

Autism Society Canada celebrates its 35th Anniversary in 2011 “Just a mom – Michelle’s story”

Michelle Samagalski plays a low key role in the Autism community at this time. She’s a “jam”— just a mom - to a 21 year old daughter with Pervasive Development Disorder. Michelle is the provincial representative for Manitoba on the board of Autism Society Canada, an organization that was started 35 years ago with the goal of helping parents find information and supports for their children living with an autism spectrum disorder.

Today, 35 years later – and with the help of board members like Michelle - ASC has grown to become the largest collective voice in the Canadian autism community. Provincial and territorial autism societies and their member groups provide direct support to people with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) and their families all across Canada. As a Board Member, Michelle sits alongside other parents who play an active role in aiding ASC to accomplish its mandate.

Prior to July 2008, Michelle was working for the Public Trustee of Manitoba for 17 years as a Client Administration Officer. She managed the personal and financial affairs of individuals with mental illnesses, and intellectual disabilities such as Autism Spectrum Disorders, as Committee pursuant to *The Mental Health Act* or Substitute Decision Maker pursuant to the *Vulnerable Persons Living with a Mental Disability Act*. Currently, she is on the Board of Directors for the Autism Society of Manitoba and member of the Autism Society of Canada as the representative for Manitoba on the Board.

Michelle’s proudest accomplishment is clearly her 21 year old daughter Kali. Kali is a graduate of the Emergency Medical Responder course at Red River College. In September, she will take the practical component of the exam and if she passes, she will be eligible to apply for employment with a rural EMS (paramedic) service. She currently works full time with the Downtown Biz Watch in Winnipeg, plays woman’s soccer, is a member of a master’s synchronized swim team and curls with Special Olympics. Michelle says, “My daughter has taught me that there is not one single intervention that has been effective in improving her quality of life. Just intervene! Whether it is speech-language, or tutoring or ABA or nutrition – try it all.” Michelle is adamant that parents should be provided with a menu of available options and the costs for each. She strongly believes that it is not one thing, but a variety of interventions that will assist a child: parents should be able to choose the options that might work for their child, and then try them. If it works, then funding should be continued until it is no longer showing results; at which time, parents should go back to the menu and choose something else. Michelle is Kali’s number one supporter. Her daughter has accomplished so much and she is extremely proud of her.

Autism Society Canada supports Michelle and her family by advocating on a national platform on their behalf. After 35 years of experience working with the Canadian autism community, ASC knows that the time is now to develop the foundation of a Canadian Autism Strategy, so individuals across Canada can access high quality services for their Autism related needs. For more information log on to www.autismsocietycanada.ca, or contact us at **866-476-8440**.

ASC’s Provincial Member society in Manitoba is Autism Manitoba.

<http://www.autismmanitoba.com> or 888.444.9563