

Autism Society Canada celebrates its 35th Anniversary in 2011 “Finding hope in Yukon – Karen’s story

Karen is a parent of a young child with autism and she sits on the Autism Yukon Board of Directors. She also supports Autism Society Canada (ASC), 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. In conjunction with ASC, and through her work with Autism Yukon, Karen is a great asset to her autism community as she continues to fight for more government funded programs in the Yukon.

Today, 35 years later – and with the help of parents like Karen - 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.

A fellow co-worker was the first person to suggest to Karen that her son might have an ASD. “Apparently others suspected it too, but they never said anything to us,” she says. They travelled out of territory for a diagnosis and were stunned to find out that their son had an autism spectrum disorder.

One of the first resources Karen reached out to was Autism Yukon, an organization that participates in annual awareness campaigns throughout the year, offers public training sessions, movie screenings, media campaigns, and school based campaigns to raise awareness about autism. The governmental department in the Yukon that officially supports autism is known as the FSCD (Family Supports for Children with Disabilities). This department was expanded in 2009 to provide services for all children in the Yukon with disabilities. Karen has received a lot of support from FSCD social workers, as well as Autism Yukon. Through funding from FSCD Karen has received speech and social language therapy, integrated SLP-yoga therapy, ABA and behavioural consultation. Karen is grateful for the funding, but she is very clear that more needs to be done for the children and families of the Yukon who are living with an autism spectrum disorder: more training for teachers, administrators, and educational assistants, more support for individuals through educational assistants and peer mentoring, more intervention options for children, and the list continues. “A key component to any decent plan,” says Karen “is easily accessible funding for children with autism and their families.”

While there are many challenges that come with caring for a child with an ASD, Karen’s son has taught her that every day is a new day and that there are always many opportunities to learn new skills. Like Karen says, “Love is unconditional: every child has special characteristics that make them the special part of your heart, and no matter how hard things get you fight for what is right, what is needed and what is important. Having a disability does not mean that you cannot be an important part of society, or that you don’t want the same things as all children –acceptance.” As a member of Autism Yukon, Karen continues to help ASC spread Autism awareness and spread its message of acceptance.

Autism Society Canada supports Karen 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 Yukon is Autism Yukon.

<http://www.autismyukon.org> or 867.667.6406