleil and Bailey are graduates of the UNB Certificate in Applied Behaviour Analysis Program. In addition, at any given time, we have approximately 4-6 part time/contract students working in the Skills Enrichment program and afterschool program, whose employment and pay is contingent on client fees.

Revenue, expenses and overall finances – One of the most important goals under this topic is to stabilize funding and become self-sufficient. This past year has seen significant growth in our revenue stream. While I think that this growth is too new for us to say that we are “self-sufficient”, I do think that we are closer to that goal. As I mentioned earlier, our growth and success had required us to look at our accounting and HR practices and to upgrade our services.

### Future Planning

The success of our programs over the past year, and the growth of our revenue stream means that we need to revisit our Strategic Plan. The last planning session was almost 4 years ago. As a result, we will be conducting a new strategic planning session for this year.

### Major Funders

We are fortunate to have many, many people who support us with donations and grants. I can’t possibly name everyone but I am thankful to each and every one of you who has donated to us. Below, I would like to acknowledge our major supporters over the past year.

Canada Summer Jobs  
SEED  
United Way  
Fredericton co-op community fund  
Fairstone Financial  
Department of Social Development  
Engage UNB  
McGinnis Cooper  
NB Children’s Foundation

In closing, I would like again to thank the Board of Directors and Shannon, the ED for all their hard work. I would also like to thank you, the membership, for choosing ACF and placing your confidence and trust in our services. We exist to serve and support you. If there are programs or services you would like to see us offer, or if you have feedback on our existing programs, please do not hesitate to contact us – either Shannon, or a Board Member. We love to hear from you, and we look forward to continuing to work with, and for you.

Respectfully submitted,  
Barbara D’Entremont  
Chair, Board of Directors