

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

Good evening everyone and welcome to the Annual General Meeting for Autism Connections Fredericton. As you can see, 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. Kaihla 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. Being a board member means that you offer your time, without pay, to help sustain and grow this organization. Your dedication, expertise, skills, and talents have allowed ACF to flourish and grow over the years. You are a board that pitches in and lends a hand – whether it be for fundraising, organizing events, building playground equipment, or developing programs. For all the work you do, I am truly thankful.

### Our Past Chair

When I took over as Chair, Paul McDonnell became the first board member to hold the position of Past Chair. Paul worked tirelessly for ACF for many years. The success and longevity of ACF is largely due to Paul's leadership. This past fall, Paul and his wife, Liz were the driving force behind our very successful Bowling for Autism fundraiser. In fact, Paul and Liz were the ones to create this event in the first place and I think it's fair to say that it could not have happened without their efforts. Over the past year, Paul has patiently answered all the questions I have about being chair. Thank you Paul for supporting me and for supporting ACF.

### Changes to the Board Executive

Vice Chair – In April, Kim MacKeigan stepped down as Vice Chair, but has remained a member of the board. Kim had served in this position for a number of years. Over the years, she has attended and assisted with many fundraising events and organized activities. Kim has always been willing to lend a helping hand wherever it was needed. I would like to thank Kim for her past and ongoing service.

After Kim stepped down, the board elected Michael Elliot to serve as our new Vice Chair, as of April. Mike has been a member of our board for a number of years. As a member of the Canadian Armed Forces, Mike has been an invaluable liaison with Base Gagetown. If you have been to one of our Drive-By Santa events, you will no doubt have noticed the large military vehicles on display and the soldiers volunteering their time. Or maybe you have come to the Walk/Run event and seen soldiers participating in their gear. This has been due to Michael's efforts. Welcome Michael in your role as Vice Chair.

Secretary - In February, 2022, Ginette Hannon resigned from the board. Ginette had served as a general member for a number of years and as secretary for the most recent years. Ginette wanted to focus on growing her photography business. We wish Ginette well in her future endeavors. Liz McDonnell filled

in as Secretary until June. In June 2022, the board elected Katie LaCosta to serve as Secretary. Katie has been a member of the Board for a number of years. Katie organized a parent support group in the past and was responsible for launching our very successful Skills Enrichment Program. Welcome Katie in your role as Secretary.

So, your current executive is:

Past Chair: Paul McDonnell  
Chair: Barbara D'Entremont  
Vice Chair: Michael Elliot  
Treasurer: Trisha Fornier-Hoyt  
Secretary: Katie LaCosta

Other Changes to the Board

In February, 2022, Monique Lavigne resigned to focus on her personal career and family. Monique founded and operated "No Limits Soccer", which we have been proud to support. We wish Monique well in her future endeavors.

In March, 2022 Bruce Van Stone joined the board. Bruce is a clinical counsellor with ASD-W. He works directly with many autistic youth and adults, and has an autistic son. Bruce came to us with experience serving on a number of different boards of organizations dedicated to serving youth and families. Bruce also has extensive fundraising experience. Bruce has jumped right in by participating in fundraising and organized events.

In April, 2022 Kailha Winter-Smith joined the board. Kailha works for the UNB Student Accessibility Centre as an assistive technologist. She is also a Reservist Canadian Military Captain for the Canadian Cadet Program. Kailha brings with her a wealth of knowledge and experience in the disability community, both from her employment and from serving on various boards dedicated to serving and supporting disabled persons. Kailha recently launched a new parent support group.

On behalf of the Board, I would like to extend a warm welcome to Bruce and Kailha.

Executive Director

Shannon O'Brien continues to be employed as the Executive Director. ACF is continuing to thrive and grow under Shannon's leadership. With Shannon as the ED, we have seen the expansion of our Skills Enrichment Program as well as the development of several new programs. We have seen the launch of a successful membership program. Notably, this September Shannon launched a new After School program, which by all accounts has been quite popular. We reportedly have become the practicum site of choice for UNB ABA students and we have also become a sought-after site for volunteers. Most importantly, I hear stories about children who ask to come to our centre and who don't want to go home when it's time for them to leave. I think this speaks volumes, both about Shannon's leadership skills, but also to the atmosphere and culture within the Centre. Kudos Shannon and keep up the good work.

Strategic Planning Update

Last year, Paul present four key areas identified by the board for strategic planning. These were: 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. I believe we have made excellent progress in each of these areas

Programming – Existing and Potential. As mentioned, the Skills Enrichment Program has been expanded, as were the summer camps, and a new after school program, Kidz Corner, was launched. We ran a successful Robotics Club, which included an Autistic Peer Leader. Also, as mentioned Kailha has launched a Parent Support Group. Finally, we are in the process of developing a pilot for a transition from school program for high school students. Expect to hear more about that in the coming months.

Client Services – We have refreshed the web site and digitized the resource guide. The digital membership database and management system was created and the new Membership Program was launched. Rebranding is planned for the upcoming year.

Succession planning and human resources – I have already told you about changes to the board. We continue to have 2 regular employees – Shannon O’Brien and our part-time book keeper, Barb Lockhart. In addition, we have contracted the services of Wendy Weller, BCBA to supervise students delivering service, and we have hired Mary-Soleil Soucy, a recently graduated UNB student, with a Certificate in Applied Behaviour Analysis, to provide services for the more complex Skills Enrichment clients. We also have 4 other part time/contract students working in the Skills Enrichment program and afterschool program, whose pay is covered by client fees.

Revenue, expenses and overall finances – One of the most important goals under this topic is to stabilize funding and become self-sufficient. Of course, as a non-profit, we also aim to keep costs to the membership as low as possible. Towards this goal, we continue to foster partnerships with UNB and Autism Nova Scotia to offer low cost programs. The expansion of the skills program to include the Department of Social Development as a funder, the expansion of summer camps, and the establishment of the after school program has brought in sufficient income for us to expand our space. I am very exited to announce that, on January 1, we began a new lease. This involved us taking over a portion of the adjacent space, which was vacated by the daycare. We now occupy 3615 square feet. Stay tuned for an announcement and open house to launch the new space.

### 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.

Fredericton co-op community fund  
Windsor foundation  
Dave Lawrence radio personality with Rewind 93.1  
United Way  
Autism Nova Scotia  
Post Secondary Education, Training, and Labour (PETL)  
Department of Social Development  
Canada Summer Jobs  
SEED

Engage UNB  
McGinnis Cooper  
NB Children's Foundation  
Fairstone Financial  
Elizabeth Hamilton

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