

## **Autism Society Canada celebrates its 35th Anniversary in 2011 “A Canadian plan for Autism – Vicki’s Story”**

Vicki Harvey is a parent, an educator and an advocate. She worked with Autism Society Nova Scotia for many years and is now a staff member with the Provincial Autism Centre, responsible for the Community Outreach. Vicki is also 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 Vicki - 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, Vicki sits alongside other parents who play an active role in aiding ASC to accomplish its mandate.

Vicki has always played an active role in the autism landscape in Nova Scotia: as a member of the Autism Management Advisory Team, Vicki was tasked by the Provincial Government to create a report on the Lifespan Needs of people with ASD in Nova Scotia. This document detailed the situation in Nova Scotia around the lack of services for people with ASD in all levels of life – birth to death. While working on the AMAT report, the team researched services and programs in other countries and were particularly impressed with the New Zealand approach. The New Zealand approach differs from the Canadian approach, in that it aims to create resources for children and adults on the spectrum. Also, this approach is sensitive to cultural perspectives and emphasizes ASD education and awareness for both parents and health care practitioners.

As a mother to a child on the spectrum, it is quite discouraging to know that the resources in your area are limited to a specific age group. This April, the government committed \$4 million more to the Early Intensive Behavioural Intervention program. This raises the total dollars dedicated to autism in Nova Scotia to \$10 million per year. However, this covers the preschool years only. There are no funds for persons over 6 years of age. Service is provided through Education dollars, and the Department of Community Services, if the family and the individual meet the criteria for Direct Family Support (respite funding).

There are three main core issues that Vicki believes Canada must address to help bridge the gap between what is needed and what is actually available to the public: 1) Determine what the best practice services should be and who should deliver these. A combination of approaches may be needed to fully serve the individual, 2) Create a way to provide consistent, life-long services at no cost to families, 3) Train professionals and para-professionals to properly deliver programs and services.

Autism Society Canada supports Vicki 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](http://www.autismsocietycanada.ca), or contact us at **866-476-8440**.

ASC’s Provincial member society in Nova Scotia is the Provincial Autism Centre.

<http://www.provincialautismcentre.ca> or 877.544.4495